

**To Own Ourselves: Dancing Caribbean Radicalism In Post-
Independence Jamaica**

by

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DEDICATION

To Eric Pryce and Lilieth Harris

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ABSTRACT

“To Own Ourselves: Dancing Caribbean Radicalism in Independent Jamaica” is a political history of the West Indies grounded in dance as a decolonizing epistemology. This work charts the development of staged concert dance in Jamaica, particularly the choreography and community of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica (NDTC) from 1962-1976. Led by Rex Nettleford, a choreographer, public intellectual, and cultural consultant to the Prime Minister, the NDTC’s diaspora aesthetics and theories of race and nation directly affected cultural policy. This dissertation shows that dance pedagogy and performance informed a specifically West Indian strategy of embodied radical politics, and that dance was central to nationalist efforts to identify a practice of freedom as bodily self-ownership in response to the failures of the state’s vision of post-coloniality. Using movement analysis, queer theory, black studies, and transnational history methodologies, this project explores how migration, regional aesthetics, and Caribbean diaspora all formed the relational system through which Jamaican dancers theorized erotic agency and bodily autonomy.

“To Own Ourselves” contends that the NDTC’s performance history constitutes a queer archive of West Indian nationalism and black radicalism during the decade that followed independence, when anti-racist social movements in the region and the circum-Caribbean migratory sphere sought to transform standards of physical virtuosity, ability, and value for black bodies. The NDTC drew on what this dissertation identifies as the performance strategy of “smaddification,” or the use of spectacle and exaggeration as a political tactic to protest the

erasure and flattening of representations of gendered blackness within Jamaican multi-racial nationalism. The NDTC's concerts became a space of participatory democracy not only for company members but for the general public, who used dance as an occasion to critique state-sanctioned ideas of Jamaican identity. The shifting criteria by which audiences and state actors judged the NDTC's ability to represent the nation reveal the instability of Caribbean systems of racial legibility and national belonging, as well as the creatively adaptive ways that black Jamaicans reenacted their history to assert their claims to social citizenship.

INTRODUCTION To Own Ourselves

In 1979, Rex Nettleford appeared as a guest on a Norwegian talk show to discuss the future of Jamaica's political economy. The 46-year-old professor, public intellectual, and choreographer was widely known as one of the young nation's most established voices in politics and the arts and was even rumored to be a contender for the next Prime Minister of Jamaica. Nettleford forcefully argued that a decade of failed attempts by the Democratic Socialist government to nationalize foreign ownership of land and natural resources led to an economic crisis that left the state increasingly reliant on foreign aid. Culture was the only resource Jamaica had, or could ever hope to own. "For a people who have been suppressed and who have been dependent," Nettleford said in his interview, "they have had only what is innately theirs to fall back on - their capacity to create in song, to create in dance. After all, one's body belongs to one."¹

Then the program shifted. The intellectual and statesman performed a demonstration of the Afro-Caribbean moves that, he argued, were a fundamental expression of Jamaica's national project of defining their brand of creole creativity. Rising to lead a group of three lithe and blond Norwegian dancers he explained that Jamaican movement, through a creole form that was "cross-fertilized" with a European innovations, reflected Afro-Jamaican quotidian moments formed in relation with the landscape. With his movement and sound, clapping and calling out a five-beat drum rhythm ("oom, ah, oom, akan-kan"), he led the women in a series of floor

¹ Rex M. Nettleford, "From Ted - Norway and Lasse - Sweden Rex Nettleford" (University of the West Indies, Radio Education Unit, May 7, 1989).

exercises, a simple grounded chasse across the small stage that he blithely claimed was as easy as walking. As he taught them how to burden their steps and root their movements, he slowly sped up the pace from “stroll” to a “run” until the dancers they are left spent, panting, laughing, unable to keep up with his beat. Within this movement of levity, Nettleford enacted the high energy performance strategies that this project argues black Jamaicans have long used to make claims to the land that they did not legally own, by making plain to this European audience the amount of bodily control it takes to stylishly and joyfully adapt to the furious and non-linear pace of Caribbean modernity.

More than forty years later, and almost sixty years after independence in Jamaica, Nettleford’s claim that dance, and particularly a style of concert dance drawn from Afro-religious peasant practices known as Jamaican “folk” culture,” could be a path to liberation seems idealist at best. At worst, it has been interpreted as being what Michael Hanchard called a “black culturalist” appeasement by the state in the context of Brazil’s racial story, or an empty representation of pro-blackness offered as a consolation prize to block the formation of oppositional formal black politics.² My argument that the National Dance Theatre Company’s (NDTC) of Jamaica’s maximalist, and spectacularized mix of modern dance and Afro-Caribbean movements was a form of radically anti-imperialist black queer performance might seem even more unlikely for those used to associating the paired down, steady sonics of reggae that later emerged in the 1970s as Jamaica’s signal most important cultural export and symbol of “authentic” black Jamaican protest. But much like Samba in Brazil and Tango in Argentina – other forms of racialized celebratory social dance in Latin America and the Caribbean that became signifiers of the state’s

² Michael G. Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

cannibalization of black working class culture – concert dance as both performance and widely decimated social welfare pedagogy holds the story of the complex and often ambivalent ways everyday Jamaicans queered the rational dynamics of state formation and nationalist performance, by finding the liberatory potential in the colonial government and independent state’s defectivities.³

For scholars and everyday Jamaicans alike, the effort to build a productive and democratic society in the wake of decolonization is widely perceived to have been a failure in normative terms, particularly because self-rule has largely failed to impact the deeply rooted structures of inequality sown by centuries of a plantation-based economy.⁴ Despite the pride that Jamaicans feel for the international success of their post-independence cultural exports like reggae, cricket, dancehall, and Olympic sprinting, a national poll in 2011, on the eve of Jamaica’s 50th anniversary of independence, revealed that 60% of Jamaicans believed they would have been better off if the nation had remained under British rule.⁵ In the context of this disillusionment, Nettleford’s evocation of the body as the site of Caribbean freedom was not simply appeasement, a fanciful exercise, or divergence from “real” politics. His brand of cultural politics called attention to micro-level, individual clashes with neo-colonialism and small steps towards liberation. Over time, and not without questionable alliances or gestures, he developed a staunchly pragmatic form of erotic and embodied politics that was deeply enmeshed in this distrust of the state’s benevolence or ability to grant true freedom.⁶ But this skeptical cultural politics was not Nettleford’s alone. It was

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⁴ On the eve of Jamaica’s 50th anniversary of independence, a newspaper poll claimed 60% of Jamaicans believed the state would have been better off if it had remained under British rule. “Give Us the Queen!,” *The Gleaner*, June 28, 2011, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20110628/lead/lead1.html>.

⁵ “Give Us the Queen!,” *The Gleaner*, June 28, 2011, <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20110628/lead/lead1.html>.

⁶ Lyndon K. Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2018).

built upon deep traditions of 19th century Caribbean bodily movement and transnational modern dance networks during the nationalist decolonization movement. He drew on the strategies of West Indian people who have long fought for their political emancipation with full knowledge of freedom's historical limits. The idea of self-ownership, of using the body as the primary battleground for anti-colonial resistance, rejected the belief that politics could only be enacted through allegiance or opposition to "isms" (a popular term for imported political ideologies) in the Cold War period. Nettleford worked within a tradition of Jamaican performance that materialized a queer, embodied politics of ambivalence, of finding ways to strategically use popular culture and the power of spectacle to negotiate with the state and its proprietary claims to liberation on their own terms. The challenge of defining a national culture through dance, while negotiating relationships with various political factions, made these culture workers central to shaping conversations about how to live with the tenuous and unstable conditions of Caribbean sovereignty. The vexing uncertainty of what constituted an "indigenous" and authentic West Indianness in an Afro-creole society, and the state's inability to create a convincing vision of national unity, resulted in a wide range of experiments in dancing Jamaican blackness, inclusive of but not limited to the often heteronormative and masculinist lore surrounding the birth of reggae and urban Soundsystem culture.

This cultural history of racial citizenship in Jamaica uses the tools of performance and dance studies to chart a West Indian hermeneutic of black radicalism that makes visible practices of freedom within and beyond formal politics of the nation. Although politicians sometimes hoped that the NDTC and other Jamaican culture workers would produce a site of nationalist propaganda, these dancers did not simply reflect already coherent and inevitable ideas about race and national identity. I'm interested in dance's ability to reveal the porous inconsistency of the body as a representational tool, an inconsistency that mirrored and contributed to the tremendous

changes in Jamaican popular discourse about black freedom and identity in the first two decades of independence. State-sponsored dancers' ability to simultaneously subsume and disavow official stories of race and nation gives us new avenues through which to understand Jamaica's post-colonial political history beyond normative metrics of success and failures, which as David Scott has shown, adhere to a certain narrative structure that imagines post-colonial freedom as a single, romantic, triumphant revolutionary event.⁷ Instead, performance, and the repetitive form of the repertoire, privileges a vision of independence as a practice that must be continually revised and reenacted. It bears testament to the political intimacies, sexual anxieties, migratory crossings, pleasures, and misalignments within black diasporic communities that were at the very heart of West Indian decolonization. It invites new questions, hopes, and expectations that aid in understanding the enduring problem of Caribbean freedom.

Emancipatory Acts

Beginning in the 19th century, Jamaica became a testing grounds for gradual, diplomatic freedom in the former British West Indies.⁸ The society that eventually became the independent nation-state of Jamaica had first come into being when the British captured the island from the Spanish one hundred and fifty years earlier, in 1655, and quickly began to transform the colony into a sugar production powerhouse.⁹ Maroon warfare and near-constant slave revolts, with Tacky's Rebellion (1760-1761) constituting the largest slave rebellion in the Caribbean before the 1791

⁷ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004).

⁸ Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004).

⁹ The date when the British Colonial period began is contested. Alternate dates include when Charles II made Jamaica a royal colony in 1661, and when the Spanish officially ceded the colony to Great Britain in 1670 by signing the Treaty of Madrid.

Haitian Revolution, gave Jamaica the reputation for being home to a particularly “unruly” black population. Despite these bouts of unrest, the slave population and plantations system grew rapidly throughout the 18th century. The island remained a colonial frontier zone with a relatively low European population and a mountainous geography that nurtured the growth of a strong Maroon tradition. Plantation owners and the colonial state's ability to assert total surveillance and control over their island territory during the times of slavery was, therefore, always tenuous. While sugar plantation owners pioneered a particularly violent and deadly culture of enslavement, black Jamaicans forged spaces of autonomy out of slave owners' inability and refusal to put paternalist discourse of protection and oversight into practice. As anthropologist Sydney Mintz argued in the 1970s, West Indian slaves had already begun to form a proto-peasantry during colonial slavery, contributing to the market economy by working subsistence plots that provided not only food for their households, but also food for the free population.¹⁰ Slave plots formed alternative systems of claiming property and staked out spaces for religious practice, leisure, and funeral rites. Through laboring on these plots for themselves, free and enslaved black people developed what Jamaican historians have called an alternative “moral economy.” Enslaved Africans contributed to local forms of liberalism before abolition, or an alternative system of communal and economic values that ran both parallel and in opposition to the plantation system. Privacy from plantation surveillance, land ownership, control over one’s time and physical labor emerged as Afro-creole ideals of freedom that could be temporarily enacted on agricultural plots.¹¹

¹⁰ Sidney W. Mintz, “Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 2, no. 1 (1978): 81–98.

¹¹ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom : Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

The concept of moral economies or orders that were formed in parallel or opposition to the values of the plantation is a central theme in Jamaica's history and cultural anthropology. On moral orders surrounding

By the 19th century, Jamaica was the most populous and productive sugar colony in the British West Indies. The British Parliament abolished slavery in the British colonies in 1834 after the Baptist War of 1831, a slave rebellion that Abolitionists used to turn the tide on debates about emancipation in England and convince planters of the inevitability of abolition.¹² Abolition ushered in a century-long period during which Jamaica's small white population and black/brown majority battled over the rights and regulations of black subjects under the British crown.

Non-elite Jamaicans, both the formerly enslaved and those who had already been free prior to emancipation, took advantage of their juridical status as freed men and women and their ability to leverage their labor to seek alternative ways of working and building communities. Many fled from the plantation to pursue small scale commercial agriculture or walked out on sugar work as they pleased to enact their vision of freedom as ownership over their time and the fruits of their labor. This popular vision of liberal citizenship under colonialism was the manifestation of plantation-owners' greatest fears. The plantocracy waged a campaign against the emerging peasantry in the local government and colonial office, accusing the black and brown population of

the politics and practices of death in 18th and 19th century Jamaica, see Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010). On moral economies shaping black Jamaicans interactions with legal structures in the 19th century, see Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004). On the continuities of peasant religious moral orders in the 20th century, see Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹² While Jamaica was known for its particularly rebellious slave population, the Baptist War was unique because its organizers were well-respected, creole Afro-Jamaicans Baptist leaders who were able to acquire a mass following. In contrast, 18th century rebellions were often organized by African-born field hands from a single ethnic group. Their Baptist War's theological justifications appealed to abolitionists. Parliament officially passed a law to abolish slavery August 1833 shortly after, citing the Baptist War as a decisive factor. On the Baptist War see: Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938*, Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

laziness, waste, and savagery for resisting the low wages and the seasonal work that the dying sugar industry offered. Much like 19th-century Latin American liberals, who despaired of the black and Indigenous peasantry's interpretations of citizenship, white creoles in Jamaica argued that black and brown Jamaicans lacked the moral and intellectual capacity to be rational and agential subjects. King Sugar was the only way forward, and blacks' insistence on choosing their work, land claims, and perceived lack of culture were all that was keeping the island in a state of poverty and savagery. Empowered by the emergence of race science, these arguments justified the restriction of self-rule and other liberal rights in the West Indies.¹³

These conflicting visions of citizenship came to a head in the context of the United States Civil War, which cut Jamaica off from an important trading partner. In 1865, the colonial legislature, led by unpopular Governor Edward John Eyre, began to roll back the privileges that black and mixed-race Jamaicans and white religious reformers had won in the twenty-five years since slavery's end, including informal squatting rights to old plantation lands and voting rights for the vast majority of black Jamaicans. Also in 1865, peasants protested against the colonial courts, and the parish of St. Thomas grew into a tide of peasant uprisings against the plantocracy and state known as the Morant Bay Rebellion. Morant Bay marked a watershed moment in 19th century Jamaican history, in many ways the culmination of the peasant and reformist-led post-emancipation social justice movements over the preceding decades.¹⁴ Haunted by fears of slave rebellions and

¹³ Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*, xvii, 346 p. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Gad Heuman, *The Killing Time: The Morant Bay Rebellion Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

Based on analysis of photographs of Morant Bay's anti-colonial insurgents, Sheller argues that the rebellion was, in fact, a multi-racial movement against the plantocracy and colonial government, rather than a "race" war between the formerly enslaved against their former masters. Mimi. Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

race wars, the colonial militia violently suppressed civil unrest, and in its aftermath, stripped away much of what was left of Black Jamaicans' claims to citizenship. In the process of attempting to curtail democracy for the formerly enslaved and their descendants, a coalition of white creole planters, merchants, and colonial officials decided they would rather surrender completely to imperial oversight than risk black political participation. Jamaica's House of Assembly voted itself out of power, and Jamaica became a Crown Colony under the direct rule of Great Britain to guide the final decades of political and economic reconstruction.¹⁵

Even after the wave of political repression that followed the Morant Bay Rebellion, attempts to control, “civilize,” and surveil the Jamaican and broader West Indian peasantry were never successful. Trinidadian-American theorist Lyndon K. Gill argues this incompleteness of state control resulted in West Indian’s “queer relationship to formal legal and moral dictates,” marked by inconsistency, ambivalence, and non-normative forms of organizing to demand that their needs were met by the state. These queer politics were born out of frontier cultures “where authority – colonial, postcolonial, neocolonial – has historically been and continues to be precarious and imperfect at best.”¹⁶ As they had done in previous centuries, non-elite Jamaicans found ways to exercise control over their hours, build a peasant labor system that decreased their dependency on the plantation (if not outside of the global economic system), and construct their own creole ideas for popular justice and local democratic systems to suit the needs of a multi-ethnic society.¹⁷

¹⁵ Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest, “Introduction” *Victorian Jamaica*, eds. Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2018).

¹⁶ Lyndon K. Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2018), 1.

¹⁷ Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780–1870* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004), 9.

However, as Diana Paton reminds us, even as West Indians recognized, hid within, and exploited the gaps in colonial power, they still saw the law and colonial authority as a powerful and usable force.¹⁸ Rather than rejecting colonial institutions, the courts, missionary organizations, and the plantation completely, black peasants often developed a flighty and discontinuous, but none-the-less significant and integrated relationship with the state. Jamaicans showed up loudly and forcefully in civic and religious life to express specific grievances and to stage performances of their broader disavowal. Mimi Sheller also identifies how peasants included plays on gender and sexual performance into their repertoire of performing “citizenship from below.” She argues that the powerfully public ways that black women queered the role of “mothering” to include queer kinship, public activism, and religious leadership roles constituted insurgent erotic politics.¹⁹ Popular notions of freedom included independent economic activity, rest, formal legal action, and protest. But it also included the ability to be a disruption, disturbance, and an annoyance, and most of all, an insistence on being seen.

The many ways that non-elite Jamaicans performed non-alignment with the duties of ideal British citizenship by spectacularizing “non-productive” labor and communal or individual erotic practices have been well-documented by historians of emancipation. Nadia Ellis writes of Bruckins, a social dance developed by slaves to celebrate emancipation, and the continuation of Kingston Jonkonnu carnival traditions despite their ban in 1841, as ways that black Jamaicans created a spectacle out of their bodily autonomy. Mimi Sheller describes peasants unruly misuse of courtrooms by being loud, violent, and in joyful contempt of the law to perform both investment in

¹⁸ Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004).

¹⁹ Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*, xvii, 346 p. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

legal proceedings and disinterest in Anglo-colonial rules of comportment.²⁰ The religious performance Native Baptists, a form of Pentecostal Christianity brought to Jamaica by African American refugees of the American Revolution, also constituted a form of physically taxing and spectacular protest.²¹ Thomas Holt writes of mid-19th century revival meetings in which “people had visions, went into trances, threw themselves on the ground, jumped from windows apparently unhurt, went for three to four days without food, and of course, *did no work* (emphasis added).”²² While these practices were not considered constructive or morally virtuous “leisure time” by mid-to-late 19th century British standards, Victorian Jamaicans' performances of an alternative value system to the plantation similarly materialized their aspirations to a good, moral, and healthy life.

The interwar period, global Great Depression, and the emergence of the nationalist movement transformed the grounds on which Jamaicans organized for freedom. The 1920s and 1930s is often periodized as the next great collective push for democracy in Jamaica. Men returning from fighting for the British Crown during World War I to disenfranchised colonial territories spread disillusionment with the promise of imperial subjecthood.²³ Bourgeois brown alliances sought to build socialist and populist alliances with black union agitators around the idea that both racial equality and economic justice could only come about in the context of an

²⁰ Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery*.

²¹ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 290

²² *Ibid.*

²³ See Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America* (London ; New York: Verso, 1999). Reena N. Goldthree, “‘A Greater Enterprise than the Panama Canal’: Migrant Labor and Military Recruitment in the World War I-Era Circum-Caribbean,” *Labor* 13, no. 3-4 (December 1, 2016): 57-82, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-3595955>.

independent nation state.²⁴ This mobility and the creation of a black internationalist consciousness also brought on a cultural revolution to the West Indies and its growing diaspora, or what Lara Putnam calls the “circum-Caribbean migratory sphere,” where Antillean migrants traded local music, dances, ways of healing, and forms of political agitation. I use the Jamaican patois term “shay-shay” to describe the courtship and competition dances that emerged out of this cosmopolitan migratory cultural period (like mento, lindy-hop calypso, *son*). Through shay-shays, working class West Indians danced an imagined geography of a diasporic community that arched from New York to London to Georgetown. They used their cosmopolitan movement language as a testimony of their impact on the popular culture of the Global North and to resist being marginalized to the peripheries of empire.

Between 1944 -1962, Jamaica once again became an early testing ground for gradual freedom in the West Indies. After World War II, Great Britain began the process of divesting from its Caribbean colonies, sped by the labor riots, international pressure, and the delegitimization of racial pseudo-science. Colonial Office and brown creole nationalists aligned in the gradual push towards independence, Jamaica was granted a new constitution in 1944 that reformed Crown Colony status, consolidated Jamaica's current two-party system, and ushered in universal male suffrage.²⁵ Even as nationalist leaders built their movement on the grassroots activism and support of black labor protests, they still shared Colonial Office’s fears that blacks were not ready for self-rule. The Jamaican Welfare Limited (1937), one such late colonial reform,

²⁴ Margaret Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939* (London: Pluto Press, 2017). Stevens traces to roots of the “red international” in the West Indies to the second decade of the 20th century.

²⁵ Robert Buddan, "Universal Adult Suffrage in Jamaica and the Caribbean Since 1944," *Social and Economic Studies* 53, no. 4 (2004): 135-62.

pioneered a colonial social welfare and development program that would become a model for the British Colonies at large. It sought to teach poor black Jamaicans in rural areas to not only be industrious and be part of local civic life but to also develop “constructive” leisure practices modeled on British and American physical education pedagogy. This led to new appropriations of popular culture by the colonial state and its local allies. Rather than use dance labor to perform "non-work" - or the uses of their bodies outside the capitalist system - late colonial and early nationalist artists attempted to "professionalize" dance labor to make their artistry legible in global markets. This transformation of peasant and working-class dance into a folk cultural product that could be taught in classrooms or viewed on a concert stage often meant erasing and disavowing the ways that popular working-class dances of the early 20th century, or shay-shays, were far from provincial and untouched African survivals that American anthropologists often fantasized West Indian art to be. So called local folk art, as anthropologists and folklorists of the 1940s and 1950s witnessed it, was migratory and reflected the protests, grassroots movements, and diaspora consciousness of Jamaican workers of the mid-twentieth century.

In 1956, Jamaica joined the Federation of the West Indies, a short-lived supranational coalition of islands that sought to integrate the economies of the former British West Indies to form a single, unified state. Federation ended in 1960, when Jamaicans voted in a referendum to take a swifter path to independence alone. While the importance of this period is often minimized within both popular and scholarly histories of Jamaica, this dissertation argues that Federation came at a particularly formative moment of Jamaican national imaginary and arts infrastructure, affecting how Jamaican dancers and performance institutions oriented themselves on the world stage long after Federation’s demise. These middle-class social welfare workers who practiced what I identify as “national dance”—or state-affiliated dance projects that professed a mission of broadly representing “authentic” national culture—clashed over long-standing inter-island rivalries and

developmental inequalities, and even collaborated to create a sense of unity out of the West Indies' creole diversity. These transnational dance labor exchanges and pedagogy were instituted into the lasting fabric of Jamaica's arts movements.

Jamaica was the first British Caribbean colony to become independent in August 1962. That same summer, a group of Kingston-based dancers joined together to form The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica. Many NDTC members shared the internationalist orientation of the Federation era of dancers, as well as a commitment to integrating black popular culture into dance pedagogy and state-affiliated performance. However, multi-class and multi-racial groups of dancers differed in their relationships to the state and the idea of "folklore" as an authentic national movement. Unlike the urban, middle-class leaders of the generation before, Nettleford and NDTC co-founder Eddy Thomas identified as "peasant-born" themselves and had been recipients of the increased social mobility that late-colonial social welfare and education reforms permitted. Even as they claimed the title of "nationalist dancers" they approached the work of "professionalization" and ambassadorship with an ambivalence. They flaunted a range of cultural influences in the faces of critics who condemned their lack of West Indian authenticity. They were never fully state-sponsored, in large part because of a lack of adequate funding for the arts, but the NDTC used their loose political affiliation with government patrons to claim favors while using the freedom of "amateur" status to duck government censorship. Their experimentation in Caribbean dance showed their messy work of trying to make sense of everyday experiences of decolonization. This was the very tangible labor of enacting Caribbean freedom.

Queer West Indian Dance

Even as popular dance traditions were translated for the stage or commercial markets, they did not automatically lose their political meanings and usefulness. Barbadian intellectual Edward Kamau Braithwaite argues that the NDTC developed in the "maroon tradition," a relation to

hegemony was “contemporaneous of course, but independent of and outside though not unconnected with the plantation” or the state.²⁶ I argue that a queer tradition also made its mark on nationalist arts movements as they attempted to integrate black peasant practices into national hegemony. Public disavowals and exclusionary rhetoric about queer folks – a social category and orientation which scholars like Cathy Cohen have led us to acknowledge has always included working-class black women and others marginalized by non-normative gender and class performances – were a consistent feature of Jamaican public life in this period. The national arts movement was one context in which queer men and women found spaces of pleasure, visibility, power, assimilation, or rebellion. Through the 1960s and 1970s, queer dancers like many of the members of the NDTC, including Nettleford,, nonetheless claimed and embodied mainstream nationalisms, though at times contentiously or uncritically, moving in-between different modes of defining and articulating the self as it served them.

The tools of performance studies and queer dance studies—with their attention to relational politics, poetic resonances, and attempts to give voice to an experience that defies articulation—can help us understand these ambivalences and contrary relationships between black Jamaicans, the global market, and the state in the post-emancipation period as what Nadia Ellis describes as “multiple, contradictory, and spectacularly embodied in performance.”²⁷ Queer performance studies’ archival methodologies enrich my reading of how bodies enact or disrupt hegemonic ideologies of race and nation. Queer dance studies can contribute to the work of history by challenging the primacy of the textual archive and by “demanding a physical history that

²⁶ Edward Kamau Braithwaite, “Foreword,” in Rex M. Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Cultural Definition and Artistic Discovery : The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, 1962-1983* (New York: Grove Press, 1985).

²⁷ Nadia Ellis, “Jamaican Performance in the Age of Emancipation” in *Victorian Jamaica*, Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest, eds.(Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2018).

provocatively moves theorizations of self and sexuality, nation and assimilation alongside written histories and theorizations of queer moments.”²⁸ It has challenged me to look beyond the written performance archive’s often racist and gendered attributions of individual genius to a chosen few, and to use speculation to imagine unvoiced references and encounters. As Priya Srinivasan has shown, speculating how physical presence, not just written and speech acts, shaped historical events allows us to write histories that acknowledge the contributions of creatives who lacked language skills and citizenship rights, or whose stories were actively erased from the archives of concert dance and the nation.²⁹

Queer dance in Jamaica also grew out of a longer queer relationship with authority, the long history of spectacularly disruptive peasant and working-class performance. The dance culture that emerged decades before the jazz-age in the first entertainment venue and nightclub built to cultivate the talents of black Jamaican performances, owned by none other than Marcus Garvey, was queer in this sense. Garveyite dance culture, which marks the beginning of this dance history’s genealogy of West Indian concert performance, was full of contradictions. It was a proletariat collective even as it embraced middle-brow aspirations, touted symbols of European imperial and military power even as it disavowed empire, and promoted patriarchy and alternative gender roles. What tied Garvey’s performance aesthetics together, and what made them queer, was a certain defiant visual excess that he articulated as a black right reclaim spectacle from the proprietary privileges of white people. He wrote: “Why therefore should some folks want to be spectacular and do not want Negroes to be spectacular? We say it therefore, that since they have found some

²⁸ Clare Croft, “Introduction,” in *Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings*, ed. Clare Croft (Oxford University Press, 2017), 13.

²⁹ Priya Srinivasan, “The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What’s Behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Dance History,” *Discourses in Dance* 4, no. 1 (2007): 7–48.

virtue in being spectacular we will try out the virtues there are in being spectacular.” Jamaican playwright and scholar Honor Ford Smith discusses how Garvey’s embrace of excess and unstable ideological combinations “enabled active subjects to grasp alternative meanings which addressed their specific problems in diverse ways.”³⁰ The idea that being publicly spectacular, visible, and entertaining, might not only be considered an aspirational desire but a strategy of anti-racist protest and a virtue of citizenship, is the defining ideology that links all of the West Indian dancers that shape this study.³¹

Garvey’s commitment to being fabulous and using spectacle to hide from colonial power and shelter his radical anti-racist critique became central to the national dance movement in Jamaica. Rex Nettleford argued that everyday practices of augmenting the self were central to the work of transforming Jamaicans from colonial subjects to citizens, a process he clunkily termed in a characteristic hybrid of patois folksiness and academic haughtiness “smadditisation,” or more popularly, “smaddification.”³² The Jamaican patois word “smaddy,” (directly translated into

³⁰ Honor Ford-Smith, “Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica,” *Interventions* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 20.

³¹ Following the stance of my research subjects, I claim to interdisciplinarity with ambivalence, knowing that Black Studies and Caribbean Studies has used creative and fugitive methods in response to the violent erasure of black life from historical records before it became fetishized by the academy.

³² Nettleford coined smadditisation in a 1982 article in which he attributes the “smadditisation of Jamaica” to the Democratic Socialist government of the 1970s. He says that he first heard this term used by a Mr. Anthony Liang who worked at the Popular Music Development program of the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC). In 1997, Charles W. Mills further theorized “smadditisin” as a political process, and he changed the spelling to “smaddification.” Nettleford maintained that Mills, in his attempt to make a theory of his coinage, “didn’t get the word right.” As the Jamaican press and other scholars adopted this phrase, it morphed into its more popular rendering “smaddification” which I adopt in place of the original spelling to honor the phrase’s popularization and evolution (after all, this dissertation is committed to eschewing what is “correct” in favor of what is useful in the everyday, in the spirit of Nettleford’s own approach to representing creole culture). I keep Nettleford’s spelling of the verb form: to smadditize. Rex Nettleford, review of *Review of Jamaica – Struggle In the Periphery*, by Michael Manley, *Caribbean Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1982); David Scott and Rex Nettleford, “‘To Be Liberated from the Obscurity of Themselves’:

standard English as “somebody”) refers to a person that carries oneself as a “big man,” or makes oneself purposefully and defiantly noticeable. One resonance of smaddy is captured in Reverend Jesse Jackson's call-and-response self-affirmation, “I am- Somebody,” an utterance that calls into being the fact that one’s value is at once internally self-defined and a visible, unshakeable fact. Smaddification is the work of reclaiming humanity and heritage stripped away by colonization through everyday acts of embodiment and exaggerated moments of performance. It forms the corrective to Martiniquean poet/artist/theorist Aime Cesaire’s description of the process of becoming a colonial subject as the stripping away of humanity, or “thingification.”³³ This arrival at a sense of individual self-confidence rooted in pride in the collective cultural achievements of West Indians (regionally) and Jamaicans (nationally), Nettleford felt, was a process necessary for forging the kind of political community that independence, emancipation, and even the black solidarity that Pan-Africanism and Third World unity failed to fully realize.

Throughout this text, I define spectacularization as a one high energy, queer dance strategy of smaddification, because of the ways that it critically magnifies performances of blackness as love, connection, social currency, diasporic tension, fabulous difference, utopic possibility, and undeniable value, and the ways white supremacy has attempted to denigrate blackness. Acts of

An Interview with Rex Nettleford,” *Small Axe* 10, no. 2 (2006): 97–246; Charles Mills, “Smadditism,” *Caribbean Quarterly; Mona, Jamaica* 43, no. 2 (June 1, 1997): 54–68. See also: Tracy Robinson, “Gender, Equality, Justice and Caribbean Realities: They Way Forward” (Caribbean Association of Judicial Officers (CAJO) 3rd Biennial Conference 2013 “Equality, Justice and Caribbean Realities- The Way Forward,” Bridgetown, Barbados, 2013).

³³ Nettleford does not cite Cesaire as his inspiration, but I am not the first to map connections between these two processes. See Girvan, Norman. *Caribbean integration: can cultural production succeed where politics and economics have failed? (Confessions of a Wayward Economist)*, W. Andy Knight, Julián Castro-Rea, and Hamid Ghany, eds., *Re-Mapping the Americas: Trends in Region-Making* (Routledge, 2016), 258.

spectacularization that emphasized queer alternatives to normative official racial stories articulate the fragility and contradictions of the nationalist project, and redirect the project of personal sovereignty or other ways of embracing power collectively to the microscale of interactions between individual bodies. This projects adds to the growing field of “queer diaspora,” and as defined by scholars such as Nadia Ellis and Gayatri Gopinath, to chart a series of literary and photographic aesthetic practices, intimacies, and affective networks that testify to the racial, sexual and gendered “otherwise” of queer of color existence that remain unacknowledged, if not hidden, within imperialist history writing.³⁴ Gopinath defines the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora as optics that disrupts coloniality’s ways of seeing, moving, and knowing racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies “though the particular deployment of queer desire and identification that renders apparent the promiscuous intimacies of our past histories as they structure our everyday present, and determine our future.”³⁵ Queer diaspora as an archival and curatorial practice allows me to collect and chart connections between dancers that shared the disruptive aesthetic practice of smaddification, by compiling a sprawling genealogy that reflects the vast, global modern dance community that West Indian dancers saw themselves as central to. Smadditizing performances maximalize queer desires and make visible Global South connectivity in ways that often joyfully offend raced and classed European and Anglo-American ideas of “good taste” or “good sense,”

³⁴ Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham Duke University Press Books, 2018); José Esteban. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

For a theorization of the black, queer “otherwise,” see Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

³⁵ Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*, 7.

revealing the ridiculousness of these regulatory systems that seek to delimit how black folks can dance, praise, commune, find pleasure, and express eroticism.

Queer dance as collective activism and action unearths what poet Edward Kamau Braithwaite called the Caribbean's "submarine" affinities that can challenge us to theorize the self in community beyond the normative boundedness of the sexuality, gender, and even nationality.³⁶ Queer dance's potential to create solidarity comes from an embrace of diaspora's intrinsic conflict, tension, and dissidence. The NDTC and its forerunners' repertoires are a testament to both their full-bodied commitment to creating spectacles of self to project national pride and a lack of faith in the very project of the state formation, rather than individual bodies, as the path to achieving true sovereignty. The queer diaspora tradition that I identify similarly circumvents a nationalist futurity geared towards "belonging" in opposition to "non-belonging."³⁷ Beyond the here and now, these dances manifested fictional histories, imagined elsewhere, impossible connections, diaspora intimacies, and communities that transcend national boundaries.

Visibility, being fabulous, or being "represented" within a hegemonic national narrative or global black community does not constitute freedom. As madison moore reminds us in his theorization of fabulous and spectacularly eccentric performance as form of embodied QTPOC critique, visibility can be a double-edged sword. Spectacle can help black folks materialize utopia in their daily lives and resist being passively under the white gaze, but it can also be used to surveil, frame, or fetishize.³⁸ Art historian Krista Thompson has theorized the power of spectacle or "shine"

³⁶ Clare Croft, "Introduction," 13; Kamau Braithwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean*, vol. 9/10 (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974).

³⁷ Ronald Cummings, "(Trans)Nationalisms, Marronage, and Queer Caribbean Subjectivities," *Transforming Anthropology* 18, no. 2 (2010): 169–80.

³⁸ madison moore, *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (Yale University Press, 2018), 29.

in West Indian dancehall photography and videography as a self-conscious shield directed against visual entrapment and exploitation. Flashiness, reflectiveness, and “bling” can be protectively disarming to viewers, allowing black folks to assert opacity or at least confront surveillance on their own terms.³⁹ Ideally, smaddification is a vision of freedom that does not necessitate the disempowerment of others, in opposition to colonialism and the plantocracy’s notions of freedom that relied on the ability to own, subjugate, and exploit black bodies. However, NDTC’s vision of dancing black pride relied at times on local hierarchies of primitivism and modernity, cannibalizing folk practices while denying them artistic credit, and gendered stereotypes that were not liberatory for all Jamaicans. Alongside an analysis of the ways that institutionalized folk culture can be exploitative, my work attempts to historicize spectacularization to push against a notion that folklore created for entertainment or commercial consumption is automatically anti-revolutionary, anti-black, and unauthentic. Likewise, over-the-top and theatrical interpretations of Afro-Caribbean traditions are not merely failed attempts at European aesthetics. Theatricality, dramatic flourish, and the virtues of the spectacular, are also a form of politics from below.

To be a black Jamaican and claim emancipation and its contradictions, or to spectacularly and earnestly perform ambivalent nationalisms and imperfect democracy, is to “disidentify” in Cuban American scholar José Esteban Muñoz’s robust theorization. It is to assert the right to thrive “on sites where meaning does not properly ‘line up’ out loud, fabulously, and unapologetically.”⁴⁰ The NDTC choreographed, reprised, and re-imagined their repertoire across

³⁹ Krista A. Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁴⁰ José Esteban. Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, *Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 78.

the 1960s and 1970s, to articulate these contradictions in Caribbean political life, and find a way to move towards freedom.

Rethinking Race in Jamaica

Rather than a black-white racial binary, Jamaica's class/color hierarchy is most often described as a division between the "brown" middle and elite classes (inclusive of middle eastern and mixed-race Jamaicans) and the dark-skinned black working class and poor majority. Jamaican politics are often narrated as a series of shifting alliances between these two groups. Since the colonial government granted universal suffrage in 1944, a two-party parliamentary system consisting of the Jamaican Labor Party (JLP) and People's National Party (PNP) has dominated both formal and informal political participation in Jamaica. Both parties emerged out of the West Indian Labor movement of the 1930s, an anti-British Great Depression era-coalition between black workers and an anti-colonial movement led primarily by "brown" or light-skinned, mix-raced middle-class reformers. For the first decade of independence (1962-1972), the conservative Jamaican Labor Party maintained majority rule, led in its first term by the charismatic, populist trade union leader Alexander Bustamante (1962-1967). Bustamante's promises of order and safety from the threats of communism, socialism, and atheism during the transition from Crown Rule appealed to both poor rural voters and landed elites. JLP's leadership held this multi-racial coalition as proof of their ideology of racial harmony. Political scientist Anthony Bogues points out that this "Brown Creole Nationalism" upheld the traditional privileges of the racial categories of the white capitalist class, brown creoles, and "Jamaica Whites" (middle-Eastern, or mixed-race Jamaicans with very light-skin as to appear white).⁴¹ Unlike notions of creolization posited by Caribbean cultural theorists in

⁴¹ Lisa Douglass, *The Power of Sentiment: Love, Hierarchy, and the Jamaican Family Elite* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

the 1970s, who used the term to describe the unique process of cultural production that arose from the uneven social relations of plantation societies, Brown Creole Nationalism centered "a notion of Creole which stated that Jamaica was neither African nor European while upholding European standards as the universal norm."⁴² The JLP's cultural policy sought to preserve a vision of national folk culture that acknowledged an African cultural heritage, while maintaining the supremacy of British values and political institutions as the path forward to national modernity.⁴³

After half a decade of rapid economic growth, cracks in the JLP's hold on power emerged in the late-1960s as the JLP's traditional voter base of poor and black rural inhabitants began to voice discontentment with foreign ownership of already scarce farming land, as well as rising levels of unemployment in the industrial and agricultural sectors. In Kingston, black nationalist movement—including Rastafari and Black Power—critiqued the ways that brown creole nationalism's myths of multi-racial democracy served to hide color hierarchies and sustain the inherited class privilege of the brown elite. The PNP, led by a charismatic and attractive politician named Michael Manley capitalized these grassroots, multi-class coalitions. While part of a powerful family of "brown" elite career politicians, the fair-skinned Manly adopted a youthful and heretical "pro-blackness" as a political stance. The political and cultural changes during the first Manley administration (1972-1980)—the international success of reggae and Rastafari, the PNP's adoption of a program of moderate socialist reform, and a politics of Non-Alignment—marked a

⁴² Anthony Bogues, "Nationalism and Jamaican Political Thought," in *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom: History, Heritage and Culture*, ed. Kathleen E.A. Monteith and Glen Richards (Mona, Jamaica: University College of the West Indies Press, 2002) 365.

⁴³ Deborah A. Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*, Latin America Otherwise (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 69.

permanent shift in both popular imaginaries and scholarly discourse about Jamaica's racial story.⁴⁴ The denial of blackness and the value system that undergirded Brown Creole nationalism did not simply disappear through the triumph of a black cultural revolution.

The legacy of Manley's economic policies continues to be highly contested, but the grassroots, reggae-influenced vision of black modernity popularly referred to as "roots culture" has remained central to hegemonic notions of "authentic" black Jamaican culture in both nationalist and touristic discourse. Some popular forms of nationalism continue to imagine Jamaica as a multi-racial melting pot, dismiss local expressions of Black Power as simply derivative of US politics, and view critical scholarship as an application of US empire's racial ideologies. However, scholarly work on the Cold War and Jamaica from the 1970s onward has largely maintained that Brown Creole Nationalism worked to naturalize the leadership of a small group of light-skinned elites who retained political and economic control of the nation. These critiques of multi-racial nationalism – primarily in the fields of political science and anthropology – argue that economic freedom, anti-imperialist resistance, and progressive political reform are dependent not only on attacking racial inequality, but promoting a black nationalist "race consciousness."⁴⁵ While in both everyday life and in the political discourse of the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond, Jamaicans persistently claimed racial identities and political ideologies that extend beyond blackness, much of this

⁴⁴ I use the term racial story to refer to the ways that racial ideology is encoded in narrative and performance scenarios that become inextricably linked to personal and collective life-story-telling. I borrow this framework for thinking about race from conversations with Paulina L. Alberto. See Paulina L. Alberto, "El Negro Raúl: Lives and Afterlives of an Afro-Argentine Celebrity, 1886 to the Present," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (2016).

⁴⁵ Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York ; London: Routledge, 2003); Brian. Meeks, *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean*, (Mona, Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2000); Rupert. Lewis, *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

scholarship cites this lack of coherence as evidence of a failure of the Jamaican national project to accurately reflect the nation and the product of elites' persistent denial of blackness as part of the nation's official racial story.

A focus on the black masses and the mulatto elites as the main political division in Caribbean politics, and the tendency to see Manley's black cultural revolution as a turning point, erases the range of competing ideologies of black nationalism, forms of radicalism, and the complex network of patron-client relationships that structured political affiliations. Anti-blackness did not simply disappear through the triumph of a black cultural revolution. Rather, blackness' usefulness as a unifying national story changed the language through which politicians and "respectable" media outlets perpetuated stigmas of blackness, transferring them onto other Afro-descendant bodies marked by class, profession, and gender performance.⁴⁶ The exaggerated emphasis on a black brown divide also perpetuates a false notion of blackness as a eugenic and cultural fact, in contrast to brownness, which is represented as a creative, but white assimilationist, construction. In fact, both blackness and brownness in Jamaica are unstable and rely on the visual, the social, and most of all, I argue, the performative interpretations. Recent scholarship has employed black internationalist frameworks and transnational methodologies to open up comparative ways of understanding Jamaican blackness, highlighting the complexity of black

⁴⁶ This has been well documented within Caribbean Feminist studies. See: Rochelle Rowe, *Imagining Caribbean Womanhood: Race, Nation and Beauty Contests, 1929-70*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Belinda Edmondson, "Public Spectacles: Caribbean Women and the Politics of Public Performance," *Small Axe* no. 13 (2003): 1; Sistren and Honor Ford-Smith, *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005); Consuelo López Springfield, *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Nicole C. Bourbonnais, *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

identity and political behavior. Following the scholarship of Lara Putnam, Harvey Neptune, Margaret Stevens, and others, I seek to integrate West Indian history into larger histories of black radicalism within the British Empire, United States, and the greater Caribbean to illuminate the range of local and transnational influences that constituted the West Indies' constructions of blackness and brownness.⁴⁷

While West Indian theorists in the 1960s and 1970s frequently compared British Caribbean constructions of multi-racial harmony and social democracy to parallel ideologies in the Lusophone and Spanish-speaking world, Jamaicans never applied the term “racial democracy” to their national context. Yet, the methods and comparative frameworks that histories of racial democracy have generated provide a useful roadmap for re-interrogating the radical potential of multi-racial institutions and creole cultural politics, and the ways that revolutionary coalitions in the Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean were marked by a constant push/pull between racist and anti-racist visions of national community. Scholars of racial democracy also argued against the need to define stable or geographically fixed notions of black authenticity or politics, pushing the need to study regional, local, and transnational or migratory black community in concert.

Smaddification is not only a reaction to or a conversation with whiteness, but is also a diaspora dialectic that attempts to address inequalities within international black coalitions and the

⁴⁷ These scholars lay a foundation for thinking through these kinds of inquiries in the interwar and World War II periods. They argue that the British Empire's extension of citizenship protections to all of its colonial subjects were powerful forms of claims-making for Afro-descendant West Indians, an experience that was significantly different from the legal segregation that shaped black political formation in the United States. Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Margaret Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

Caribbean as a whole. The Black British Caribbean has yet to be fully included in these conversations of racial self-making and cosmopolitanism both because of language divides and because, as Edwards Hayes has argued, black internationalism is unevenly attributed to subjects with different historical relations to empire and nation. I use the aesthetic practices of Queer Caribbean diaspora to draw attention to erotic forms of politics and performances of regional and anti-racist coalitions that are often excluded from US-centered or Latin Americanist visions of progressive, revolutionary, masculine forms of radical black politics. I also draw on what Gayatri Gopinath calls a “queer regional imaginary,” a scholarly orientation within queer diaspora that uses the region (defined as both supranational and subnational) to reveal how migration and return migration circulated shared frameworks of queer embodied aesthetic practices around the circum-Caribbean.⁴⁸ For instance, my emphasis on the period of Federation, a moment when geographically and demographically diverse British West Indian polities attempted to creatively imagine and perform unity, represents one queer “otherwise” to the idea of Jamaican autonomy and racial nationalisms. Caribbean performers used regional and diaspora affinities to enact smaddification by drawing attention to the relational cultures of small islands to amplify the Caribbean’s collective contributions to global culture, and by mapping out alternative geographies that disavowed the centrality and uniqueness of imperial seats of power.

This project affirms and follows the routes and imagined geographies from the 1930s into the post-war period that shaped West Indian racial performance, particularly the circum-Caribbean migratory sphere that linked New York, Central/South America, and the British West Indies. This project also seeks to reclaim the labor that West Indians contributed to the

⁴⁸ Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham; Duke University Press Books, 2018).

intersecting traditions of American modern dance and Negro Dance, experiences that show how black and brown Jamaicans marked unique interventions into the aesthetic conventions of mid-20th century Black Diaspora. I trace these transnational conversations into the post-independence period by following the migratory dance-labor networks through which Jamaican artists traded choreographies of sovereignty with dancers in Africa and its diaspora. By highlighting or curating, as Gopinath calls her practice of lovingly mapping the connections and intimacies between queer makers within the South Asian diaspora, the shared aesthetic practices of the NDTC's community reveals how Jamaicans performed the work of diaspora recognition with their bodies, and how Jamaican Nationalist Blackness as it emerged in the decade following independence was authored in dialog with the decolonizing Global South.⁴⁹

West Indian art-makers both exploited and resisted their position in global black consciousness, all the while struggling to configure modernity that was all their own. The history of the Jamaican concert dance allows us to see beyond the racial performances commonly associated with accommodating or resisting colonial hierarchies and to understand how, in the rich internationalist milieu of decolonial black politics of the 1960s and 1970s, blackness was at once a choice, a creative construction, an exclusionary constraint, and a joyous experiment.

On Loving Dead Dancers

I never met Rex Nettleford, who served as the NDTC's Artistic Director and lead Choreographer from 1962 until he died in 2010. I was born in the United States to Jamaican immigrants, upwardly mobile but from working-class backgrounds, stalwartly protestant, without access or desire to be privy to the social world of the urban middle-class artists and intelligentsia.

⁴⁹ Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions*.

To some, the fact that I study Jamaican dance but never experienced Nettleford's physical presence and direct mentorship reach is a marker of my foreignness. It sets me apart from the wide network of dance histories and political historians who were educated in Jamaica or worked within the University of the West Indies system during the second half of the 20th century, for whom Nettleford was a mentor, intellectual guide, and sentry into the world of dance studies. My fascination with Nettleford, cultivated in part by this distance, also separates me from the many who shaped their dance careers in direct opposition to his mainstream, commercial, and folkloric style. However, as I began to study cultural policy in Jamaica, it was clear that Nettleford, even in his absence, archives, and legacy acted as sentry into my journey into Jamaican cultural studies. I had to confront and trace his steps to come to terms with the battles over representation of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly arguments over who was allowed to embody black culture and under what terms.

The NDTC's offices and archives are tucked behind Kingston's Little Theatre—a large, concrete, 1960s-style cultural complex on the busy intersection of Tom Redcam Road and Arthur Wint Dr. It sits on a major intersection near Crossroads, a junction that connects "Downtown" Kingston (home to both the old city's business district and many of its lower-income neighborhoods) and "Uptown" (the financial districts of New Kingston, the University, and upper-class neighborhoods on the hills). The white-washed, concrete building holds the company's administrative offices where the Artistic Director and Archivist/Office Manager (the company's only paid employees) work, as well as its practice studio. The studio has large, garage-style doors that are kept open to the streets during the company's late-night practices, letting in the cool night air to the un-air-conditioned space. Pedestrians passing by, or waiting at the bus stop on Tom Redcam Road, can often stop and peer through the chain-link fences that surround the complex, the bright fluorescent studio lighting acting as a spotlight on the dancers.

Much of the research for this dissertation was conducted during a series of trips to Kingston in 2018 and 2019. It is the first monograph-length project to use the company archives that Nettleford carefully stewarded without his oversight. Throughout my stays in Jamaica, my days fell into a steady habit. When I wasn't watching rehearsals or classes, I spent hot afternoons in the tiny room beside the practice studios lined with file cabinets. I sat on the concrete floor with files of documents sprawling open beside me, watching VHS recordings of old performances on a static-ridden television or reading Nettleford's painstakingly kept records until the light from the archive's tiny barred window was not enough to read by, chasing the last beams of sunset to finish my walk home before dark. I scanned thousands of financial documents, performance contracts, photographs, and most of all, critical reviews of the NDTC with Nettleford's own lengthy rebuttals. Sometimes, in the mornings before the dancers arrived at the studio, I walked across the street to the Edna Manley School of the Arts—whose dance department was founded by NDTC dancers Bert Rose, Barbara Requa, and Cheryl Ryman—where Nettleford donated his private collection of books on physical education, dance, and African art. Other mornings, I took a bus uptown to the neighborhood at Mona to the University of the West Indies (UWI). To get to the UWI's sound/visual archives, I walked down a hallway of administrative offices lined with photos, drawings, and paintings of Nettleford honoring his almost 50-year long tenure as a faculty member, and later in life, his post as the institution's Vice-Chancellor. On other days, I would take a route taxi all the way downtown to the bustling Parade Market to visit the National Archives at the Institute of Jamaica, the country's premier research institution where Nettleford acted as chairperson. Nettleford, his artistic commitments, and legacy as an institution builder haunted me everywhere I searched for dance history in Kingston.

Cultural theorist Natasha Barnes describes Nettleford's life's work as a quest to gain the personal influence and build the kinds of cultural infrastructure to “enable the kind of profound

epistemological revision that would dignify the low, the profane, and the outcast” forms of working-class culture, “and even more important, to produce the criticism that could understand and explain the shift.”⁵⁰ Nettleford wanted to transform a colonial mindset that associated artistry with Europeanness, to the beauty in black popular and social dance and the merit of his strategies of translating it onto the stage. Engaging with critics, even to the point where he was publicly accused of intimidating young journalists and theatre colleagues, was a crucial part of his project of shaping West Indian criticism.⁵¹ Some of these letters were sent, and others existed only for the archive. Nettleford crafted his rebuttals with future historians of the Jamaican dance as the intended audience. To quote his remarks to an established dance theatre writer in one of Jamaica’s major newspapers, who Nettleford felt sure would end up on the wrong side of history, it was his moral duty to set the record straight: “as a trained historian,” he wrote, “I am too aware of the nonsense that can pass as off as gospel to eager researchers in the quest of ‘facts’ twenty or thirty years after the event.”⁵² As a trained historian, Nettleford also likely knew the power of archives to shape history. I, an eager researcher, lived the tension of being seduced by his strong opinions and intensely critical of his methods. Oral histories with many of the remaining first generation of NDTC dancers, as well as several research trips to New York and London to seek out the personal archives of Nettleford’s friends and rivals in the Black Arts World, helped me fill in the gaps and understand the politics behind the omissions in his collection.

⁵⁰ Natasha Barnes, *Cultural Conundrums: Gender, Race, Nation, and the Making of Caribbean Cultural Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006): 24.

⁵¹ Mervyn Morris, “NDTC, Su-Su and Truth,” *Sunday Sun*, August 15, 1982.

⁵² “Rex Nettleford to Harry Milner,” August 11, 1980, NDTC Archive.

Nettleford was deceptively easy to locate, but he is a vexingly difficult public figure to write about because he was a master of code-switching and confounding race and class performances. Few scholars of Jamaican cultural history would fail to cite Rex Nettleford's written work in their discussions of race and national culture, but even fewer have attempted to grapple with his reputation as a Black cultural advocate who rejected black power, as an anti-establishment institution builder, a gay man, defender of the patriarchal modes of leadership, as a pragmatic radical.⁵³ Creative and erudite from an early age, a dark-skinned son of peasants born in 1933 and raised by his mother and grandmother in a Jamaican north coast village on the edge of sugarcane fields, Nettleford could switch between the posh Anglicized Jamaican accent he cultivated as a scholarship student at Oxford and countrified patois in the blink of an eye. His fame as a public intellectual grew throughout the 1960s, both through the NDTC and his roles acting and choreographing Kingston's popular pantomime shows and as the head of the university's adult and trade union education initiatives. His queerness was known but rarely noted; it is knowledge that is hidden in his archive but passed down through orality, gossip, and performance. When Michael Manley's administration attempted to use the arts to create a new culture of mass politics in the 1970s, Nettleford led their efforts, becoming chairman of the government committee on worker participation, cultural advisor to the prime minister, and chairman of the Council of the Institution of Jamaica (the nation's primary research and arts intuition).⁵⁴ While Nettleford did not establish the long relationship between dance and formal/oppositional politics in Jamaica, his prominence in

⁵³ Some explorations of NDTC's institutional legacy include Sabine Sörgel, *Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2007); Deborah A. Thomas, "Democratizing Dance: Institutional Transformation and Hegemonic Re-Ordering in Postcolonial Jamaica," *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2002): 512-50.

⁵⁴ Honor Ford-Smith, "The Body and Performance in 1970s Jamaica: Toward a Decolonial Cultural Method."

the national media and institutional legacy cemented its centrality in formal post-colonial policy formation. Through his strategic championship of black culture, working-class folk, and urban poor social and religious dance forms became nationally recognizable.

Still, perhaps because of the literary, masculine bent of the West Indian artist movement, the radical Marxist politics favored by the young, popular intellectuals of his time, Nettleford's written and embodied contributions to the idea of Jamaica as a black nation are rarely included in the canon of black radicalism. The radical left and anti-establishment working poor rejected Nettleford's class and sexual performance as a black man, and dismissed the work he did as something less than "serious" politics. Others accused the NTDC of transforming revolutionary folk art into easily consumable market commodities. Nor are these critiques wholly without foundation. Nettleford's clean-cut appearance, the affected accent he put on in public appearances, his embrace of North American and European movement languages, and his involvement in the tourism industry and international film industry, and adherence to the increasingly neoliberal Jamaican state of the course of the 1980s and 1990s are hard positions to reconcile with popular visions of the third world revolutionary. Indeed, his defenders have often avoided talking about his dance career and commercial work, focusing instead on a narrative that emphasizes his prolific writing career, his support of working-class culture, his work in institution building, and involvement in more obviously progressive causes, such as with trade union education.⁵⁵

My goal is not to argue the purity or progressiveness of Nettleford's catalog, but rather to attempt to position his commitment to the commercial and spectacular within a certain genealogy

⁵⁵ See for instance, Rupert Lewis, "Mirror Mirror On the Wall/Who Is the Fairest of Them All?' Rex Nettleford and the Knotty Issue of Identity," *Caribbean Quarterly* 57, no. 3-4 (December 2011): 33-48. Anthony Bogues, "Rex Nettleford: The Canepeice, Labour, Education and the Caribbean Intellectual," *Caribbean Quarterly* 57, no. 3-4 (2011).

of queer Jamaican politics. Nettleford disavowed the very characteristics that usually allow third world art to be valued as “original” performance or available to be “translated” by outsiders into United States and European notions of the avant-garde—authenticity, difficulty, qualities of “rawness,” and open transgression.⁵⁶ He opens up a space for me to explore Caribbean black radicalism as frivolity and pleasure. While Nettleford hoped to develop these practices of freedom, these fleeting embodiments of emancipation, as an experiential roadmap for Jamaicans in the broadest sense, he was also deeply invested in exploring how race, class, and geography favored or limited one's ability to move and claim value. His danced body of work allows me to ask crucial questions about how one not only achieves black freedom, but perhaps also expands our imagination about who is allowed to represent black freedom in the Caribbean.

To talk about bodies is to talk about erotics. Avoiding dance, sexual desires, and sensuality in our discussions of Nettleford risks missing an opportunity to explore the ways that, through the work of one of Jamaica's most prominent public figures, erotic forms of citizenship were both policed from and institutionalized into the very fabric of Jamaican civil society. Cheryl Ryman, an NDTC principal dancer and choreographer in the 1960s and 1970s, emphasized this lack of hierarchical distinction between mind/bodily intellectual Nettleford, so that “his choreography was one way of disseminating information and analyzing information, coming to terms with that information, then he wrote about it on an intellectual basis.”⁵⁷ To Ryman's articulation of how embodied practices of theorizing both preceded and worked in dialog with his written practice, I

⁵⁶ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 9.

⁵⁷ Cheryl Ryman, Interview by Author, Kingston, March 23, 2018.

I'm grateful to Cheryl Ryman for helping me reason through the relationship between Nettleford's public written and embodied practices.

analyze how dance and embodiment might function as a fugitive strategy, an act of marronage in plain sight.⁵⁸ I read Nettleford's words and choreography as intertextual creative practices, while paying close attention to moments when they seem to diverge or fail to "line up" to understand how they worked together to both amplify aspects of his political persona and hide others.⁵⁹ My exploration wades into these inconsistencies between words and actions. Nettleford's carefully constructed archive and preemptive rebuttals to future critics reveal a dialectic of avowals and disavowals that prove his artistic, political, racial, and sexual identifications to have been a fluid process rather than solid "facts." His body and his biography are central to my attempts at imagining a queer Jamaican history that extends beyond overwhelming homophobia and isolation.⁶⁰ I use performance to show the power of state discourse in both staged and everyday actions of Jamaicans across race and social class, and also how opportunities for resistance came from this space of dwelling in ambivalence and contradictions.

A study of Jamaican dance that centers the NDTC, and Nettleford in particular, also runs the risk of re-inscribing NDTC's own company lore that structures the emergence of Jamaican concert dance around the figure of a benevolent patriarch: a self-taught, male genius. Far from affirming such a narrative, my story also follows the women social dancers, social welfare workers, performers, and anthropologists outside of the NDTC who acted as Nettleford's teachers, who I credit with devising what is now recognizable as Jamaica's Afro-Caribbean dance language. The racial, gender, and sexual politics of why, at the moment of independence and throughout the

⁵⁸ Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁵⁹ José Esteban. Muñoz, *Disidentification*

⁶⁰ Lyndon K. Gill, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2018).

1960s, Jamaican politicians promoted the work of a man like Nettleford while denying publicity and funding to other Jamaican artists, further demonstrates the broad spectrum of positions that queer artists inhabited between belonging and nonbelonging to the nation. Other foundational NDTC dancers include (but are not limited to) NDTC co-founder Eddy Thomas, Joyce Campbell, Bert Rose, Barry Moncrieff, Barbara Requa, Cheryl Ryman, and Audley Butler. Many of these dancers contributed to this study directly, by sharing their memories via oral history interviews, shaping my analysis through thoughtful conversations, and teaching me movement and dance history. Other dancers who pursued dance careers in the United States but moved in and out of the NDTC's orbit, such as Garth Fagan and Clive Thompson, also shaped how I charted the NDTC's experience of migration, diaspora, and black internationalist community. I hope in future writing to better honor this broader group influence on Jamaican concert dance and my scholarship. However, while many of these dancers came and went, pursuing projects and personal spaces beyond Jamaica and the NDTC's sphere of influence, Rex Nettleford, whose choreography and leadership dominated every season of NDTC dance from 1962 to his death, remains my through-line. Many other dance organizations have contributed to the rich landscape of dance performance in Jamaica, but no other company could claim such privileged ties to state patronage. To trace the consistent presence of dance as a discourse of race and nation throughout Jamaica's post-independence history is to contend with this outsized artist, historian, administrator, and archivist.

Over the past few years that I have been doing this work many elders from the NDTC and their wider Caribbean community scholars, writers, and dancers who led the region in celebration of and critical reflection on independence have passed: Nettleford, Derek Walcott, Stuart Hall, Barrymore Moncrieffe, Audley Butler, and Edward Kamau Braithwaite. I have met each departure with great mourning and surprising attachment, alerting me to the one-sided intimacy that I've

cultivated with these men whom I have never met. I have gotten to know them by reading their archives, listening to their voices, and studying how their bodies move. I developed an affinity despite our differences in age and gender, and relation to patriarchy. Feeling this erotic connection to these people and their political projects, while facing the tragic impossibility of our meeting face-to-face has reminded me that much like ethnographers, historians ought to be self-reflective also. I've had to fight my longings to write a romantic postcolonial narrative with a hopeful ending and come to terms with my grief for a vision of Caribbean freedom that never was. I've accepted my desire and ambivalence, used it to fuel writing about how the allure of both patriarchal revolutionary masculinists *and* idealized queer communities can exist in tandem. In the cold, white, Ann Arbor winters, I built an imaginary West Indian community to sustain me. Perhaps the greatest and most worthwhile struggle of this scholarship has been to feel the full force of my love for these 1970s visions of Caribbean freedom, so spectacularly embodied by the NDTC, to trace the boundaries and peer into the spaces of exclusion, and to return to the messiness of the present with new strategies for forming attachments across diaspora.

Dissertation Structure

Each of this dissertation's five chapters begins with a cornerstone work in the NDTC's repertoire and then opens into a discussion of how the dancing bodies in each piece affected or reflected larger conversations about race and state-formation. The chapters move chronologically and are organized thematically around the evolution of both the concert dance and Jamaica's racial story. Chapters 1 and 2 begin in the late colonial period (1934-1960), and chart a genealogy of concert dance in Jamaica, revealing the vaudeville traditions, social dance, modern dance training, and African Diaspora religions that formed the basis of the NDTC's movement style. A search for the regional lineages of the NDTC's queer aesthetic guides my questioning. Chapter 1, named after the black social dance "shay-shay," emphasizes the links between performance culture and

early decolonizing politics in the former British West Indies. I tell this story by using African American modern dancer Katherine Dunham as a bridge between trans-national Pan-African and Modern Dance performance networks in the 1930s and 1940s. I draw from Katherine Dunham's ethnographic work in the Caribbean, but decenter fieldwork and "live fidelity" that many biographers represent as the sole basis of her Caribbean-inspired concert dance. Instead, I emphasize her West Indian collaborators, rivals, and social dance source material to explore the gaps and silences generated by her US-centered history of West Indian dance.

My second chapter, "Federation Market," charts the stories of Jamaican dance teachers who traveled around the region in the 1950s, teaching rural communities in support of late-colonial social welfare physical education development. I shape my periodization around the short-lived Federation of the West Indies (1958-1962), a supranational framework for tracing the formation of a common West Indies dance pedagogy that has all but been erased from histories of Jamaican dance. I analyze the work of Jamaican modern dancer and social welfare officer, Ivy Baxter, who created a Pan-West Indian modern dance and folk dance curriculum taught across the islands. Baxter's fraught performances of inter-island tensions and competitions over which island held the central "source" of West Indian culture reveal the lasting impact dance education had on Jamaicans' orientation within the Caribbean.

My third and fourth chapters explore the NDTC's representations of racial politics in Jamaica between 1962-1970 concerning global Black Power and decolonization movements, shifting the scale of my inquiry from the West Indian region to queer diaspora formation. "Two Drums for Babylon," covers the NDTC leadership's trips to West Africa and fieldwork with the emerging Rastafari religion, interactions which deeply impacted Jamaica's cultural policy in the early years of independence. As Jamaica transitioned from a British Colony to an independent nation, political leaders grappled with how to create "authentic" representations of the country's

African cultural heritage to reflect Jamaica's majority black populace. I analyze three ballets about Jamaica's African past and contemporary Rastafari demands for repatriation to Africa. I explore the diaspora intimacies and Nettleford's attachments to powerful male leaders of the decolonization movement to read NDTC performances of black fraternal connections as queer diaspora longings. My fourth chapter, titled "Jonkonnu," takes as its inspiration the *Plantation Revelry*, Nettleford's folk ballet about Jonkonnu festival culture and the plantation roots of Jamaica's culture. *Plantation Revelry* became the subject of controversy in 1968, during the height of Black Power protests in Jamaica, when leftist intellectuals pushed against the NDTC representations of plantation life that used levity, spectacularization, camp, and satire. Using dancer/scholar Sylvia Wynter's cultural criticism and clashes with the NDTC to explore the shifting grounds of black authenticity, I explore how the somatic mandates of late-1960s black nationalism in Jamaica were structured by gender and class performances.

Finally, my fifth chapter, "Kumina," examines Jamaican embodied responses to the Cuban Revolution and other Caribbean socialist visions of citizenship, by studying Kingston's 1976 Caribbean Festival of the Arts, a Pan-Caribbean and Latin American anti-imperialist artist festival. This chapter grapples with the institutional legacy of the NDTC and their role in standardizing a West Indian aesthetic. Moving beyond the concert stage, I analyze the planning, construction, and public relations used to promote the festival as a culminating performance of the vision of national identity that the NDTC helped to establish over the first 15 years of independence. I also employ an analysis of spectatorship and audience participation – particularly the crowd's unruly or enraptured responses to dance performance – to understand how West Indian audiences inserted themselves into or disavowed regional stories about revolutionary citizenship.

CHAPTER 1 Shay-Shay

“Me wi dance de shay shay
Me will dance the kachrill...
Me wi dance till the whole
a mi foot-bottom peel”

-Jamaican Folk Song¹

In 1935, anthropologist and African American dancer Katherine Dunham made a short film of an unnamed couple dancing together in the daylight on an open, private veranda in Kingston, Jamaica. As the film opens, they are facing each other, arms loose at their sides, languidly moving their hips and shoulders as they shuffle forward, then back and away from each other. The few times they get close enough to touch, they pause their back and forth to dance with their foreheads and hips pressed together for a few intimate seconds. Then, they seem to remember the camera and spin away in opposite directions, laughing. The film skips and the couple is dancing again, no longer as playful, but romantic. They are slower this time, clasping hands in a close embrace. The film skips forward, and the female partner is dancing on her own. Her hair is tied up in a cloth wrap, and she is dressed in a plain, slightly crumpled house dress.

¹ Song lyrics as transcribed in Sylvia Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Toward the Interpretation of Folk Dance as Cultural Process,” *Jamaica Journal* 4, no. 2 (1970): 44.

But she is feeling herself, casually rubbing her hands on her stomach as she mouths the words to a song we cannot hear, she shimmies her shoulders and shay-shays in the sunlight. ²

The term shay-shay, local slang for partner dances to popular music in the early 20th-century, was used almost interchangeably with mento dancing or as a general descriptor for lively, jazz-age social dances performed by black Jamaicans across rural or urban geographies. ³ The term “social dance” broadly refers to the popular or participatory dances performed in social settings, rather than in the concert hall, practice studio, or to perform a set role within a religious ritual. The shay-shay, for example, developed its form from a creolized version of the quadrille and had a few foundational characteristics: a shuffling chasse, a loose, pelvic-centered wind of the hips, the close-hold between partners. However, the true delight of the shay-shay was its shape-shifting qualities that reflected the many global and migratory influences of Caribbean port cities, drawing from and incorporating other circum-Caribbean popular dances like son, rhumba, or bamboula. The dance, with its vague typology and de-territorialized origins, has been largely overlooked in Jamaica dance anthropology and dance education. These pedagogies of national dance focus on localized, rural “folk” forms with origins that are less easily traced to commercial and popular culture fads.

In this chapter, I use the geographic messiness of the category of dances called shay-shays and the stories of circum-Caribbean migrants who innovated these movements to bridge two sites of inquiry: United States Modern Dance history and the political history of the West Indian anti-colonial movement. I focus on Marcus Garvey’s return to Kingston and the construction of Edelweiss Amusement Park (1929-1934) and Beryl McBurnie’s calypso stage shows in New York

² Katherine Dunham, *Martinique-Jamaica, 1936*, video recording, 1936.

³ Cheryl Ryman, “The Jamaican Heritage in Dance: Developing a Traditional Typography” *Jamaica Journal*, 44 (June 1980): 13.

and Trinidad (1938-1948). Garvey and McBurnie shared the political mission of harnessing popular culture and social dance in the service of West Indian decolonial politics, as they emerged in the period surrounding the 1934-1938 West Indian Labor Riots that gave birth to Jamaica's formal political party system. These case studies allow me to explore strategies of embodied citizenship in this early stage of state formation. Rather than seeing social uplift and the everyday practices of sexual and embodied citizenship as separate anti-colonial epistemologies, shay-shays at Edelweiss Park and in McBurnie's cabaret limbo reveal how pleasure, leisure, and bourgeois discipline merged to form a specifically West Indian working-class, black and migratory politics.⁴ Like the labor unions that grew parallel to the shay-shay dance craze, West Indian dance politics challenged elites for control over work hours and leisure time. The amusement park and its patrons used dance spectacle to make black enjoyment and erotics marvelously visible to local and global publics.

An emphasis on the secular and cosmopolitan form of shay-shay also challenges our conceptual parameters of what kinds of movement Caribbean bodies could authentically master and innovate, particularly according to United States dancers and anthropologists like Katherine Dunham. Dunham recorded Jamaican social dance and nightlife during her 1935 research trip to the Caribbean, looking for evidence of African survival in New World Dance traditions. Dunham evoked Caribbean dance religions—especially from Haiti and the West Indies—to theorize African diaspora as a continuum of black experience, rather than a primitive foil to modernity in the colonial imaginary.⁵ Within her choreography, Caribbean or tropical dance suites signified a

⁴ Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*, 346 p. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

⁵ Kate Ramsey, "Melville Herskovits, Katherine Dunham, and the Politics of African Diasporic Dance Anthropology," *Dancing Bodies, Living Histories: New Writings about Dance and Culture*, ed. Lisa Doolittle and Anne Flynn (Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2000); Anthea Kraut, "Between Primitivism and

utopian intermediary space between Northern industrial capitalism and African savagery.⁶

Dunham's early career films and ethnographic writing from her time in West Indies are rich sources from the early twentieth century that reveal the visual form of Jamaican shay-shays.⁷

However, Dunham found shay-shays as jazz-age circum-migratory social dances tricky to place on the continuum of black modernity. Cosmopolitan, secular, playful, and resistant to functionalist anthropological analysis, they did not fit her idea of what black Caribbean bodies could create.⁸

Dunham's neglect of shay-shay and other interwar urban West Indian dance styles remain important because she became a definitive global voice on Afro-Caribbean dance: so much so that she is often credited with being the mother of Afro-Caribbean high concert dance. Formerly a liminal figure in the history of American modernist dance, scholarship has rightfully begun to explore Katherine Dunham's contributions to the field of anthropology, her space within the history of American Modern dance, and her impact on nationalist Latin American, African, and

Diaspora: The Dance Performances of Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Katherine Dunham," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (October 17, 2003).

⁶ By inserting Caribbean dance numbers into their dance reviews, as an "intermediary terrain between Africa and America," Dunham and North American dancers used the Caribbean as a historical placeholder to make the evolution of black culture across time and space legible to audiences in the United States, and to begin to build Africana temporalities and origin stories. Anthea Kraut, "Between Primitivism and Diaspora: The Dance Performances of Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Katherine Dunham," 450.

⁷ An exception is Lara Putnam's *Radical Moves*, which analyses how the circum-Caribbean press wrote about the dance craze in the 1910s and 1920s and charts its migrations around the West Indian diaspora. Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁸ Dunham's anthropological work was inspired by her mentor, Melville Herskovits, who pioneered a methodology for tracing New World Black culture retained cultural survivals from Africa, as a way of historicizing (rather than pathologizing) racial difference. Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of The Negro Past*, Reprint edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990). On how Dunham eventually departed from Herskovits' style of ethnography, see Kate Ramsey, "Melville Herskovits, Katherine Dunham, and the Politics of African Diasporic Dance Anthropology."

Caribbean dance movements abroad.⁹ However, this push to remediate Dunham's exclusion from the dance historiography of the *United States* has led some historians to position the Dunham Company (and particularly their 1951 tour of Latin America and the Caribbean) as the sole inspiration for "ethnic" and "folkloric" concert dance movement in the *Caribbean*.¹⁰

⁹ Several books seek to reposition Dunham's choreographic contributions within dance studies. Joanna Dee Das's Dunham biography is a significant recent contribution to this project, Joanna Dee Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora*, 1 edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017). Other significant reformulations of Dunham as a diaspora theorist include: Katherine Dunham, *Kaiso!: Writings by and about Katherine Dunham* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Anthea Kraut, "Between Primitivism and Diaspora: The Dance Performances of Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Katherine Dunham," *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (October 17, 2003): 433-50. Another vein of Dunham scholarship has traced her influence on diasporic cultures alongside other black American women anthropologists, including Julia L. Foulkes, "Ambassadors with Hips: Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus and the Allure of Africa in the Black Arts Movement," in *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960s*, ed. Avital Bloch and Lauri Umansky (NYU Press, 2005); Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, "'Keep Alive the Powers of Africa': Katherine Dunham, Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Deren, and the Circum-Caribbean Culture of Vodoun," *Atlantic Studies* 5, no. 3 (December 1, 2008): 347-62.

Dunham's ethnographic work, particularly her study of Vodou, has been more fully integrated into anthropology than Dance Studies. For her contributions to the field of anthropology, see for example Kate Ramsey, "Melville Herskovits, Katherine Dunham, and the Politics of African Diasporic Dance Anthropology," in *Dancing Bodies, Living Histories: New Writings about Dance and Culture*, ed. Lisa Doolittle and Anne Flynn (Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2000), and this anthology: Elizabeth Chin, ed. *Katherine Dunham: Recovering an Anthropological Legacy, Choreographing Ethnographic Futures* (SAR Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Joanna Dee Das, *Katherine Dunham: Dance and the African Diaspora*, 143. Katherine Dunham made similar claims about her extensive influence in an interview with her biographer, Ruth Beckford. See Ruth Beckford, *Katherine Dunham, a Biography* (New York: M. Dekker, 1979), 107.



Figure 1: Katherine Dunham in costume for Tropical Revue (1945) at New York's Century Theatre. Photograph by Alfredo Valenti. Library of Congress.

This unidirectional narrative fails to acknowledge a circum-Caribbean history of Afro-Caribbean concert dance, and the role of 20th century social dances in shaping staging conventions. Within this revisionist turn in Dunham scholarship, few have analyzed Dunham's research, study, and performances in the British West Indies or with West Indians abroad. This despite the centrality of Trinidadian Shango/limbo sources to many of her works. Dunham deemed the island bodies she filmed to be too Westernized for her project of excavating the primitive roots of New World black dance. In keeping with Dunham's biases, US-based scholars and practitioners commonly consider her fieldwork in Haiti and her initiation into Vodou (experiences that she details in her second ethnographic memoir, *An Island Possessed*, 1969) to be the only foundation

for what is now known as Afro-Caribbean dance in the United States.¹¹ This emphasis on original fieldwork and spiritual transformation erases an alternative history in which Dunham and other African American dancers in the 1930s and 1940s took private lessons with West Indian dance professionals and also drew from less authentically “native” (or migratory and creolized) circum-Caribbean social dances like the shay-shay, calypso, and mento to develop their concert creations. Dunham and Dunham's scholars' insistence on a strict divide between the kinds of knowledge that foreign researchers and "native" bodies can produce reveals the persistence of dance history's failure to come to terms with the Caribbean's particular forms of creole creativity, local cultures of entertainment production and consumption, and its complex modernity. How do we take black West Indian dancers' claims and contributions to the diverse source material of their creole culture seriously, while critically engaging with the racial and imperial hierarchies that structure these affinities to Africaness, New World blackness, or Europeaness? How can we use Caribbean logics or radical moves against European epistemologies to frame our interpretations of the queer and spectacular unruliness of working-class Jamaican political performance?¹²

Writing Katherine Dunham out of Jamaican and West Indian dance history does not remedy this problem of the American-centered dance history. Just as Dunham has shaped the ways that US scholars write about Jamaican and African Diaspora religion and dance, Dunham's

¹¹ Within dance history, Vodou dance has been prized for its liberatory protentional not only because foundational New World anthropology has been able to trace its deities and ideologies to African counterparts, but because the religion both contributed to and memorializes the Haitian Revolution. See Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

A notable exception – which focuses on Dunham's early ethnographic work in Jamaica – is A Lynn Bolles “Katherine Dunham's First Journey in Anthropology” in *Katherine Dunham: Recovering an Anthropological Legacy, Choreographing Ethnographic Futures*, edited by Elizabeth Chin, (SAR Press, 2014). Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹² Honor Ford-Smith, “Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica,” *Interventions* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 18–44.

techniques, writing, tours, and attempts to build dance institutions throughout the Caribbean became part of how Jamaican and West Indian dancers learned to articulate their life stories and career journeys in ways that are recognized by the outside world. Dunham's West Indian legacy - sustained by West Indian dancers at home and abroad who taught her, borrowed from her, claimed her, fought against her, were ambivalent towards her - functions as an organizing structure for this chapter. Dunham's use of Afro-Caribbean dance served as one of many strategies that local dancemakers and anthropologists used to reclaim their contributions to black culture.

In this chapter, I am primarily interested in the interpretations, expectations, and silences that a United States-centered and imperialist story of Caribbean dance (as articulated in and perpetuated by current scholarship on Dunham) has created. The lack of attention to jazz-age social dance is one such silence. Furthermore, I attend to how Caribbean artists worked with and against the idea of Katherine Dunham to intervene in political conversations about nation, imperialism, and US power.¹⁸ Instead of attempting to verify the West Indian influence in Dunham's dance creations, I trace a longer history of social and commercial dance in Jamaica, Trinidad, and through West Indian migratory routes that predates Dunham's 1951 Latin American and Caribbean tour, guided by the stories of black Caribbean performers and spectators in the interwar period. Instead of seeking to understand how Afro-Caribbeanness was "refined" and made useful to North Americans, I am interested in the unruly and smadditizing ways that black and brown West Indians exploited their own obscurity, taking advantage of the global North's vague and unnuanced visions of tropical cultures to claim a broad regional dance lineage. I analyze the transnational movement of somatic West Indianness as performed by participants in

¹⁸ On the boundaries that American anthropology and theatre studies have put on the study of dance, see Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003).

Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanist social dance competitions in Kingston, and New York-based calypso concert and nightclub dancers like Beryl McBurnie. These dancers drew on theories of diaspora inspired by black nationalist and anti-imperial organizations like the UNIA and delighted in embracing spectacle and producing joy. They claimed migrancy, rather than ancestral rootedness, as the origin story of the black West Indies. They used stories that migrants and the circum-Caribbean press carried back home about the international influence of their fad culture to make themselves even bigger. I map the complex sets of references, artistic connections, and anti-imperial critiques that informed the decision by West Indian audiences to claim dance as a useful contribution to their nationalist project of self-definition. Orienting a story of West Indian dance towards the West Indies and around traveling bodies of West Indian dancers reveals that what appear to be neatly separate categories of concert dance, social dance, and commercial forms (like the vibrant vaudeville tradition in the 1930s and 1940s West Indian nightlife), in fact, developed in tandem. Working through Katherine Dunham's generative research on dance and diaspora, and around how "an idea of Dunham" that has shaped imaginaries for West Indian dance performance, I argue that anti-colonial dancers in West Indies and its migratory centers deftly negotiated with the United States and British Empire to claim their right to shine on the world stage.

Shay-Shay and the Garveyites Uptown

In 1928, Marcus Garvey arrived in Kingston to stage the final act of his political career. Exiled from the United States under criminal charges, the Jamaican-born Pan-Africanist writer, organizer, and entrepreneur moved the base of his multi-national, millions of members-strong organization back to his home island. Garvey's fall from grace, arrest and exile by the United States government on charges of mail fraud, and return to his country of origin (1927-1935) also came at an auspicious moment for him to make his mark on the early West Indies nationalist movement.

Garvey's many projects in Jamaica included founding the first formal political party in 1929 (the People's Political Party, PPP), running for municipal office, launching two new periodicals, and establishing an early workers' rights association that was a direct precursor to the West Indian labor union movement in the late 1930s.¹⁴ However, none of these projects were greeted with as much local fanfare among the press and ordinary Kingstonians as the Edelweiss Park Amusement Company, a complex that, at its height, consisted of a nightclub, an amphitheater, a cinema, and a 200 member-strong vaudeville company.

Open from 1929 to 1934, Edelweiss Park was the cultural heart of Garvey's outreach in Jamaica, replacing Liberty Hall (the Kingston Division of the UNIA headquarters) as the center of his activities and becoming the chief financial drain on his dwindling resources. Garvey's recruitment of black creative talent was the first theatre project in colonial Jamaica that sought to create an entertainment industry by and for a multi-class audience of black people, a key component of his plan to build a political and consumer base for his populist capitalist ambitions. Because of Garvey's reputation as a powerfully charismatic leader, militant anti-racist agitator in Jim Crow America, and financial trickster, both the United States government and the British Colonial Office watched and recorded reports of both his mass meetings and entertainment spectacles, leaving an investigative archive that enriches newspaper reports of the park's activities. These sources reveal visions of Edelweiss Park's densely packed program of nightly vaudeville shows,

¹⁴ All of Garvey's West Indian-based initiatives peaked during a period of strained ties between the Pan-Africanist and United States UNIA leaders, making them especially difficult to place within UNIA history. By 1934, when the park closed as a result of Garvey's ongoing financial troubles, North American leaders renounced his leadership over the UNIA Parent Body and denounced Garvey's activities in Jamaica and the world. Thus, when this chapter mentions the UNIA or Garveyism, it refers to the Garvey-led enterprises and branches of the Jamaican UNIA unless otherwise specified. See Robert A. Hill ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume VI: November 1927-August 1940*, (Duke University Press, 1991): 334.

social dances, and UNIA meetings. Through them, we can imagine how discourses of racial uplift and discipline merged with modalities of embodied black pleasure in fabulous and bombastic Garveyite spectacles of Pan-Africanist utopia. Alongside written reports on UNIA activities, I use Katherine Dunham's films of Jamaican jazz-age social dances in the 1930's Kingston—particularly the shay-shay—to argue that promoting extravagant pleasure, dancing, and improvisation was equally important to Jamaican Garveyism as his emphasis on black industry and labor. Edelweiss Park's ambitious and puzzling performance sets reveal the ambivalent footing of Garvey's populist political project in Jamaica, bringing what Honor Ford-Smith describes as the “unruly,” or subversive and heretical, elements of international UNIA popular culture and local labor protest into the spotlight.¹⁵

Soon after returning to Kingston, Garvey acquired two properties: a private residence in an affluent Kingston neighborhood which he called Somali Court and the one-and-half acre estate located in Cross Roads, Kingston that would become Edelweiss Park. These two properties encapsulated Garvey's immediate goals for transforming the Kingston scene by creating spaces where black people could rise to visible prominence in political and public life. Launching Edelweiss Park was part of Garvey's official platform to reclaim public space for the black working class in his campaign for municipal government. In addition, he announced a proposal to restore the old Kingston Race Track into a “Hyde Park” for the working man, a space where the poor could stroll and show off their Sunday best.¹⁶ Just as Garvey referenced symbols of metropolitan

¹⁵ Ford-Smith, “Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular “; On Garvey and populism: Nicholas Pastides “Marcus Garvey, Race Idealism and His Vision of Jamaican Self-Government.” *Caribbean Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2005): 37–52.

¹⁶ The Old Kingston Race Track is now National Hero's Park, a large public park where Marcus Garvey's remains are held.

empire to envision spaces of black freedom in Kingston, his calls for luxury and diversion for black Kingstonians were rooted in a belief that, as imperial subjects, West Indians had the right to all of the protections and provisions of the British empire. When Garvey announced to a crowd of supporters that “as black people, we form 90 percent of the population of this country, and according to the British Constitution, we are entitled to 90 percent of everything worthwhile [sic] in this country,” his claims were inclusive of spectacle, visibility, and fun.¹⁷

Garvey represented his plan to transform black leisure time into aspirational middle-brow culture as both social reform and economic resistance. In a speech at the park’s first dance competition, Garvey stated that it was his duty as a reformer to show the poor, black people of Kingston how to enjoy themselves in style:

I shall endeavor to improve the social standard of the people of Kingston and St. Andrew, and all over Jamaica. It is simply a disgrace to observe a large number of people of our own race on the streets and other functions; their conduct is deplorable. It is my duty, as a reformer...You can take your female friends, your male friends, your family and whoever you like to Edelweiss Park and enjoy a few happy hours. Who cannot dance, will enjoy a concert, or you will have some funs to make, and so cement the bond of fellowship that exists amongst the classes. You cannot afford to go to Myrtle Bank, Manor House and the rest of them, but you can here and feel as equally happy amongst ourselves.¹⁸

Garvey’s audiences would have immediately grasped his reference to the segregated Myrtle Bank Hotel, owned by the United Fruit Company, a corporation whose name is almost synonymous with American neocolonialism because of its immense landholdings and political control over Central American and the Caribbean. The California mission-style building in the harborside business district of Kingston physicalized white Jamaican efforts to block black social mobility. Rebuilt after the devastating 1907 earthquake that left the city in a state of dystopian shambles that locals attributed to failures of British colonial governance, the American hotel became a symbol of

¹⁷ R. Charles, “The UNIA and the Activities of Marcus Garvey,” January 7, 1929, JNA.

¹⁸ R. Charles, “Marcus Garvey, Meeting at the Ward Theatre,” November 28, 1928, 1B/5/79/268, JNA.

what elites hoped would be the “new” Jamaica. A de facto segregated space, it was part of the attempt by the old planter class and new merchant class to market an ultra-modern touristic future, free of visions of tropical diseases and black degeneracy that plagued the colony’s international image in the late nineteenth century.¹⁹ Encouraging his followers to spend their money on (his) black-owned establishment, Garvey taunted, “We go to their Theatres; we support their Garden Parties, and all their amusements. We open our hands to them and they closed [theirs] against us; well they started it. We shall soon have our own Theatre and everything else.”²⁰ Garvey envisioned Edelweiss Park as a space that would outshine the splendor of these informally segregated spaces. It was a specifically black enterprise that would “cement the bond” that sustained his multi-class black constituency and provide a political alternative to leisure culture by established white and Jamaica White families that constituted the island’s elite.²¹

Early occasions of conviviality at Edelweiss Park—a New Year’s event for which party-goers paid a modest entrance fee to dance until the early hours of the morning, and a competition dance that brought out 200 couples to face-off for cash prizes—yielded crowds in the thousands. Colonial office reports confirmed that, to their dismay, the audiences were representative of Garvey’s economically diverse following, and that “quite a number of respectable and better off negroes and colored people attended this entrainment.”²² Soon, Garvey expanded his venture. The original

¹⁹ Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 210.

²⁰ R. Charles, “Marcus Garvey, Meeting at the Ward Theatre.”

²¹ Krista A Thompson writes in-depth about Myrtle Bank Hotel’s symbolic space in Kingston’s racial order and negotiations between US and UK empire. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*.

²² R. Charles, “The U.N.I.A. and Marcus Garvey,” December 11, 1928, JNA. Ken Post confirms Garvey’s followers in Jamaica included “not only the poor, but members of the upper and middle petty bourgeoisie, middle class and small businessmen who wished to be bigger,” Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and Its Aftermath* (London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978): 206.

property consisted of an elegant, two-story house, which Garvey transformed into a multi-use performance space. He eventually expanded the space, making room for a poured-concrete dance-floor and jazz bandstand next to the house. The veranda served as the venue's stage, facing rows of open benches that allegedly could fit an audience of five hundred people in the backyard, though some reports claimed it could seat one thousand. A "radio broadcast," "or loudspeaker, amplified sounds of the performances to across the compound."²³

Edelweiss Park became one of the few performance venues that supported local, black artists, and served as space of political organizing for many folks who would go on to build the West Indian theatre and dance movement.²⁴ Newspaper reviews reported a packed show on most nights, perhaps because the park offered a bewildering variety of amusements that would suit all tastes. Beyond the concert stage, a week at Edelweiss Park might include a Sunday night Christian religious service, a comic female impersonation performance, a campaign rally for Garvey's People's Political Party, a rumba or tap-dancing act, an edifying historical play, a bicycle race, and a boxing match. The perplexing range of entertainments lacked a unifying pedantic message, other than their commercial viability and spectacle. Garvey's celebrity presence as a metonymic maker of racial uplift also unified the performance program. He often served as host, orator, playwright, contest judge, and master of ceremonies over the proceedings.²⁵

²³ see Hill, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume VI*, 534

²⁴ Una Marson, whose *Pocomania* is considered the first full length play about Jamaican folk culture, comedic actor Ernest Cupidon, who is credited with being the first actor to promote Jamaican dialect on the stage, and Berto Pasuko, who founded an integrated ballet company in Europe, all used the park as early training grounds for their future anti-racist arts careers.

²⁵ Ibid, 497.

TO-MORROW NIGHT !
 The Most Wonderful
CONCERT & VARIET
 Of Months, to be Staged
At Edelweiss Park
 67 Slipe Road,
 Wednesday Night, 6th July, 1932, at 8 o'clock.
 By A Combination of the Productions of
THE EDELWEISS AMUSEMENT COMPANY
 Including
The Edelweiss Concert Choir
The Edelweiss Concert and Jazz Orchestra.
The Follies of Edelweiss
 And Other Celebrated Jamaica Artists.

The Grandest thing Jamaica has seen up to Now. About £100 will be given away in amounts of £50, £20, £10, £5, £2 and £2.

Admission: Patron Tickets 4/-, Reserved Seats 1/6.
 General Admission 1/-—You are guaranteed full enjoyment.
 Don't miss it. Take Trams and Busses and transfer to
EDELWEISS PARK.

The two most beautiful girls of Colour for the month of June for Kingston and St. Andrew will be presented.

To-night! To-night!
 Let Joy be unconfined —
 Dance and free the Mind.
PUBLIC BALL
 AT EDELWEISS PARK, 67 Slipe Road
 TO-NIGHT from 7 to 12 Midnight.
 And EVERY TUESDAY.
 For Respectable People only.
 Admission — 6d.
 Best Music in Kingston.
 Come and bring your friends.

Figure 2: Daily Gleaner Advertisement for Edelweiss Park, July 5, 1932.

In addition to creating the physical infrastructure for his project, Garvey was invested in creating a unified performance culture that included UNIA-affiliated critics, spectators, and performers. The UNIA publications like *The Blackman* and the short-lived *New Jamaican* helped to create a circum-Caribbean community of art criticism for middle-brow and popular performers, which had formerly been available only for “high-brow” productions.²⁶ Garvey also embarked on an open search for local talent, one that was publicized as and accompanied by a strict professionalization regiment. Garvey hired “Professor Gerardo de Leon” (né. Gerald Lyon)—a Jamaican-born choreographer, cabaret performer, and talented female impersonator with a

²⁶ Honor Ford-Smith, “Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica,” 37.

piercing falsetto who had honed his craft in New York, Cuba, Belize, and Paris—to serve as artistic director of the park and oversee the mass revue productions.²⁷ Leon’s first project was to choreograph a show of the “Black Follies of the U.N.I.A. 1929,” a cabaret to rival, in Garvey’s words, the “White Follies” of New York and France.²⁸ The Folly’s chorus line was an erotic extension of the mechanized, precise, and disciplined black glamour that the UNIA African Legion and Black Cross Nurses proselytized throughout the African Diaspora. While the colonial government’s detective office reported that Leon briefly left Garvey’s employ due to a conflict over a bounced check—a fact the report saw as proof of the Pan-Africanist agitator’s fraudulent enterprises and waning power—Leon returned by 1931 to lead a new venture to find 200 recruits to form the Edelweiss Follies. Directed by Leon enlistees underwent a five-month training course in singing, acting, elocution, dancing, and stage work.

Performances of imperial power at Edelweiss Park that borrowed from famous Hollywood acts of New York nightclubs, were not simplistically anti-colonial or liberatory because they heretically defied upper-class values or snubbed their nose at British rule. Leon’s shows took advantage of the eroticism and racialized tropes that often marked vaudeville performance. Consequentially, some audiences projected these ways of seeing black and brown bodies onto his female performers.²⁹ A review that praised the dancing “chocolate brown cuties” strutting their “hot

²⁷ Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 192; R. Charles, “The U.N.I.A and Mr. Marcus Garvey,” March 14, 1929, JNA. 1B/5/79/268. For descriptions of Leon’s solo act see: Frank Taylor, “Search for 200 Vaudeville Artistes,” *The Daily Gleaner*, August 24, 1931.

²⁸ R. Charles, “The U.N.I.A and Mr. Marcus Garvey.”

²⁹ See Raquel Romberg, “Ritual Piracy or Creolization With An Attitude,” *NWIG: New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 79, no. 3/4 (2005): 175–218. For more on chorus girls, mechanization, and modernity, see Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, “Race,” and Nation in Early Modern Dance* (Routledge, 1998).

stuff” compared the Edelweiss Follies chorus line to “Ziegfield Follies with Palm Beach Tan,” a reference that points to how even in a venue marked for racial uplift for a majority black audience, the Follies also performed in the discursive realm of exotic, touristic tropical variety shows.³⁰ In opposition to the sexy, glamorous follies, minstrel-type cabaret acts and female impersonators mocked the uncouth behaviors of “low class” women.³¹ The vaudeville programs at Edelweiss were influenced by jazz-age nightlife culture in Harlem, where the UNIA was born, and in fact, Edelweiss Park’s nightclub space was named after Harlem’s Dreamland. Fiona I. B. Ngo argues that this Harlem Jazz-age performance culture referred to US imperial geographies, shaped around a milieu of Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American migratory cultures, that used tropical (black and orientalist) and gendered bodies as shorthand for sex and power.³² For instance, *Snapshots of 1931*—the Folly’s first performance—also featured an exotic “rope skirt dance” set “On a Tropical South Sea Isle.” The highlight of the night was an “Arabian” dance number, in which Leon’s drag alter ego “Ginger” appeared as the lead in a tragic harem drama of unrequited love.³³

These references to the oriental exotic were not merely vague imaginings of the other from without, or on the other hand, nascent if incomplete gestures towards the potential of a common third world identity as Michel Seigel’s work on black orientalist vaudeville in the United States has suggested.³⁴ In the context of the Caribbean, these performances must be read alongside

³⁰ “Musical Show at Edelweiss Park,” *The Daily Gleaner*, August 31, 1932.

³¹ Honor Ford-Smith, “Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular,” *Interventions* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 36.

³² Fiona I. B. Ngô, *Imperial Blues: Geographies of Race and Sex in Jazz Age New York* (Duke University Press Books, 2014).

³³ “Snappy Revue at Edelweiss Last Night,” *The Daily Gleaner*, December 8, 1931.

³⁴ Micol Seigel similarly analyses the role of black vaudevillian performers in both the U.S. and Brazil in helping to craft racist scenarios of exotic Orientalism on stage in the late 19th and early 20th century. Micol

Garveyism's fraught and inconsistent stance on the anti-Asian nativist movement in Jamaica that grew alongside of and in conjunction with labor unionism. Garvey's political campaign in Kingston at times targeted Chinese and South Asian Jamaicans with physical violence, and in at some of his rallies he blamed uneven colonial relations on the increasingly affluent Middle-eastern minority.³⁵ In other speeches, however, Garvey acknowledged that British colonists, not "Chinese and Syrians and other aliens in this country," were responsible for the Black man's woes.³⁶ However, his anti-colonial arguments, as enacted through orientalist performances at Edelweiss, were dependent on proving the rights of black people to claim land and citizenship. This line of argumentation casted other racial minorities as "aliens" with no place in the new Jamaica he hoped to build.

While the park's promotional advertisements continually compared its offerings to European and American standards, West Indian working class urbanites and the circum-Caribbean black bourgeoisie press did not see the vaudeville shows and other events that Edelweiss hosted as foreign imports. Instead, they considered them to be part of a claimable and useable hemispheric culture. Edelweiss Park organizers sought to create a performance space that reflected the multi-class, migratory milieu of circum-Caribbean, US, and British imperial commercial entertainment. By the end of the 1920s, one-third of black populations in Harlem and Brooklyn were British West Indians, and these migrants and their children would play leading roles in shaping popular culture, radical leftist movements, and anti-racist struggles in North America for

Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Duke University Press Books, 2010).

³⁵ Obika Grey, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica 1960-1972* (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press): 15-16.

³⁶ R. Charles, "Marcus Garvey, Meeting at the Ward Theatre," November 28, 1928, 1B/5/79/268, JNA.

decades to come.³⁷ These imperial ties, transnational migrations, and the supranational political affinities that they created became central to the relational ways West Indians articulated their place in the islands and abroad.³⁸ Charting the cultural and political communities that West Indians formed through imperial migratory networks, West Indians, to quote Lara Putnam, “believed themselves to be the center of all things” despite their marginal status in the eyes of more powerful nations. They rightly believed themselves to be co-authors of hemispheric and British black culture, and this included jazz age music and concert dance innovation.³⁹

Not only were performers at Edelweiss Park trained to provide “world-class” entertainment inspired by a mix of Harlem nightlife and local popular culture, but much of the culture at the park was centered around establishing a common standard within the Jamaican UNIA ranks for respectable modes of spectatorship and quality amateur participation in the arts and entertainment industries. Several reports and eye-witnesses recounted that before concerts, Garvey would take the stage to instruct his multi-class audience on how to listen, describing “how polite society here and abroad behaved at concerts and asked listeners to show the same polite concert and encouraging behavior to contestants.”⁴⁰ Whether his followers had been successfully “disciplined” into proper

³⁷ On impact of West Indian migration in the pre-war and interwar period on black radicalism see Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America* (London ; New York: Verso, 199); Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008); Margaret Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

³⁸ Harvey Neptune writes in depth about the creative tensions and negotiations that West Indians made as they charted a sovereign future while trapped between two empires in Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

³⁹ Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 3, 157.

⁴⁰ JJ Mills quoted in Wycliffe Bennett and Hazel Bennett, *The Jamaican Theatre: Highlights of the Performing Arts in the Twentieth Century* (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2011):195.

middle-class spectatorship standards, or the intangible allure of the performances simply served as an incentive for subdued behavior and careful listening, the emphasis on both maximal entertainment and class-conscious modes of black spectatorship reflected the ritualized visions of citizenship as ordered anti-colonial spectacle that characterized transnational Garveyite culture.⁴¹ Garvey billed his programming as contributive to the goals of Jamaican self-governance by bringing high-quality entertainment and edifying or religious programming to the working poor, and by teaching his audiences how to speak, move, and feel in the presence of art usually reserved for elites.

Whether the night's program centered on a raucous vaudeville show or a selection of choral hymns, social dances and dance concerts often ran before, after, or during Edelweiss performances. A jazz band playing the latest hits supplied a steady soundtrack for the party atmosphere. The park also held weekly "practice dances" or informal balls that working class folks could pay to enter, like those often sponsored by civic or charitable organizations.⁴² While informal and unchoreographed, these practice dances and dance competitions were not completely unregulated spaces of creative expression that were separate from the rules that governed the UNIA's vision of race, respectability, valorization of capitalist labor, and professionalism. The records of a Colonial Office investigator sent to spy on Garvey's Park reveal that Professor Leon's talents as a dance professional and master female impersonator were not only useful to choreograph the Follies. They also served a pedagogical function, as participants were taught how to translate social dance styles into spectator events. At the park's first competition dance, Leon and his lady dance partner demonstrated popular dances and "addressed the dancers on the

⁴¹ See Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*; Honor-Ford Smith, "Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular."

⁴² Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 156.

qualities of dancing and the manner in which to do it so as to delight those who were looking on them, and at the same time to achieve the best results.”⁴³ An advertisement for Edelweiss Park’s weekly public balls also stressed that the dances were open to “Respectable People only” even as they encouraged “Let Joy be unconfined- dance and free the Mind” during the “hours that should be devoted to recreation.”⁴⁴

The seeming contradictions between joyful, working-class social dances, and regulated standards of virtuosity were not a foreign imposition on the part of the park's staff, but fit within a Caribbean tradition of performance labor—particularly as they have emerged through laborious Carnival traditions and popular competition dance. Riffing on Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s notion of Caribbean as a zone of cultural repetition—tied together across space and language by repeating danced rhythms—performance scholar Joseph Roach has proposed that we christen the basin of water that joins and divides the island nations as a “sea of sweat.” His emphasis on perspiration draws attention to how these brutal plantation economies built on forced labor—in which Caribbean bodies suffered labor in the humid heat—also gave birth to sweaty, high energy, and time intensive performance labor in the form of elaborate Carnival and Jonkonnu costuming and durational parades.⁴⁵ Sweat becomes the materialization of the sacrifices that smaddification often

⁴³ R. Charles, “The U.N.I.A. and Marcus Garvey- Meeting at the Kingston Race Course,” December 3, 1928, JNA 1B/5/79/268.

⁴⁴ “Public Ball,” Advertisement, *The Daily Gleaner*, July 5, 1932, 4.

⁴⁵ Joseph Roach, “Sweating Blood: Intangible Heritage and Reclaimed Labour in Caribbean New Orleans,” *Performance Research* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2008): 140-148. Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and The Postmodern Perspective*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

demands. It is a glimmering remainder of pleasure, pain, or effort – a commitment to *not* making it look easy. Roach’s formulation reminds us that the smell, the shine, the feel of salt and water on bodies moving together was and is as Caribbean as tobacco, sugar, and slavery. Sweat’s gleaming reflection shines light on a process and practice-based approach to studying Caribbean cultural and material exports. The UNIA’s culture of equating collective pleasure with disciplined, strenuous, movement referenced – like carnival – a specifically Caribbean form of protest that allowed black bodies to reclaim the fruits of their labor within a plantation economy.

While the practice dance participants were expected to come ready to present their most impressive moves, Edelweiss Park stood apart from other “respectable” venues because it sanctioned jazz age courtship dances like the shay-shay. By creating a space for unchoreographed, popular black dancing—the likes of which were banned or scoffed at by Kingston high society outside of exoticized tourist shows—Garvey widened the score of performances of racial uplift. As couples would step onto the dancefloor to show off signature steps, their footprints stamped out a cosmopolitan, circum-Caribbean Jazz age culture—mentos, jazz, calypso, and *son*—that reflected danced exchanges in labor networks that spanned the Caribbean coast of Latin and Central America, Cuba, the West Indies, and New York. Disquieted by these pelvic-centered, quickly evolving and cosmopolitan dance idioms, middle-class Jamaican spectators grouped all of these African Diaspora urban dances under the moniker shay-shay. Originally referring to a rural dance figure—often performed at the end of a “camp” or creolized European Quadrille—the shay-shay found its way into city dance-halls and nightclub stages as agricultural workers migrated to the Kingston in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Edelweiss Park closed in 1934 due to Garvey’s persistent over-speculation and financial woes, but we can imagine that when Katherine Dunham disembarked in Kingston the following summer of 1935, the “shay-shays” and other popular social dances that she witnessed and filmed

from the sidelines of public dancehalls and private parlors were similar. These Kingston dances are all that remains of her film archive of this first, fraught experiment in Caribbean fieldwork. She describes but dismisses the importance of these 20th-century urban dance cultures in *Journey to Accompong*, her short, self-reflexive ethnography that instead centers around an impatient wait to witness her research subjects recreate a sixteenth century Maroon Koromante War Dance. The Accompong Maroons were the community of enslaved Africans who escaped into Jamaica's mountainous Cockpit Country region, fighting and diplomatically bargaining for their autonomy from the British plantation complex in 1739 after long years of struggle. Inspired by her academic mentor Melville Herskovits and his fieldwork among the Saramaka Maroons of Dutch Guiana, Dunham was eager to head to the hinterland to find similar proof that early anti-colonial warriors remained the faithful custodians of West African religious and cultural forms.⁴⁶ Dunham's Maroons, however, resisted her expectations. They proved to be disappointingly acculturated, more keen to listen to her Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday records than perform the African digging songs of her fantasies.⁴⁷ Dunham witnessed quite a bit of dancing in Accompong, but found it lacked the appropriate visible proximity to a verifiable African past. Their social dances failed to stand out amongst the Afro-Caribbean danced and drum religions that Dunham encountered further along her journey in Martinique and Trinidad, and most of all, Haiti's Vodou possession dances. According to Dunham, the villagers were increasingly becoming Americanized and urbanized, and abandoning the old ways—the sacred rites of the war dances that Herskovits would argue were artifacts of an African past—for the lively and sensual shay-shay and mentos of the

⁴⁶ Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of The Negro Past*, Reprint edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

⁴⁷ Katherine Dunham, *Katherine Dunham's Journey to Accompong*, (New York: Henry Holt & Co 1946): 4, 90-91.

1920s and 1930s.⁴⁸

While she did not consider the Accompong Maroon's social dance parties to be relevant evidence of the purity of their Africaness, Dunham found the "clicking of the heels in the air, entre-sixes, backbends, and elaborate turns" that they executed to be worth mentioning in her narrative.⁴⁹ Much like the dances she participated in and observed in Kingston, she felt that these shay-shays signified a contemporary global, black consciousness, rather than an African survival, because of the sex and joy that they exuded. As cosmopolitan and urbane Dunham may have been, she had found the "throng of lithe black bodies that rhumbaed, shay-shayed and pasodabbled [sic] to the saxophone and drum" in the Kingston night scene, "only a little short of copulation itself."⁵⁰ The familiar sight of black bodies moving for pleasure became a point of diaspora connection to her, allowing her to imagine that these mythical maroons' "Spanish and Indian and African ancestors may have known passions other than warfare," and may have felt desire similar to black North Americans or even "their cousins in Kingston."⁵¹

The heat and delight of the social dances, their uncanny modernity, radiate through the grainy black and white of Dunham's films of couples dressed in crisp white linens in an open-air venue. Smooth sensuality and abrupt changes of pace make the dancing a joy to watch. One couple stands a few feet apart as they expertly rotate their pelvises in a mento wind: keeping thighs pressed close they swivel their legs and hips up and down in a "S" shape. The man and women lean forward with hunger and intention as they watch each other's snaking torsos. They break apart

⁴⁸Ibid., 134-135.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 25-26.

⁵¹ Ibid., 26.

into a series of energetic, skipping steps similar to the Lindy Hop: the form of shay-shay that West Indian migrants imported to New York City.⁵² Stepping out in front of the bandstand to outshine his partner in a solo, the man wobbles precariously across the floor in a flat-footed shuffle, only to straighten and execute a nimble spin at the precise moment when his fall felt inevitable.⁵³ In a practice dance like this, where individuals competed for the onlooker's gaze, the jazz band too might be expected to be virtuoso movers, making music with their whole bodies as they stood above the dancers. Writing about a shay-shay dance party in the parish of St. Mary in the mid-1930s, Zora Neale Hurston remarked "You have to see those native Jamaican bands to hear them. They are doing almost as much dancing with the playing as they are playing."⁵⁴ This emphasis of flash, fun, and fancy footwork, this excessive and unapologetic quest to be seen, resonated within the Park as a response to Garvey's call for black folks to embrace and embody "the virtues of being spectacular" as a right of citizenship.⁵⁵ Garveyite dancers' quick shifts of energy between soft, intimate partner dancing and jarring feats of agility resist the colonizers regime of "thingification" and exemplify smaddification as a West Indian legacy of enacting humanness as dance praxis (to borrow from Sylvia Wynter), because they refuse the viewer the ability to label black experience as

⁵² According to Lara Putnam, the original Lindy Hoppers were, in fact, Bajan migrants. Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 157.

See also, Katherine Dunham, "The Negro Dance," in *Kaiso! Writings by Katherine Dunham*, ed. Veve E. Clark and Sara E. Johnson (Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2005) 222-223.

⁵³ Katherine Dunham, *Martinique-Jamaica, 1936*.

⁵⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, *Go Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Jamaica and Haiti*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009): 14.

⁵⁵ Marcus Garvey, quoted in Honor Ford-Smith, "Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular," 19.

only one thing: pain or pleasure, labor or laziness, acquiescence or subversion.⁵⁶

While we can only speculate what similar practice dances at Edelweiss looked like, and what kinds of riotous shay-shays and smooth jazz steps struck fear and confusion among spectators, we know that empowering black Jamaicans to see leisure and pleasure as part of a diaspora politics was seen as at best, ridiculous, and at worst threatening to some members of Kingston's brown middle-class and light-skinned elite. The park's emphasis on international conventions of vaudeville performance and low-brow diaspora black social dance led the Colonial Office and the black bourgeoisie press in Jamaica and abroad to believe that nothing serious or edifying could be drawn from the pleasure park. The lowly social status and questionable artistic taste of the park's performers and audiences also came under attack. These critics stood in opposition to *The Gleaner's* primarily glowing reviews of the Folly's performances, and rumors that accused Garvey of stealing the best performers directly from the British government by promising competitive wages to members of the Jamaican Military Band to perform at this park, which sparked an investigation by the Colonial Office into his allegedly underhanded recruiting tactics.⁵⁷ Frank Taylor, a Jamaican theatre critic, denied the quality of the park's early shows and the very idea that talent could be found en masse among native artists. He accused Garvey and his team of "buoying a people up with fantastic stories of princely salaries when you know they haven't got a cat's in Hades chance of even getting the role of knock-about comedian in a tenth-rate 'barnstorming'

⁵⁶ Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁵⁷ M.B. Edwards, "M.B. Edwards to H.E. Sir R. Stubbs, G.C.M.G, Kings House," March 28, 1929, IB/5/79/268, JNA. A.R. Lord, "Letter to the Honorable Colonial Secretary, Kingston," April 18, 1929, IB/5/79/268, JNA.

trope.”⁵⁸ John Vere, a Jamaican writer who later became a New York-based theatre producer, dismissed the park’s patrons, who he called “a motley crew of laborers and domestics” that paid to be “‘socially uplifted’ at a quarter per head,” as sheep-like followers who had been duped by Garvey’s delusions of grandeur.⁵⁹ Scoffing at the park’s claims to fabulousness, he found no pleasure in the sight of low-status workers as they “shuffled around on a bit of concrete and later sat on the benches and enjoyed a concert of doubtful quality.”⁶⁰

These critics who framed the park as ridiculous or even dangerous for the “illiterate masses” drew attention to the very serious ways in which Garvey threatened the delicate spatial separation and control over labor conditions that elite Jamaicans held dear—even as his rhetoric of capitalist racial uplift also reified respectable social values and fears of unchecked, salacious pleasure in poor black communities.⁶¹ The power to control work hours, terminate employment and protect leisure time had long been central to visions of freedom that black Jamaicans, and workers all over the Post-emancipation Caribbean, fought with local landowners and industrial employers to gain.⁶² Early nationalist leaders—including Garvey in his writing and public speeches during this period—preached adherence to landowners’ work standards to their followers to combat fears of riotous, mob-rule black Jamaican politics and eighteenth-century stereotypes of

⁵⁸ Frank Taylor, “Search for 200 Vaudeville Artistes,” *The Daily Gleaner*, August 24, 1931.

⁵⁹ John Vere, “September Articles by John Vere in the New York Age” in Marcus Garvey, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume VI: November 1927-August 1940*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 527-541.

⁶⁰ John Vere, “September Articles by John Vere in the New York Age,” 534.

⁶¹ M.B. Edwards, “M.B. Edwards to H.E. Sir R. Stubbs, G.C.M.G, Kings House.”

⁶² See, for instance, Anthony Bogues, “Michael Manley, Equality and the Jamaican Labour Movement,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 2002) 84-85.

lazy, surly, uncivilized, and rebellious West Indians.⁶³ Attempts to control the terms of spectatorship—like the guidelines for taking part in a dance contest—and sociality within the park evidence that Garvey’s idea of black joy and freedom was bounded by classed discourses of discipline and liberal reformist notions of “healthy” and constructive amusement.⁶⁴ However, in contrast to the brown creole-led, folk culture promoting 1940s Jamaican social welfare and recreation movement (discussed in-depth in Chapter 2) Garvey embraced black urban popular culture (entertainment for entertainment’s sake) and extravagant production as a modality of building modern, black political subjectivities. He preached that as part of claiming bourgeoisie citizenship, “the tired, careworn and anxious public” deserved “after a hard day’s toil to find the healthiest and best of entertainment and amusements.”⁶⁵ This included maximal displays of grandeur. Working-class Jamaicans used the grounds that Garvey provided to move in ways that combatted middle-class nationalists’ visions of a useable and *brown-creole* Jamaican culture (as opposed to these diasporic black and creole cultural forms). By dancing just for pleasure, they claimed ownership over their time and contributions to migratory black culture.

Writing for a U.S. newspaper to report on Garvey’s mischief-making in the Caribbean, John Vere recounted a rumor about rebellious dancing domestics that gives insight to how some elites feared that the park’s advocacy of leisure had the potential to cause disorder extended far

⁶³ On post-emancipation labor-law, discipline, and resistance in the British West Indies, see Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*; Natasha Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom: Antigua and the Aftermath of British Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015). Diana Paton, *No Bond but the Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780–1870* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2004).

⁶⁴ See Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender, and Population Politics After Slavery* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2014).

⁶⁵ “New Attractions at Edelweiss Park,” *The Gleaner*, October 7, 1932.

beyond the social and temporal space of the dancehall:

“You must not work continuously,” he [Garvey] told the domestics, “you must have an hour’s rest daily.” One housewife found her four servants “resting” one day and when she was told that they were following Garvey’s instructions she promptly gave them a permanent “rest” from her employ and advised them to go and “rest” for Marcus.⁶⁶

Whether this story reflects fiction or fact, we can see how “Marcus” and Garveyism—as experienced through his amusement park enterprise—became a site for poor Jamaicans and elites to argue in this early nationalist, anti-colonial movement over *whose* Jamaica would the New Jamaica be. Who would enjoy and reap the benefits of sovereignty and who had a right to be seen on a national stage? Edelweiss was a distinct space where one could imagine how liminal black bodies might constitute a certain vision of “racial uplift” and a Jamaican nationalist futurity, in which the pleasures of viewing and moving could be just as productive as the labors of training, or in which social dancing could be re-imagined as part of the practice of creating diaspora. It was Garvey’s commitment to the popular, pleasure, theatricality, and spectacle that forged the ties between emerging modalities of black West Indian performance and anti-colonial politics.

Perhaps because its functionality cannot fit into any neat definition of black nationalism, the Edelweiss Park period remains marginal to histories of both Garveyism’s international impact and national political histories of Jamaica. The park represented what elite black politicians in both Jamaica and within the leadership of the US-based UNIA feared were the most dangerous and queer aspects of Garvey’s charismatic leadership of the black popular classes: his ritualistic performances, use of costume and religious iconography, and emphasis on entertainment value.

⁶⁶ As Laura Putnam points out, though John Vere was one of Edelweiss Park’s staunchest critics for showcasing black popular culture he would later host the “Opportunity Knocks Talent Show,” in the 1950s and 1960s, which became the entry point for many downtown artists into the music industry, reminding us that “positions vis-à-vis popular culture were never simple or fixed, especially across the tumult of decolonization and nation-building.” Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 193. John Vere, “Articles by John Vere in the New York Age,” 534.

Richard Iton has argued that these aspects appealed to the black masses in ways that went against “rational” and liberal values for black leadership.⁶⁷ Garvey’s detractors claimed that the park was yet another fraudulent investment scam like his scheme to sell stock in his failing Black Star Line shipping venture—devoid of even a facade of bourgeois respectability and legitimate plans for racial uplift—and an attempt to take advantage of his poor, loyal followers. Like the legacy of his Black Star Line, this vision of Garvey as a wily trickster and commercial failure complicate the relationship between the man and the Pan-Africanist ideology his movement helped to inspire.

Just as these West Indian—and particularly working-class Kingstonian—manifestations of Garveyism remain a slippery and vexing moment in UNIA history, shay-shays and other Jamaican urban couples dances have yet to be fully integrated into a nationalist or American “Afro-Caribbean” dance history. The very things that made shay-shay so fantastic but unusable to Dunham—its references both to a deep past and startling modernity, the ways it disavowed mapping and neat historicizing, its resistance to functionalist analysis and constructive social purpose, its troubling pleasures—also vexed early middle-class nationalists. Urban popular dance in Jamaica was stuck in the strange conceptual stalemate of being ultra-modern (American influenced and migratory) and shamefully primitive (sexual, African), hence lacking in utility for a multi-racial, creole national project. As the West Indian concert dance and little theatre movement developed throughout the 1940s and 1950s, local dancer/anthropologists embarked on a project to categorize popular dances that had been formerly dismissed as “cultureless” under the broad category of shays-shays into different localized, provincial folkloric origins, and verify their roots in Africanist

⁶⁷ These are features that Richard Iton identifies as part of a queer black political tradition that integrationist and civil rights-based black leaders in the United States feared fed into the “irrational” and underdeveloped nature of poor black’s political consciousness, Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

practices. While this understanding of shay-shays as embodied Africanist memory helped to integrate migratory working class and agrarian black culture into discourses of the New Jamaica, Edelweiss Park's self-professed claims that the park was the most cutting edge and high-quality space of black life in 1930's Jamaica (and even the world) gives insight into how its dancers saw themselves. Dancing in ways that were unapologetically modern, populist, locally referencing, and supranational, Jamaicans made themselves the center of everything.

New York City in Limbo

Katherine Dunham left Jamaica on a steamship to spend a short time in Martinique later that summer of 1935, and then island-hopped to Trinidad to study Shango—a Yoruba and Catholic creole African Diaspora religion, known as the “Trinidadian voodoo” for its Orisha worship and possession dance.⁶⁸ The limbo is the most globally recognizable segment of Shango dance and Bongo funeral rites, a wake dance that symbolizes two types of corporeal movement: suspension between this world and the next and the crossing of the middle passage. Trinidad and Tobago is the only nation in the Caribbean or Latin American with a living limbo tradition, but a similar pole dance called the *mazumba* has been recorded amongst the Jamaican Maroons in the early twentieth century.⁶⁹ A competitive dance of balance, strength, and flexibility, the dancers bend over backward, walking or rhythmically scooting their legs underneath a bamboo pole without grazing its barrier. Some have marked the limbo as a dance of the slave-ship, an embodied remembrance of

⁶⁸ Nathaniel Murrell writes that after the Orisha World Congress in 1981, practitioners officially changed the region's name from Shango (a reference to the principal deity) to Orisa/Orisha (or Orisha-Shango). In reference to its pre-1980s legacy, I retain the name Shango in this chapter.

⁶⁹ Molly Ahye, *Cradle of Caribbean Dance: Beryl McBurnie and the Little Carib Theatre* (Trinidad and Tobago: Heritage Cultures Ltd., 1983), 251.

how captured Africans contorted their bodies in ship hulls.⁷⁰ Others have searched for, but failed to verify with specificity, limbo's connections to Kongo and Yoruba cosmology.⁷¹ While the legacy of limbo in the new world is longer than the shay-shay (Sonja Stanley-Niaah marks it as one of the first dance moves recorded in the new world) its origins were equally creole and muddy.

Dunham likely did not see and certainly wasn't able to record the limbo during her time in Trinidad or Accompong, years before the dance became recognized around the world through the hits and Hollywood movies that cashed in on the calypso craze of the late 1950s and early 1960s in the Caribbean, the USA, and Great Britain. She did meet with Shango priests and priestesses (or Mongba), and saw a Shango possession and a few country dances. However, she was anxious to move on Haiti, burdened as she was by the constant social invitations from polite society in Port of Spain that kept her from her immersive rural fieldwork. In the fieldnotes that she sent to Herskovitz, Dunham also described being frustrated when she attempted to take video footage of the ceremonies. Eventually, she all but abandoned videography: "The damned camera sounded like a trolley car even when they were singing. Though the mongba or priest and I were friends, I got in some very, very deep water when an old woman caught me peering through a crack and taking a picture of who is getting possessed."⁷²As in Jamaica, Dunham's trip to Trinidad was marked by the absence of the types of dances that she came to the island to see. However, the prohibitions and limitations that Trinidadian and Jamaica ritual participants placed on Dunham's research greatly affected her ethnographic methods. During her time in Haiti, she veered from her

⁷⁰ Molly Ahye, "In Search of the Limbo," in *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk: How Movement Shapes Identity* ed. Susanna Sloat (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005).

⁷¹ Sonjah Stanley Niaah, *DanceHall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010), 35.

⁷² "Katherine Dunham to Melville Herskovits," November 15, 1935, Melville J Herskovits (1895-1963) Papers, Northwestern University Archives.

mentor Herskovits' insistence on a strictly scientific approach to fieldwork. Instead of keeping a critical distance and factitious photographic records she shifted to a participator-observer approach and established a more open dialogue with her interlocutors.

More importantly than this fieldwork, however, during her time in Trinidad Dunham was introduced to a network of dance professionals who taught her their own choreographed versions of Trinidadian dances. Back in New York two years after her return from the field, Dunham worked with Beryl McBurnie, Trinidadian nationalist, folklorist, and the first dancer to perform the limbo on the concert stage. McBurnie is perhaps the most well-known female choreographer in the history of British West Indian dance, however she enjoyed only a brief moment of celebrity in the early 1940s in the United States as an early innovator of Caribbean fad culture. Dunham took private lessons with McBurnie in New York, who had made a name for herself in both nightclub and avant-garde concert dance settings for her stage shows that mixed popular Caribbean social dance with Bongo, Limbo, and Shango. Dunham then integrated Trinidadian dance into some of the most iconic works in her repertoire like *Shango* (which mixed elements of Cuban, Haitian, and Trinidadian Yoruba religion) which was originally performed as part of the 1945 Broadway musical *Carib Song*. Throughout the 1940s, Trinidadian dancer Bosco Holder (who helped to lead McBurnie's troop at home during her sojourn to the US) and his brother Geoffrey Holder both taught at Dunham's school in New York, further injecting a Caribbean concert dance sensibility in the US Negro dance movement. These lessons have been treated thus far as an extension of Dunham's fieldwork, another encounter with a "native" source, as if Trinidadian dance professions were incapable of the same skillful ethnographic methods, movement analysis, and original innovation as Dunham has been credited with.⁷³

⁷³ McBurnie is barely a footnote in most Dunham biographies but McBurnie's biographer and Little Carib Theatre dancer Molly Ahye describes how the Trinidadian folklorist-cum-dancer was a protegee of both



Figure 3: Right: McBurnie as the Belle Rosette in “Martinique Costume.” (1941). Left: McBurnie as the Belle Rosette in “Carnival Costume.” Photograph by Carl Van Vechtan. New York Public Library Jerome Robbins Dance Division, NYPL Digital Collections.

I bring together the few written and film sources that chronicle Beryl McBurnie’s time in New York, where she danced under the stage name The Belle Rosette, to speculate about what Dunham’s dance lessons may have looked like, and to also think about the ways the experience of migration shaped McBurnie’s contributions to West Indian nationalist dance. Rather than taking for granted the assumption that McBurnie taught with complete anthropological accuracy and

Carlton Comma, a librarian helped Dunham with her research, and Andrew Carr, one of the native guides that Dunham employed to lead on her ethnographic field outside of the city. McBurnie gave Dunham private studio lessons to learn Shango chants, Bongo wake dance, and Kalinda stick fighting and meanings behind the ritual dances. Molly Ahye, *Cradle of Caribbean Dance: Beryl McBurnie and the Little Carib Theatre*, Petit Valley, Trinidad; (Heritage Cultures Ltd., 1983) 4-5. Stephen Stuenkel, *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago*, 254, chapter 3 note 17. Lavinia Yarborough Williams, quoted in Molly Ahye, *Cradle of Caribbean Dance*, 4.

cultural purity, I argue that she crafted her persona and movement language into an amalgamation of circum-Caribbean cultures to identify her unique approach to using Trinidadian dance to articulate the island's emerging national identity. In a wider sense, McBurnie draws attention to the role that West Indian dancers and intellectuals in the development of US Negro Dance as creative intermediaries between the fieldwork and the stage—both through their physical work as dance teachers, choreographers, and company members under African American-led companies and their theoretical contributions towards imagining diaspora through embodied Africanisms. Beryl McBurnie's was part of a two-sided dynamic of fraught but nonetheless generative exchange between West Indians and US black artists. West Indians used their connections to US dancers, anthropologists, and discerning audiences to convince those at home that black social dance could be staged as national culture.

McBurnie grew up in Woodbrook, the primarily middle-class suburb of Port of Spain that has also traditionally been the home of some of the island's most famous Carnival steelbands. She came of age during the Trinidadian anti-colonial labor and cultural movement of the 1930s. Beginning at the turn of the decade, a robust "creole patriot" multi-racial coalition of the Black, Chinese, Portuguese and Indian creole intelligentsia—which included famed writers such as CLR James, Ralph Mentor, and Albert Gomes—sought to radically rewrite Anglo-centric histories of European dominance and oppose slavish emulation of British culture. By the 1934 and the onslaught of the Great Depression, a multi-class coalition—including UNIA supporters, Marxist organizations like the Marxist Negro Welfare and Social Cultural Association (NWSCA), and race affiliate groups—formed the core of the anti-British protest movement. They organized a series of actions to challenge the racial and economic hierarchies of the creole establishment: hunger marches to protest unemployment which peaked in the summer of 1935, labor strikes, and

demonstrations in support of Ethiopia's colonial war against Italy (1935-1937).⁷⁴ The World War II British-US “destroyers-for-bases” deal, which heightened US military presence in the island, further ignited and complicated the early independence movement on the island, as creole patriots used the language of US modernity to point out the failures of British rule.⁷⁵

As a light-brown creole young woman, McBurnie had access to some of the best schooling available to girls in Trinidad. She attended Tranquility Girls School, a Methodist secondary school and one of the first to prepare women to sit the Cambridge secondary exams. In physical education, she learned the Scottish reels and English country jigs that made up “folk” arts education under the colonial system and likely took private ballet lessons. In the early 1930s, she put together a company of dancers and began to play with setting movement to black folk music in her mother’s parlor and backyard. Still, “her group maintained a low profile because of the cultural climate which was not prepared to accept as ‘respectable’ any attempts at performing what was considered ‘slave’ activities.”⁷⁶ Many of even the most bohemian members in the Port-of Spain intelligentsia still saw calypso as a primitive source of working-class black expressivity, much like elite Jamaicans’ cultural rejection of the shay-shay. McBurnie gained some material for her Trinidadian folklore and dance rhythms through both urban field trips to the Rada community in the Port of Spain neighborhood of Belmont, a religious settlement of free African migrations

⁷⁴ Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36-38.

⁷⁵ Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees*.

⁷⁶ Molly Ahye, *Cradle of Caribbean Dance: Beryl McBurnie and the Little Carib Theatre*, 3.

founded in the late nineteenth century by formerly Dahomey migrant named Robert Antoine.⁷⁷ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, she would travel extensively throughout the West Indies and South America to collect “folk-forms” for her homegrown theatre movement. From 1959 to 1971, the Little Carib Theatre housed both her groundbreaking dance company and Derek Walcott’s National Theatre Trust. However, it was her fieldwork in New York City, observing and participating in racial performances in the downtown club scene, that provided her with the material to initiate the West Indian dance movement.

In 1938, McBurnie left Trinidad for New York City, where she moved into a studio apartment in East Harlem. Her father reportedly held onto ambitions for her to study medicine, but she dropped her science course load to study physical education courses at Columbia Teachers’ College. She also took dance classes with two leaders in the world of New York Modern Dance: Martha Graham and Charles Weidman at the Academy of Allied Arts.⁷⁸ McBurnie threw herself into the overlapping Negro Dance and Leftist Dance concert circles, teaching lecture classes at the 92nd St YMCA (taking over the “Origins of Jazz Course” from Asadata Dafora) and at the New Dance Group to students like fellow Trinidadian native Pearl Primus.⁷⁹ That McBurnie’s

⁷⁷ Andrew T. Carr and Eugene Beard, “A Rada Community in Trinidad,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1953): 36–54. Rosanne Marion Adderley, *“New Negroes from Africa”: Slave Trade Abolition and Free African Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean* (Indiana University Press, 2006), 116-117.

⁷⁸ As McBurnie's biographer Judy Raymond notes, McBurnie was perhaps purposely vague about how long and with whom she studied during her time in New York City. Letters of reference and a 1949 CV provide some proof of her association with these teachers, if not the duration and consistency of her formal training. Judy Raymond, *Beryl McBurnie* (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2018).

⁷⁹ Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

Primus’ relationship with McBurnie continued for decades, and she credited her for being one of the influential forces in her early career. 1953, Primus visited Trinidad to do field research and study again with McBurnie’s Little Carib Theatre. There she met Percy Borde, a member of McBurnie’s company who served as her tour guide, and later became her husband and creative partner.

Caribbean dance expertise was grouped in with Sierra Leonean dancer/musician Dafora, whose concert styling of ritual influenced a generation of Negro Dancers, exemplifies how both West Indian and African dance were jointly considered the primitive forebears of American Jazz modernity. United States' audiences' complete ignorance of what constituted Trinidadian culture provided an opportunity for McBurnie to collect and practice a range of social and concert dance forms to incorporate in her stage persona.



Figure 4: The Belle Rosette with her drummers. Undated. From the collection of Ray Funk.

Formal schooling and the concert stage only amounted to a small segment of her performance education and emerging fame. McBurnie was best known for performing at

nightclubs with Latin American and Caribbean music acts under the name “Belle Rosette.”

McBurnie's integration of calypso songs in her concert stage performances was her most significant innovation for West Indian dance. Her dances presented these traditions as relevant to national culture as Afro-Diaspora dance religions like Rada or Shango. McBurnie's time in New York coincided with a moment in the late 1930s and early 1940s when the city was caught in the first wave of the calypso crossover and her brand of West Indian female performance was both excitingly strange and easily assimilable into tropical black fad culture. The black fad performance was making small waves before performers like Harry Belafonte took the tropical rhythms nationwide and mainstream in the 1950s.⁸⁰ While calypso and carnival—like mento and dancehall shay-shays—were still seen as low-class party music in the West Indies, calypso was considered a cutting edge black sound in the global north: rising from cool New York nightclubs, to calypso-themed Broadway showcases by Dunham and Primus, to Hollywood films.⁸¹ McBurnie was also part of a series of Calypso residences at the Village Vanguard in the 1940s which introduced the circum-Caribbean jazz age music to American jazz fans. She sang and danced with the Great Macbeth band for a season. The New York scene gave McBurnie a chance to experiment and perfect her own calypso inspired concert movement language, outside of her conservative middle-class community in Port of Spain that saw the genre as vulgar and working-class.

Embodying the folk through calypso and Shango allowed McBurnie to play with being

⁸⁰ I borrow the term and analytic “black fad performance” from Shane Vogel, to think about how the mass culture industry has taken up black performance, and how black performers have appropriated transnational performances of blackness to exploit American desires for exotic blackness. See, also, Vogel's analysis of Belafonte's disavowal of the calypso fad that he helped to build and its claims to authenticity. Shane Vogel, *Stolen Time: Black Fad Performance and the Calypso Craze*, First edition (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁸¹ Michael Eldridge, “There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow,” *Callaloo* 25, no. 2 (May 2002): 620–38, 622.

sexy, experimenting with commanding an audience, and dancing a diasporic history in ways that her Protestant, middle-class community in Trinidad would have limited. The exotic reputation of commercial calypso bands and films created a space for her within Anglo-America's imaginary of *latinidad*, even gaining her the patronage of white and West Indian theatre professionals alike. Critics praised the exotic negro performers with crisp accents and dance stylings, which they often miscategorized as a "Latin" rhumba or Brazilian "samba" (a dance made famous by samba sensation Carmen Miranda). These cultures signified an all-encompassing foreign and tropical brownness. McBurnie's position within this Caribbean fantasy landscape was cemented when, much to the delight of the negro press nation-wide, the "Harlem girl" became Carmen Miranda's understudy in the Broadway musical "Sons O' Fun." Headlining a "white show" was a rare opportunity for a "colored girl."⁸² Grace Lee Boggs, who remembered McBurnie as part of CLR James's New York circle in 1940s, claimed that McBurnie also performed in the Brazilian-themed Copacabana nightclub in mid-town, a venue made famous by Carmen Miranda.⁸³

McBurnie (as South American sensation the "Belle Rosette") got her big break in 1941 when socialite Louise Crane recruited her to perform at one of her Coffee Concerts at the Museum of Modern Art. Crane organized the show of "music heard ordinarily only in nightclubs" to open the museum's resources to black and Latin American artists and expose these performers to a more elite, discerning audience who could understand the "experimental" modern nature of their art.⁸⁴ The press release for what the museum erroneously described as a night of "Voodoo

⁸² Calvin, "Belle Rosette to Get Carmen Role."

⁸³ Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography* (U of Minnesota Press, 2016).

⁸⁴ "MoMA Press Release, 'Series of Non-Concert Dance to Be Presented,'" April 21, 1941, MoMA Press Release Archives.

Chants, Inca Tribal Dances and Primitive Songs” to draw audiences to the show, titled “South American Panorama,” stressed Trinidad’s proximity to the coastline in Venezuela.⁸⁵ Just like the island of Trinidad, the MOMA represented McBurnie’s body as West Indian but “Spanish” adjacent to position her performances within familiar aesthetic frameworks such as both Latin American “primitive” source material for United States modern arts, and Mexican and Brazilian modernist painters in museum’s collection.⁸⁶ Following the coffee concert, *New Amsterdam News* writer Marvel Cooke wrote the first major press feature about the new starlet, an article that launched McBurnie as a local celebrity. According to Cooke, the program that preceded McBurnie was full of “dull music interpreted lugubriously.” But as soon as McBurnie executed the “first sinuous and sensuous movements of the Chango” the audience was brought out of their aloof spectatorship, becoming raucous and rowdy.⁸⁷

Brenda Dixon-Gottschild writes about how black vaudeville performers in the twentieth century would masquerade as “Spanish,” Latina, or even “Oriental” in order to play in venues and to inhabit roles denied to African Americans, because of the higher cultural capital and wider range of racial performances attributed to “Latin” races.⁸⁸ There is no evidence of McBurnie purposely performed as anything other than Trinidadian and “colored,” in fact, she quickly shut down reporters who assumed that the intricate hand gestures of her Shango were of “oriental”

⁸⁵ “MoMA Press Release, “Voodoo Chants, Inca Tribal Dances and Primitive Songs in South American Panorama- Museum of Modern Art Concert,” May 20, 1941, MoMA Press Release Archives.

⁸⁶ For instance, in the decade leading up to McBurnie’s Coffee Concert, the MOMA mounted a Diego Rivera’s career retrospective (1931), “American Sources of Modern Art (Aztec, Mayan, Inca)” (1933), and a solo show of the work of Brazilian modernist Candido Portinari (1940).

⁸⁷ Cookie Marve, “Just on the Program But Belle Rosette Reveals Rare Keen Artistry,” *New York New Amsterdam Star-News*, June 7, 1941.

⁸⁸ Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Waltzing in the Dark: African American Vaudeville and Race Politics in the Swing Era* (Springer, 2016).

rather than African influence.⁸⁹ However, Trinidad's geographical proximity to South America helped audiences in the United States make sense of her sultry sensuality and the ways that her racial performance deviated from US blackness. Described in the New York press as a chic, grinning gamin, with bright colored costuming, a Martinican style headdress and a charming accent that was a mix of French and British (a puzzling description that was more fantasy than fact), McBurnie fit seamlessly into the racial and sexual imaginary of the tropicalesque.⁹⁰ If white America's idea of African "primitive dance" and African American jazz dance was marked by blindingly quick and intricate "fancy footwork," McBurnie's light-skinned body performing a languid shay-shay while singing a calypso song, or her slow and isolated tensing of extended limbs and muscles in a Shango possession, read as a product of the sensuous Spanish tropics.

In other readings by critics, McBurnie's Caribbean-ness associated her with another American fad: horror films and tropical stage shows based on fantastic stories of Haitian Vodou that soldiers brought home from the US occupation. When America *Vogue* magazine spotlighted her as one of their rising stars of 1941 after her coffee concert series and Village Vanguard performance, she was described as "High-springing, completely theatrical, Belle Rosette has a fresh, non-sociological voodooism, a gay, laughing way with her."⁹¹ Attaching her Caribbeanness to "voodooism"—with its decidedly black and Haitian location—the Belle Rosette with her upper-class Trinidadian accent, British education, and modern dance training stood in limbo between

⁸⁹ Cookie Marve, "Just on the Program But...".

⁹⁰ Dolores Calvin, "Belle Rosette to Get Carmen Role," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 27, 1942. Dan Burley, "Harlem Girl Takes Over Carmen Miranda Job in Broadway Show," *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, April 4, 1942. On the "tropicalesque" as a visual aesthetic see Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*.

⁹¹ Allene Talmey, "Vogue's Spotlight," ed. Edna (1914-1951) Woolman Chase, *Vogue; New York* 98, no. 7 (1941): 76, 77, 117.

primitivism and modernity. Throughout her career, McBurnie was haunted both by the “idea of Katherine Dunham” and the “idea of Carmen Miranda”—whom she openly lamented being confused with.⁹² McBurnie no doubt both played into and fought against these exotic, racialized Caribbean roles, leaning into self-conscious and often tongue-in-cheek racialized performance that Micol Seigel calls “nation drag.”⁹³ They represented the sorts of Antillean fantasies that she was cast into—the representation space that she could occupy (Martinican market women, voodoo priestess and Brazilian *Baianas*), the kinds of knowledge and claims to creativity her work could carry as a black woman dancing the Caribbean onstage.

Calypso’s insertion into both conceptions of both black and downtown cool and its whirlwind entrance into the city’s nightclub scene emphasizes the cosmopolitan and cutting edge origins of circum-Caribbean working-class migratory culture. It rose at a moment when American dollars were flooding into the Trinidadian economy as American companies drilled for “black gold” in Trinidadian oil fields, and American military presence occupied the island. From America’s standpoint, totalizing dominance was straightforward and clear. However, in the same way that American servicemen’s wholesale embrace of the calypso scene in Port of Spain signified Trinidad’s sly intrusion into tastes and desires of imperial foot-soldiers, West Indians in New York were keen to point out that, however uneven, the terms that creole exchange went both ways. Calypso’s takeover in New York served as proof that, as Michael S. Eldridge argues that the most radical calypsos claimed, that “The Tropics *are* New York; that the two places have become virtually interchangeable; that Gotham has been irrevocably inflected with Caribbean culture, and that Trinidad is at the same time thoroughly up-to-date, happily incorporated into the cultural

⁹² Dolores Calvin, “Belle Rosette to Get Carmen Role.”

⁹³ Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters*.

empire emanating from that North American center.”⁹⁴ It is impossible to over-emphasize the power of popular culture in framing how West Indians began to orient themselves within the world system in the age of decolonization, its emergence as a discourse of battling white supremacist myths and of helping West Indians imagine new terms of geo-political relations. Even if white Americans misunderstood the context and specificity of their artistic contributions, Caribbean people still knew they were helping to dictate the rhythms that moved the most powerful nations in the world.

Much like the anti-British activists in Port of Spain, McBurnie was more than willing to use the resources and idea of US power to build an anti-colonial movement. Still, she remained aware of the limitations of the representational and interpretive frameworks that critics and spectators on African American dance in the metropole. She used shifting “nation drag,” cultivated careers in uptown modern dance and downtown cabaret, quit gigs, and took on part-time work to avoid being tied down to any space. She reportedly abandoned her Broadway role early in its run, returned several times to Trinidad for undisclosed health visits in the middle of her shows’ runs, and very few of her teaching residencies seemed to be recurring or consistent. Because her ultimate goal was to consistently gain experience and connections in the United States in order to build a specifically anti-British, spectacularly Caribbean nationalist theatre at home, McBurnie’s life was characterized by constant movement. She moved between Caribbean identities and between the nightclub, the concert stage, and academic audiences without permanently settling.

Film recordings of McBurnie as the Belle Rosette gives an additional insight into the ways in which her performances played with, embraced, and subverted the stereotypes willingly forced upon her by the sensationalizing press, which could capture the energetic quality of control and

⁹⁴ Michael Eldridge, “There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow,” *Callaloo* 25, no. 2 (2002): 622.

softness to her work that resisted certain kinds of erotic spectacle. The only existing Belle Rosette performances on film in New York are two “soundies” in which McBurnie dances alongside Sam Manning, the Trinidadian vaudeville performer and calypso singer who was famously the creative/romantic partner of Marcus Garvey’s first wife, Amy Ashwood Garvey. Shot on Long Island at LOL Studios, these films of popular acts last a few short minutes and were designed to be played at special jukeboxes.

One of these soundies, “Quarry Road,” is staged in a nightclub setting. The camera opens to an integrated audience who bob enthusiastically to the music in their chairs, which are crowded around Manning and his four-piece band onstage. They wear broad straw hats, striped shirts, and jaunty neck scarfs: costumes that seemed to signify French Antillean dress.⁹⁵ Manning sings a medley of calypso songs before the Belle Rosette and her dancers arrive two-thirds into the film. First, a male dancer thrusts through Mannings's band and jumps off the raised stage to dance amongst the tables. He is dressed in high-waisted, wide-legged animal print pants that are slit up the sides. He stomps on the stage briefly, flinging his arms up and down in wide, energetic, but almost jaggedly uncontrolled movements, clearing the stage for the Belle Rosette. He exists as McBurnie enters in a long-sleeved costume that is almost matronly compared with the two female dancers, including her sister Frieda, in small midriff-bearing bandeau tops that accompany her. McBurnie is a calming balm after the explosion of energy of her male predecessor. Her performance—confined to small space and meant to complement, rather than overshadow, Manning's musical performance—does not contain the frantic energy and dynamism that reporters used to describe her solo stage show. It isn't even a display of technical virtuosity. She and her two back-up dancers are charmingly out of sync, and woman one seems to have more enthusiasm than rhythm. Unable

⁹⁵ *Quarry Road*, film recording (Soundies Distribution Company of America, Inc., undated).

to isolate her shoulders and hips, each twitchy movement the eager back-up dancer jolts her entire body. However, the performance does capture a sense of fun. McBurnie moves with more ease than effort, shakes her hips softly, hops and shimmies, and twirls from left to right while flapping her elbows and then winding her wrists. Her movements are smooth and upbeat, but soft and tender.⁹⁶

Judy Raymond, McBurnie's biographer, has read the subtlety of McBurnie's movement language and conservative costuming in these films as proof of her demure authenticity ("proper" dancing "no doubt based on traditional steps, with no suggestive or erotically inclined moves") and as a clear disavowal of the forceful sexuality of figures like Carmen Miranda and Dunham.⁹⁷ However, I see McBurnie's relative restraint as the source of her sensuality. While McBurnie is clearly performing to the camera, hers is a scaled-down and more intimate shay-shay, much like Dunham's aforementioned 1935 film of the couple in Kingston on their private patio who revel in the indulgence of body-satisfying movement. Performance scholar and carnival theorist Rawle Gibbons names the driving impulse of the carnival—calypso's ultimate stage—as the desire to "fill up the space," to enlarge oneself through movement, costume, and performance. McBurnie's subtle and grounding performance of pleasure help to bring out a dimension of calypso performance often ignored by carnival studies for the clamor and colorful costumes of the collective processional, a quieter register that none-the-less enacts smaddification as an arrestingly vulnerable display of joyous humanity that pushes against normative stereotypes of black or brown womanhood. Her back-up dancers' lack of control only extenuates McBurnie's black cool as a

⁹⁶ See Jasmine Johnson's analysis of tenderness as a black performance affect: Jasmine Elizabeth Johnson, "A Politics of Tenderness," *The Black Scholar* 49, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 20–34.

⁹⁷ Judy Raymond, *Beryl McBurnie* (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2018).

study in contrasts, restrained movements executed with grace, and a megawatt, joyful smile energizing her face. In other words, McBurnie masterfully dances on the fine line between “doing the most” and “doing the least,” reminding us of calypsos’ roots as a circum-Caribbean pleasure dance. Her sexy shay-shay is the opposite of the performance of strain and exaggeration that audiences demanded from their black fad performers, literally bending over backward to entertain. Her highly expressive face adds a “high affect juxtaposition” that Brenda Dixon Gottschild says is the space of contrast where the aesthetic of black cool lies.⁹⁸

McBurnie returned to Trinidad in 1948, this time to stay. Upon her return, she brought a decade’s worth of lessons and alliances with United States institutions and African American colleagues. Throughout the 1940s, she continued to travel back to Trinidad and conducted research trips around the Caribbean and Latin America, growing her repertoire and testing the dances she developed for her New York concerts with her company dancers in Port-au-Prince on local audiences. Three years after this permanent return, she fulfilled her long-time dream of opening a performing arts theatre in her hometown. Little Carib Theatre opened to great fanfare in 1951. Fellow Harlemites Paul Robeson and future Trinidadian Prime Minister Eric Williams (who had just left his teaching post at Howard University) were among those officially honored at the opening ceremony. McBurnie filled her program notes with her US credentials—letters of recommendation from Charles Weidman, Columbia Teachers College, the YMCA, and the West Indies National Council in New York—affirming her contributions to global dance culture.

⁹⁸ Here, I think of Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s description of Africanist movement and embodiment of cool as a balance of energetic, affective and kinesthetic contrasts: “It is in embracing these opposites, in being and playing the paradoxes, from inside-out and outside-in, and their high affect juxtaposition that the aesthetic of cool exists.”

Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Greenwood Press, 1996), 17.

McBurnie also brought back a new limbo, which she performed at this first Little Carib Theatre concert. McBurnie was the first to perform the limbo as a concert or fad dance, to transform it into an Afro-Caribbean concert and dance education staple. It is thanks to Trinidadian dancers like McBurnie, the Holders, and “The First Lady of Limbo” Julia Edwards in the late 1950s, that the limbo gained worldwide fame.⁹⁹

Through McBurnie, the limbo and shay-shay traveled from Port-of-Spain to New York and back, gaining new meanings as a marker of Trinidadian identity and losing some of its sacred associations with Shango practice in the transition. The West Indian culture McBurnie helped to create in concert with Garvey and Dunham reflected the unevenness of West Indian experiences to migratory culture and how hierarchies of class, gender, and nationality attributed different levels of access to the black internationalism. The decolonization movement also provided a new language of connection, and new discourse to justify claiming space. As the Little Carib Theatre grew into a West Indian institution, one thing kept folks coming back over and over: McBurnie’s closing calypso jump-up. The theatre became known for employing only the best steel bands for the closing number, and it became customary after this last dance for the performers to move into the aisles to draw audience members on stage. They stacked the empty chairs on the edges of the room to transform the little theatre into a dancehall, blurring the lines between performer and participant, so that “at the Little Carib Theatre common folk rubbed shoulder to shoulder with the elite as the music after a performance became the magic ingredient for mixing.”¹⁰⁰ Molly Ahye recounts “News spread about this ‘post-performance’ dancing and eventually, because the capacity was limited to about 300 to 350, the show had to run for several nights or be repeated after an

⁹⁹ Shane Vogel, “*Stolen Time*” 179.

¹⁰⁰ Molly Ahye, *Cradle of Caribbean Dance*, 49.

interval..."¹⁰¹ The audiences filled the space, kicking and spinning, contorting themselves, bending their knees and arching their backs, taking over, and showing off: a shameless spectacle of a nation.

Conclusion

Katherine Dunham's journey to Jamaica came full circle in 1960, almost twenty-five years after her initial trip, when she returned with a proposal to build a Dunham institute in Jamaica to kick start the local art scene and initiate a new vision for the future of Jamaican dance. Meeting with a government-sanctioned committee formed to cultivate the national arts, Dunham proposed an ambitious scheme that brings to mind Garvey's dreams from several decades before, including a small museum, modern ballet rehearsal rooms, a library and a small army of her own personnel. The meeting's minutes testify to the committee's serious consideration of the proposal—after all, the dancer was a household name throughout the Americas. However, the artists and culture workers who made up the council feared that Dunham's celebrity would overshadow local talent and that her vision would impose an artificial coherence on what was actually a diverse artistic landscape. Furthermore, they thought that Dunham's international appeal would detract from the national art movement's ultimate goal of representing a uniquely Jamaican culture.¹⁰² While the full reasons that Dunham's plan fell through are unknown, the committee's insistence that there was more than enough local talent on which to build a national culture was a striking departure from the inter-war and early post-war discourses on national art.

Dunham's international celebrity and early advocacy of West Indian culture in the 1930s

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Minutes of the Meeting of the Arts Advisory Council Held at the Ministry of Housing and Social Welfare on Friday December 13; Minutes of the Meeting of the Arts Advisory Council Held at the Ministry of Housing and Social Welfare on Friday December 9, at 3:30 PM.

and 1940s served as an inspiration and point of reference for West Indian artists to enter into conversations about blackness, beauty, and their place in the world. Rejecting fixed cartographies of Jamaican and West Indian movement, social and concert dance's migratory movements explored the "boundedness and unboundedness in the gender, temporal, and local and global nuances present in the ways in which people make and link spaces through their creation."¹⁰³ Or as Ivy Baxter, a mid-century Jamaican dancer who would follow in McBurnie's footsteps to lead the next stage of West Indian concert dancer's evolution, said of her attempts to situate herself in the bright confusion of diaspora space, "I always say that we don't always here do West Indian dance, [we] mainly concentrate on the fact that we are West Indian, dancing."¹⁰⁴ The refusal of West Indian dancers to submit to demands for cultural purity, and their persistent focus on what it meant to be a West Indian body in migration and flight, became the basis for a regional arts movement to redefine the Caribbean's place in global history.

¹⁰³ Sonjah Stanley Niaah, *DanceHall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto*, 119.

¹⁰⁴ "Creative Arts in the West Indies" (University of the West Indies, Mona: University Radio Service, May 29, 1958), University Archives, UWI.

CHAPTER 2 Federation Market

The Ivy Baxter Creative Group and Eyrich Darby ended Kingston's first modern dance concert by a Jamaican choreographer at the Ward Theatre in November 1956 with a work called "Federation Market."¹ The Baxter Group danced this bare-foot narrative ballet to a calypso soundtrack, mixing a still relatively new and radical form of concert dance with familiar circum-Caribbean jazz style. The program notes announced to the crowd gathered in downtown Kingston's stately Ward Theatre: "Men and women of the island intermingle, though not always on friendly terms. A humorous supposition of what MIGHT happen after FEDERATION."² It told a story of a carnival celebration on an unnamed West Indian island, populated with bands of Trinidadian revelers, a Barbadian street seller, and an assortment of Jamaican and St. Lucian onlookers. The plot imagined the comings together and clashes that could result from the union of the British West Indies islands under the new federal government through a comical rendering of the relational politics of the everyday. The dance seemed to question if cultural continuities and interconnected migratory roots would be enough to overcome distance and difference. As different islanders acted out grudges and rivalries on the road to a West Indian nation, this sly

¹ Norman Rae, "'Danse Moderne' Shows Vitality, Energy, But..." *The Daily Gleaner*, November 19, 1956.

² Ivy Baxter, and Eyrich Darby, "Programme: Danse Moderne." Ward Theatre, December 1956, MS 2177.1.2.6, 6, National Library of Jamaica.

celebration performed both a near and certain future of federal consolidation, and the impossibility of crafting a single nation out of what Glissant called rhizome lands, or the intertangled but distinct roots of the Caribbean's regional history.³



Figure 5: The Ivy Baxter Creative Group dances the limbo in the Sun Over the West Indies stage show, Howard University (1961). Image courtesy of NDTC Archives

The Baxter Group could not dance a complete and cohesive vision of the Caribbean nation, because the Federation of the West Indies (January 3, 1958- May 31, 1962) never developed beyond contested and unfinished exercises in coalitional politics. However, these federal exchanges in the service of attempting to define West Indian modernism and modernity

³ Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael J. Dash, xlvii, 272 p. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 1997. Glissant's theorizations of the futility of Caribbean nationalism, see Joshua Ian Jelly-Schapiro, "The Caribbean in the World: Imaginative Geographies in the Independence Age" (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2011,

had a lasting effect on how Jamaicans dancers and performance institutions oriented themselves on the world stage, even after Jamaicans voted in a referendum to leave Federation and pursue independence solo. The short and incomplete project of Federation reveals how imperial migratory routes and infrastructure served to help West Indians define cultural unity and differences, just as much as the region's common African roots and plantation histories. Their work testifies to how despite this common history of sugar slavery, creating a common language if not consensus to communicate what it meant to be black or brown and West Indian did not arise naturally, but was a product of dedicated artistic labor. While Jamaican national history often underemphasizes the cultural impact of Federation, this period was a particularly formative moment for the national imaginary. It was a moment during which Kingstonian dancers understood themselves as the vanguards of modern and "creative" dance in the West Indies, and Jamaicans at large learned to embody ideas of race, development, and democracy in relation to their Caribbean counterparts.

The dance, theatre, literary, and plastic arts created in the decade of negotiations (1948-1958) preceding the British West Indies joining together as a federation enacted a desire to break from colonial traditions, identify regional continuities, and project local "realities."⁴ I name the "queer regional aesthetics" that developed out of these joyful and discomfiting artistic attempts to form political community outside of the nation "Federation Modernism."⁵ The rich archive of Federation Modernist art movements and institutions stand as a testament to the ambivalent yet

⁴ I use the September 1947 Montego Bay Conference on Closer Association of the British West Indian Colonies as the starting point of "Federation Modernism," though many of the artists identify careers and themes of unity last well before and after Federation. I follow some of these lasting currents and resurgence of dreams of Federal Unity in chapter 5.

⁵ Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press Books, 2018).

lasting grounds for unity that the BWI formed during decolonization. They reflect how a decentralized and often contentious West Indian nationalism emerged despite widespread frustration and confusion about Federation's goals. The always brutally frank Norman Rae – dance and art critic for the *Daily Gleaner* (1956-1970) – gave voice to the confusion that these attempts to join the West Indies and its diaspora's varied traditions into something distinctive and whole could engender in audiences. He labeled “Federation Market” a failure, criticizing the choreography for not fully embodying Graham's sharp, precise movement, and ineffectively mixing references from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean into a tangled mess.⁶ In many ways, these highly experiential but often clumsy attempts captured the generative failures of Federation's utopian mission: to find harmony within the difference of West Indian cultures, stages of economic development, and ties to the US or British Empire.

The Baxter Company's farcical imagining of a supranational union in the Caribbean as a raucous event marked by petty fights and misunderstandings between island cultures reflected how many islanders experienced the political theatre of West Indian Federation. Throughout the 1950s, West Indians imagined that their political futures would be inextricably tied together, but how to go about the process of independence remained a topic of contentious debate. Local and colonial political leaders remained anxious about whether individual West Indian islands could brave the world economy alone, or if they should reach across cultural, geographic, and economic divides to form a federated state. The large islands of Trinidad, Jamaica, and Barbados squabbled about how to divide political influence and fiscal responsibility for islands with less developed economies, while the smaller islands of the Leeward and Windward archipelagos chafed against the “Big Islands” dominance in crafting their collective freedom. The West Indian Federal

⁶ Rae, 'Danse Modern,' 1956.

movement was anti-colonialist but not anti-imperialist.⁷ Its leaders imagined independence within the bounds of continued British administrative oversight and a robust Anglo-political tradition. However, different factions disagreed on the degree to which Great Britain or the rising hemispheric power of the United States would aid or influence the transition to political sovereignty. The Cuban Revolution at the end of the 1950s further skewed the balance of power towards the United States and their anti-communist policing in the Caribbean, but divisively widened the range of possible political futures that West Indians debated amongst themselves. Partly because of those local and supranational arguments about federal failures and futures, some West Indians faced independence within the Commonwealth with hope, while others teetered between ambivalence and wariness.

Because of islanders' inability to form a cohesive political identity and strong anti-colonial movement at home, scholars have often argued that diasporic West Indian identity — performed through spectacles such as Pan-Caribbean Carnivals, or through radical anti-racist and communist political organizing in New York and London— formed stronger inter-island solidarity-ties abroad.⁸ The open nature of pre-1965 commonwealth migration laws, the British Council's

⁷ David Killingray, "The West Indian Federation and Decolonization in the British Caribbean," 78. .

⁸ West Indian progressive societies and political movements in New York, writers and community organizers in London, and Federation statesmen like CLR James, Norman Manley and Eric Williams (who began their life-long friendships and rivalries in metropolitan centers abroad) are foundational characters in these black internationalist narratives of the West Indies. This literature ranges from broad black Atlantic histories to close, single island cultural studies, including Hazel V. Carby, *Cultures in Babylon* (London: Verso, 1999); Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London; New York: Verso, 1999); Roxy Harris and Sarah White, eds., *Changing Britannia: Life Experience with Britain* (London: New Beacon Books Ltd, 1999), Paul Gilroy, *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, First edition, paperback issue edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008).

scholarship and arts sponsorship initiatives, the cooperation of colonial welfare commissions, and the University College of the West Indies (UCWI, an external college of the University of London) all served as pathways through which West Indians in the 1940s and 1950s moved between islands —England, Manhattan, and the Caribbean archipelago —to create a culture in the name of Federation.⁹ Federation provided an unprecedented moment of inter-island artistic movement and new opportunities for a small, emergent black middle-class to study abroad or at regional universities at home. However, Federation's troubled intimacies and aspirations were not only experienced by the upwardly- or internationally-mobile, but also as local practices of citizenship, performance, and spectatorship that articulated West Indians' demands and expectations for the late-colonial state.

Dance and theatre educators who worked as social welfare recreation officers and who worked within the UCWI were crucial to the process of attempting to turn popular culture and everyday life into nationalist pedagogy, and representing the Federal government's cultural policy in rural outposts. They translated Federation into experience and embodiment for those who could not access Federation Modernism's literary culture. Dance and theatre converted ideas of supra-national, multi-racial harmony into performance scenarios and a methodology of channeling collective feeling into movement one could own within one's body. However, these inter-island

⁹ More recently, Laura Putnam and others have begun to lay the groundwork for a working-class history of West Indian identity that decenters well-known male nationalist and decolonial movement leaders as the main characters in this political drama. These histories also move away from the emphasis on diaspora as the epicenter of West Indian progressive movements. Instead, they use popular religion, music, dance, and the print culture of the first three decades of the 20th century to map the creation of a multi-class, Caribbean-based community that was self-consciously black, mobile, and international. Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

encounters also reflected the unequal terms of exchange within the federal cultural marketplace. Dancing bodies revealed assumptions based on geography and class about which West Indians held the keys to cosmopolitan and modern movements, and which provided Africanist or exotically Caribbean source material, reproducing the economic hierarchies and cultural divides that tore Federation apart.

Garvey's Exit and the Modern Jamaica

In Jamaica, much like Trinidad, the mass Independence movement consolidated in the mid-1930s, around the same moment that Marcus Garvey fled to British shores to escape the financial ruin of Edelweiss Park. The Great Depression ignited the first wave of civil unrest and labor protests among agricultural workers and other wage earners in an anti-imperialist movement known as the West Indian Labour Rebellions of 1934-1938. The labor rebellions spread in a series of riotous eruptions across British Honduras, British Guiana, Trinidad, St. Vincent, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, Barbados, the Bahamas, and Antigua. In Jamaica, the rebellion peaked late in 1938: the centennial of the end of slavery on the island.¹⁰ The rise of workers' collective action marked the first time in Jamaica's long history of revolt against the plantation system that a popular movement united under the banner of decolonization. It was out of this grassroots movement that modern Jamaican party politics emerged.

Marcus Garvey's ability to unite black Jamaicans into a more cohesive and incorporated political constituency paved the way for brown middle-class nationalist leaders to capitalize on this anger against white elites and the British Empire, filling the political vacuum Garvey left behind with trade union-based party politics that became the basis of the modern two-party system that remains to this day. While driven by a common goal, the anti-colonial movement in Jamaica was

¹⁰ While slavery was abolished in 1834, a period of apprenticeship continued until 1838.

fractured along the lines of social class and the urban/rural divide. Cousins Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante led its two warring factions. While Manley and Bustamante both came from the brown-creole elite, they represented opposing political styles—if not always substantively different policies. Over three decades (1940-1970), they dominated Jamaican parliamentary politics. Bustamante took a roundabout road to his political career, spending the first three decades of the 20th century doing odd clerical and agricultural jobs as he traveled around Cuba, Panama, and New York. After returning to Kingston in his late-40s to build his money-lending business, Bustamante became involved in labor organizing in the late 1930s. Known for his inflammatory orations and ideologically malleable populist style, he became a hero of the black working classes and poor rural black population. During the labor rebellions of May 1938, police arrested Bustamante under the accusation that one of his speeches incited a riot, and his short but well-publicized jail time further added to his uncompromising and maverick persona. Bustamante founded a union in 1939, which would form the political base of the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP, 1943). While Bustamante shared Garvey's populist style and working-class constituency, he was not by any means a black nationalist and did not fully embrace the potential of black culture. Much of his appeal lay in his proximity to whiteness and his willingness to reach across class and racial divides in an act of class altruism.¹¹ After Great Britain granted the Crown Colony universal suffrage in 1944, Bustamante's party won with a comfortable majority and served as the first locally elected Chief Minister.

During Bustamante's arrest, Norman Manley, an English-born, middle-class barrister, stepped into the role of a calm and "reasoned" mediator between the bosses and labor. Later that

¹¹ Brian Meeks argues that Bustamante's arrest engendered a "gratefulness factor" in his electoral success. See: Brian Meeks, *Critical Interventions in Caribbean Politics and Theory* (University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 55.

year, Manley launched the People's National Party (PNP) at the Ward Theatre in Kingston, a Fabian socialist-leaning, progressive party favored by middle-class nationalists. Manley's promises of progress stood in stark contrast to his populist cousin or the flamboyance of Garvey's legacy. He eschewed a queer, charismatic, and race-based political community for measured diplomacy, multi-racial harmony, a stalwart commitment to British Civil Service, and gradual reforms.

¹² Manley felt the UK would only grant independence when Jamaicans were prepared to perform their readiness for citizenship and had developed a unique and constructive national character. He created Jamaica Welfare Ltd., a private organization that trained village leaders to lead in social uplift, and education, and cooperative agriculture initiatives. This village training model proved so successful that it became the basis for social welfare programs across the West Indies and the British Empire.¹³

The new two-party system and its brown leaders brought an end to the Garveyite period of diasporic, popular, and black nationalist political organizing. It signaled the ascent of a “Brown Creole Nationalist” bent of mainstream politics that marked the period leading up to independence, which rested on a narrative of Jamaican exceptionalism that erased the historic instability of political coalitions between brown and black Jamaicans in favor of a discourse of multi-racial democracy. Still, the Manleys and Garvey shared the same desire to “teach” black Jamaicans to become better spectators and consumers of high culture and create nationalist

¹² See Palmer, *Freedom's Children*, chapter 9, Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*.

¹³ “Social Welfare Conference Held at Hastings House, Barbados from 17th to 21st March 1952,” n.d., CO 103/716, no. 1, The National Archives, TNA (The Kew). See also: Deborah A. Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*, Latin America Otherwise (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 52-53.

institutions to promote and house the arts.¹⁴ This symbolic alliance of the institutionalized, middle-class, and respectable anti-colonial movement and politicized black labor fed the emergence of a nationalist art movement "indigenous" to the Jamaican way of life. In 1941, the PNP took over the former Edelweiss Park grounds and built their new cultural complex on the property, replacing its unruly entertainment schedule with a more top-down, ordered vision of cultural politics. They turned the interior performance spaces into the offices of the *Public Opinion* (the newspaper of the Peoples National Party) and later its "sister" publication *Focus*—an arts and literary magazine that served as the voice of the PNP's vision of "high" West Indian culture. *Focus*' editorial vision came mainly from Edna Manley, Manley's British-born wife and a modernist sculptor, who became a leader and patron of this homegrown art movement. Edna Manley spearheaded a plastic arts and arts education program aimed at expanding arts access outside of the private salons and libraries of the elite, and advocated increased exposure for European modernism and "traditional" or "primitive" African arts.¹⁵ In 1952, the PNP solidified its stance as an increasingly centrist, accommodationist anti-colonial movement by purging radical Marxist members Richard Hart, Ken

¹⁴ West Indian literary journals that formed the proto-structures of federal exchange, like Frank Collymore's Barbados-based *BIM* magazine (1942-present) and A.J. Seymour's British Gianaese *Kyk-Over-All* (1945-1961), emerged alongside Edna Manley's *Focus* magazine in the post-war period. They gained inspiration from and championed the careers many of the same writers as Una Marson's London-based Caribbean Voices program. James Procter, "Una Marson at the BBC," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 19, no. 3_48 (2015): 1-28.

For a discussion of the interrelated and gendered cultural and political projects that the *Focus* and *Public Opinion* came to represent within the PNP nationalist agenda, see Raphael Dalleo, "The Public Sphere and Jamaican Anti-colonial Politics: Public Opinion, Focus and the Place of the Literary," *Small Axe* 14:2, June 2010, pp. 65-86.

¹⁵ Edna Manley began writing editorials urging the development of "native arts" in 1934, likely aware of Garvey's published speeches and writing in *The Gleaner*. See Veerle H. Poupeye, "Between Nation and Market: Art and Society in 20th Century Jamaica" (Ph.D., Emory University, 2011), 26.

Hill, Arthur Henry, and Frank Hill from their leading roles in the party. In 1955, the PNP gained control of the parliament and led the island until its independence in 1962.¹⁶

This struggle between JLP and PNP political performances was only one tension that shaped the question of what form Jamaica's independent government would take. Until 1961, Jamaicans saw their path to independence in tandem with the rest of their West Indian compatriots, an unwieldy alliance based on a shared colonial past and the dream of a stronger economic future, a future that no one island could hope to achieve alone. Federation—both as a political idea and promise—had been part of conversations about independence within local politics, expatriate communities (including West Indian students' organizations in London), artistic communities, and the British colonial office since the late 19th century.¹⁷ Preparations for integration began earnestly with the Montego Bay Conference of 1947, and were later ratified through the British Caribbean Federation Act of 1956. With relatively independent local legislatures and an established, self-sustaining civil service corps (relative to Asian and African colonies), the BWI seemed primed for a smooth transition to self-governance by British standards.

Federation was a late colonial institution, as well as a vector for collective bargaining over the terms of independence. In the Cold War period that preceded independence, the colonial government's efforts to promote and preserve imperial order and influence through the transition to self-governance, and local leaders' initiatives to ready the nation's poor for independence by advancing their vision of liberal citizenship, often worked in ambivalent collaboration.¹⁸ It served

¹⁶ For further information on the PNP purge, see Richard Hart, *Towards Decolonisation: Political, Labour and Economic Developments in Jamaica 1938-1945* (Canoe Press, University of the West Indies, 1999).

¹⁷ David Killingray, "The West Indian Federation and Decolonization in the British Caribbean," 72-75.

¹⁸ In 1939, the British colonial government was eager to subdue the riotous atmosphere in the West Indies in the face of impending war in Europe. They sent the Moyne Commission to report on social and labor conditions in the West Indies colonies. After the end of wartime austerity in 1945, the Moyne

both Great Britain's desires to push the Caribbean towards economic independence and those of West Indian nationalists, who hoped that a unified front would prevent the region from ultimately succumbing to North American Cold War dominance.¹⁹ At the same time, as Harvey Neptune argues, Caribbean independence movements also performed their admiration, often both genuine and strategic, for American modernity, ideas of democracy, and popular culture in order to bargain for reforms with the British Colonial Office, which was anxious to keep their influence over the Commonwealth intact.²⁰

The West Indian Federation government lasted only four years, pushed to its demise by Jamaicans' decisions to leave the union one year before its collapse. From the beginning, warring political/economic interests, petty jealousies, and old grudges divided the short-lived supranational governing body. Divisions formed over issues of taxation, free trade and migratory movement between islands, the seat of the capital, and the attribution of voting rights in the most populous and economically prosperous territories of Trinidad (the capital site), Jamaica, British Guiana, and Barbados (the home of Grantley Adams, the Federation's Prime Minister). While British Guiana (Guyana) opted out of the union early in the negotiations, Trinidad led the push for a strong central government and free trade within Federation, following the model set by federated Nigeria.

Commission's Report became the basis of a series of late colonial forms, which included investment in inter-island social welfare infrastructure, a new regional university system, and funding for the arts in an attempt to pacify the region and prepare them for self-governance. By the post-war 1940s, independence in the West Indies seemed to be an inevitability. After the wartime decline in the sugar industry, the colonies relied even more heavily on Colonial Welfare and Development services so that British West Indies (BWI) was more of a financial liability than a boon for the empire. David Killingray, "The West Indian Federation and Decolonization in the British Caribbean."

¹⁹ Michael Malouf, "Dissimilation and Federation: Irish and Caribbean Modernisms in Derek Walcott's *The Sea at Dauphin*," *Comparative American Studies An International Journal* 8, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 144

²⁰ Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

However, as the magnet for economic immigration in the Eastern Caribbean, with its rich oilfields and job opportunities on US bases, Trinidad opposed the free movement of citizens between federated states. Jamaica—relatively geographically removed from Federation’s locus in the Eastern/Southern Caribbean—advocated that “the federation should start with the minimum powers needed to gain recognition as an independent political entity” to maintain Jamaica’s protectionist economic policies.²¹ This culture of “Big Islandism,” or the special provisions and diplomatic power Jamaica and Trinidad demanded because of their economic dominance, fueled simmering resentment among the smaller islands.

Weak leadership, opposition to the uncharismatic and unpopular federal Prime Minister Adams, and personal grudge matches between some of the most prominent members of the leading West Indian Federal Labour Party—C.L.R. James, Grantley, Manley, and Eric Williams—made their way into major papers and troubled their aspirations of performing to rational, objective British ideals of diplomacy and manly conduct.²² Within Jamaica and its diaspora, some prominent progressive nationalist figures like the Jamaican Progressive League of New York founders W.A. Domingo and W. Adolphe Roberts opposed Federation as an unwieldy union that would slow Jamaica’s path towards independence and drain its resources. They worked to build

²¹ “Joint Memorandum by the Colonial Office and the Jamaica Delegation Summarizing Talks on Federal Matters in London, January 1960,” January 1960, ICS40-A3, 26, Senate House Library, CLR James Papers.

²² The CLR James Papers at the Senate House Library chronicles some of these tensions. See also Palmer, Colin A., “The Challenge of Political and Economic Integration,” pp 40-75, in *Eric Williams and the Making of the Modern Caribbean*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

opposition amongst an ambivalent public they claimed “were being led, or driven, like sheep” to their doom.²³

Though he was a steadfast advocate of regional unity, Rex Nettleford would later argue that, much like the PNP leadership’s “smug declarations of multi-racial harmony, impressive growth rate and an exemplary Civil service,” Federation felt like an abstract marker of national achievement that had little material resonance for the masses. In contrast to the spirit of trade union mobilization in the 1930s and 1940s that equated collective freedom with the creation of an independent West Indies, by the 1950s a desire for “wide-spread social change seemed to have taken second place to constitutional advance and involvement in a West Indian federation.”²⁴ The PNP failed in their appeals for their nation’s poor to support and uplift their fellow West Indian islanders, while they faced job scarcity, unemployment, and increasing feelings of political alienation from their leaders at home. In 1961, Federation was a casualty of Jamaican political party wars, as over half of the Jamaican electorate (60.8%) voted “no” to the Federation in a referendum called by Alexander Bustamante aimed at weakening PNP leadership.²⁵ With Trinidad and Barbados unwilling to be the sole economic leaders in the South-Eastern Caribbean, Federation fell apart within a year.

A Distinctive West Indian Culture

Individual federal leaders inspired confidence and loyalty, but their enactments of statecraft in federal negotiations often failed to impress because of the cloud of dramatic intrigue

²³ W. A. Domingo and Walter Adolphe Roberts, *British West Indian Federation: A Critique*, 19, [1] p. (New York, N.Y.: W. Domingo, 1956), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/>.

²⁴ Rex Nettleford, *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race, and Protest in Jamaica*, (LMH Publishing Ltd., Kingston, 1970) 49.

²⁵ David Killingray, “The West Indian Federation and Decolonization in the British Caribbean,” 81.

surrounding federal negotiations. Playwright and actor Roderick Walcott (the twin brother and frequent collaborator of Nobel Prize-winning poet and playwright Derek Walcott) reported after the 1956 British Caribbean Federation Conference that negotiations felt more like a failed marriage arrangement than a triumphant leap towards independence: "It was nothing like the authoritative cry of a Toussaint saying 'Let my people go', or the passive philosophy of a Gandhi admonishing an Emperor . . . It was the bickering [of] politicians still unused to statesmanship, with more personal interests involved rather than national sincerity." Instead, Walcott placed the hope for a true federal consensus in a cultural consciousness cultivated through the performing arts: in Creative Dance, the steelpan and calypso bands, and most of all the University College of the West Indies Inter-Mural department, whose travels around the eastern Caribbean to cultivate adult drama and dance initiatives helped to combat "the dark cloak of common 'big islandism.'"²⁶

For many West Indians of all social classes, the Federal Modernist movement and Extra-Mural Adult Education movement was the focus of a regional imagined community, a community that the messy reality of inter-island politics often obscured or made seem impossible. Federal artists working for the new university saw the search for collective "self-discovery" as the next frontier for Caribbean freedom. Artmakers created an expansive and imaginative trans-national history as a basis for this regional unity, claiming territories and past events outside of the British empire as constitutive of West Indianness by virtue of their influence on Caribbean culture. Trinidadian Carnival, Jamaica's Garveyism, the Haitian Revolution, the negritude of Martinique, and later, the Cuban Revolution, all signified historical forces that constituted regional identity. Firm in the belief, as Joshua Jelly purposed, that "one can only understand the history and the destiny of the Caribbean's constituent territories and peoples by viewing them as part of a single

²⁶ Roderick Walcott, "A Federated West Indian Theatre," *The Voice of St. Lucia*, March 11, 1956.

coherent region (or “nation” in [CLR] James’s verbiage).”²⁷ Federal arts used and built on the networks of the circum-Caribbean print and theater culture of Garvey’s time to circulate a piecemeal genealogy of West Indian freedom. Looking at the outgrowth of creativity that the period of Federation Modernism generated, James asserted that the birth of the West Indian novel, the swing of the calypso, the inspired improvisation of the staged shay-shay, all were moments of discovery and revolution as potentially earthshattering as Columbus’ arrival in the New World or Castro’s revolution.²⁸ Regional identification and comparison in both West Indian history writing and performance were strategies of smaddification, or increasing the volume and scope of the West Indies’ calls for recognition.

In the post-war period, artists used the promise of a West Indian nation to structure their dreams of a distinctly West Indian culture, one that assuaged anxieties about the irreparable imprint of British colonialism with the promise of something cosmopolitan, new, and distinctively modern. Federation artists held a variety of philosophical positions concerning what this aesthetic response to political modernity must reflect.²⁹ While West Indian novels like those by George Lamming, Earl Lovelace, Sylvia Wynter, Samuel Selvon, and C.L.R. James were perhaps the most

²⁷ Joshua Ian Jelly-Schapiro, “The Caribbean in the World: Imaginative Geographies in the Independence Age,” 2.

²⁸ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Vintage, 1989), 417.

²⁹ Fault lines or shifting affinities among emerging artistic representations of West Indian identity settled into similar camps as debates over cultural creolization would develop in the 1970s post-colonial historical academy: one side that declared Federation as a creole culture that was “entirely new” that developed in response to the modern West Indian political culture, and one that imagined the West Indian culture should directly reference or grow from the islands’ African or British inheritance. Pollard examines this divide through the Caribbean modernist works of two Federation writers: Bajan Poet Edward Kamau Braithwaite, who fell on the side of Africanist continuity, and St. Lucian Derek Walcott, who believed that the Caribbean was so lacking in cultural essence and a usable past that the novelist must birth it into existence. see Charles Pollard, *New World Modernisms* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004). See also Malouf, “Dissimilation and Federation.”

celebrated testaments to the movement by both contemporary critics and Caribbeanist scholars who followed, performance and performance pedagogy most clearly articulated a social mandate and developed in close tandem to federal education and social welfare initiatives. Separated by the Caribbean Sea, the West Indies lacked the centralization and state intervention that shaped cultural development projects elsewhere in the British Commonwealth. However, Africanist performance scholars Kelly Askew and Paul Schauert's proposition that state-affiliated music and dance performance in post-colonial commonwealth provides rich source material for interrogating simultaneous and competing "national imaginaries" in countries with substantial rates of illiteracy, are nonetheless applicable to the West Indies' looser political affiliations.³⁰ Caribbean dance and drama represent the clearest attempt to translate debates about cultural formation among communities in London, New York, and the "Big Island" capitals of Bridgetown, Kingston and Port of Spain into participatory community action.

This ethos of creativity as public service ties together dance companies and individual arts that I identify as part of Federation Modernism. Many participated in or came from the same vaudevillian Garveyite circles as the artists of the colonial period and led similarly migratory careers, or received British Council scholarships between 1945-1960 before returning to the West Indies to help build national arts infrastructure at home. In this way, Federation Modernists came of age in similarly diasporic and anti-imperialist communities as the previous generation of West Indian artists, but they framed their work as part of the project of Federation's supranational cultural development. They were further separated from the earlier generation by their decidedly

³⁰ Askew and Schauert use performance to illustrate an inadequacy in Benedict Anderson's famous use of print culture - or singular, static texts - as the basis of his "imagined community." They argue that performance and spectatorship remind us that the nation-building process does not create a single cohesive community but many contradictory and often combative experiences. See Paul Schauert, *Staging Ghana: Artistry and Nationalism in State Dance Ensembles* (Indiana University Press, 2015).

middle-class values and disavowal of the crassness of the entertainment and tourism industry. By the 1950s, few federal artists unabashedly mixed commercial interests – particularly careers in tourism, vaudeville, or nightclub entertainment– with “art” or concert dance like their predecessors and counterparts in the United States and London. They formed proudly “amateur” dance and theatre groups that often charged members’ dues and donated event proceeds to philanthropic organizations, while maintaining careers as teachers, civil servants, and social welfare officers. Federation dancers, in particular, distanced themselves from mercantile or unrespectable aspects of performance culture. This distancing was in part by economic necessity. Jamaica lacked a popular audience for creative dance, and the modern dance movement faced serious prejudice from the cosmopolitan elite who felt that home-grown, “native” artists lacked the polish of their European or American counterparts who occasionally toured Kingston. Performers that received the co-sign of the British Council and USIS gained elite patrons, British expatriate connections, and social clout. Colonial grants, late colonial development institutions, and (often foreign-owned) cooperate sponsorship formed the main sources for funding and legitimization for the nationalist concert dance movement.

Both the federal dance and theatre movements were deeply inspired by Beryl McBurnie’s interactive, expressive, concert dance nightlife act, and as well as the Little Carib Theatre’s multi-class spectatorship community. However, added to McBurnie’s folk/calypso theatre movement were a new group of modern dancers and theatre professionals, trained in England and the United States, who sought to add “discipline,” limits, shape, and cohesive standards to what they interpreted as folksy, unpolished local talent. As CLR James articulated, citing an emerging myth that West Indians were natural dancers and musical performers, “the mass of people are not seeking a national identity, they are expressing it” and it was up to artists to both cannibalize and

contain the Carnival spirit in West Indian society.³¹ As Derek Walcott described the challenges of creating Trinidad's National Theatre Trust in the 1950s: "our sin in West Indian art is the sin of exuberance and self-indulgence, and I wanted to impose a theatre that observed certain rules."³²

In Kingston—a center of dance training for the "creative," "modern," or "art dance" in the region—Federation dancers primarily focused on nationalist narratives about Caribbean life, creating stories based on fantasies about the peasantry or "folk" to draw out regional continuities. However, the movement was less concerned with proving fidelity to anthropological fieldwork than producing a unique, refined, local style by using Modern dance as its structuring framework. As Eyrich Darby described the project of Caribbean modern dance, created in the lineage of "mighty rebel" Martha Graham: "The contemporary dancer glories in the sure grasp of bare feet on a bare stage, a freedom from an enforced and restricted vocabulary of movement. And in this new approach lies the revelation of things to come."³³ Darby and Baxter's embrace of American Modern dance as a site of originality and a modality of black and brown freedom was not without contradictions, particularly because Graham and many of the other white, female pioneers of Modern dance liberally stole without attribution from Global South cultures and migratory dancers in their search for "universal" movement. In the BWI, color, class, and geography similarly limited who could represent the Caribbean modernity. However, Jamaican dancer's strategic choices were also made in the context of decolonization from British empire. For Jamaica and much of the British Caribbean, islands that early 20th-century dance anthropologists had passed over because

³¹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Vintage, 1989).

³² Derek Walcott, "Meanings," *Savacou: A Journal of the Caribbean Arts Movement*, no. 2 (September 1970): 47.

³³ Ivy Baxter, and Eyrich Darby, "Programme: Danse Moderne."

of their lack of a distinctive, Africanist dance tradition, the idea of embracing this New World, American modernist approach to dance provided a path to self-definition and new points of connection beyond their British colonial past.

Creative Dance performance's ties to the local Federation project, Cold War cultural politics, and the colonial government's social welfare reforms had a lasting impact on Jamaica's dance theatre economics and style. Through these government-funded routes, Modern dance spread far and wide across the large and small islands, as a unique modality of bridging both emerging notions of a cohesive Caribbean history and shared contemporary experience. The call for something new did not provide a clean slate. Federation dance often reflected the same inter-island rivalries, local racial and cultural hierarchies, and Big Island/Small Island divides that caused Federation to fall apart.

Brown Girl in the Ring – Ivy Baxter's Caribbean Modernism

In 1952, the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group performed *Pocomania* at the Caribbean Festival of the Arts in Puerto Rico.³⁴ The two-years young company was nervous about performing among much more established Trinidadian, Puerto Rican, and Haitian folkloric troupes, who had identified and perfected folkloric interpretations of "native dances" for many years longer than the Jamaican scene.³⁵ Performing for the first time in a pan-Caribbean festival, the Baxter Group both delighted in the diasporic connections between their performances of Afro-Caribbeanness and were vexed by a desire to aesthetically differentiate their movement from that of Haiti, the Spanish Caribbean, and the other islands within Federation. *Pocomania*—their single nod to Afro-Diaspora

³⁴ This dance, which Baxter refers to as *Pocomania* in her memoir *Arts of an Island*, also fits the description of the Pocomania-based work *Elation* that Baxter's group performed in their 1952 season in Jamaica.

³⁵ Baxter, *Arts of an Island*, 300

dance religion—went as practiced until the dramatic climax, when the accompanying drums fell quiet, and dancers carried out the movements of a possession dance in complete silence, just as Baxter had witnessed at a Pocomania gathering in Kingston. While the effect on the audience was arresting, the dancers themselves experienced it as a moment of failure. Many of them entered into a trance-like state, and thus crossed from being agential performers to unwilling participants in a black “cultist” ceremony. The dancers confessed to Baxter: "I felt light. I felt as if my head was growing, but I was ashamed to tell you."³⁶ After Baxter felt these same sensations at a later performance, the Baxter Group changed the ending and intensity of the choreographed possession sequence, opting for controlled precision rather than ritual authenticity. They were anxious to never repeat their performance’s dangers of being taken over by the “primitive” rites they sought to contain and regulate.



³⁶ Ibid., 302

Figure 6: The Ivy Baxter Creative Group perform Pocomania in the Sun Over the West Indies stage show, Howard University (1960). Rex Nettleford, in the role of the Shepard, is at the center. Image courtesy of the NDTC Archives.

Baxter's cautionary tale of catching the spirit reveals the thin line that Federation Modernist performers danced on when they used African Diasporic religion or other sources linked to "the folk" as their source material. As middle-class artists, their dances were invested equally in performing connectedness to a national folk presence and the folk cultures of Federation, and a purposeful distance from the ritual context. While using folksiness as inspiration that added cultural authenticity, the dancers risked being possessed by, rather than being in possession of, black culture, and thus giving up ownership of their claims to the individualized creative genius and anthropological "objective" detachment. Their embrace of Afro-diaspora ancestral religion and possession rituals as cornerstone performance scenarios for telling regional stories threatened West Indian claims to multi-racial identity and British rationality. Issues of authorship over their work, and troubling intimacies between brown female, federal artists, and the black, working class and peasant characters they played, plagued dancers.

Until the 1950s in Jamaica, concert dance was considered elite and racialized as only suitable for non-black bodies—taught primarily by white, East Asian, or brown creole elite ballet mistresses in private studios.³⁷ Ivy Baxter, a brown creole, middle-class woman, was the first Jamaican to ground concert dance in local social dance and everyday black life, and to situate her nationalist philosophy of movement firmly within the West Indian independence project. Baxter pioneered the use of Modern dance training in Jamaica to exert artistic control over what middle-class and elite audiences saw as dangerously unruly black cultural forms. Baxter's ideas about what

³⁷ Some of these ballet mistresses, most notably Hazel Johnson and Herma Dias, experimented with adding folk stories and movements into their ballet beginning in the 1930s. Their work was never as integrated into a discourse of nationalism or circulated as widely as Baxter. Sabine Sörgel, *Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica* (transcript Verlag, 2007) 67.

constituted “folk” resources were limited by the generation before her and their search for African purity. To fill for this lack, Baxter drew from the analytical tools of her training in European expressionist dance to capture Jamaica’s national character rather than its so-called authentic traditions. In part because of Baxter's scientific approach to observing and constructing movement, her rejection of mystical or even somatic discourses about dance’s effects, folk dance studies in Jamaica were surprisingly capacious. Recreation pedagogy was less concerned with which steps constituted the most quintessential national aesthetic, as much as how to best represent a wide variety of typical experiences in West Indian everyday life and then channel this new knowledge toward the uses of the soon-to-be independent state.

Born in the Kingston suburb of Spanish Town in 1923, Baxter was the youngest of six sisters, from a "well-entrenched, middle-class family."³⁸ Her father, whose parish church birth records identified him as “coloured” or brown creole, was a civil servant who worked as an inspector for the Jamaican railway, and three of her sisters won prestigious national scholarships to attend university abroad.³⁹ Baxter’s friend, company member, and colleague Alma Mock Yen described Baxter as "what we would describe in the parlance of today’s Jamaica as “a browning” – meaning, light-skinned – the apricot type popularly associated with social class privilege. ⁴⁰ Baxter came of age at the height of the postwar middle-class reform movement and benefitted from the

³⁸ David Scott and Rex Nettleford, “‘To Be Liberated from the Obscurity of Themselves’: An Interview with Rex Nettleford,” *Small Axe* 10, no. 2 (July 25, 2006): 138.

³⁹ Birth Certificate of Ivy Evelyn Allen Baxter, March 3, 1923, Spanish Town, St. Catherine, Jamaica Civil Registration, Spanish Town. Microfilm; Christening Record of Aubrey Williams Baxter, December 6, 1978, Middlesex, Clarendon, "Jamaica, Church of England Parish Register Transcripts, 1664-1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939F-D62F-Z?cc=1827268&wc=M6GG-ZM9%3A161382801%2C161803201> : 20 May 2014).

⁴⁰ Alma Mock Yen, “Remembering Ivy Baxter: Her Life and Her Legacy,” 8.

political opening that the West Indian labor movement created for young women to engage in the public life of nation-building.⁴¹ Jamaican feminist artists and intellectuals like Uma Marson, Aimee Webster, and Amy Bailey became part of the first generation of educated black women reformists in the early 20th century. They were embedded in and inspired by the political culture of the Edelweiss Park and the Garvey movement.⁴² They were prominent voices for women's rights and the birth control movement in PNP circles in the 1940s, and their contributions to both political discourse and the arts helped to shape the federal art movement that followed.⁴³ Marson's *Pocomanía* is considered one of Jamaica's first great nationalist plays, and it paved the way for dance artists like Baxter to explore Afro-Caribbean culture as legitimate subject-matter for mainstream art.⁴⁴ Along with Majorite Stewart, the High Commissioner of the YMCA, these female reformers helped to craft the policy that became the basis of Norman Manley's Jamaica Social Welfare Ltd., particularly public discourse around women's education and family planning.⁴⁵

⁴¹ David Scott and Rex Nettleford, "'To Be Liberated from the Obscurity of Themselves,'" 136.

⁴² Honor Ford-Smith, "Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica," *Interventions* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 2004): 18-44.

⁴³ Nicole C. Bourbonnais, *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Dalleo, "The Public Sphere and Jamaican Anticolonial Politics," *Small Axe* 14, no. 2 (June 2010).

⁴⁴ Uma's Marson's influence on both Jamaican and Black British art movements was substantial. She served as the first black woman producer in a creative role to be hired by BBC. During WWII, her program *Calling the West Indies* played a crucial role in shaping and discriminating a West Indies literary voice at home and abroad. Marson also testified for the Moyne Commission in 1938 on topics ranging from the social "problem" of common-law marriages and the single motherhood, as well as racism/colorism within social service clubs in Jamaica. Karima Atiya Robinson, "Stages of Liberation: Ritual, Nationalism and Women's Cultural Production in Jamaica's Pre-Independence Era" (PhD diss., Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University, 2007) 113.

⁴⁵ Baxter, *Arts of an Island*, 296.

Using Commonwealth mutual aid and charitable networks, Stewart brought two Canadian physical education officers to teach modern dance at Kingston's YMCA and select elite all-girls high schools in the early 1940s. Baxter attended these classes and showed a natural aptitude for modern dance, such that she was chosen to train as a "native" replacement for her Canadian mentors.⁴⁶ Through a YMCA scholarship, Baxter went north to the University of Toronto to study physical education in 1943 and returned to teach dance in Kingston.⁴⁷ Baxter came to identify as a West Indian patriot and an African diaspora subject through her experiences of racism and being part of a Caribbean diaspora community abroad, a narrative that mirrors those of the Windrush generation of writers in exile. Mock Yen credits Baxter's experience in Canada with shaping her Pan-Caribbean sensibilities: "By way of her Canadian sojourn she understood first-hand what it feels like to be perceived as a black woman from the Caribbean—not apricot - not cinnamon—but black; and not from Jamaica, Dominica, Barbados, but from the Caribbean. She was now open to issues of identity for native Jamaicans, and integration in terms of the Caribbean."⁴⁸ Her travels abroad ignited a nationalism based on the West Indies collective subjugation under colonialism, and ignited a commitment to using dance education as a vector for racial uplift.

Baxter was working as a dance teacher in Kingston when Philip Sherlock, a Jamaican social welfare reformer and the architect of the University of the West Indies Extra-Mural Department, gave her a program from the opening night of Beryl McBurnie's *Little Carib Theatre* in Jamaica. McBurnie's vision of a dance medium that was wholly Caribbean, contemporary, and creative was what the recently politicized 25-year-old Baxter had been searching for. She had found a model

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Meet Miss Ivy Baxter," *Spotlight Magazine*, vol. 13 no. 2, September 1952.

⁴⁸ Alma Mock Yen, "Remembering Ivy Baxter," 9.

that would allow her to imagine her place into the burgeoning nationalist movement. How to access folk culture spaces rarely traversed by the brown middle-class, however, proved to be a more significant challenge. Unlike McBurnie's experience in Trinidad—where the calypso loomed large in the country's imaginary and dance religions like Shango had begun to be analyzed by both local and foreign anthropologists—Baxter was expressly discouraged from conducting anthropological research in the countryside or with working-class urban communities. When she began to take an interest in creating her choreography mid-1940s, middle-class anxieties about Jamaica's lack of a robust, anthropologically relevant “native” culture threatened to end her dance career before it began. She was told to abandon her search because “there were no Jamaican dances, no not one, just a little ‘shay shay’ and ‘bram’ on a Saturday night.”⁴⁹ Baxter conducted some early research in stealth, sneaking out of the window of her family home to attend Pocomania meetings in one of Kingston's less-reputable areas. She traveled to Trinidad to harvest ideas from McBurnie's choreography and theatrical production.⁵⁰ Baxter also encountered staged and competitive forums for local folk dances by adjudicating village and parish arts festivals organized by Jamaica Welfare as a high school dance student (a collaboration with Welfare development she would continue for the rest of her dance career).

Baxter combined this preliminary “research” with a curriculum of ballet barre-work and modern dance floor work to create her own movement method, forming The Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group (IBCDG) and dance school in 1950. The IBCDG was comprised primarily of middle-class amateurs, dance teachers, clerks, and students who Baxter recruited from YMCA

⁴⁹ Baxter, *Arts of an Island*, 297.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

classes, local theatre troops, and expatriate circles.⁵¹ Mock Yen describes these relatively privileged dancers as indicative of the Federation Modernist but misfits within their social sets. They were akin to bourgeoisie audiences in the United States that Susan Manning calls "middle-class dissidents" whose gender and class performances may have diverged from the Kingston respectable society's conservative ideals.⁵² The IBCDG established itself as the premier (and essentially only) non-commercial Creative Dance group in Jamaica. Between 1951-1960, Baxter's dancers dominated the Concert Dance domain in Kingston, traveling on behalf of the Jamaican and federal government, performing frequently in salon concerts and in Jamaica's Little Theatre Movement's larger, more popular pantomime productions. The Baxter Group became Kingston's main dance teaching institution and an incubator of contemporary dance pedagogy.

The IBCDG's first concerts in 1950 reflected mainstream creole nationalist ideologies and scenes from daily city life. For instance, Baxter's 1950 solo *Polychrome* served as a manifesto of Creole nationalist ideology that relied on degrading blackness in order to imagine social progress. Baxter danced as different archetypes within the multi-racial nation, embodying, in turn, what the program notes identified as "Whiteman, Yellowman, Redman, Blackman." Backed by a spoken word poem that described Jamaica's multi-racial immigration history, her brown female body—a ready symbol of Creole mixture—walked tall and direct as she mimed the white man's experience. She bent slightly and moved skittishly, elbows akimbo, as the yellowman, and her black man crouched low and carried a heavy burden. Using vertical spatial levels and ascending movement scales to mime the relative social levels and confidence in each man's future in the

⁵¹ Baxter, *Arts of an Island*, 94; Sabine Sörgel, *Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica* (transcript Verlag, 2007), 67

⁵² Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

nation, *Polychrome* revealed a vision of racial harmony in Jamaica that was both pragmatic (recognizing a current reality of racial inequality) and positivist (using physical ability and stature to represent relative confidence and modernity).⁵³ It signified her first uneasy attempt to embody the nation by abstracting easily recognizable Caribbean creole tropes to transmit ideas of national identity. *Polychrome* performed the Jamaica Welfare commission's civilizing mission, to use cultural policy and recreation to help black people "gain self-confidence" and learn the motions of modernity.

Baxter's dance reflected the mixed-race Jamaican female body to be a transitional body, one that could be whitened either through the law or racial mixing, or claim blackness through performances of racial authenticity. Her ability to claim fluidity and the resonances of the ways that her light-brown skin was read as *mulatto* throughout the circum-Caribbean, black in the United States, or in the possession of a privilege approximate to whiteness in some Kingston circles, changed with her location. However, in the context of Jamaica, this association between race and class performance harkened back to an 18th-century law that enabled free mixed-race Jamaican women to claim the legal status of surrogate whiteness due to the shortage of white female settlers by proving their ability to perform white behaviors.⁵⁴ *Polychrome* offered a vision of racial harmony that reflected the continuation of this racial ideology in elite, Brown Creole nationalism. Racial inequality could be overcome by performances of respectability and good citizenship. She used strategies that resembled Susan Manning's notion of "metaphorical minstrelsy" practiced by white

⁵³ Robinson, "Stages of Liberation," 271.

⁵⁴ Linda Strutz, 'Mary Rose: "White" African Jamaican Woman? Race and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica', in Judith Byfield, La Ray Denzer and Anthea Morrison (eds.) *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture, and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian Hinterland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

American modern dancers in the 1920s, such as Helen Tamiris and Ted Shawn. Within the performance strategy of “metaphorical minstrelsy,” racism and anti-racism worked in tandem.⁵⁵ White performers abstracted well-known black and orientalist stereotypes to relay their anti-racist ideals of human universality (coded as whiteness) and assert their ownership over global culture.⁵⁶ While in the case of the United States, the ability to use the experience of others to produce “high” concert art was the property of white performers, in Jamaicans’ racial economy Baxter’s “high yellow” skin held the privileges of representing the ideal national body.

These first experimental works earned Baxter a British Council scholarship in 1950-1951 to study “Free Dance” (or European expressionist movement) at the Sigurd Leeder School where she would explore dance notion, choreutics, eukentics, and dance composition. The London School was founded in 1934 in the German expressionist dance tradition, which taught students to use dance as a modality to convey universal emotions and human experiences and to cultivate a movement practice that harnessed their personalities and creative visions. It was through Labanotation, a system for recording and analyzing movement, created by German choreographers Kurt Jooss, Sigurd Leeder, and Rudolf Laban, that Baxter unlocked an ethnographic method for understanding black movement without resorting to metaphorical minstrelsy or non-agential possession. It helped her see not only social dance or “folk religion,” but the quotidian movements of market sellers, urban street beggars, European tourists, agricultural workers, and even civil servants as the inspiration behind the gestures and kinesthetic impressions that formed the foundation of her movement language.

⁵⁵ On the relationship between racist and anti-racist in multi-racial Caribbean nationalisms, see Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁵⁶ Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*.

Compared to her forerunners, Baxter's vision of what could be considered West Indian dance was both more limited in its embrace of Africanist epistemologies and more capacious in defining the Caribbean culture as a "universally" recognizable modernity. If one dance writer described McBurnie as "the closest person to the source of Dance in the West Indies" because of her eccentric performance as a lady anthropologist, Baxter purposely maintained a critical distance.⁵⁷ Working within the conservative social landscape of Jamaica's colonial brown middle-class, Baxter took on a public persona that was quieter, more analytic, and less likely to dance the solo than her Trinidadian counterpart to whom she was often directly compared. She was less likely to dance as a mimetic representation of the "folk" in her choreography, particularly rituals of spirit possession and Afro-Diaspora religion. While her group did stage versions of *Pocomania* and the Trinidadian limbo, Baxter's legacy in the story of Jamaican dance is based less on rendering embodiments of the folk as they had been made "legible" through the discipline of anthropology and more on articulating a foundation of set strategies for translating and converting everyday movements into both concert dance and recreation pedagogy.⁵⁸ Even then, later in her career, when Baxter was able to embark on fieldwork in the Eastern Caribbean, she used her status as a "serious" expert and civil servant to emphasize critical distance from folk blackness, to embody Africanist religion or courtship dances linked to sexualized, lower-class blackness, without being overcome by it. More than just claiming the same critical distance and access to the avant-garde as white performers, Baxter also reclaimed the labor of artistic creation. She performed

⁵⁷ B.G., "UCWI Summer Course In Dancing: A Scheme to Educate Leaders in Dance," *The Sunday Gleaner*, July 3, 1955.

⁵⁸ Ivy Baxter, "The Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group," Ivy Baxter Collection, National Library Jamaica.

smaddification by refusing to make it “look easy,” by denying her talent was natural, by showing her work, and steadfastly taking credit for it.

Baxter’s approach to Jamaican dance signaled a break from foreign anthropologists’ fetishization of performances that could be imagined as live reenactments of untouched native rites, fulfilling white and elites’ fantasies of black “authenticity.” Despite her use of “research” as legitimizing labor to justify an Africanist movement language as high art, much of Baxter’s work drew on imagination and narrative improvisation, beginning by “creating the dances and then letting the research come afterward.”⁵⁹ In order to claim her ability, as a mixed-race Jamaican, to have complete creative freedom, she drew and propagated on circum-Caribbean discourses about West Indians’ comparative claims to British or Africanist heritage. Like Dunham, Baxter maintained throughout her career that folk material in Jamaica was thoroughly Anglicized and distant from a “pure” African source. Baxter infused her choreography with quotidian gestures of peasant labor, creolized early 20th-century popular dance, and with ring games like “Brown Girl in the Ring,” folk songs, and social dance, maintaining throughout her career that “there have not been so many dances – traditional dances – to get our material from.”⁶⁰ Her most famous work and Jamaica’s first full-length ballet, *Rat Passage*, told the tragic tale of a stowaway on a banana boat to London, and was a decidedly contemporary, cosmopolitan, and circum-Caribbean tale of migration and crossing. Baxter used the narratives of Jamaica’s lack of dance history as an excuse to experiment and play around with plot and style, embracing shay-shay’s cosmopolitanism optics

⁵⁹ Mock Yen, “Remembering Ivy Baxter,” 10. Baxter, *Arts of An Island*, 297.

⁶⁰ Ivy Baxter, “Creative Arts in the West Indies” (University of the West Indies, Mona: University Radio Service, May 29, 1958), University Archives, U.W.I

if not it's revolutionary potential, rather than attempting to render authentic recreations of black religious culture.⁶¹

Baxter's efforts to imbue Jamaican dance with a reputation for "technical seriousness" in comparison to the "grassroots" dance of the Southern and Eastern Caribbean, were noticed, if not always appreciated, by her counterparts on other islands. Sculptress and Norman Manley's wife Edna Manley captured this sentiment at the Federal Festival of the Arts that marked the union's inaugural parliamentary meeting in Port of Spain. Manley sat in the audience as the Baxter troupe opened the program with an expressive dance interpretation of poems by three West Indian writers: Roger Mais, Vera Bell, and M.G. Smith. She wrote for the *Gleaner* that she heard murmurings of Jamaica's perceived lack of Caribbean conviviality after the Baxter performance, repeating hearsay that "Jamaica seems very serious indeed to the people of the South Caribbean. They call us 'those *serious* Jamaicans.'"⁶² This sense of "seriousness" of course, was historically bounded and racialized and likely referenced aesthetics marked as white or European. Particularly by contemporary standards, Baxter, much like Beryl McBurnie and the Holder brothers, imbued her productions with a fair amount of the spectacular, Broadway-inspired camp, and narrative imagination. As a whole, her work was far from staid or "serious" even in comparison to these St. Lucian and Trinidadian acts. However, Baxter's work and her company's identity was also filtered through a relational framework of artistic criticism in the West Indies, imbued with ideas about relative economic development, infrastructure, and access to British Council educational opportunities. What Jamaicans saw as their cosmopolitan mastery of the kinds of "free dance" that British Council and United States Information Service (USIS) exported (what was perceived by

⁶¹ Ivy Baxter, "Creative Arts in the West Indies."

⁶² Edna Manley, "Personal Impressions," *Public Opinion*, May 10, 1958.

other islands as “professionalized” dance that took itself a bit too seriously), was just one of the ways that West Indians understood federal relations through their bodily performances. These circum-Caribbean stereotypes of Southern Caribbean dance (with its proximity to South American sensuality, stage-show theatrically, and exotic Shango possession religion) versus Anglicized Jamaican dance were dramatically played out on the federal stage.

The Social Welfare and Development Commission, the Sugar Industry Labor Welfare Board, and the new University College of the West Indies Extra-Mural Department became some of the primary vehicles for this dialectic between artists from big island cities and rural outposts or small islands. In 1955, while continuing her choreographic work, Baxter became the co-director of the Social Welfare and Development Commission's Recreation Department, along with master poet, comedian, playwright, and actress Louise Bennett.⁶³ Together, Baxter and Bennett created a training curriculum and led workshops for social workers in recreation. As recreation instructors and social workers charged with the task of using dance to create a uniform West Indian culture, Ivy Baxter and her colleagues across the islands were charged with not just performing nationalist modern and folk dance, but also teaching movement as a connective praxis of federal citizenship. They borrowed square dancing instructions from welfare manuals they brought from the United States, collected pro-Federation popular songs, drew from Beryl McBurnie's published accounts of the dances of Trinidad and worked with Lavinia Williams, an-American-born Dunham protégée,

⁶³ Miss Lou is perhaps the most iconic and beloved folkloric performer in Jamaica and the West Indian Diaspora at large, and as Edmondson shows, an underrated literary voice. Her performances relied on capturing the poetry of black working-class women's everyday language and embodying their affect in comic and but not uncomplicated performances of urban West Indian femininity, even though she came from an educated middle-class background. In the 1990s, Jamaican feminist literary critic Carolyn Cooper reclaimed Miss Lou's legacy as a master poet in the Caribbean oral tradition: Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the “Vulgar” Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*, 1st U.S. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995). For more on Miss Lou's gender performance, see Belinda Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

to integrate both modern dance techniques and the dances of Haiti into West Indian dance education anew. In 1959, Baxter embarked on her first “familiarization” tour throughout the Southern Caribbean, visiting Trinidad to learn about Carnival dance, as well as lecturing and meeting emerging dance groups in St. Lucia, Grenada, and Barbados.⁶⁴

Baxter also trained welfare officers in techniques based on the modern dance pedagogy she learned at the Leeder-Joss school. She gave public lectures and wrote a recreation training manual to instruct young people in youth clubs on movement exercises. She provided concrete steps to help them brainstorm inspiration for non-narrative creative dance compositions, expand their movement patterns through the principles of eukinetics and choreutics, and use improvisation to lay the foundation for choreography.⁶⁵ Modern dance was so firmly integrated into Jamaica’s recreation policy that by the time of its first independence festival, “Creative or Modern Dancing” was set out as a category for parish and national dance competitions—along with “pure” folk dance and original concert dance compositions based on folk or traditional dancing—meant to display the “national aspiration and achievement” in the performing arts.⁶⁶ Baxter worked with dance groups in Jamaica and throughout the West Indies through outreach programs sponsored by the Extra-Mural Department in the late 1950s and 1960s, mentoring local dance groups and teaching her approach to creative recreational movements.

⁶⁴ Ivy Baxter, “Recreation Officer’s Report on 3 Weeks Lecture Tour in Southern Caribbean Islands,” March 16, 1959, MS 2177.1.2.10 (6), NLJ.

⁶⁵ Ivy Baxter, *Recreation: A Guide to Programme Material for Young People in Groups, Clubs and Associations*. (Council of Voluntary Social Services in Jamaica, 1969).

⁶⁶ General Syllabus of The Independence Festival of Jamaica, 1963, presented by The Ministry of Development and Welfare.

Village dance groups brought their shows into the institutionalized celebration of national festivals in Kingston and liberally sprinkled their submissions with flashes of current style and passing trends. In this way, rural communities, sometimes in concert with local welfare officers, learned to narrate their favorite movements through the language of the niche and local. Modern dance's mantra of creating art from the body and one's own experience allowed social dance to figure into West Indian concert dance in more overt, and increasingly less stigmatized ways for the rest of the 20th century, though the exact alchemy needed to transform these dances from folk culture into art would continue to shift and change. By adopting Baxter's standards for staging folk dance, village participation in festivals amplified local shay-shay practices, creating performances that at once challenged and succumbed to Social Welfare's often laborious mandates for embodying local realities. Village dance troupes also became a space to recruit rural converts into the nationalist and federal projects. Despite these limiting discourses about the social and historical separations between the middle class and the folk, in practice, the "migrations" of middle-class people into the countryside as part of social welfare programs had an inverse and opposite effect on the development of national culture. More than just drawing inspiration from popular and peasant sources, the presence of ethnographers and dance professionals in rural areas also created a smadditizing backchannel of sorts, expanding the frameworks and avenues through which members of the "folk" could intervene into a conversation about how the national character could be communicated through the body.

When I interviewed former IBCDC members Bert Rose and Clive Thompson about the most memorable highlights of the company's repertoire, they vividly recalled choreography from *The Cane Cutters Dance* over 60 years since they last performed it. They jumped from their seats to execute the instantly recognizable and quintessentially Caribbean gestures of machetes slashing downwards into the cane stalks, their arms moving in elegant sweeping arches—dynamic

lines across the body to represent idealized peasant strength and masculinity.⁶⁷ Through her curiosity, and her attempts to find a space in Caribbean dance history outside of models that Beryl McBurnie, Dunham, and Carmen Miranda before her had laid out, Baxter allowed urban scenes, quotidian movements, and formerly rejected shay-shays into the canon of Jamaican concert dance movement. The language of modern dance and Baxter's systematic approach to movement allowed her to circumvent debates about preserving cultural authenticity and the functionalist explanations of dance pieces. It allowed her to seek inspiration in some of the most quotidian aspects of Caribbean labor and draw from circum-migratory pleasure dance.

Baxter's integration of poor black workers and creators into these modernist visions made some space for local ideas of nationalism to enter nation-wide and federal dialogues. Her disavowals of fidelity, at times manifested as regional stereotypes or even abstracted "ministry," none-the-less asserted her right to be as "creative" as any white dancer. However, Baxter's refusal to define West Indian culture and articulate its relation to the claimable identities of Africanness or indigenusness—particularly compared to more charismatic and ideologically consistent characters such as Beryl McBurnie and her protégée Rex Nettleford—also contributed to her fall from grace as the West Indies continued to search for unity.

Performing Big Islandism

In 1961, a St. Lucian "Folklore enthusiast" wrote into the *Barbados Advocate*, the nearest "Big Island" daily newspaper to her/his location on the frontier lands of Federation, to use the paper's regional reach as a platform to amplify her/his concerns. The writer mentioned news of recent cultural exchange programs between the large islands in Federation and dance troops from the US and Venezuela, and sourly pointed out that "somehow, it would seem that the smaller units

⁶⁷ Bert Rose, Interview with Author, March 2018. Clive Thompson, Interview with Author, March 2018.

are always left out." Mentioning dance companies in Dominica, Grenada, and Saint Lucia, the letter to the editor acknowledged that while these troupes did their best to contribute to federal nation-building, they struggled because "the dancers of the small territories are endeavoring to achieve effort about which they have heard but not actually seen." The writer called on the Federal Government to send "small island enthusiasts some expert help" in jumpstarting their own unique folkloric dance movements and in doing so "building up the spiritual aspects of Federation which are now so sorely lacking," instead of promoting empty performances of federal power by sending federal ministers to attend conferences and policy meetings "here, there and everywhere, with an entourage befitting a monarch of the olden times."⁶⁸ Calling out the uneven power relations within performances of Federation, the author used its claims to democracy to support her/his own island's nationalist goals.

While "Little 8" islands of the Southern-eastern Caribbean held "a real reluctance to exchange control from Downing Street for control from Kingston," or the even closer capital of Port of Spain, they hoped that joining a union with the larger colonies might afford them access to labor opportunities and infrastructure investments.⁶⁹ Long before Federation began, small island residents were painfully aware of their place within the geopolitical pecking order of the Caribbean. West Indians from micro-states of the South and Eastern Caribbean, each with a population lower than 100,000, had long enacted Federation affinities by "voting with their feet"—migrating to the "Big Islands," Cuba, and the Central American Caribbean coast.⁷⁰ But once they reached the shores

⁶⁸ "Folklore Lover," "Small Islands Need Cultural Development," *Barbados Advocate*, July 22, 1961.

⁶⁹ "A New W.I. Federation"

⁷⁰ On post-emancipation migrations from Antigua, see Natasha Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom: Antigua and the Aftermath of British Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2015); Putnam, *The*

of Trinidad or Barbados, they often faced discrimination due to stigmas around their "provincial" roots and nativist resentments. Calypsos, one of the most generative archives for documenting working-class perspectives on Federation, documented small island hopes and uneasiness about equality after the islands reached independence together. Drexnell Peters highlights calypsonians like King Striker and Small Island Pride, Grenadian calypsonians living in Trinidad whose defiant celebration of the Eastern Caribbean's liminal status serves as a testament to these regional divides. They wrote songs in preparation for the first meeting of the federal parliament to advocate for migrants in Trinidad. Striker sang,

Ah glad we have federation
To stop this discrimination
They used to tell Grenadian
Go back to they island.⁷¹

While Eric Williams quickly squashed hopes of free movement within the Eastern Caribbean, Caribbean migratory workers continued to advance the dream of an ideal union that protected the rights of islands big and small, and gave each citizen a stake in the future of every territory.

While Federation did not last long enough to fully set up an inter-island public art infrastructure and cohesive vision of what the letter-writer called the "spiritual aspects of federation," the union laid the foundation for a more integrated West Indian art movement, which remained throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Migrants enacted much of this work in diaspora, as both Indo-Caribbean and Black West Indians shared experiences of British racism, and regional cultural commonalities made clear through a common outsider status. Federation artists at home

Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁷¹ Striker quoted in Drexnell Peters, "The Masses Speak: Popular Perspectives on the West Indian Federation," in *Ideology, Regionalism, and Society in Caribbean History*, ed. Shane J. Pantin and Jerome Teelucksingh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 40.

still lacked what so many artists of their generation migrated to the United States and England to find—a cohesive movement and center for artistic collaboration. Access to an artist community continued to be uneven based on nationality, class, color, and locality. Cultural distances posed one deterrent to collaboration. Spatial divides, insufficient performance venues, lack of radio and other communications technology—particularly in the smaller Leeward and Windward Island territories—posed significant technical constraints.⁷² Inter-island travel remained expensive and inconvenient to most of the region. The UCWI Extra-Mural Department and Social Welfare recreation programs facilitated the free movement of privileged artists from more established theatre centers to help build local movements, all the while law-makers in federal parliament sought to limit economic migration and free movement within the Federation. The values of these arts and educational institutions reveal another alternative to Jamaican nationalist history’s criteria for modernity, which relies on British standards of “development” and colonial “good-governance” to justify why Jamaica “surpassed” the rest of the Caribbean to become the first to break from federation to become independent alone. Federation Modernist institution-building attempted to create a political “otherwise” in which unity, mutual aid, and creativity became the standards of West Indian “success,” and solidarity was valued by islands big and small as a smadditizing strategy of Pan-Caribbean empowerment.

Because of the real constraints posed and enormous energy needed to make federal unity a physical reality, federal sites of convergence tended to be ephemeral, shifting, and loose coalitions. For instance, theatre and dance professionals like Ivy Baxter and Beryl McBurnie all responded to small islanders’ calls for help setting up art infrastructure, using British Council grants and Social

⁷² “Federation Impetus to Extra-Mural Activities,” *The Gleaner*, February 24, 56, Papers of Errol G. Hill 1800-2003, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth University.

Welfare Officer positions to both fund their ethnographic research and lead workshops to share expertise with local artists. They hoped that through shared practices of embodiment and through the process of building a theatre movement in the West Indies that was cohesive spiritually and in terms of technical “standards” they could build unity. Just as national festivals gave Jamaicans opportunities to remark on and contribute their visions of national and federal culture into the collective milieu, inter-island arts programs and adult education summer seasons at the University College of the West Indies gave artists from the Eastern Caribbean opportunities to convene in Jamaica and grapple with federal imaginaries and realities. However, even among this group of “native artists,” geopolitical, race, and class hierarchies inflected conversations about the background, “traditional,” frontier cultures of the Southern and Eastern islands. These meet-ups in some ways answered the small islanders' desires for re-allocation of resources, even as they refused “Big Islands” discourses of relative benevolence, modernity, and virtuosity. Small islanders used the language of federal unity to resist the central government’s evaluation of which federal cultures mattered, and whose performances West Indianness should come to represent the whole.

In 1952, UCWT’s Extra-Mural Department launched the first session of UWCI Creative Arts Summer School in concert with the British Council, an annual tradition that invited a small group of adult amateur actors, dancers, and playwrights to convene at the Mona campus several weeks during the semester break. It served perhaps as the seminal space for emerging artists to attempt to articulate a shared future, to make a movement out of a top-down mandate for unity, and to routinize the training of social welfare recreation officers according to established models set out by Trinidad and Jamaica. The school's first drama tutor and later first West Indian native director of studies was Errol Hill. Hill was a Trinidadian-born and British-educated black playwright, director and theatre scholar, and one of the greatest proponents of West Indian Theatre in the region. He would go on to lead the short-lived Jamaica-based Federal Theatre

Group, which promoted plays exclusively from BWI authors about West Indian life to educate audiences about local stories.⁷³

The first summer sessions were at their core concerned with supplementing the adult-education movement, building nationalist institutions, and cultivating a dedicated spirit of volunteerism: beginning with the physical labor of creating bare-bones theatre infrastructure and skilled technical staff. Working on the premise that the Caribbean was not lacking in creativity, but lacked the facilities, know-how, and “discipline” to mount quality productions, the first few years of the Summer School were primarily designed to teach production and stage management, with a smaller focus on acting and dramaturgy.⁷⁴ Students learned to paint scenery, build sets, design costumes, and lighting. They had lectures on mounting productions in both bare-bones rural settings and proscenium theatres. In social welfare discourse, the labors of the arts and recreation were not only important because they projected federal ideals to a wide audience, but also because they could convey what it meant to be a person of value (at least, according to the state). By acting and dancing in ways that reflected good citizenship, workshop participations would gain knowledge “of their own worth” and experience a change in attitude to “back up the general programme of

⁷³ The Federal Theatre Company premiered its first play, Derek Walcott's "Ione," in 1957 in Kingston. Ione was an epic in the style of a Greek tragedy about village life in St. Lucia. The play's "failures" according to local critics - its experimental poetic language and weighty "intellectual" themes which reportedly caused some audience members to fall asleep - sparked a heated public debate about if Hill and Walcott were out of touch with West Indian audiences.

B.E. Lewes, Letter to the Editor "Ione," *The Daily Gleaner*, March 25, 1957. Michael Manley, "The Root of the Matter," *The Daily Gleaner*, March 23, 1957.

⁷⁴ "Drama Summer School (Programme)," University College of the West Indies, Mona, July 1953, ML-77, Box 90, Scrapbook 2, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth University. "Drama Summer School (Programme)" University College of the West Indies, Mona, 1952, ML-77, Box 90, Scrapbook 2, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth University.

Community Development Work.”⁷⁵ Many tasks, and by extension roles, in community development were divided by gender. Women (the majority of the participants in the early years) were asked to bring their sewing baskets for training as costume mistresses, while men were required to bring tool kits, replicating the idealized gender labor norms that the PNP steadfastly tried, and often failed, to promote in their village agricultural and family planning initiatives.⁷⁶ The participating students were mostly secondary school teachers, housewives, and young men involved in amateur theatre groups. There were a handful of talented scholarship students, the youngest being Rex Nettleford, a student from the rural outskirts of Montego Bay.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ivy Baxter, “Recreation Officers Report on 3 Weeks Lecture Tour in Southern Caribbean Islands,” March 16, 1959, MS 2177.1.2.10 (6), NLJ.

⁷⁶ “Drama Summer School (Programme),” University College of the West Indies, Mona, July 1953.

⁷⁷ Errol Hill, “Errol Hill to Rex Nettleford,” September 25, 1998, ML-77, Box 23, Folder 1, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth University.



Figure 7: The second Creatives Arts Summer School at UCWI (1953). The director of the school was Errol Hill (pictured second row, second from the left). Rex Nettleford is pictured in the front row, fifth from the right. Image courtesy of the NDTC Archives.

The schools were instrumental not only in developing a discourse of theater labor as federal labor, but also in sustaining a space (in the legacy of Edelweiss Park) where performing artists across genres co-created standards of spectacular style and showmanship. As the summers progressed, the formerly separate dance and drama sessions merged into one school, and the program's focus switched towards acting, performance, and Social Welfare Recreation Officer training rather than technical support. In the late 1950s, United States Information Services also became a co-sponsor of the summer event, reflecting the growing strength of the US as a cultural influence on the island. American teachers like folk and ballet dance mistress Lavinia Yarborough Williams (the architect of Haiti's touristic performance industry) and USIS representative Reuben

Silver (who served as the Artistic Director of Cleveland's Karamau House, the oldest African American Theatre in the United States) became recurring summer school instructors in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In this way, the large islands served as both centers for inter-island arts production, and as conduits to give the wider West Indies access to American and British resources. Visiting tutors would often extend their stay, organizing shows in Kingston and workshops in the countryside under the sponsorship of the Social Welfare Office. The program recruited heavily from rural areas of the big islands to train village-level teachers to teach dance and drama, as well as from the smaller dominions. The summer school's integration of dance/movement research into West Indian dramaturgy, and dramatic pantomime into dance training, left its mark on the multi-media artist collectives that grew out of the Federation Modernist school, such as National Theatre Trust in Trinidad and the National Dance Company of Jamaica. The choreography that McBurnie and Williams gave to summer school students were integrated into the IBCDC's repertoire and even found its way into the first season of the National Dance Theatre Company. Aspects of McBurnie and Williams choreography lost some of its regional resonances overtime, merging into what Jamaicans came to see as their style of "Afro-Caribbean" dance. This total theatre aesthetic that the inter-mural department advocated—the collaboration of dancers, musicians, and actors—unified the West Indian arts movement in the 1960s.

The standardization of creative art school's theatre aesthetic, and by extension its folk and modern dance curriculum, both generated a sense of federal unity and promoted Big Island and US-centered hierarchies. The program gave opportunities for participants to enact comparative fieldwork between member states to codify the basis of a West Indian modernist style. For both audiences and students, it presented a chance, as one student described, to see "West Indian

dances danced by West Indians in West Indian University for the first time...!”⁷⁸ McBurnie focused primarily on teaching creole dances of Afro-Trinidadian and Amerindian origin, she claimed that “the students discovered that in their particular area there was this familiarity in movement,” giving students opportunities to teach other the particularities of their island's dance traditions. Citing repetitions in the movement languages in Afro-Diaspora Dance religions of the Trinidadian Shango and the Pocomania, along with the bongo, limbo and other dances from her home country that had already been codified into recreation training through almost a decade of West Indian dance pedagogy, McBurnie identified the Summer Schools as unique spaces for Caribbean artists to work “in their own milieu,” trading steps and references to create a new cultural field.⁷⁹ However, some regional dances were considered to be niche or traditional black movement, while others were taught, codified and “elevated” to the proscenium stage as the basis for new Caribbean classicism. Even though McBurnie and Baxter had traveled extensively throughout the Caribbean on their fieldwork, there was little interest in teaching frontier territory dance traditions, like Carriacou's Big Drum or Belize's Punta. Instead, they maintained that Trinidad and Jamaica remained the standard for a West Indian Afro-Caribbean culture. When Lavinia Williams took over McBurnie's role as the folk instructor after 1958, her spatial geography of Afro-Caribbean dance also stuck to Dunham's research itinerary of Haiti, Trinidad, and Martinique, so that French Antilleans Africanisms (and the archetypal presence of the Haitian

⁷⁸ Marina Archibald Crichlow, “Letter to the Editor: Creative Arts Criticism,” *The Gleaner*, August 24, 1957, Papers of Errol G. Hill 1800-2003, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth University. Crichlow would later write and perform under the name “Marina Maxwell.”

⁷⁹ “Creative Arts in the West Indies” (University of the West Indies, Mona: University Radio Service, May 29, 1958), University Archives, U.W.I.

Drummer) became foundational presences of Federation dance even as small island traditions were ignored.

Added to these regional divides within the field of folk dance, Creative Summer School students from across islands had to contend with the very newness of the notion of West Indian concert dance and theatre for most viewers. Audiences continually compared their performances to European and American touring groups who remained the pinnacle of professionalism in the eyes of critics. The school's pedagogy only served to reinforce the stark separation between what constituted original "Creative Dance" and "Folk Dance," and assumptions about whose bodies could master each movement language based on relative claims to development and modernity. Issues of regionalism and formal training influenced critics' opinions of productions. One critic of the 1957 Summer School's final presentation described Jamaican Baxter-trained student dancers as having too much classical dance training and middle-class respectability to "get the real earthy drive necessary" to convincingly dance McBurnie's Shango and the "aboriginal" (Amerindian) numbers. At the same time, the creative dance students outside of the Jamaican Baxter-trained contingent lacked the skill and virtuosity to master Darby's intricate modernist choreography fully.⁸⁰ Folk and Creative dance pedagogy edged out ballet training and ballet bodies as the new cultural ideal; West Indian critics still lacked a framework to see dances inspired by West Indian religion as modern, or West Indian bodies as fully suited for producing modern dance and British theatre.

When organizers spoke about the contributions students from the "Little 8's" made to the school's culture, they often presented provincialized caricatures in order to support narratives of large island benevolence in the region. For instance, in a University Radio program hosted by Rex

⁸⁰ Rae Norman, "UCWI Summer School Shows 'Quite Interesting,'" *The Gleaner*, August 18, 1957.

Nettleford, former Creative Art School student who had risen to be the program's resident faculty tutor in 1957, teachers Baxter, McBurnie, and Errol Hill stressed the importance of the Creative Art movement's modernizing mission. The tutors all emphasized they were providing a service to the relative minority of small island students, who were able to "rub shoulders" and engage with other theatre professionals for the first time because of their relative isolation and provincialism. Hill identified students from St. Lucia, British Guiana, and Grenada by name, who had grown under his tutelage, "because in these small islands it is amazing how shut off they feel, those who haven't had the opportunity to get away."⁸¹ These students, like the "Folklore Lover" letter writer, no doubt desired the opportunity to expand limited arts opportunities on their islands, even if they shared his/her ambivalent feelings about Jamaica and Trinidad's benevolence. However, Hill's paternalistic tone betrayed the myth of the big island exceptionalism and the misleading representation of their cultural dependency and the inter-connectivity of the Eastern Caribbean Lesser Antilles.

The work of social welfare outreach, and the ingenuity of local theatre troupes, was buried in Jamaican news reports. In fact, all of the small island natives mentioned by Hill in the University Radio report were cosmopolitan West Indian travelers with well-developed theatrical sensibilities. For Betty Thompson, the student from British Guiana, the summer school was a mere pit stop on her travels, as she headed directly from Jamaica to attend a six-month course in dance at the Sigurd Leeder School in London.⁸² Roderick Walcott from St. Lucia was busy building the St. Lucia Arts Guild in 1957. The collaborative theatre work that he and his twin brother began on their home island would expand into the famous Trinidad Repertory Theatre (1958). Far from being passive

⁸¹ "Creative Arts in the West Indies".

⁸² "Creative Arts Student Goes," *The Daily Gleaner*, August 19, 1957.

and provincial participants, the Walcotts were already well-known names in the region and became perhaps the most important leaders in the West Indian theatre movement throughout the 1960s. Allister Bain, the dancer from Grenada, was the head of the Bee Wee Ballet Company, which performed at the opening of the federal parliament and had already begun what would become an international film and TV career from his home island. His career did not begin at the Summer School, but when he was recruited to give private limbo lessons to African American film star Dorothy Dandridge as she worked on the 1957 Hollywood film *Island in the Sun*, which had been released months before the Summer School began.

Further insight into the possible dissonance between how big and small islands viewed the contributions of the UWCI summer school might be found by comparing local press coverage of the university's outreach programs. While Jamaica's newspapers regularly advertised the achievements and contributions of the school, I wasn't able to find any coverage of these sessions in Southern Caribbean papers. Instead, they expressed gratitude for more long-term outreach and sustainable programming in local outposts of the Extra-Mural Department—like the multi-week social welfare and development training workshops that Hill, Bennett, and Baxter led in the 1950s, to provide local arts with the tools to pursue their own, community-specific projects. For instance, *Daily Clarion*, an English speaking newspaper in Belize, covered Erol Hill's month-long stay on their island extensively, a stop on his 1952 tour to Antigua and British Honduras as proof of the tangible "usefulness" of UCWI and Federation in people's everyday lives.⁸³ Small islands led their own summer school programs at high schools or extra-mural centers, and resident tutors who partnered with schools and labor unions to provide arts lecture series and training to workers.

⁸³ "Belize Hears Noted West Indian Actor," *The Daily Clarion*, October 10, 1952, Papers of Errol G. Hill 1800-2003, Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth University.

More generally, the small island press, and the Southern Caribbean in general, actively rejected Jamaica's claims to cultural dominance and saw themselves as the leaders of Federation, who were doing the steady everyday work of teaching solidarity at home, rather than staging fleeting and flashy spectacles of state power. While Jamaica bullishly chose economic autonomy over cultural unity, and Trinidad fearfully fled its leadership role, the "big-hearted survivors" of the Little 8, as one writer for the *Dominica Herald* named them, opted for grassroots culture and "patient study and thoughtful fraternity," instead of ephemeral Carnivalistic explosions.⁸⁴ Through quiet acts of making themselves heard and resisting erasure, small island perspectives served as a counter-discourse to the Federal state and Big Island's monopolies on spectacularization.

In the creative arts' push for legitimacy, the small island cultures of the Leeward and Windward Islands barely figured into a notion of West Indianness. The program's organizers represented their students from the smaller islands and rural districts as frustrated and isolated artists, culture-starved, and hungry for connections with fellow creatives that could be found in cosmopolitan Kingston. The Summer School, then, was not only a utopian moment where artists symbolically built Federation through idealized fellowship, cooperative labor, and creative exchanges, but also a site where the divisive rhetoric of Jamaica's relative progress and cosmopolitanism was laid bare. Out of these uneven practice spaces, federal dances gained choreography—both techniques and signature steps, and entire compositions—to take home and integrate into their local social welfare or theatre building projects. The tensions, disavowals, and cultural distance amongst islands in the West Indies were also part of Federation's unifying project. This insider's discourse about the fine points of Caribbean cultural differences constituted the "claim of separateness that constitutes connection" that added texture to the notion of West Indian

⁸⁴ "On National Leadership," *Dominica Herald*, September 1, 1962.

culture.⁸⁵ Arguments about style and form, the terms of international collaboration and exchange, and what constituted virtuosity and “technique” all shaped the discursive landscape around West Indian connections and imperial affinities in the creative dance world.

Conclusion

Federation's drawn-out diplomatic demise, a “will they or won't they” diplomatic partnership, produced an ethos of severe disenchantment with “the compromise and crudity of day-to-day party political action.”⁸⁶ However, much like a bad break-up, Federation resulted in some pretty great art. Natasha Barnes argues that out of the rubble of a central BWI state, “Caribbean nationalism found its true object—in the novels of George Lamming, VS Naipaul, and Wilson Harris, in the witty lyricism of the Mighty Sparrow's calypsos; in Garfield Sobers’ elegant bowling.”⁸⁷ These public and internationally recognized artistic contributions proved that despite West Indians’ ambivalence about the federal state’s weak authority and vision/restrictions on freedom, every day practices of creating a West Indian nation persisted. Established through migratory routes and the connectivity of the British Empire, Caribbean unity had long been rooted within the very voices and bodies of its people.

During their 1962 Carnival celebrations, Trinidadians danced as they mourned the death of the West Indian nation when the Mighty Sparrow won the Calypso King title with his hit song “Federation.” Addressing the song to the traitorous Jamaicans, Sparrow captured the exasperation

⁸⁵ Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2015), 80.

⁸⁶ Natasha Barnes, *Cultural Conundrums: Gender, Race, Nation, and the Making of Caribbean Cultural Politics*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) 24.

⁸⁷ Barnes, *Cultural Conundrums*, 27.

that Eastern Caribbean islands espoused in their news media with the pettiness and careless indecision that Jamaica displayed in the federal negotiations:

When they didn't get the capital site that nearly cause big fight,
When Sir Grantley Adams took up his post that even made this worse,
They bawling: "We ain't want no Bajan premier Trinidad can't be capital for here"
So the grumbling went on and on to a big referendum

But if they know they didn't want federation
And they know they don't want to unite as one and only one
I say to tell the doctor you're not in favor don't behave like a blasted traitor
How the devil you mean you ain't federating no more?⁸⁸

Sparrow's combative elegy, the growth of West Indian cricket, and the birth of the Federation modernist movement, are just some brash and stylish examples of how West Indians experienced the nation-building process across regional divides: through public performances that moved people to their feet despite disappointment or ambivalence, and through outright attacks on other islands' commitments to regional solidarity.

Jamaica's legacy within the narrative of Federation and the continued dream of Caribbean integration is fraught, and Jamaican history tends to understate the impact of Federation on the island's history of decolonization. Though Jamaican nationalist discourse often disavowed the shared history and political interests with the wider West Indies, dance and theatre history bear testament to how the late colonial networks of Federation infiltrated Jamaican nationalist praxis. Between 1958-1961 the islands absorbed Federation into civil service and social welfare infrastructures, so that it became difficult to tell where one island's cultural pedagogy stopped and another begin. The PNP's Social Welfare and Development infrastructure also revealed how, despite its isolationist tendencies, Jamaica played a key role in building Federal culture. The

⁸⁸ The "doctor" refers to Dr. Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad (1962-1981). *The Mighty Sparrow, Federation/Sweeter than You*, RCA, 1962, Vinyl.

university system's home in Mona ensured that Jamaican and Trinidadian artists continued to provide cultural training to Eastern Caribbean extra-mural outposts for decades to come.

Everyday folks across the region experienced the formalities of late colonial negotiations over independence ambivalently and from a distance, by watching or reading the news of federal conferences, parliamentary meetings, and official visits filled with pomp and circumstance. They also felt the reach of the changes the new government put into place during its short time in power through social welfare policy and federal celebrations in their villages, public squares, and concert halls. Islanders formed strong feelings and playful stereotypes through the experience of coming together, celebrating, and experiencing heartbreaking failure under one government. Along with these experiences of migration and diasporic community abroad, this history continues to shape the frameworks through which West Indians relate to each other.

CHAPTER 3 African Scenario



Figure 8: The NDTC in African Scenario. Courtesy of NDTC Archives.

In his book of non-fiction essays, *The Pleasures of Exile*, Barbadian novelist George Lamming recounts his travels throughout Ghana, shortly after the nation's independence from British rule in 1957. He wrote with wonder and shame of his realization that freedom had both a psychological and corporeal effect on the Ghanaians he witnessed in Accra, one that set them apart from inhabitants of the still colonial British Caribbean. Men approached you with dignified formality and surefooted confidence, women walked with what he described as “almost an insolent casualness” in their Ashanti cloth as if they owned any room they were in.¹ He felt this change in attitude and affect bore testament to how the legislative process of state-formation

¹ George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 164.

endowed Ghanaians with “an instinctive re-evaluation of their place in the world,” a rootedness in their African identity, which even the most educated and privileged colonial subjects could not claim.² In Lamming’s imagination, free West Africa’s smaddification was complete and engrained into their most quotidian movements, and it evidenced a bone-deep knowing and kinesthetic experience of freedom. In comparison to Ghanaians, Lamming saw the proudly anglicized and patiently subservient British West Indies’ unhurried stroll towards independence as a tragically backward result of their colonized imagination.

When Jamaica was granted independence in 1962, they had not yet found official consensus on what kinds of racial performances signified the reclamation of humanness after coloniality. This chapter explores how the NDTC remixed references and resonances of Africanness in their concert choreography in the years before Black Power brought black identification to the mainstream, and how all of these early performances tell a black internationalist story of fluidity and exchange amongst black creators. I privilege both intellectual exchanges and corporeal encounters with West African dancers, African-diaspora religious practitioners, and the Rastafari—moments when Nettleford saw and recognized a performance of Africanness that could be accessed and adapted onto the bodies of his dancers to reflect the particular intersections of race, color, class, and gender in Jamaica.

Longings for Africa and the diaspora community have long been the basis for Jamaica’s most radical and liberatory social movements, from the Morant Bay Rebellion to Garveyism to Rastafari.³ A focus on the poetic relations and normatively articulated politics of resistance in

² George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 165.

³ Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2015).

articulating African diaspora connections often miss the other historical horizons, diverse grassroots articulations of blackness and contemporary internationalist alliances that contributed to how the idea of Africa shaped Jamaican political imaginaries.⁴ By witnessing and comparing these political performances of blackness, artists like the NDTC and Lamming took part in what Brent Hayes Edwards and others have identified as a Black Atlantic practice of strategically rendering a vision of freedom elsewhere in diaspora, in order to shed light on the weaknesses and possibilities for one's own walk to freedom.⁵

In the 1960s, Jamaican political leaders across the political spectrum grappled with how to create a usable African past to lead new converts into Jamaica's national project, while battling increasingly volatile opposition to anti-black economic policies and police brutality that persistently limited poor black folks' ability to claim citizenship rights. They sought to pacify disruptive, but steadily growing, social movements like Rastafarianism, which challenged the very notion that the

⁴ My focus on the evolving nature of African connections with the new world, and modern African agents role in defining what constitutes "Africanisms," follows J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005).

In this vein, new work by Deborah Thomas reminds us that Jamaica's internal racial and class politics were just one framework that shaped the decisions of its policymakers. Jamaicans citizens and the state apparatus configured a sense of cultural/political groundings by orienting their stance amongst a bevy of global political possibilities, alliances, and threats. See Thomas: Deborah A. Thomas, "Rastafari, Communism, and Surveillance in Late Colonial Jamaica," *Small Axe* 21, no. 3 (November 3, 2017): 63–84.

⁵ Brent Hayes Edwards draws attention to these comparisons as part of a repertoire of practices that create and enact diaspora, focusing on dialogues between Harlem Renaissance artists and Black Parisians. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003). Frank Guridy sheds light on Cuban and Harlem Renaissance Era co-configurations of racial identity in Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow*, *Envisioning Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), <http://mirlyn.lib.umich.edu/Record/008008093>. For work on Afro-Latino, African American and Black British cultural and intellectual exchanges see: Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Duke University Press Books, 2010); Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2015). See also, Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

nation-states could grant freedom to black people. In addition to contending with competing creative imaginings of sovereignty amongst grassroots radical movement at home, Jamaica's experience of empire and its identity as a post-colonial nation were not filtered through a singular colonial relation with mother England or a romantic affinity with African roots, but as part of a Commonwealth of black and brown nations under the crown, including newly founded African nation-states.⁶ Events like the West Indian communist and labor unionist protests of Italy's imperialist invasions of Ethiopia in the 1930s shaped a West Indian Black Radical tradition that tied Caribbean freedom to global black struggles. However, advancements in mass media, the accessibility of television, and airline travel intensified the presence and circulation of news about African and Indian independence. More than just reading newspapers and hearing rumors, C.L.R. James noted, "for an insignificant sum per month, the black masses can hear on the radio news of Dr. Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyetta, Dr. Julius Banda, Prime Minister Nehru."⁷ News about Pan-Africanism, global blackness, and non-alignment were instantly projected from conventions around the world to everyday citizens' living rooms.

Rather than tracing Jamaica's racial story to a single source or vague notion of an African past, these political histories were crucial to how Jamaicans told stories about what it meant to be young, black, and free men or women in the post-colonial British commonwealth. During the transition to self-governance, Jamaicans came to understand Africa through a variety of culturalist narratives, new world religions, colorist hierarchies, pre-colonial histories, and visions of post-

⁶ This focus on the evolving nature of African connections with the new world, and modern African agents role in defining what constitutes "Africanisms," follows J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁷ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Vintage, 1989), 407.

colonial modernity. While nationalist histories and the testimonies of historical contemporaries often separate these experiences into categories of local and foreign, past and present, folk and modern, radical and accommodationist, they were often experienced with layered and disjointed simultaneity. Converging internationalist and local struggles over hegemonic blackness constituted a wide range of political appeals to Africanness or diasporic black identity, so that blackness was never a wholly radical or reactionary, abject or empowered stance. It was often an unstable, deeply ambivalent political position that ducked locative impulses.⁸

Nowhere were these often conflicting notions worked out as publicly and completely as Jamaica's first post-independence arts organization—the National Dance Theatre Company—and the young, densely black, intensely public, peasant-identifying body of its co-director, Rex Nettleford. The early 1960s were a foundational period for Nettleford's personal and professional development, where he encountered the people and ideological forces that would shape his career. Not only did Nettleford emerge as a prominent adult educator, trade unionist, scholar of Rastafari and radio talking head in this period, he was also deeply involved in both scholarship and government task forces about African-oriented foreign policy and news analysis. Gaining intimate ties to key members of the Jamaica Labor Party, the Rastafari Movement, and a network of black culture workers abroad, he negotiated how to insert stories that reflected his class and sexuality identification into state and national hegemony, as well as where to situate Caribbean stories in the spectrum of the black diaspora.

Between 1960-1968, Nettleford choreographed and produced several significant works about African/Africanist presence in New World politics in the first five years of independence -

⁸ On the “multivocality” and class divisions in official Jamaican nationalisms and Jamaican black nationalisms, see Don Robotham, “Blackening the Jamaican Nation: The Travails of a Black Bourgeoisie in a Globalized World,” *Identities* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2000): 1-37.

including *African Scenario* (1962), *Pocomania* (1963), *Two Drums for Babylon* (1964), and *A King Must Die* (1968). These danced stories, as told through Nettleford's own experiences of diaspora insecurities, desires, and disappointments as a young, queer man, survey the affective and political stakes of positioning an African history within post-colonial Caribbean cultural landscapes. Through dances about the "traditional" African past and the modern "African Personality," performed in Kingston, Jamaica and Accra, Ghana, Nettleford grappled throughout his early career with anxieties about what V.S. Naipaul called the independent Caribbean's "failed modernity," or the lingering fears of early 20th century creole nationalists and Federation Modernists held over the insufficiency of the BWT's culture and its dependency on outside influences. This body of work used dance's ability to reflect disjointed temporalities and relational experience to reflect the many historical and geographical horizons towards which black people in Jamaica oriented their notion of diaspora return, and this chapter mirrors this form by following a network of influences and relationships rather than a strict chronology.⁹ I compare Nettleford's face-to-face encounters with three very different visions of black identity, with dances that manifest Nettleford's exploration of what Nadia Ellis calls *queer diaspora belonging*, or a "diasporic aesthetics and subjectivity where a persistent sense of the insufficiency of existing modes of belonging is matched by an awareness that new forms remain inspiringly elusive."¹⁰ Struggling to belong to the community of free African nations without having fully dismantled racist European notions of black primitivism, the NDTC's early works speak to the liminal space between belonging and non-belonging to diaspora that constituted the ambivalence of a creole orientation.

⁹ I borrow the theorization of diaspora horizons from Paul C. Johnson, *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Nadia Ellis, *Territories of the Soul: Queered Belonging in the Black Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

Pocomania (the Seaga)

Rex Nettleford created his *Pocomania* in 1963, the first dance in his four-part Afro-Caribbean religion suite that still forms the cornerstone of the NDTC's repertoire. It is a dance of negotiation, inspired by the savvy ways that Pocomania communities in Kingston used the state's attempts to assimilate black folk traditions to their own advantage. *Pocomania* is a product of Nettleford's relationship with the populist, trade union-based Jamaica Labour Party's (JLP) in the early 1960s, which was similarly simultaneously openly advantageous and fraught. The JLP's approach to cultural policy and folk art in the first five years of their rule laid the foundation for modern Jamaican nationalism. I start with this dance to lay the theoretical grounds for how the NDTC built on the Afro-Caribbean regional aesthetics of developed by brown women dancers such as Beryl McMurnie and Ivy Baxter in the Federation period, but argue that the race, gender, and class identity of the NDTC's co-founders imbued them with a radically queer, peasant orientation towards state power. *Pocomania* exploited surface readings of Africanist ritual spectacles to create optical shelter for black dancers to covertly negotiate with creole nationalist JLP leaders over official representations of black authenticity.

In many ways, Alexander Bustamante's time as Prime Minister (1962-1967) was a continuation of the economic dependency and diplomatic policies of the colonial period. Prime Minister Bustamante's first official act of foreign policy was to declare Jamaica's alignment with the West within the Cold War political landscape, announcing Jamaica's choice to begin its transition to autonomy under the guidance of Great Britain's government while remaining part of the British Commonwealth.¹¹ In the 1960s, Jamaica developed an economic policy called "industrialization by

¹¹ Jamaica, Ministry of Development, *External Affairs and Overseas Representation* (Ministry Paper No. 3), by Norman Manley (March 28, 1962), available at <http://www.nlj.gov.jm/MinistryPapers/MinistryPapers1960-69.htm>, accessed 08/28/2011.

invitation,” a shift to manufacturing and tourism based on the success of Puerto Rico’s Operation Bootstrap, which set the country on a path of dependency capitalism.¹² Bustamante’s government also promoted an idea of a Creole national identity, based on a racial story that emphasized an idealized vision of multi-racial harmony that held European modernity as the ultimate standard for development.

At the same time, the 1960s signified a break from Norman Manley’s People’s National Party’s approach to cultural policy as an extension of the welfare state. When Alexander Bustamante upset the PNP’s pre-independence political dominance to become the first Prime Minister of independent Jamaica, he chose Edward Seaga to become the Minister of Welfare and Development. Under Seaga, dance and expressive culture became central to a campaign to usher poor, black citizens into the project of state formation. The Boston-born, Harvard-educated politician was white-presenting and of Middle Eastern Jamaican descent, thus representing the continuity of creole elite dominance in the upper echelons of Jamaican business and politics. His political legacy is that of the staunchest opponent of progressive political reform in the 1970s and the leader who heralded the complete neo-liberalization of the Jamaican economy after he rose to lead the nation as Prime Minister in 1980. However, while Seaga’s body may have signified in uncomplicated ways a traditional form of political power, in this moment of independence his political style and cultural connections represented both a break from and escalation of Bustamante’s populist appeal for the working and urban poor. Nettleford and the NDTC were part of a pioneering movement to cultivate a new, peasant-based nationalism with standardized folk

¹² For a discussion of dependency capitalism in the context of Jamaica see Evelyn Huber Stephens and John D. Stephens, “The Political Economy of Jamaican Development: From Manley to Seaga to Manley” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Latin American Studies Association, San Juan, Puerto Rico, September 1989).

dance forms. Similarly to some forms of mestizo nationalism in other parts of the region, the JLP's brown creole nationalism increasingly propagated a shared African heritage as the base of their rainbow culture.¹³

Seaga uniquely understood the power of the popular in Jamaican politics, the under-terrain currents of queer, fantastic forms of black leadership and embodied protest rooted in 19th century peasant political culture. Before he became a politician, Seaga made a name for himself on the downtown scene by growing a popular record label. He was a devoted music anthropologist who studied the African influence in rural and urban black music. He entered public office as the MP for West Kingston, inspiring religious-like devotion and loyalty from a working-class and unemployed poor black following. Unlike Bustamante's conservative and often anti-black public stances on national cultural policies, Seaga was willing to step across the cultural, physical, and social distance between the uptown domain of well-off brown folks and the downtown world of the black Kingston ghettos. Melding his skills as a social scientist with astute cultural and political savvy, Seaga would become the first JLP politician to adopt a computer system to keep track of every member of his constituency, collect JLP party dues, reach out to individuals and even "discipline" individuals if needed. One American political analyst called Seaga "the first truly modern politician to emerge from the JLP . . . Seaga has been able to use his knowledge of sociology, demography, welfare, polls, the pork barrel and muscle (when needed) to acquire and utilize power."¹⁴ This performance of proximity, paired with clientelist intimacies, violent threats, and support of

¹³ Deborah A. Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 66.

¹⁴ Frank McDonald, "Jamaica II, A Political Overview," *Institute of World Affairs, FJM*, April 25, 1970, 13.

culturalist performances of "blackness" (particularly in the realms of music, religion, and the expressive arts) secured him a loyal base of the working class and unemployed constituents.¹⁵

These cultural and religious connections were not merely symbolic gestures or folksy gestures, but technological and spiritual sources of power that helped to solidify Seaga's authority and shape the political culture of Kingston. Seaga's omnipresent power in West Kingston allowed him to take on a ritual leadership role in urban Pocomania communities. Pocomania is an African diaspora Revivalist religion that pulled from elements of Myal (a name for possession religion and healing arts practiced by Jamaican slaves) and Christianity. A male leader called a Shepherd, or a woman leader called a Shepherdess or a Mother, lead revivalist meetings. The communal practice involves spirit possession dance, ritual drumming, ritual role-playing, singing, and feasting. Revivalists gather with the goal of "calling down the spirits" of deities and ancestors to worship and embody memories of the African past.¹⁶ In the early to mid-20th century the term "Pocomania," meaning literally "a little madness" in Spanish, was pejoratively applied to particularly "wild" or stigmatized groups of urban Revivalists, meaning communities that were marked by a linguistic, movement-based, or religious proximity to Africa (as opposed to Zion Revivalist practice in which "civilizing" Christian elements were more visible).¹⁷

¹⁵ Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 65-67.

¹⁶ Karima Atiya Robinson, "Stages of Liberation: Ritual, Nationalism and Women's Cultural Production in Jamaica's Pre-Independence Era" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2007), 50. For more on the revivalist religion in Jamaica, see Dianne M. Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Robinson, "Stages of Liberation," 43.

The basis of Seaga's authority grew through his ability to tap into Pocomania's moral order and source to spiritual power, even allegedly leading as a Shepherd in his own right.¹⁸ By the 1980s, when Seaga assumed the Prime Ministership, he had developed an almost authoritarian hold on West Kingston that drew comparisons to Duvalierism in Haiti.¹⁹ His close relationship to the feared Pocomania Shepherd Mallica Kopo Reynolds, his practice of appearing unannounced at revivalist meetings downtown, and his secret police ties and extra-state gang terror all legitimized to his control.²⁰ Obeah, or West Indian African diaspora healing/witchcraft practices which are incorporated into Revivalist religious cosmologies, are also known as science. As Seaga himself articulated in his essay "Revival Cults of Jamaica," science or the non-ancestor worship related technologies of healing, clairvoyance, divination, and high knowledge were "considered to be as powerful as the use of spirits," and Seaga's dense network of religious, social scientific, and technological modalities of enforcing power made him a master scientist.²¹ Seaga's underground political economy of racial and class altruism, symbolic gestures, gift-giving, political favors and hidden networks of extra-state power exemplify what Obika Grey described the "JLP state mechanism" in the 1960s as an authoritative democracy: a hybrid form of state in which "some

¹⁸ Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁹ On Duvalier's use of Vodou religious orders to and rumors as part of his rule, see Paul Christopher Johnson, "Three Paths to Legal Legitimacy: African Diaspora Religions and the State," *Culture and Religion* 6, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 79-105, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01438300500071265>.

²⁰ Frank McDonald, "Jamaica II, A Political Overview," *Institute of World Affairs, FJM*, April 25, 1970, 14.

Seaga's relationship with Reynolds was exposed in Gunst's sensationalized 1997 book on Jamaican gang warfare. Laurie Gunst, *Born Fi' Dead: A Journey Through The Jamaican Posse Underworld* (Macmillan, 1995). See also, Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Cornell University Press, 1997).

²¹ Edward Seaga, *Revival Cults in Jamaica* (The Institute of Jamaica, 1982).

liberties characteristic of a capitalist democracy prevail, but they are constrained by an institutionalized ensemble of disciplinary and coercive practices rooted in state power, clientelism, and the exercise of personal prerogative.”²²

This local base of Seaga’s power had implications for national cultural policy. As Deborah Thomas explains, “what was as especially significant about Seaga’s policy was that he extended the privilege accorded to the lifestyle and cultural practices of the rural peasantry to similar practices among the urban poor.”²³ Seaga believed that “folk art forms”—including urban practices like Revivalism and Pocomania—had languished over the 25 years preceding independence when PNP held power, and the face of the national art movement remained the brown intelligentsia. Seaga insisted that folk and popular artists needed “not instruction, but exposure” to magnify their reach, a shift in cultural policy that gave working-class black artists access to government-funded platforms, while keeping the divide between the “professional” brown creole art world and “raw” talent of Africanist performers.²³ The former music executive focused on expanding public platforms for the arts, including mass media programming and the expansion of rural folk festivals into a network of nationwide events surrounding Independence Day celebrations. As Afro-

²² Obika Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960-1972* (Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1991), 10.

As Diana Paton and Maarit Forde have argued, few scholars have adequately address Afro-Caribbean religion in their studies of West Indian political culture. Paul Johnson’s work on religious syncretism in Brazil and Haiti, as well as literature Brujaria and spiritual capital in Puerto Rico, are helpful models from outside of the former BWI for the study of African Diaspora Religion’s role within informal/formal economies and state power in the modern Caribbean. See Paul Christopher Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), Paul Christopher Johnson, “Secretism and the Apotheosis of Duvalier,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 2 (June 7, 2006): 420–45.

Diana Paton and Maarit Forde, *Obeah and Other Powers the Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

²³ Arts Advisory Council, “Minutes of a Meeting of the Arts Advisory Council Held at This Ministry on Friday 11/1/1963,” November 1, 1963, MS 363, vol. 2, National Library of Jamaica.

Caribbean religious historical contributions to Jamaican society finally gained the attention of the country's warring political factions, their constituents entered into complex and compromising negotiations with politicians who sought to harness their cultural efficacy.



Figure 9: A young Rex Nettleford, from his personal collection (1959). Image courtesy of NDTC Archives.



Figure 10: A young Rex Nettleford, from his personal collection (1959). Image courtesy of NDTC Archives.

With a plan for Jamaican cultural policy in place, Seaga made an opportune alliance with the new NDTC's leaders, Eddie Thomas and Rex Nettleford. Nettleford was a man with both the creative vision and representational politics to help execute Seaga's mission of institutionalizing black culture. He was a presence so powerful that in the words of the poet Derek Walcott, "we can't get blacker or more beautiful than Nettleford himself."²⁴ Nettleford was a "first-generation black rural migrant" to Kingston, who had been the recipient of the benefits of the social welfare movement of the 1940s and 1950s, and held a lasting "appreciation of, and involvement with, formal cultural institutions established during the colonial period."²⁵ Dark-skinned, handsome and

²⁴ Derek Walcott, "Superfluous Defense of a Revolutionary," *Trinidad Express*, August 20, 1971.

²⁵ Deborah A. Thomas, "Democratizing Dance: Institutional Transformation and Hegemonic Re-Ordering in Postcolonial Jamaica," *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2002): 527.

a new member of the black bourgeois intelligentsia, Nettleford emerged as a charismatic young spokesperson for “all things African” at the University of the West Indies, elite political circles, and the world of dance theatre in the late 1950s. Besides leading the university Extra-Mural program's adult education initiatives, Nettleford had a regular political news spot on Radio Jamaica and was a frequent contributor to *The Daily Gleaner*, Jamaica’s most widely circulating newspaper, activities that extended his cultural reach beyond the academy. Nettleford’s choreographic themes leaned towards “social issues” and Afro-Caribbean heritage dance, an affiliation that reflected his staunch insistence on emphasizing his rural roots as a source of authentic Jamaicanness, despite his Oxford education and tentative acceptance into the ranks of the elite.

Nettleford’s mix of intellectual refinement and folksy nationalism stood in contrast to his NDTC co-founder, Eddie Thomas. The Eddie Thomas also came from humble rural beginnings, but his Martha Graham school credentials added New York City glamour and cultural cachet to the homegrown movement. Nettleford's nationalist vision and charisma often overshadowed Thomas' influence on the company, but Thomas did much of the creative labor surrounding productions, including costume design, set design, and music selection. Drawing on their deep connections to the West Indian Theatre movement, particularly the Little Theatre Movement in Kingston’s yearly Pantomimes which attracted the city's most talented performers, Nettleford and Thomas gathered the premier dancers from the Ivy Baxter Company and private dance workshops across Jamaica to form the NDTC in 1962.

At this moment of Jamaica’s history when, increasingly, illuminating the previously hidden spaces of black life and an African cultural past became part of the national project, the radical optics of Nettleford’s peasantry-referencing, black body radiated powerfully in the public sphere. Though his visual presence signified only one aspect of his celebrity, it is essential to understanding the impact of the many vectors through which Jamaicans of the 1960s encountered him: as a voice

on the radio (masterfully code-switching between Oxford English and countrified patois), as a lecturer in the Universities and countryside, as an opinion piece in the newspaper, and as a desired physical presence as a speaker or guest. Rex Nettleford – known popularly as "Sexy Remy," with his high cheekbones and smooth flat planed-jawline, clean-cut and coy smile, was the darkest on Kingston's *Variety* women's Magazines' 1961 "Bachelors of the Year," a marked contrast between the lighter-skinned ideal type.²⁶ His queerness was the subject of gossip and whispers, something "everyone knew" but is rarely notated, in some ways negated by (or at least neutralized) by his space within hegemony and overshadowed by his strong anti-racist identification. One could encounter Rex Nettleford's body, casually draped in the striped black and white boatneck t-shirt that he wore at Oxford in the late 1950s, in practice tights and a leotard cut low on his chest, in a Dashiki, in a loosely cut suit, in a smooth black turtleneck. Nettleford's presence blurred the ideological assumptions associated with the identities of urbane intellectual and traditionalist peasant. The undisputable visual "fact" of his blackness, an easy optical marker of racial authenticity, sheltered the complexity of his class status and the queer contradictions of his both his masculine performance and unstable affiliations between Jamaica's JLP and PNP binary in mainstream politics.

After the new National Dance Company of Jamaica toured their first show around the island in 1962 as part of independence day celebrations—a mix of American and British modern dance, Afro-Caribbean inspired movements, and theatrical mime—Seaga recognized capable workers to entrust with his ethnographic research whose racial optics lent themselves to his vision of Africanist authenticity. Accepting the invitation to be an official patron of the NDTC, Seaga wrote Nettleford: "I sincerely believe that a body of performers have been assembled who are now

²⁶ "The 1961 Bachelors," *Variety*, Spring 1961.

capable of handling indigenous material with a sensitivity for its heritage and its traditions” and offered the company access to his field-recordings, music research, and contacts.²⁷ It seemed natural that the first Afro-Diaspora dance religion that the NDTC translated into concert dance was *Pocomanía*, both because of its ties to Seaga’s research and because of its pejorative reputation as an expressively African form of Revivalism. In its 1963 season, the NDTC presented *Pocomanía*, inspired in part by research "field trips" led by Seaga in downtown Kingston. The politician also served as a consultant during practice sessions to ensure that the company translated his vision of anthropological authenticity onstage. When he revived the dance for the 1969 season, Nettleford wrote in *Jamaica Journal* that “to this day the shuffling metronome-like movement in space so typical in the poco rite is known as ‘a Seaga’ among NDTC members. It was he who actually demonstrated some of the steps in rehearsals and lectures to the NDTC on the meaning of the cult.”²⁸ In an interview with Jamaican broadcaster Neville Willoughby in the 1960s, Nettleford told a story about attending a Pocomania meeting in Kingston as an ethnographic observer, and encountering firsthand the impossibility of disentangling Seaga’s cultural/religious power from state power:

“When I was doing all that fieldwork in Jamaica and there was a certain politician who encouraged Pocomania (our kind of Shango- spirit possession thing) and many of his constituents were people who worshipped that way. And I went to one of their meetings and he came in an hour afterwards and it was most interesting to see the switch from the worship of God to the singing of praise and what have you of their political leader coming, who happened to be a shepherd, you know.”²⁹

²⁷ “Edward Seaga to Rex Nettleford,” October 2, 1962, NDTC Archive.

²⁸ Rex Nettleford, “Pocomania in Dance Theatre” *Jamaica Journal* 3, no.2 (June 1969) 22.

²⁹ Neville Willoughby, “Interview with Professor Rex Nettleford, Artistic Director N.D.T.C.,” Transcript, *RJR-Pipeline* (RJR, August 1974).

Nettleford's description of this sly code-switch evidences his recognition of the porous categories of spiritual power and political power and the symbolic relationships between informal black politics and formal state politics. For Pocomania participants in Seaga's community, to call on the ancestors or spirits might also court the favor of earthly powers, yielding immediate material benefits from the JLP leaders who invested in housing and infrastructure for their loyal constituencies. By re-encountering Pocomania communities through Seaga's mediation and their understanding of political power as integrative of the erotic, embodied, performative, popular, and spiritual, Nettleford began to articulate, through his body and his writing, a fugitive pedagogy of simultaneously building and undoing the state's claims of ownership over black culture.

In what he called his "dance-essay," Nettleford played with audience expectations of Pocomania as a primitive folk rite, while inserting what I read as an insurgent argument about Pocomania's use as an everyday form of black politics.³⁰ Rather than attempting to portray Pocomania with Seaga's anthological clarity and making its secretive rites legible, this first and perhaps least accessible of his signature ritual Afro-Caribbean dances stands as a testament to the ways that political personality and clientelism shaped how blackness and Africa were presented to the nation. If *African Scenario*—with its steady vertical lines of company members moving up and downstage with wave-like momentum—was designed to draw the audience into a collective ritual rite of passage, *Pocomania* portrayed a sort of ordered chaos and obscurity. It is a large ensemble piece that featured most of the company members on stage at once. The "upliftment table," around which much of the ritual activity centers, is laid out with candles, ceremonial objects, and food offerings. It is set far upstage and often shrouded from view. With dancers grouped in ritual circles,

³⁰ Rex Nettleford, "Pocomania in Dance Theatre," 21.

My dance analysis is based on "Tape 43" of NDTC Archive's U-Matic tape collection, attributed to the 1960s but otherwise lacking complete metadata.

trios and clusters around the possessed, there are few moments during the piece when the entire dancing company is front-facing and fully visible, or moves together as a unit. The resulting feeling of the dance is that of disruptive incongruity, of many different movement counterpoints dancing at the same time, as Edward Braithwaite described the chaotic and complex ritual choreography that he argued only Nettleford had ever succeeded in capturing onstage:

At first it would seem as if everybody is rushing wildly around the room. But as you remain in the room and observe, you realize every move, every person in that room makes, is connected with what is happening in the centre of the room and all you're getting is some fantastic counterpointing which is reflecting the counterpoints being played on the drums.³¹

In control of these repeating patterns of worshippers is Nettleford in the role of the shepherd, who spends much of the dance downstage in close proximity to the audience in a voluminous orange robe, bottom-heavy and unwieldy. He is a solid block of visual magnetism in front of the other dancers. His moves are wide and weighty, his neck is loose and his arms swinging in a half-circle, and his large robe balloons as he spins. In this dance, Nettleford's body acts as both a symbolic gatekeeper and a visual shield, a whirling spectacle that uses hypervisibility to provide a hiding space for Afro-Diaspora religion to thrive. The power in the staged Pocomania is at the forefront, but if you focus too much on it, you will miss the details of the ritual underway upstage.

Pocomania was a dance about the secrecy, coercion, and strong, overwhelming leadership that post-independence state and extra-state hierarchies of power held in common. Nettleford wrote that in his role as the Pocomania leader he reflected the charismatic power of the Shepherd: "For the Shepherd's turns immediately reveal why he is the Shepherd and why his followers are his

³¹ Edward Braithwaite, *Africa in the Caribbean*, Transcript, 3rd CAM Conference (University of Kent, England, 1969), CAM 4/3/2 (1).

flock . . . the movement conjures up strength, agility, command, power.”³² Nettleford dancing “the Seaga” in the role of Shepherd was a form of compliance and critique, as well as a commitment to finding Caribbean solutions to Caribbean problems.



Figure 11: Nettleford (front, center) in the role of the Shepard in Pocomania (1963). Photo by María LaYacona. Courtesy of NDTC Archive.

Nettleford was notoriously pragmatic about political alliances and institution building, as David Scott has argued, even as he both publicly and privately critiqued the JLP’s practices of artistic censorship, anti-communist fear-mongering, and attempts to influence the NDTC to toe the party line quietly.³³ Nettleford also refused to break down folk rituals into easily or “authentically” folksy stagings that fit neatly into middle-class fantasies. As he said of his research orientation

³² Rex Nettleford, “Pocomania in Dance Theatre,” 22.

³³ See David Scott, “‘Seeing False Images of Ourselves’: Rex Nettleford’s Mirror Mirror in the Wake of the 1960s,” *Small Axe* 54 (November 2017): 152–66.

towards fieldwork in 1975: "Let me hasten to say, I did not, aware of myself as a peasant, did not see that our job was merely to transpose things from the field to the stage—that's Anthropology not Art."³⁴ Nettleford was asserting what we might call a shay-shay sensibility and practice: a refusal of Jamaica's "traditional" Africanist culture as static, or anything other than cosmopolitan, useful, and spectacularly vital.

Much like the Pocomania constituents of West Kingston, who used religious deference as a bargaining tool for material concessions from politicians, Nettleford was willing to bargain to push forward his own ideological goals. Spectacle as a fugitive practice, for Nettleford, was a ritual of protection, actively creating the conditions for blackness to thrive and arrive at a place of self-knowing. *Pocomania* was also a celebration of the religion's creole strategies of survival in the current political context. The dance argues that the integration of worship of God, the spirits, the state or the nation in post-independence Jamaica were not a corruption of "folk religion" or an incompatible alliance, but proof of black people's ability to recognize and negotiate with heavenly and earthly forms of power on the same stage and on their own turf.

Two Drums for Babylon

The JLP's alliances with Afro-diaspora religious groups constituted only one vision of the state's incomplete attempts to claim ownership and interpretive power over "Africanity." Nettleford also played a key role in aiding the PNP with their contentious negotiations with the Rastafari, a process that would have profound implications on his written and danced representations of Jamaica's relationship to the idea of an African homeland. In early 1960, Rex Nettleford, along with his UCWI colleagues Roy Augier and M.G. Smith, spent two weeks with members of the Rastafari Movement in Kingston. They produced a widely circulated report that is commonly

³⁴ Lee Robert, "Interview with Prof. Rex Nettleford," 1975, NDTC Archive.

considered to be a major early breakthrough in the process of de-vilifying the anti-establishment Black-nationalist "cultists" for a middle-class Jamaican audience and define a foundational doctrine for what was at this moment in history a rapidly evolving and adaptive set of beliefs and forms of protest.³⁵

In the early 1960s, the mainstream newspapers like the *Gleaner* represented Rastas as an anti-social "cult" of dreaded derelicts, viewed with suspicion at best and branded dangerous enemies of the state at worst, a belief that most "respectable" folks shared. Several leftist writers – like John Maxwell who staunchly advocated for the Rastafari in PNP-leaning newspaper *Public Opinion* – and a few Rastafari public figures had begun to advocate for the Rastafari in the press. Fictional renderings like Roger Mais' *Brotherman* (1954) present an early vision of Rastas as healers and sage folk characters. Still, the fear that brown, middle-class Kingstonians in the late 1950s and early 1960s felt for the Rastafari movement is well-documented, such that V.S. Naipaul described their understanding of the religion as "a black lower class contagion, a sort of backyard Mau-Mau."³⁶

The report claimed that the authors initiated their inquiry "at the request of some prominent members of the Ras Tafari brethren," who wanted the university men to clear up public misconceptions of Rastafari criminality and relay the needs of their poor urban communities to the

³⁵ M.G Smith, Roy Augier, and Rex M. Nettleford, "The Rastafari Movement in Jamaica, Part I," *The Caribbean Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1967). The original report is available online at http://www.cifas.us/sites/g/files/g536796/f/1960e_RasTafariMov_B.pdf. Accessed May 16, 2015. Earlier significant non-fiction scholarly works on the Rastafari include George Eaton Simpson's "The Ras Tafari Movement in Jamaica: A Study of Race and Class Conflict" (*Social Forces*, vol. 34, No.2), and "Political Cultism in West Kingston" (*Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 4, No.2).

³⁶ V. S. Naipaul, *The Middle Passage: The Caribbean Revisited*, Reprint edition (New York: Vintage, 2002), 227.

government.³⁷ While Nettleford was not the primary author of the report (he is commonly credited only with writing a short section on dance and Rastafari drumming), Nettleford maintained that he was the crucial link or contact between the Rastafari and the UCWI researchers. Nettleford knew he narrowly escaped rural poverty by receiving a series of local and national scholarships, and he narrated the origins of his empathy with the movements' critiques of the limits of post-war social welfare and federation era anti-black policing of Rastafari as the result of his situational proximity and sustained childhood friendships with Rasta converts. He said they trusted in his credibility as a public scholar who spoke frequently and eloquently about Africa and diaspora Black Identity and respected his decision to return to Jamaica after studying abroad to teach African and West Indian history.³⁸

While the University's report and the then ruling PNP's attempts to address the Rasta's requests for a repatriation scheme had been traditionally seen as a gesture of the establishment's benevolence towards the "cultists" within the West Indian academy, Nettleford explanation of the report's impetus has recently come under fire. In a series of talks and interviews, historian Robert A. Hill argued that PNP leader Norman Manley orchestrated the report as part of a secret project to pacify and rehabilitate Rastafarians. He placed the report in the context of two violent altercations between increasingly militant Rastafarians (a bloody riot at Coronation Market in downtown Kingston in protest of the brutal police beating of a Rastaman in 1959, and an armed black nationalist uprising in Red Hills Suburbs of Kingston in 1960), as well as the Government's anti-communist fears of the radical left as they aligned with US Cold War hemispheric policing.

³⁷ M. G. Smith, Roy Augier, and Rex Nettleford, "The Rastafari Movement In Kingston, Jamaica. PART 1," *Caribbean Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1967): 3.

³⁸ David Scott and Rex Nettleford, "'To Be Liberated from the Obscurity of Themselves': An Interview with Rex Nettleford," *Small Axe* 10, no. 2 (July 25, 2006), 175.

While he affirms Nettleford's role as the researchers' liaison to the Rastafari, Hill argues that the University Report, which masqueraded as social science and Extra-Mural Department outreach, cloaked a covert government intelligence mission to address brewing discontent within the unemployed urban population.³⁹ Whether the report was commissioned by Norman Manley or self-directed, the goal of the writing was pacification. The author detailed incidents of Rastafari violence in-depth (real and alleged), warning the public that if the government failed to appease what they classified as the movements' reasonable demands "it would be . . . disastrous."⁴⁰ Still, the report marked a shift in public, artistic and scholarly discourse about Rastafari, even if it did not immediately lessen state violence against poor Jamaicans who were visually marked as Rasta. It helped to establish Rastafarianism as a religion, instead of primarily a social movement or a dangerous cult. The report initiated a turn in anthropological and religious studies, which now sought to position Rastafari within broader genealogies of Black Atlantic religion and black protest.⁴¹

Nettleford's involvement in the Rastafari Report would become his first and perhaps most internationally recognized work of dance anthropology, a novel connection because, despite its linkage to Reggae music, dance is rarely seriously analyzed in connection to Rastafari ritual. For the rest of his dance career, he was inspired by the radical sonics of reggae and was broadly supportive of Rastafarian values of black pride. However, while he was sympathetic to reframing Rastafarians

³⁹ Robert Hill delivered a public talk at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, the University of the West Indies entitled "The University Report on the Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica: Half the Story Has Never Been Told" in 2013. On academic controversies and legacy of the report, see also Neil Roberts, "Violence, Lividity, Freedom," *Small Axe* 18, no. 1 (March 2014): 183-184.

⁴⁰ M. G. Smith, Roy Augier, and Rex Nettleford, "The Rastafari Movement In Kingston, Jamaica. PART 1," *Caribbean Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1967): 17.

⁴¹ Roberts, "Violence, Lividity, Freedom," *Small Axe* 18, no. 1 (March 2014): 185.

as religiously devout and creatively generative black nationalists rather than public enemies, Rastafari also posed an urgent intellection problem for Nettleford's formulation of Jamaican cultural nationalism. Nettleford was a staunch West Indian nationalist who believed that the struggle for black pride and Jamaican "self-confidence" outside of colonial structures was contingent on identifying and developing the West Indies' unique contributions to world culture. For him, "Back to Africa" or repatriation movements were yet another desire to look outside of Jamaica for a black future. He argued that repatriation was a product of their still colonial-minded, economically dependent, and migration-centered society's outward orientation rather than searching within. This hesitation to fully endorse the movement's brand of black nationalism is evident in descriptions of Rastafari in NDTC programs and publications throughout the 1960s, in which Nettleford somewhat pejoratively referred to them as a Jamaican "cargo cult," insinuating they naively fetishized empty symbols of Africa without realizing their real purpose.⁴² While Nettleford danced to remember African history, he rejected a romanization of Africa that imagined that the continent held the keys to Jamaica's own racialized inequalities and insecurities.

By 1970, Nettleford seemed to come to terms with his ambivalence about Rastafari in his first monograph, a series of essays on the race relations and culture of the first decade of independence, *Mirror, Mirror: Race Identity and Protest in Jamaica*. Despite his critiques of the Rastafari, he argued that they were the ultimate mirror to Jamaican society. Rastafari's radical rejection of the state was a "social barometer" that forced Jamaicans to reckon with the state's historical denial of an African past, extreme social inequality, and mass unemployment.⁴³ Most of

⁴² See, for instance, Rex M. Nettleford 1933-2010 and Maria LaYacona, *Roots and Rhythms; Jamaica's National Dance Theatre*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 33.

⁴³ Rex M. Nettleford, *Identity, Race, and Protest in Jamaica*, 256 p. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972), 100.

all, Rastafari's calls for repatriation represented the nation's constant search "elsewhere"—whether it be Europe, Africa, or the hemispheric power of the USA—to define their place in the world. In this way, while many Rastafari identified as stateless in protest of the "Babylonian" systems of capitalism and racial hierarchy that Jamaican creole or multi-racial nationalist myths protected, Nettleford knew that Rastafari was a maximal and powerful projection of the potential and pitfalls of the Jamaican personality.

Before Nettleford wrote of his ambivalence and hopes for Rastafari, he created *Two Drums for Babylon*, a strange and tortured romance story that complicates the pragmatic, unsentimental treatment of Rastafari and the "idea of Africa" that he put forward in his academic work. *Two Drums* was Nettleford's first attempt to think through how Rastafari was not a liminal exception, but a central metaphor for Jamaican society.⁴⁴ The dance asks what Rastafari's vision of black freedom might become if it was made manifest on Jamaican soil, and who that vision of freedom would leave behind. I propose that we read this work both as a secondary, imaginary ethnography of Nettleford's interactions with Rastas in Kingston and at home in the North Coast that re-centers the queer possibilities of Rastafari's peasant roots. Reading *Two Drums* alongside Nettleford's own writing about Rastafari, gender, and kinship, I explore how the dance uses Rastafari's position at the crossroads of belonging and nonbelonging to explore how to reconcile queer, unruly, and possibly destructive desires with nationalist hegemony.

⁴⁴ Other examples include Orlando Patterson's 1964 novel *Children of Hebron*. Nettleford also tackled some early, satirical representations of Rastafari dance. In 1961/62 Nettleford directed and choreographed Sam Hillary's *Banana Boy* for the annual National Pantomime, a comic musical that had characters labeled as "Rastas." *Banana Boy* is another early theatrical example of Rasta's being cast within the typography of national characters before the explosion of reggae in the 1970s.

⁴⁵ Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica*, 121.

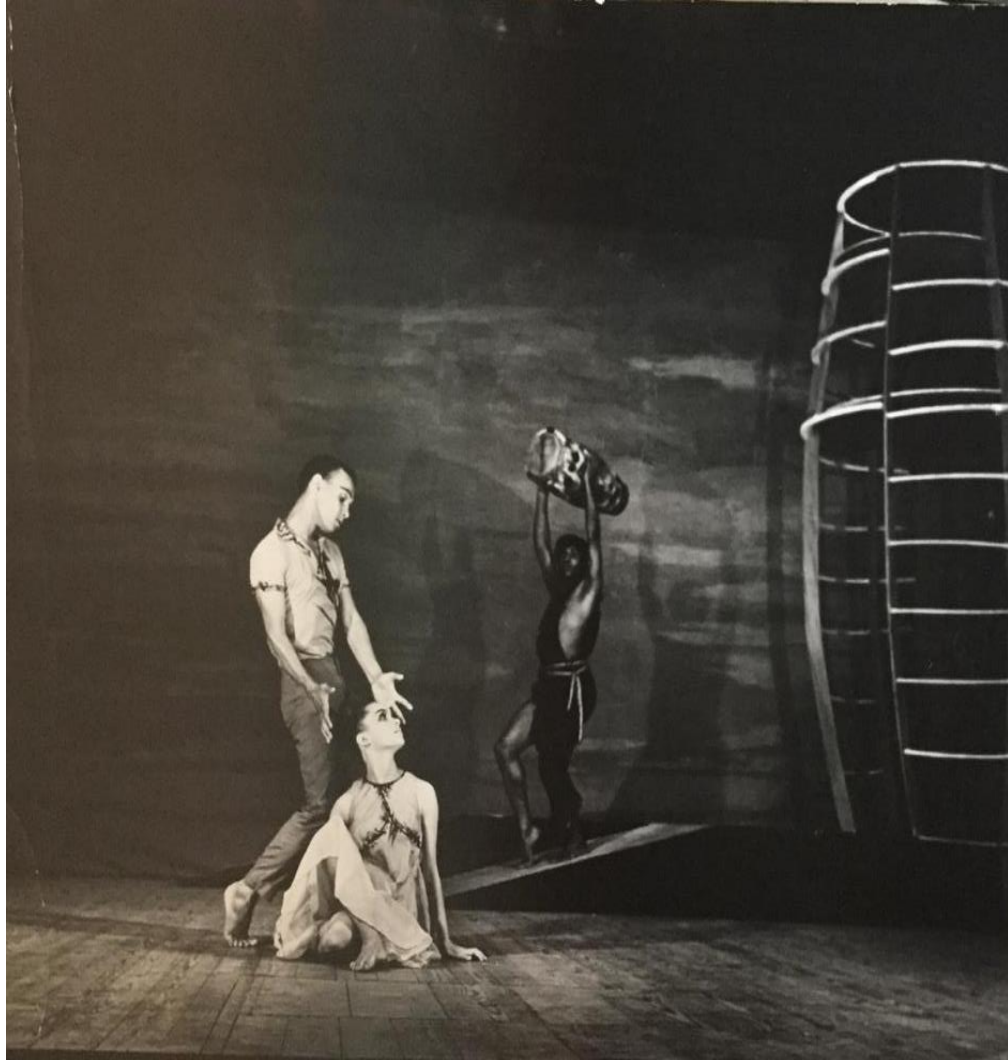


Figure 12: Bert Rose, Bridget Casserly, and Audrey Butler in Two Drums for Babylon. Undated (1964). Photograph by Maria LaYacona. Courtesy of NDTC Archive.

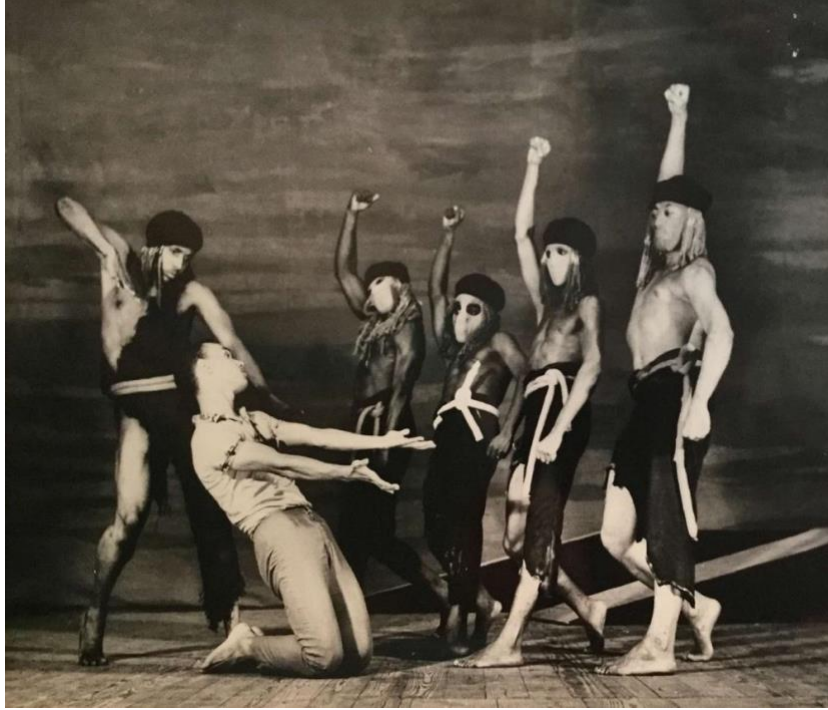


Figure 13: The Rastafari movement language of the NDTC, arms raised in a show of power. Bert Rose (on his knees) plays the brown-creole middle-class man. Undated (1964). Photograph by Maria LaYacona. Courtesy of NDTC Archive.



Figure 14: The Babylon Chorus.(n.d.) Photograph by Maria LaYacona. Courtesy of NDTC Archive.

Two Drums centers on a doomed romance between two brown-creole, middle-class Jamaicans and their inevitable seduction into the Rastafari way of life. The dance begins with a romantic pas-de-deux between the leading man, danced originally by the lithe, light-skinned and delicate-featured NDTC Hubert (Bert) Rose, and Bridget Casserly, who plays his betrothed. Rose was among the early NDTC members to follow in Eddie Thomas' footsteps and journey to New York to train at the Martha Graham School, while Casserly was an NDTC founding member who received formal training at one of the few classical ballet schools in Kingston. Rose and Casserly were two of the lighter-skinned company members, their bodies a camel-tinted tan that matched many of the nation's upper-middle class and elites.⁴⁵ The young man and his love dance a soft and dream-like modern ballet and are attended by a female chorus whom Nettleford identified as an embodiment of the Rastafari concept of Babylon, or the colorist, racist capitalist system.⁴⁶ Their movements mirror the long vertical lines and graceful extensions of what Nettleford described as "the delicately self-contained body movements of Babylon"⁴⁷ The young man is seduced away from his love by a Rastafari "chief" (played in the original production by the broad-chested, dark-skinned Audley Butler) who acts as a father figure to the youth. He is initiated into the Rastafari community. Shifts in music, alongside movement, mark the transformation from the realm of bourgeois society to the land of the Rasta. The middle-class world is scored to Aaron Copland's

⁴⁵ This kind of color/class -conscious type-casting was typical of Nettleford's approach towards representing a culturally creole and racially-integrated, but not color-blind, vision of Jamaican society.

⁴⁶ Danced in the 1964 season by Mavis Lai, Noelle Hill, and Yvonne Costa, the female attendants were called "The Babylon Chorus" "1964 Season of Dance gets Underway," *The Sunday Gleaner*, August 15, 1964.

⁴⁷ Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica*, 121.

“Piano Variations,” while the Rastafari move to “Jamaican cult drumming.”⁴⁸ The Rasta provides a sense of rootedness to an ancestral black heritage for the brown creole leading man, caught between coloniality and post-coloniality. However, the young man becomes disillusioned with the cult when his betrothed follows him and is enticed by the Rastafarian “chief,” ultimately choosing to leave behind her middle-class respectability and run away with the Rastas.

While in 1964, Rastafarianism was not yet firmly integrated into Jamaican popular and youth culture, the middle-class character's fascination with hyper-masculine, highly erotic Rastas was strangely prophetic of the symbolic role that Rasta would play in youth protest movements of the late 1960s. The Rastafari chorus enters and leaves the stage through a giant sculpture of a drum, the door to an Africanist past/future. Bare-chested and adorned with dreadlocks wigs similar to those now sold at tourist souvenir stalls throughout the Caribbean, the Rastafari dance to a drum-infused soundtrack with their fists raised and clenched for much of the performance. Rather than drawing directly from Rastafari ritual dance, a choice some have used to critique the dance's lack of “authenticity,” the Rasta ensemble pieces used a modernist movement language which laid a foundation for NDTC's extensive repertoire of “reggae” works over the next half-century, which includes a signature broad-shouldered and wide footed stance. The stomach is concave, the shoulders lean back while the pelvis juts forward, the arms forcefully strike strong “power poses,” and the hips stay loose and undulating. The extreme effort in the arms and legs, and low, effortless swing in the hips and core, recreates a magnetic tension Brenda Dixon Gottschild associates with the Africanist embodiment of black cool.⁴⁹ Here, queer belonging for the Rastafari is not

⁴⁸ Loretta Collins, “The Harder They Come: Rougher Version,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 46-71, <https://doi.org/10.1215/-7-1-46>.

⁴⁹ Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996).

integration or demystification, as the *Rastafari Report* dreamed, but a future in which the black male bodies can be made so grounded and monumental they counter-balance fears of the instability of Jamaica's post-colonial sovereignty.

To dance as a Rasta in 1964 was to flex, both in the literal and Black diaspora vernacular sense, a defiant movement language I see repeated in diaspora performances across time and space: the sure footing of London's black punks, the Afro-jazz stylings of Fela Kuti, the laidback bounce of Bob Marley, the butch charisma of queer Zimbabwean performance artist Nora Chipaumire. It was to embody black pride as a collective show of strength and steady strain, uniquely Jamaican yet recognizably diasporic, through movements that were at once languid and resolute. The density and solidity of the Rastas' sure stance stands on one pole of a racial/gender binary that this dance essay portrays, while the Rasta's lady conquest and her "Babylon Chorus"—which Nettleford described as "middle-class ladies of quality, all"—prance on the other end of the spectrum, representing pale imitations of European dance.⁵⁰ In fact, after seeing the 1964 premiere of *Two Drums*, sculptor and wife of the PNP opposition leader Edna Manley wrote to Nettleford in her annual private review of the season that the female lead's striking lack of substance made the love triangle unbelievable: "the girl was too ethereal, too almost Greek. She had no 'other side' to her, no hidden depth."⁵¹ Casserly's flowing white tunic-style costuming, and the modern dance she adopts as she seems to lose her will and is drawn into Rastafari—adopting stiff arms and carriage, low to the ground, supplicant, losing the linear directionality of her opening solo as the tension in her body reveals physiological distress—is read as a reference to one of Martha Graham's Greek tragedies. While the male Rastafari hold the possibility for becoming

⁵⁰ Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica*.

⁵¹ "Edna Manley to Rex Nettleford," 1964, NDTC Archives.

Man—the fully agential subjecthood that colonialism disallowed—through collective movement, the Babylon chorus is a container or allegory for the confusion of the brown middle-class, trapped between Europe and Africa.

In part, the weak female roles in the company's performance mirror the ways women are often left out of representations of Rastafari in Jamaican society at large.⁵² Rastafari's fetishization of the idealized male body as a space of temple like purity—*ital* (or free from meat, salt, or man-made toxins), celibate, free of colonial dress, adorned with locks—made their bodies a highly visual counterpoint to the creole, female body, alternative vision of Jamaica's racial story. The early movement, as it was amplified by dreadlock-wearing, urban sects such as the Black Youth Faith in the late 1950s and 1960s, was both deeply patriarchal and socially encoded as a specifically male experience of unemployment, and rejection of traditional marriage and respectable masculinity. Women's involvement in building Rastafari and its early ties to spirit-possession religions with strong female leadership roles like Kumina and Pocomania were downplayed in public and academic literature about Rastafari in the 1960s and 1970s. Unbreached corporality, firm divides between the spirit and living realms, and untainted masculinity, superseded even some claims to Africanist authenticity in the process of crafting a communal Rastafari oral history, so that, as Kenneth Bilby and Elliot Leib argue, "Nyabinghi music is partly derived from Kumina remains unpopular with many Rastafari, who, despite their respect for the 'Africanity' of Kumina drumming, disapprove of certain fundamental aspects of the Kumina religious experience, such as

⁵² The incongruity of popular understanding of the identities of "woman" and "Rasta" was evident in the ways that Nettleford, critics', and even dance scholars descriptions of the dance almost always omit female members of the NDTC also played Rastas in *Two Drums* productions.

ancestral spirit possession and the emphasis placed on the dead in the affairs of the living."⁵³ New women's histories of Rastafari from scholars such as Imani M Tafari-Ama and Jeanne Christiansen have intervened into feminist scholarship of the later-20th century, which focused solely on dogma and stripped Rastawomen of all agency. They stress an ethnographic approach to understanding women's experiences of meaningful community and liberatory claims-making in Rastafari communities.⁵⁴ Still in the 1960s, and in certain "mansions" or branches of the movement, limitations on female membership rights and ritual participation was a rule of doctrinal law.

While women – both the brown middle-class lead and the Rastafari – are necessary for imagining black nationalism's links to the past and future in which a Rastafari might be re-generated and integrated into Jamaican society, their lack of substance and ownership over the kind of space-claiming and grounding movement that signified postcolonial subjectivity reflects the appeal of Rastafari as patriarchal fantasy. Rastafari entered into global mainstream popular culture in the late 1970s as a modern, progressive vision of black freedom and youth culture; part of Rastafari's early appeal in poor black communities was its rejection of female-centered kinship networks. In this way, this radical form of black nationalism captured the through-line that connected Garvey's vision of capitalist patriarchy with colonial critiques of female heads of families endorsed by Social Welfare Reformists and the radical left. Rastafari's embrace of homosocial spirituality and performance of male leadership rooted in African ancestral pride served as an alternative vision of traditionalist Jamaican community that could remedy the "problem" of

⁵³ Kenneth Bilby and Elliott Leib, "Kumina, The Howellite Church and the Emergence of Rastafarian Traditional Music in Jamaica," *Jamaica Journal* 19, no. 3 (1986): 23.

⁵⁴ Jeanne Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning and the Rasta Woman: Gender Constructions in the Shaping of Rastafari Livivity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

unmarried, female-led black families which had been pathologized by the colonial government as the root of Jamaica's failed modernity.⁵⁵

For politicians and nationalist institutions in the New Jamaica, negotiating with Rastafari in this period before international figures like Bob Marley pushed the religion into the mainstream was not necessarily a progressive or black culturalist stance. It was also a real source of political power and an affirmation of Jamaican values, a push to become a male “somebody” that equally referenced Federation era colonial vision as much as African diaspora longings. It was both radically anti-racist and deeply conservative, as well as masculinist and authoritarian. Engaging with Africa through Rastafari as a traditionalist fantasy of black masculinity that could be desired and claimed by both middle-class men and desired by middle-class women was an early and effective step towards pushing the religious movement into the mainstream.

As a child of a female-headed peasant family and a participant in village welfare programs from an early age, Nettleford immediately recognized the Rastafarian's intervention and its efficacy for young, disillusioned Jamaican men.⁵⁶ Described by one critic as a battle between the “bourgeois”(mulatto, brown-skinned, and effeminate) and the “primitive” (black, masculine) in Jamaican society, the dance suggested a different set of historical “roots” for Jamaican nationalism, a possibly destructive but still powerful masculinity stripped away by colonization.⁵⁷ However,

⁵⁵ See for instance: Nicole C. Bourbonnais, *Birth Control in the Decolonizing Caribbean: Reproductive Politics and Practice on Four Islands, 1930-1970* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Lara Putnam, “Global Child-Saving, Transatlantic Maternalism, and the Pathologization of Caribbean Childhood, 1930s-1940s,” *Atlantic Studies* 11, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 491-514. Diane J. Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders*.

⁵⁶ David Scott and Rex Nettleford, “‘To Be Liberated from the Obscurity of Themselves’: An Interview with Rex Nettleford,” *Small Axe* 10, no. 2 (July 25, 2006): 97-246.

⁵⁷ Harry Milner, an art critic for the Gleaner, made this assessment in 1968 when the NDTC staged a revival of *Two Drums*, claiming that representations this tension in Jamaica society that felt urgent to explore in the

Nettleford also wrote about the dance as the fulfillment of fantasy as a certain kind of queer diaspora, an affective connection to an imagined African horizon made possible by decentralizing the heterosexual relationship and disavowing heterosexual desire. Nettleford wrote in an explanation of his dance that the young man's refusal of "Babylon captivity," or the respectable life of a middle-class sanctioned heteronormative marriage, was also a rejection of "a matriarchal society ruled by sexually alluring females who are yet emotionally unsatisfying." His seduction into the Africanized, deeply patriarchal world of the Rastafari was, in contrast, a "ritually virile, vigorous and emotionally fulfilling" alternative to female sexuality.⁵⁸

Rastafari enabled Nettleford to explore what traditional visions of black community and hidden, unspoken but somatically present desires could offer to middle-class black masculinity. In this space of tension between Rastafari's disavowals of queer sexuality and femininity, and its aspiration for structures of kinship and male intimacy, Nettleford found a black diaspora aesthetic and affective network that was useful to dream with. This praxis of queer diaspora belonging, much like the Pocomania practitioners' manipulations of the state's flawed visions of blackness, exploited and materialized the impossibilities and unfulfilled utopic properties of diaspora.

African Scenario (the KariKari)

Nettleford's fantasies of both Rastafari and Africa as spaces of idealized black masculinity and "homeland" for black Jamaicans were challenged during his trips in Africa, travels which revealed the limitations and possibilities of diaspora as a foundation for Caribbean ideas of a rooted, claimable black identity. Rex Nettleford took two trips to West Africa in the 1960s. He

early 1960s was dated, now that the Rastafari had begun to be incorporated into Jamaican society. Harry Milner, "NDTC Third Programme," September 1, 1968.

⁵⁸ Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica*, 121.

arrived first as Jamaica's representative to the International Conference of the World Assembly of Youth in Accra during August 1960. For the second trip in March 1962, a few months before Jamaican independence, the then 29-year-old professor traveled as one of four delegates sent by the Jamaican government on a Technical Mission to Africa. The delegation would decide once and for all if Rastafari dreams of mass repatriation to West Africa and Ethiopia could be made into a reality. These journeys both included long stop-overs in Nkrumah's Ghana, which after its independence in 1957 represented the "vanguard of black and African hopes," and attracted scores of diaspora tourists and migrants from the United States and the Caribbean in the early 1960s to be part of "the African Personality"—a set of Pan-African values, cultural mandates, and programs of economic self-reliance aimed at reversing the handicaps of colonial subjugation and instilling a sense of national pride based on intrinsic "African" values.³⁹ Arriving at two crucial moments in Jamaica's march towards independence and his own development as a nationalist artist, Nettleford experienced the relational performance of distance and proximity between the homeland and the New World in very different ways. Dancing and meeting other diaspora artists in Nkrumah's Ghana had a lasting effect on Nettleford's understanding of freedom within the British Commonwealth, and Jamaica's own contributions to grappling with the conditions of post-coloniality.

The archive of Nettleford's trip to Africa consists mainly of personal mementos and correspondence, a snapshot into his memories of new friendships and a period of exciting creative

³⁹ Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*, New edition edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 101.

While the term "African Personality" is associated almost exclusively with Nkrumah, it too is likely a product of diaspora exchange, originally coined by Edward Wilmot Blyden, a West Indian born Liberian teacher known as the "Father of Pan-Africanism."

See also: Nate Plageman, "The African Personality Dances Highlife: Popular Music, Youth, and Cultural Modernization in Nkrumah's Ghana, 1957-1965" in *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa* ed. Takyiwaa Manuh, Peter J. Bloom and Stephan F. Miescher, (Indiana University Press, 2014).

possibilities. Throughout the three-week-long Youth Conference, he and the other delegates earnestly discussed anti-colonial movements across the diaspora: pledging their support for the Cuban revolution, condemning imperialist intervention in the Congo Crisis, criticizing United States presence in Panama, and demanding freedom for the newly elected president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, who was still imprisoned in England for his alleged involvement in the Mau Mau rebellion.⁶⁰ By night and during an extended stay after the conference's close, Nettleford socialized until the early hours with a group of dancers and artists based in Ghana. His postcards and pictures represented blooming friendships with Pete Myer, a queer Indian-born disc jockey and theatre figure, and Ghanaian dancer and choreographer Beryl KariKari.⁶¹ In exchange for teaching basic modern dance technique classes, Nettleford's new friends took him around to see staged and ritual performances.⁶² Upon his return, Nettleford was interviewed for *The Gleaner* by Marina Maxwell, a Trinidadian performer, who he shared his contagious excitement with about the hopes for independence that had manifested in Ghana. He saw one possible genealogy of dance heritage that he hoped could clarify the obscurity of Jamaica's unverified geography of African cultural-historical roots. He spoke of the danced continuities between the core/pelvis centered traditions of the West African dance, Haitian Vodou, American Modern concert dance, and the NDTC's emergent style: "Excited, he got up to illustrate . . . his dark arms outstretched, his face intense . . . 'Contract . . . release . . . see it . . . The very same movement we have in the West Indies!'"⁶³ This was one of

⁶⁰ Marina Maxwell, "'Anancy' Lives Also in Ghana's Little Theatre," *The Sunday Gleaner*, October 2, 1960.

⁶¹ KariKari's name is also spelled "Berylle" and "Beryle" in different records. KariKari married UK-based Ghanaian novelist Cameron Doudu.

⁶² "Berylle KariKari (Beryl KariKari) to Rex Nettleford," August 10, 1962, NDTC Archive.

⁶³ Marina Maxwell, "'Anancy' Lives Also in Ghana's Little Theatre," *The Sunday Gleaner*, October 2, 1960.

Nettleford's first articulations of his coming to see the Africanist presence in Modern Dance, a presence he forcefully brought to the attention of naysayers who accused the NDTC of falling prey to American hemispheric cultural imperialism when they presented Graham-inspired numbers. Unlike the generation of Federation modernists who fetishized American modernism's claims to newness and originality, Ghanaian dancers provided the NDTC with justification to claim ownership over all of New World dance culture.



*Figure 15: Rex Nettleford (center, left) with members of Jamaica's Technical Mission to Africa (1962).
Courtesy of NDTC Archive.*

This common basis of movement was not merely a novel historical note, but part of a larger discourse on how movement could influence and be influenced by the national character and political culture of a society. Nettleford's travel observations highlighted not only the similarities between the two nations' dance and folklore but also the ways that Ghanaian embodiment of their nation's sovereignty emphasized Jamaica's lack. According to Nettleford, Ghanaians moved through the world in a way that Jamaicans could not, through quotidian and

extraordinary performances of African Personality executed with a "self-confidence" that he described as thrilling to witness. He spoke of Nkrumah's leadership with great admiration, even though it strayed from the two-party democratic system that his British education instilled as the only possible political future for the West Indies. As Nettleford described the revolutionary arts and political dreams that young Africans presented at the conference, Maxwell—an emerging radical political voice in Caribbean diaspora theatre—admitted to "daydreaming off" about the sad state of Jamaica's floundering nationalist fervor, wondering "the emergent and young countries who were showing some spunk . . . and how long it would be before we had something Positive and National to say."⁶⁴ Maxwell and Nettleford's anxieties about the depth of their island's lack of nationalist fervor and desire to be free echoed George Lamming's observations about the African Personality as reclaimed and embodied heritage. While Nettleford, with his unflinching faith in the political savvy of poor Jamaicans, did not publicly share Maxwell and Lamming's pessimism or their country's irrevocably colonized mentality, he shared a conviction that independence DID something to a body, imbuing every step and gesture with Rasta-like certainty in one's ownership of a homeland.

When Nettleford embarked on his second voyage to Africa eighteen months later, the Jamaica he left behind had moved forward significantly in its journey towards decolonization. This time, independence was not contingent on an extended diplomatic and economic project of consolidating the Federal state, but an immediate reality, so much so that Nettleford was already in the process of helping to plan the Independence celebration for August of that year. The Technical Mission to Africa was one of the last gestures of the PNP's accommodationist policy for addressing "the problem of Rastafari," before the transfer to the JLP government in April 1962

⁶⁴Marina Maxwell, "'Anancy' Lives Also in Ghana's Little Theatre."

heralded more openly repressive policing and condemnation of the religion. Out of the ten recommendations recorded in the Report—which included a range of infrastructure and social welfare reforms such as low-income housing, sewage disposal and garbage collection, technical training programs, and increased access to media and radio facilities—two fact-finding missions into the viability of Rastafari mass immigration were the only aspects of the program that the PNP addressed before they ceded leadership after independence. In 1961, a group of Jamaican delegates, including three Rastafari Brethren and a UNIA representative, had traveled to Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone on an initial unofficial and largely ceremonial mission to discuss the possibilities of repatriation with African leaders. Eager to gain the full support of both the Jamaican government and their host nations, they boasted of their movement’s potential utility to Africa’s economic growth and social progress.⁶⁵ The second Technical Mission sent government officials and Nettleford—as a representative of the University—to report on the logistics of labor opportunities and government aid for this migration scheme.

The trip in many ways confirmed the distance between diaspora dreams of return, and the complexity of political realities. Jamaican government viewed their support for repatriation as a pressure valve to release social unrest among the urban unemployed, and a possible alternative to migration to the UK and United States in the age of increased restrictions of border laws. However, the new African states that the two delegations visited on their tours were facing the challenges of a growing population, land resettlement, and unemployment. They had little need for workers with few vocational skills or educational credentials. Instead, they expressed interest in

⁶⁵ Roy Augier and Veronica Salter, *Rastafari: The Reports* (Kingston, Jamaica: Caribbean Quarterly, Cultural Studies Initiative, UWI, 2010).

The Mission yielded two official documents: Minority and Majority Report. Rastafari delegates wrote the minority report in response to what they felt were omissions and a misleadingly pessimistic tone in the original (majority) report.

skilled agricultural scientists, community development workers, teachers, and exchange student programs. Only Ethiopia offered a limited land tenure scheme, though hardly a long-term plan for mass repatriation. In "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," Stuart Hall portrays the Rastafari's petitions to Norman Manley and their goal to settle as citizens of contemporary African states as a utopian project doomed to fail: "they wanted to go somewhere else, to go to the other place that had intervened, that other Africa which was constructed in the language and the rituals of Rastafarianism."⁶⁶ Rastafari rituals of chanting, drumming, smoking, and reasoning their ways outside of the racism, classism, and capitalist exploitation of Babylon enacted a spiritual process overturning colonial epistemologies and of stealing away, or marronage, towards Africa.⁶⁷ Once they reached its sacred physical shores, the Rasta had to contend with the fact that Africans were also experiencing freedom and decolonization as a process, rather than a stable and unchallenged state of being.

Just as the Rastafari were forced to reckon with their desires to assert their Africanness through land claims against the aspirations of African governments—with its own class conflicts, prejudices, and economic difficulties—Nettleford had to reassess his dreams for independence, particularly as he had once idealized Nkrumah's ability to seamlessly blend the tradition of "the African Personality" with the creation of a modern, egalitarian and just state. As the representative of a (soon to be) sovereign nation, Nettleford looked at the project of African socialism and nationalism with newly critical eyes, questioning anew whether the post-colonial swagger and Afro-centric cultural purity he had read into the bodies of Ghanaians before could be equated to their superior modernity and cultural autonomy over the West Indies. Federation modernists had mourned

⁶⁶ Stuart Hall, "Negotiating Caribbean Identities," *New Left Review*, I, no. 209 (1995): 3-14.

⁶⁷ Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Jamaica's lack of a singular, pure indigenous culture, and idealized Africanness as a singular and binary opposite of European subjectivity. Now, Nettleford was attuned to the ways that the post-colonial condition was often an awkward, dissonant, and powerfully creative mix of warring identifications, and African identity itself was much more diverse than he had first imagined. Nettleford had looked to Nkrumah as a vision of strong, male, charismatic leadership that was the foil of the blunders of Federation. The sting of disillusionment rendered Nettleford rather harsh in his assessments of what he perceived to be Nkrumah's administration's "failures." For instance, after a meal at the home of the prominent public official and Minister of Industries Krobo Edusei, he wrote a letter to his friend and collaborator in the field of musical theatre, Louise Bennett, to pettily critique the menu:

"Africa - Ghana - for all its sense of direction displays the most glaring contradictions which are sometimes unintentionally downright ludicrous. So yesterday we were served an excellent Ghanaian meal of foo-foo and soup; but to top it all, champagne was served. It actually is like serving champagne with ackee and saltfish."⁶⁸

Nettleford's petty critiques of Ghanaian food, along with Edusei's choice of a soundscape of the "lightest operettas" instead of "highlife or indigenous music," and the Western-style dresses and wigs of the attending guests, were in part an insolent criticism of high-up officials in the People's Convention Party (PCP) who were able to skirt the otherwise rigidly enforced strictures of Nkrumah's vision of the African "new man" and "new women."⁶⁹ His complaints were also symptomatic of the uneven and unrealistic expectations that New World visitors had of pre-

⁶⁸ Rex Nettleford, "Rex Nettleford to Louise Bennett," March 1962, Louise Bennett Coverly Collection, National Library of Jamaica.

⁶⁹ Rex Nettleford, "Rex Nettleford to Louise Bennett."

colonial purity in 20th century Ghana.⁷⁰ They were built on assumptions about "Africa" that often ignored how West African cultures themselves were and are creole constructions, very much in dialogue with new world migrations and returns.⁷¹ While Nettleford embraced the kinesthetic and affective connections of his queer diaspora relations he found with Ghanaian artists, in so far as they allowed him to extend Jamaica's claims to an aesthetic Afro-Diaspora lineage, Jamaican ideas of Africa were still taunted by the colonial binaries of "primitivism" and modernity. His comments to Bennett also evidenced a growing realization that although the architects of Ghana cultural policy were as close to the preverbal "African source" as one could be, they still faced the same challenges and contradictions facing post-coloniality within the Commonwealth.

Nettleford continued to admire many of Nkrumah's achievements, particularly what he observed as the "well-ordered and disciplined" nature of Ghana's society (in his view, a successful creolization of an ideal of British liberal governance) at the moment before PCP began to chip away at civic freedoms. He wrote to Bennett with envy about the resources allotted to the Ghanaian Art's Council and the state's prioritization of the arts, a funding commitment that no Jamaican government has ever matched. However, spending more time witnessing statecraft in Ghana solidified Nettleford's inclination that ordering a national history along a binary of the "traditional" past and present was an impossibility for the migratory, rhizomatic histories of the Caribbean. In his letters from Ghana, he articulated what would become one of his most famous coinages that captured his vision of the ideal Jamaican artist practice of radical ownership of world culture without losing their rootedness to peasant culture: "For we have the melody of Europe

⁷⁰ Ibid.; Nate Plageman, "The African Personality Dances Highlife"

⁷¹ This argument has been made by several historians of West African and Latin America, with one of the key examples being the trade between Brazil and Lagos. See J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

without losing the rhythm of African and this is a powerful combination properly concocted.” He reclaimed the transitory space between “primitive” Africa and African American Jazz modernity that the Caribbean had been exiled to by North American Negro dancers. While creolization rests on a shaky foundation of muddled histories and puzzling displacements, its ability to queer notions of authenticity and hold multiple origin stories allowed Jamaican artists—at the very least—to create their own criteria for their failure.

Nettleford’s collaboration with Beryl Karikari, founder of the state-sponsored Obadzeng Troupe, evidenced how these creole dance practices were also queer diaspora aesthetics, shared through individual relations and cultural exchange. In Karikari and her collaborators, he found like-minded colleagues among the theatre community in West Africa who were self-consciously experimenting with the complicated state mandates of the African Personality’s claims to perfect modernity and tradition. The majority of Karikari’s creative dance repertoire fit squarely into the PCP’s objectives for national art: narrative dance theatre that focused on peasant and pre-colonial village life. In a style the NDTC would later adopt, the Obadzeng troupe included both dancers and musicians who performed during interludes in the program. Karikari paired with musical director Saka Acquaye’s band, The African Tones, who supplied government-approved genre of highlife to their concerts.⁷² The NDTC’s *African Scenario* borrowed directly from the Obadzeng group’s and Karikari’s fieldwork, reflecting a deeply contemporary story of how West African dancers were creatively constructing modernity out of a pre-colonial imaginary.

African Scenario is a coming-of-age story. It was the very first dance that Nettleford choreographed for his troupe of dancers, yet to be named the National Dance Theatre Company,

⁷² On music and the cultural mandates of the African Personality, see Nate Plageman, “The African Personality Dances Highlife: Popular Music, Youth, and Cultural Modernization in Nkrumah’s Ghana, 1957-1965.”

in August 1962. Nettleford and Eddy Thomas produced a nation-wide tour called *Roots and Rhythms* in honor of the independence celebrations; the dance was Nettleford's sole contribution to the revue-style show, his first attempt at coming to terms with Jamaica's artistic and cultural debt to an African homeland. With costumes, music, ritual references, and call-and-response songs all sourced from recent trips to Ghana and Nigeria, the dance led audiences through a young couple's courtship and ceremonial steps to maturity to the pulsing beat of the NDTC drummers. *African Scenario* was danced barefoot with an "Africanist" vocabulary: the undulating torsos of the young bride and her handmaidens, the repeated movements in line formation, the high leaps and powerful flat-footed kicks of the warriors, the whirring and flying spirit possession of the witch doctor. While the dance would become a lasting cornerstone of the repertoire, when it debuted, some spectators were so shocked to see the company's "belly-rolling and back-to-Africa nonsense" that scandalized Kingston audience members stormed out of the theater during the performance.⁷³

At this moment when African heritage, and especially a notion of *blackness*, had yet to be fully integrated into Jamaica's racial and national cultural story, much of the critical reception and audiences' responses framed the *African Scenario* as an exotic fantasy-landscape of a distant, historical past. Letters between Karikari and Nettleford reveal that she sent him images from her fieldwork on notes, particularly Ga and Akan festivals and "puberty customs," around which he structured his composition.⁷⁴ In between scenes where the dancers moved to a sparse drum accompaniment, the NDTC's singers sang a mix of African-language music—from Yoruba religious songs and to Ghanaian highlife tunes—in a solemn choral style in-between each scene. However, Nettleford

⁷³ Sabine Sörgel, *Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica* (transcript Verlag, 2007) 104. See also Rex M. Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Cultural Definition and Artistic Discovery: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, 1962-1983* (New York: Grove Press, 1985).

⁷⁴ "Beryle Karikari to Rex Nettleford," August 10, 1962, NDTC Archive.

maintained that though he set his scenario in pre-colonial Africa, his movement language was much more contemporary and close to home. He had decided to tell a story about Africa with the dances of Jonkonnu celebrations in the West Indies, Pocomania revivalist meetings, and Kumina rituals of the southeastern province of St. Thomas, modern dance from the United States, as well as West African concert dance influences that he had witnessed on a recent trip to Ghana and Nigeria. Nettleford insisted, “there is no pretense in reproducing Africa in the literal sense.”⁷⁵ Liminality, ambiguity, and sometimes pure whimsy were more useful strategies for dancing Jamaican creole mixtures and origins buried in the ruins of slavery. *African Scenario* did not seek to be authentically African as much as diasporic, revealing Jamaican blackness and dreams of an African homeland as a labor of creativity, presenting a choreography that, in the words of Jasmine Johnson, could be “understood as ‘black’ not so much in the parts that make its sum, but in the impossibility of finding its bottom.”⁷⁶

Still, one search for an origin source leads to the Obadzeng group’s *Legend in an African Forest*, which was staged in June 1962 and production when Nettleford was in Ghana assisting the group’s rehearsals. It is impossible to know how much Karikari’s approach to staging and choreographing female dancers influenced Nettleford, and Nettleford all but erased Karikari from future descriptions of his fieldwork in Ghana. However, I borrow Priya Srinivasan’s methodology of privileging corporeal presence and the visual archive when imagining the unacknowledged role of women dancers in modern dance history to credit KariKari with being a creative force behind the queer diaspora aesthetic and somatic connections that *African Scenerio*’s choreography testifies

⁷⁵ Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica*, 137

⁷⁶ Jasmine Elizabeth Johnson, “Queens’ Diaspora,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 9, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 44–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528631.2015.1059582>.

to.⁷⁷ Much like *African Scenario*, the rather convoluted plot of this *Legend in an African Forest* is mostly a showcase for “folk” movement, and also involves two young people falling in love, the battle between two warring tribes, and the invocation of black magic. The staged promotional images that Karikari sent to Nettleford in June 1962 give us one window into how he might have been inspired by the expanded movement vocabulary of her women dancers. In *African Scenario*’s gorgeous courtship scene, during which his young couple falls in love, perhaps more than any of Nettleford’s early works, reflects courtship as play and parity (and features a lead female role that does not link femininity to Europeaness) which may have been inspired by Karikari’s work. In this duet, the female Initiate and her Fiancé circle around each other, crossing and switching sides, but keeping each other at arms-length. They mirror each other exactly. They jump-kick with flexed feet, tense and stretch, wind-mill their arms and stomp into the ground. The dance settles even as the drums intensify, and they walk slowly around each other. They lift their arms, bending forearms in front of their chests, and just their elbows come to touch, keeping the distance while they continue to swing their hips and look intensely into each other’s eyes. It is a gesture that is both protective and connective, a coming together that, unlike *Two Drums*, does not require surrender on either side. It is a vision of smaddification that holds possibilities for black becoming that are, at least for moment, not confined by patriarchal limitations.

⁷⁷ Priya Srinivasan, “The Bodies Beneath the Smoke or What’s Behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Dance History,” *Discourses in Dance* 4, no. 1 (2007): 7–48.



Figure 16: Promotional photo for Legend of an African Forest (1962) Image courtesy of NDTA Archive.

This striking, expansive, and grounded movement, and the centrality of women characters as metaphors for nation-state formation, is mirrored in images and descriptions of *Legend in an African Forest*. The particular ways that Karikari mixed global black influences (modern, Akan, Ga, Hollywood) in theatrical, arresting gestural collages harken not only to the movement language that we see in an *African Scenario*, but also in *Two Drums for Babylon*. One photo shows a woman (likely Mary Ankrah, *The Forest Ballet's* star) surrounded by male warriors in a scene where a witch doctor spins her into a rageful trance, her back arched, her body tilting forward and up to launch an attack. In another image, a woman squats in front of three costumed men. Her arms form an L-shape pointing upward and extending out from her shoulder, her muscles are strung taut with energy. These snapshots of Karikari's performances lead me to speculate that more than just supplying Nettleford with anthropological scenarios on which to base his narrative

of puberty rites—a metaphor for Jamaica's coming-of-age as a black nation—Karikari also inspired choreography and performance scenarios for how Nettleford would stage black freedom for decades to come.

In exchange, Karikari's dancers borrowed Nettleford's training exercises that he demonstrated in his modern dance to create a piece called *Artistry in Black and White* for their 1962 season titled *Ballets of Ghana*. Staged in black leotards and tights that Nettleford brought to Ghana at Karikari's request, the dance consisted mainly of modern Afro-Caribbean dance floor combinations, likely similar to those that the NDTC used during their practice warm-up.⁷⁸ The program notes advertised the dance's origin as "a demonstration in dance of the exercises set down for the troupe by Mr. Rex Nettleford of the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, to condition their bodies to dance."⁷⁹ Born, raised, and trained in England, Karikari did not need Nettleford to introduce her or her dancers to modern dance or Western-style staging. Her work, as she described in her program notes, consisted of "indigenous steps held together by the technique of modern ballet."⁸⁰ However, by representing the only "purely" modern work with no explicitly local themes in their repertoire as part a process to condition their bodies to dance diaspora connection, rather than a colonial past or US-influence, Obadzeng's Group might have artfully side-stepped government-aligned critics who could have challenged their fidelity to state policy. Nettleford and Karikari's conscious mix of dance styles and highly produced scenarios also muddied the divides between what we often see as the dance language that signifies free expression, interiority, and individuality (qualities that American and European modern dancers

⁷⁸ The Obadzeng Troupe, "Programme: Ballets of Ghana" (Dance Performance, June 28, 1962).

⁷⁹ "Berylle Kari Kari to Rex Nettleford," August 10, 1962, NDTC Archive.

⁸⁰ The Obadzeng Troupe, "Flyer: Ballets of Ghana, An Evening of Creative Dances by Berylle Kari Kari," (Dance Performance, June 28, 1962).

claimed sole proprietorship over) and “folkloric” art produced in the context of state censorship and patronage in the Global South. Even working within these constraints, artists found freedom within the expanse of Pan-Africanism and global blackness for experimentation and fantasy.

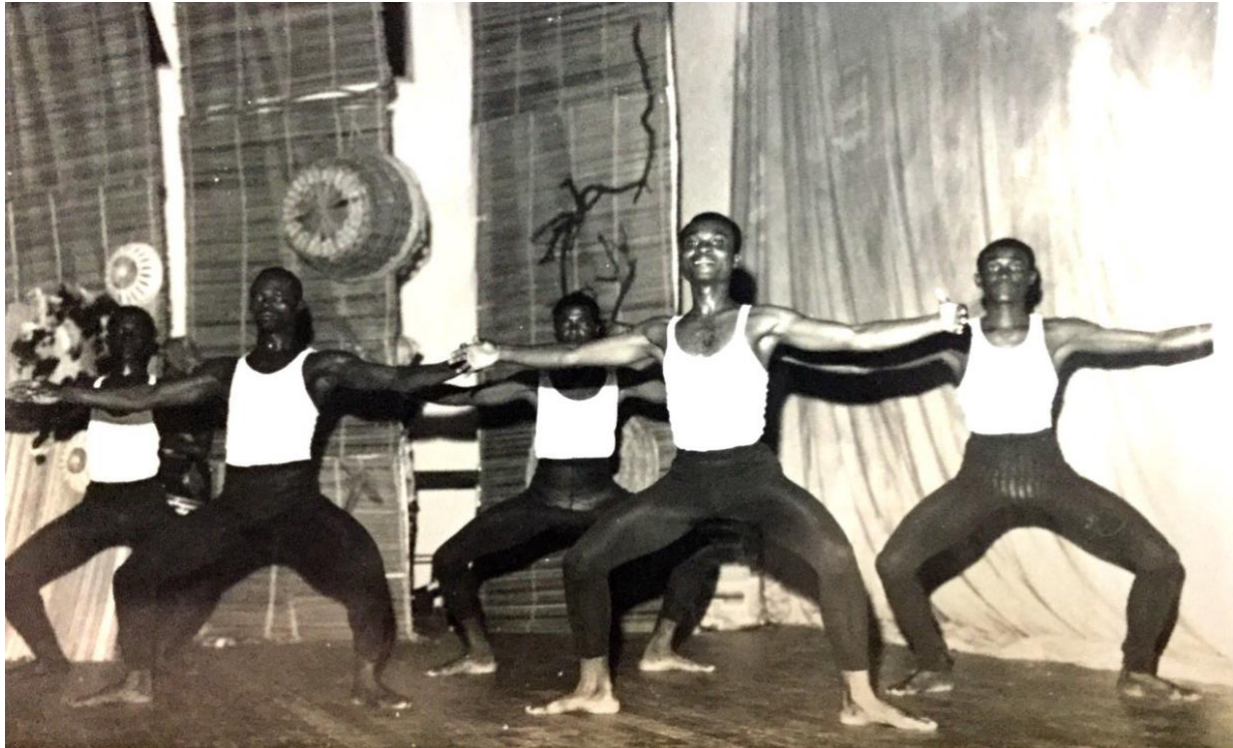


Figure 17: Obadzeng Group, promotional photograph (likely Artistry in Black). (1962). Image courtesy of NDTA Archive.

Rather than lamenting the Caribbean’s vexing contradictions, Nettleford’s travels and experiences in staging “African Scenarios” led him closer to embracing a bricolage nationalism or “failed modernity” as central to the West Indian experience. This creole orientation allowed him to negotiate and celebrate with such oppositional orientations as brown creole nationalism’s cultural project and Rastafari’s Pan-Africanism, drawing inspiration in both religious movements from how everyday Jamaican’s adapted Afro-diasporic region’s claims to black authenticity as a tool of demanding recognition and power from the decolonizing government. He saw these same negotiations with the idea of the “African Personality,” as well as African modern dancers and audiences’ astute and critical responses, in his travels through Ghana. After his second trip to

Africa he seemed to sense, as Stuart Hall remarked, that post-coloniality was not a destination that nations arrived at the moment of independence, but a long, tortuous process through which the colonial and post-colonial “constantly displaced one another, repeated themselves but always with difference, simultaneously resonated off, jarred against, mirrored and disrupted each other.”⁸¹ Rather than reaching the promised homeland and finding himself on stable ground, the Africa that Nettleford and the Rastafari met was also in motion and in flux. Though jolted off balance at first, Nettleford eventually remembered a Caribbean way to move with the flow.

A King Must Die

Nettleford’s last African Ballet of the 1960s, *A King Must Die*, is an Afro-pessimistic tragedy: cool, jazzy, and powerfully dark. It premiered in Kingston during the NDTC’s 1968 season, and its Oedipus Rex references drew the comparison to Martha Graham’s treatments of Greek tragedies. While a Dance Magazine critic who saw the company perform at Brooklyn Academy of Music attributed the work’s style to the heavy influence of American Graham and wondered if the group had adequate technical training to claim the movements, NDTC publications (in a typical NDTC commitment emphasizing a Caribbean-centered orientation) maintain that the true source work’s grounded, core-centered movements were Haiti dance religions, as those taught by Lavinia William at UCWI Summer Schools.⁸²

Scored to African American jazz drummer Art Blakey’s *The African Beat* suite, the narrative of *A King Must Die* follows an autocratic Queen Mother of a matriarchal society (Yvonne La Costa in the original production)—a sexual, fertile figure whose solos emphasize

⁸¹ Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life Between Two Islands*, ed. Bill Schwarz (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2017),13

⁸² Dennis Scott quoted in *Dance Jamaica*,114.

splayed legs and wide, birthing squats—who grooms her son/consort to be the leader of a young polity at the brink of revolution. The new king, danced by Nettleford, dons the symbols of European imperial power, a cape, and a top hat, and is briefly able to employ the former revolutionaries, dressed in straw hats and sunglasses of the secret police, as violent agents of his totalitarian state.⁸³ However, his ambitions, fueled by the queen mother, override his judgment. He challenges a new revolutionary leader, causing the rebel's followers to lead an angry mob against him. Nettleford dies in a tense, climactic solo, as he rolls and convulses on his back, straining against his chest out, and using his legs as locomotion to slide and spin across the floor as he balances on his hip and shoulder blades. After he finally curls into a fetal position in defeat, another man breaks from the mob to steal his throne, and the cycle begins again.

Nettleford and poet, playwright, founding NDTC member Dennis Scott evoked Franz Fanon's functionalist, psychoanalytical description of the purpose of dance for tribal communities, as a volcanic eruption of repressed violence and sexual rage: "Symbolic killings, fanatic rites, imaginary murders—all must be brought out."⁸⁴ Dance formed both protection from these urges and a warning about the instability of personalist power. The symbolic killing that *A King Must Die* performed hoped to banish the feminized, subservient colonial past to make room for stable, rational democracy. Created in the wake of the 1966 coup that doused Nkrumah's increasingly restrictive regime, and failure of Nigeria's multi-ethnic harmony as it descended into the Biafran war, *A King Must Die* is foremost a ritual death for an idealized African past and utopic African

⁸³ Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica*, 112. While Nettleford only explicated the Jamaican and West African resonances of *A King Must Die*, the costuming (particularly the headgear) may have also held a reference to François "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his paramilitary force, the Tonton Macotte. See Paul Christopher Johnson, "Secretism and the Apotheosis of Duvalier."

⁸⁴ Dennis Scott quoted in *Dance Jamaica*, 114.

modernity's promise to provide a roadmap for Caribbean freedom. In *Dance Jamaica*, Nettleford explained that beneath the work's mishmash of high-stylized black aesthetics, there lies an "unsentimental statement of the penalties and ironies of Third World leadership" and "the warning . . . for those among us who aspire to power."⁸⁵ It reveals the conflicting ways in which racist discourses of primitive "tribalism" and autocracy—as well as idealistic Afro-modernity—equally informed how Jamaicans saw both Africa and the possibilities of black politics in the Caribbean.

Even as he was critical of a model of Jamaican nationalism that used Africa as its foundation or foil, Nettleford maintained that the commonwealth connections, political lessons, and diasporic intimacies Africa provided were still useful for thinking about Caribbean modernity. While Jamaica watched as the promise of black democracy throughout Africa seemed to falter in the 1960s, plagued by both internal conflicts and neo-colonial interventions, some cited both Jamaica's continued British cultural allegiance and exceptional multi-racial harmony as a safeguard against tyranny. Nettleford, aware of the secretive workings of the JLP and PNP's cults of political power, warned his listeners on Radio Jamaica that the real test of the nation's lasting peace would come when Manley and Bustamante "had to hand over the keys of heaven to their successors."⁸⁶ Jamaica's formal democracy had always revolved around these two cults of personality, and their intermediaries' informal material and symbolic concessions to their constituent's interests, like the Rastafari and Pocomania communities in West Kingston. The dance prophetically previewed the partisan political violence and CIA destabilization that would plague the island in the 1970s.

Nettleford's pragmatic black nationalism—a faith in diasporic black and Jamaican folk cultural expression grounded in his own peasant roots—was structured by allegiance to British

⁸⁵ Rex Nettleford, "New Analysis," Transcript (Kingston: RJR, May 15, 1964), Box 10, Folder 28, NLJ, The Rex Nettleford Collection.

⁸⁶ Rex Nettleford, "News Analysis," (RJR, June 1, 1966).

notions of "good governance" and a Liberal faith in the states' ability to be an agent of social change. It foreclosed him from fully aligning with the Rastafari's radical rejection of the state and the capitalist system, even as he lauded their masculinist critiques of creole nationalism's spiritual and material inadequacies. Through their involvement with nationalist institution-building, and by using their commitments and credentials from formal academic and cultural institutions established under colonial PNP period to gain patronage among white and creole elites, Nettleford and Thomas found themselves in a unique position to translate policy into practice and also begin to insert their voices into politicians' agendas. Using their bodies to articulate the complexity of dissonance and harmony amongst emerging black identifications, they created projections of how African Diaspora religions could survive and infiltrate the new regime, just as they had infiltrated the previously brown/white, and more entrenched middle-class world of dance. Personal encounters, one-on-one intimacies, queer discomfort, collective reasonings and imaginings of black futures all mattered, shaping the local media landscape and policy. However, visibility and an increased network of connections for these two black queer men also came at a price.

Another possible reading of *A King Must Die* is that it was a meditation on Nettleford's, or "King Nettleford" as his opposition sarcastically crowned him, own symbolic death threats. In August 1968, Nettleford wrote to Thomas to defend himself from claims that he was seeking political power, by rejecting any desire to expand his leadership: "They will expect from you as a leader, complete dedication, concern for them as human beings and they will even threaten to consume you (this is what "The King Must Die" is partly about)."⁸⁷ As Nettleford's racial ideologies and vision for the company cemented, he faced both internal pushback from his NDTC collaborators and outside critique from colleagues at the University of the West Indies. A new

⁸⁷ Rex Nettleford, "Rex Nettleford to Eddie Thomas," August 27, 1968, NDTC Archive.

generation of NDTC dancers began to challenge Nettleford's singular, materialist, and peasant-based idea of Caribbean identity. Academics who returned from the United States and Great Britain to the University of the West Indies in the mid-1960s, bringing with them a black racial politics born of out West Indian and African American civil rights coalitions, had a vision of Jamaican identity that soundly rejected creole nationalism in favor of Black Power. As the NDTC moved away from the Federal and Commonwealth models of black cultural exchange it charted in nascent stages, and United States influence became even more entrenched in every part of Jamaican life, Nettleford faced his most significant threat to his vision of creolization.

CHAPTER 4

Jonkonnu

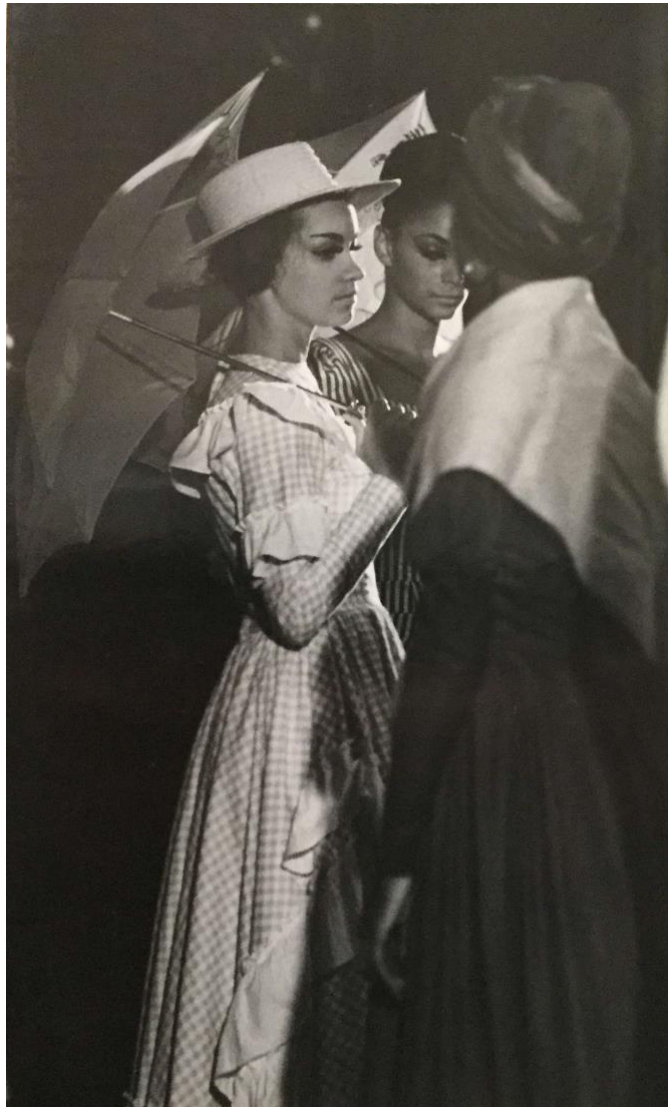
At the end of *Plantation Revelry* (1963), the NDTC's folk ballet about the role of the plantation in shaping Jamaican culture, the entire large ensemble cast gathers on stage for a Jonkonnu masquerade celebration. The costumes are monumental, excessive, like the infamous decadence of the plantocracy: full skirts, ruffles and bright colors, unwieldy headdresses. The traditional Jonkonnu stock personas of Horse Boy (in an oversized, horsehead mask) and Houseboat (wearing a Great House replica as a headdress) are towering presences. The dance is high energy, a romp, as the company reels and whirls up and down the stage. It is exhausting and exhilarating to watch and execute. Yvonne deCosta, the NDTC's ballet mistress for much of the 1960s and a principal dancer, described the sights and sounds from the wings in a series of disjointed exclamations: "Lights, curtain, applause, curtain calls, and panting! 'The oxygen mask! I can't breathe!'"¹ The vitality in the dance evokes a (overwrought and jocular) feigning of a brush with death.² Barbara Requa, another NDTC founding member, recounted to me similar memories of fatigue, and of bounding across the stage only to run back into the wings and line up for the next go-round:

¹ Yvonne daCosta, "A View from the Wings," *NDTC Newsletter*, 1969, 20-21.

² On qualities of breathe and queer black performance see Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham Univ Press, 2016).

"It just went on and on and on and on.... The energy that we had to use to get through that dance A lot of Rex's dances were like that, you really got breathless you know? Catching your breath, because his dances were so vital."³

Requa reminds us that the embodied experience of dancing this “total theatre” aesthetic of pantomime, song, dance, and remembrance was often hot, hard, and heavy work.



*Figure 18: Plantation Revelry, a view from the wings with Bridge Casserly (wearing a hat)
Undated. Image Courtesy of NDTC Archives.*

³ Barbara Requa, Interview with Author, Kingston, August 2, 2018.

I begin with these experiential memories to evoke, once again, Joseph Roach's argument that effort and sweat are foundational Caribbean performance aesthetics. *Plantation Revelry* pays tribute to Jonkonnu festival culture's employment of high energy performance as hyper-visible "non-work" to resist the plantation's control of time and labor. The NDTC promoted a tradition of maximalist expressive culture, which can be traced back to the queer aesthetics of Garveyism's embrace of the "spectacular" and Ivy Baxter's expressive didactic storytelling that glorified everyday manual laborers. The gleam on dancer's foreheads, the spectacular and unwieldy production of restaging the plantation, the seesawing effort to literally balance the weight of the Great House on their backs as they dance enacts the struggle to hold both celebration and weariness in black performance. They materialize what Saidiya Hartman calls "ambivalence of pleasure and its complicity with dominative strategies of subjection" in the coercive context of slavery and under white surveillance.⁴ The NDTC argued that by embodying the strain and subversion of Jonkonnu, a pan-West Indian carnival tradition to mark the end of the backbreaking sugarcane harvest, they were celebrating the underground strategies still needed for black folks to act out against the values of the plantation, as in Jamaica's uncertain postcolonial present. However, in the economic crisis of the late 1960s, many Jamaicans met the NDTC's performances of subtle redress with frustrated cries for unambiguous visions of revolution.

This chapter analyses performances and debates surrounding *Plantation Revelry* between 1968 and 1971. I use the dance to question a narrative of the late 1960s that naturalized Black Power as a straightforward path to liberation and pitted it in opposition to commercial or state-approved performances of folk blackness. While the early 1960s popularized diverse, though often flattened ideas of African heritage as part of Jamaica's multi-racial story, the "roots culture" of the

⁴ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 50.

late-1960s sought a more hegemonic notion of mainstream black nationalism based on desires for Africanist purity. At this moment when global Black Power aesthetics merged with Jamaican popular culture, the NDTC's subtle critiques of color/class hierarchy were no longer broadly legible as "authentic" black protest to a multi-class audience. *Plantation Revelry* provides an entryway into the NDTC's fraught experiments in staging Jonkonnu, which held a privileged space in the West Indian imaginary as a tradition that transformed and at times satirically reversed the social roles of the plantation. Efforts by black nationalist artists to portray black plantation dances as Africanist "resistance" to creole contamination gives insight into the political concessions, exclusions, boundaries, and discursive manipulations that constituted these shifting ideas of race and nation.

When the NDTC revived *Plantation Revelry* in 1968, questions about how to tell stories about black resistance on the plantation were not only intellectual exercises to reconcile competing remembrances of the past, but pressingly urgent debates about the future of Jamaica's economy and social life. The nation was experiencing the collapse of the sugar industry after decades of steady expansion and the growth of new foreign-owned industries that did little to address rising unemployment rates. Local and diaspora West Indian artist movements mapped out the political stakes about the scale and production of dance theatre's representation of slavery onto debates about local control over scale and production in the Jamaican economy. Within these debates, the plantation served both as a unifying metaphor for the continuities of colonial systems of corruption and control into the present day, and its continuing violence on the land, bodies, and minds of Jamaicans. Katherine McKittrick argues that the idea of the plantation serves as a "migratory" signifier for power across the black Caribbean diaspora, transplanted through "agriculture, banking, and mining, and across other colonial and post-colonial spaces—in trade and tourism the prison, the city, and resort" or any space wherein "black subjugation and land exploitation go hand in hand

and shepherd in certain (present) death.”⁵ Plantation metaphors in Jamaica are and were bolstered by the daily experience of plantation geographies, as workers joined strikes and migrated to urban centers to escape the seasonal precarity of sugar work. Police brutality and the state’s neglect of rising numbers of unemployed urban poor sparked protest against the continued violence and devaluation of black life. As the common experience ties the Caribbean together, working through and overcoming the legacy of the plantation became the basis for a vision of freedom after independence. However, as a social and economic system fueled by racism, colorism, violence, and extreme labor inequality, the plantation proved to be treacherous grounds on which to build a sense of national belonging.

Leftist artists and intellectuals in Jamaica and its diaspora engaged in a project to “re-vindicate”—in the words of Sylvia Wynter—black culture by tapping into ideas of black value and humanity that ran oppositional to the market system. While it was the NDTTC’s goal to create nationalist spectacles to direct and support the state’s gradual acceptance of blackness into its official story, these Caribbean Black Power theatre artists rejected any performance of blackness that could be easily appropriated by the state. Inspired by the United States Black Arts movement (particularly Amiri’s Baraka’s vision of revolutionary theatre), Rastafari, and the literary criticism of figures like Sylvia Wynter, Barry Reckord, Edward Kamau Braithwaite, and others, Caribbean Black Power favored smaller scale, ritual, participatory, and post-modern forms of theatrical engagement as more egalitarian avenues for performing what they regarded as authentic blackness. They rejected the spectacular, space-claiming labors of making black bodies shine through smaddification as a misguided cooptation of the master’s tools. They spoke out against plantation nostalgia and touristic tropes of black culture for perpetuating lazy and uncritical stereotypes. As

⁵ Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures,” *Small Axe* 17, no. 3 (2013): 3.

Black Power became mainstream, it shifted and solidified what kinds of art were recognized as productive “wake work”—what Christina Sharpe names the multi-registers in which black people craft language, image, and praxis to “live in the wake of slavery, in slavery’s afterlives, the afterlife of property, how, in short, to inhabit and rupture this episteme with their, with our, knowable lives.”⁶ The legibility of Jamaican artists’ “wake work”, the “correct” ways to catalog and narrativize embodied memory of racialized experience, its ability to be taken up and recognized by the public and institutions of power, was subject to the desires and visions of freedom of these radical social movements of the late-1960s.

This moment of tension pushed the NDTC to consider their ambivalent relationship to the state in a moment of cultural revolution, and their moral obligations to the increasingly opposing interests of state and nation. How should a “national” company like theirs enact Jamaica’s history to stage blueprints for liberation in the age of Caribbean Black Power? What affects, movements, themes, sets, or energetic qualities could break from colonial patterns and produce the kinds of citizens who could claim revolutionary history as their own? Could spectacular concert dance ever adhere to these changing standards of black authenticity when it was marked as queer, excessive, middle-class, and thus “anti-black”? Particularly present in this narrative about the NDTC’s transition from the racial politics of the 1960s to the 1970s is philosopher and dancer Sylvia Wynter. Wynter’s work on plantation economics and theatre aesthetics shaped Jamaican debates about the limits and possibilities of expressive culture as a means of liberation. Wynter’s thoughtful and often cutting critiques of her UWI colleague, artistic collaborator, and sometimes adversary, Rex Nettleford, gives further insight into how their queer subjectivities negotiated belonging in new global black popular culture. Using these Caribbean writers’ biographies and rivalries, I tease out

⁶ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016.).

sexual politics, colorism, and hierarchies of migratory experience that undergirded how Wynter and Nettleford positioned themselves and the NDTC as inheritors of plantation legacies of resistance or accommodation.

Black Power in the Caribbean

Blackness's transformation from underground resistance against brown creole nationalism to the cornerstone of Jamaica's racial story grew in conversation with global New Left and anti-racist movements, and in response to local dissatisfaction with the JLP's autocratic politics and discourses of multi-racial harmony. The year 1968 holds a particular "symbolic density" for the international left. It marked a watershed moment for protests against the United States' invasion of Vietnam, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy, the continuing war for liberation in Angola, and workers/student protests that rocked France, Mexico City, and Sao Paulo.⁷ West Indian students and intellectuals took part in these global social movements on campuses in Canada and the United States. They also lectured, protested, and cultivated a sense of deterritorialized, anti-racist, third world solidarity in student movements across the West Indies. Closer to home, Joshua Jelly-Shapiro has argued, it is impossible to underestimate the profound and lasting impact that the 1959 Cuban Revolution had on the long Caribbean decolonization process. While US foreign policy in the West Indies was focused single-mindedly on preventing "another Cuba," the question of whether to follow in Cuba's revolutionary footsteps or opt for gradual democratic socialist change shaped the intellectual debates of a generation of Jamaican Marxists.

In addition to these internationalist anti-racist and Marxist movements, massive social changes fed the growth of radical counter-culture in Kingston, as the city expanded to hold new

⁷Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 2.

waves of rural migrants. In the post-war period wealthy and middle-class folks fled the crowded, crime-plagued city, and created new suburban neighborhoods out of former sugar estates, such as the "uptown" enclaves of Hope Gardens, Barbican, Beverly Hills, and Mona— the home of the University of the West Indies—to name but a few. Infrastructure development and educational opportunities centered around these elite neighborhoods while “downtown” tenements and informal settlements swelled with the under-employed and unemployed. The JLP called a state of emergency in response to gang and nativist anti-Asian violence that scapegoated Chinese Jamaicans in the summer of 1966. The government cracked down on “hooliganism” and pursued an aggressive policy of slum clearance to move residents into government housing projects, an effort to tighten the state’s control and surveillance over these communities. The “government yards” of Trenchtown and Tivoli Gardens, made world-famous as the birthplace of reggae, expanded in this period. Trenchtown was established as a PNP stronghold, while local gang leaders under hire by the JLP ruled Tivoli Gardens. Despite these modernizing efforts of the state to centralize control, West Kingston maintained a fairly autonomous culture of opposition to the official JLP party line of decorum, law, and order because of the extreme social distance between the rich and the poor.^s The counterculture that emerged out of West Kingston in the late 1960s birthed the international phenomena of “rudie” or “rude boy” style, Rastafari aesthetics, reggae music, dub records, and sound system culture. This language and expressive culture carried stories of the harsh realities of urban "sufferers" and their revolutionary longings.

As Kingston was expanding and incorporating former sugar estates due to post-war internal migration, the plantation continued to drive the Jamaican economy in more ways than one. In the 1930s, the sugar industry underwent radical reorganization, receiving a boost of foreign (and

^s Obika Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960-1972* (Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1991), 116-120.

particularly American and British) capital, technological modernization, and the growth of massive factory farms alongside the development of smaller-scale cane farming to meet the growing production demands. In the period between the early 1940s and early 1960s, cane production and exports rose at an average rate of about 10% annually. At the same time, cane-workers and their families packed into tenements around mass agriculture plantation centers. The population growth rate of significant sugar-producing areas, such as the Vere area of the parish of Clarendon, was higher than that of Kingston. These tenement communities on the outskirts of cane fields often lacked even basic infrastructure and replicated the conditions of Kingston's informal settlements and government yards. However, the sugar industry went into a sharp decline in 1965. High productivity due to exploitative labor practices had masked rising production costs and the industry's failure to modernize mechanization in the 1950 and 1960s. The mid-20th century plantation once again became the locus of black rebellions and class struggles as workers protested stagnated wages, punitive layoffs due to strikes, and poor working conditions.⁹ The anger of the agricultural proletariat – and particularly unionized cane workers – against the government's continued support of foreign “absentee” landowners shook the JLP's traditional working-class/agrarian labor base.

Spatial inequality in Kingston, mid-20th-century cane-growing settlements, and the growth of a mass tourism brand built around plantation nostalgia all marked sites where King Sugar persisted as a structuring force undergirding racist regimes and black dehumanization. These economic plantation continuities were countered by cane cutter's protests, in the anti-establishment protest of reggae and rude boy, Marxist groups at UWI, and within the workers' movement. Perhaps the most influential branch of anti-establishment intellectuals was the New World Group, an

⁹ Carl Henry Fe, “Better Must Come: Sugar and Jamaica in the 20th Century,” *Social and Economic Studies* 33, no. 4 (1984): 1-49.

economics journal and “study group” led by Trinidadian Jim Best and Jamaican George Beckford. Formed in 1962 out of Georgetown, Guyana, the loosely associated scholarly collective spread to outposts throughout the West Indies, the USA, and Canada, and published both a quarterly magazine (University of Guyana) and a research journal (UWI Mona). The group’s Marxist critiques of inequality had a tremendous effect on the university and the “educated stratum” of West Indian society.¹⁰ Beckford and others formed what became known as the “Plantation School” of West Indian development economics. The Group advocated cooperative agriculture and homegrown interpretations of socialist politics on a local level as alternatives to monocrop mass agriculture and a parasitic world system that condemned the Caribbean to “persistent poverty.”¹¹

Grassroots Caribbean Black Power and revolutionary fervor in Jamaica reached its apex in 1968, with the arrival of Walter Rodney, a Guyanese intellectual and historian who joined the faculty of UWI Mona, and whose influence cut across social divides. A revered figure for a new generation of Caribbean intellectuals, Rodney confronted the academic establishment's (a social category centered around UWI's cultural sphere that extended to the NDTC) accommodationist resignation with the JLP's cultural and economic projects, declaring that "the Black educated man is as much a part of the system of oppression as the bank managers and the plantation overseers."¹² His seminal 1969 text, *The Groundings with My Brothers*, remains perhaps the ultimate synthesis of black power, black Marxism, and the Rastafari epistemologies. In Rodney, West Indians found a vision of Marxism that felt locally referencing and reverent of the importance of spirituality and

¹⁰ Obika Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 129-135*

¹¹ See George L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972). Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures,” *Small Axe* 17, no. 3 (2013): 1-15.

¹² Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1969), 62.

popular culture in political life. Throughout his tenure at UWI Mona, the government ordered the Special Branch of the police to place Rodney under surveillance in cooperation with the United States' government's attempts to suppress Black Power and communism globally.¹³ When Rodney left the country in October 1968 to attend the Congress of Black Writers in Canada, the Jamaican government banned him from re-entry, setting off a series of protests and government backlash across the Caribbean.

The response to Rodney's exile was not a reaction to a single act of injustice, but based on a Black Power critique of the persistent irony that the state, to borrow from Nettleford's contemporary summary of public reaction to the events, "prefers to ban Black West Indians and yet welcome with open arms the capitalists of Europe and America who exploit Jamaica's natural resources - the plantation owners who dominate the countryside and the hotel owners who convert their beaches and other recreational facilities into playgrounds for the idle rich."¹⁴ Thousands of university students, leftists, and poor or unemployed people banded together to protest the government's decision. They organized a peaceful march that mounted in energy and erupted into acts of vandalism and violent confrontations with the police. Responses to the "Rodney Affair"—both his exile and the state violence that met the student protest—reverberated across the West Indies and its diasporas in Canada, England, and the USA. Rupert Lewis marked the aftermath of Rodney Riots as a "regional awakening" that inspired a renaissance of the circum-Caribbean Black Nationalist literary culture. Periodicals/collectives such as *Bongo-man* (1968-1972), *Abeng* (1969) and others across the West Indies collected labor perspectives from academics, Garveyists,

¹³ Ibid., 94-95.

¹⁴ Nettleford, *Identity, Race, and Protest in Jamaica*, 129.

activists, and Rastafari artists, forming a political coalition of uptown progressive intellectuals and downtown organizers for the first time since the labor riots of 1938.

For everyday people not directly involved in the radical left, the Black Power moment gave birth to a commonsense belief that Jamaica was a black (rather than Creole and mixed-race) nation and forged a stronger connection between blackness and pride in an African heritage in public discourse. Even more so than the push to integrate folk culture into national festivals and cultivate diplomatic relationships with African British Commonwealth member nations in the first five years following independence, this black identification became part of an everyday performance of identity for Jamaicans across class, geography, and even color. Rodney joined US-based and Latin American revolutionaries such as Grenadian-American Malcolm X, Trinidadian-American Stokely Carmichael, the Argentine Che Guevara, as the hyper-masculinist ideal and objects of desire for young leftists. “Rudie” youth culture inspired by spaghetti western and Blaxploitation aesthetics was encapsulated in hit movies like *The Harder They Come* (1972) and formed a parallel thread of a less self-consciously leftist vision of popular blackness. Black Power appealed not only to working-class and disenfranchised Jamaicans who had formally been excluded from visions of nationhood, but also to black middle-class Jamaicans who had acquired some political power and social mobility during the Federation period but felt frustrated that land and capital remained in foreign and “Jamaica-white” (light-skinned or white-presenting creole elites) hands. Claims to African descent, not just creolized cultural Africanness, and the application of plantation power dynamics to everyday life, became unifying racialized orientations within the island’s cultural landscape. ¹⁵

¹⁵ The 1970 census produced the widely quoted statistic that 90% of Jamaicans identified as Black, doing away with the wide range of mixed race creole categories 1960s and colonial period, categories that accounted mixed-race South Indian and East Asian identities. "Statistical Yearbook of Jamaica," ed. Statistical Institute of Jamaica ([Kingston]: The Statistical Institute of Jamaica Printing Unit, 1990).

In public memory and Caribbean historiography, these images of Black Power and spectacles of protest constituted a second independence movement that formed the groundwork for a lasting vision of West Indian nationalist culture and pride. The invocation of the plantation in Black Power discourse was not simply a metaphor for the connected but still distinct economic conditions of Dependent Capitalism in the 1960s. Representations of histories of slavery felt pressing and urgent because the plantation system had never truly gone away. This desire for black fraternity and community as a means of redress shifted how bodies could perform liberation and national pride in concert dance and the everyday.

Plantation Revelry



Figure 19: Plantation Revelry (1963). Dances from old Jamaica in front of the Great House. Photograph by Maria LaYacana. Image Courtesy of NDTC Archive.

In many ways, *Plantation Revelry* is the Great House at its most fantastic and utopian. There are no white folks on the NDTC's plantation (or at least, no white characters), and no sugar cane, just dancing black workers and genteel creole young ladies. However, it remains perhaps the most controversial and perplexing NDTC dance to date, contesting (at least on the surface) Nettleford's commitment to creating liberatory black art and most certainly the emergent aesthetics of Black Power. For years before I found a film recording of *Plantation Revelry* I collected pictures, stories, and photographs about the dance that had all but disappeared from the company's repertoire after the early 1970s. I was fascinated with Nettleford's justifications of its troubling and bizarre storyline of two brown creole daughters of an estate owner returning from finishing school in England to attend Christmas celebrations, who are welcomed home by servants or slaves who dance for their delight and put on a masquerade ball as a welcome, inspired by Jonkonnu carnival traditions. When I first viewed the 1968 recording that I use in this performance analysis, the fast-moving, pantomime-heavy dance felt weighty with "black stereotypes" and forced celebration, so that it was hard to imagine what kind of liberatory impulse could have propelled the creation of such a work. *Revelry* is not only conceptually vexing, but a difficult and expensive work to produce, revive, and tour. The dance was long, high-energy, and required the dancers to show their mastery of a range of styles: ballroom quadrilles, grounded bruckins (a 19th century set dance), and the dynamic, journeying footwork of processional Jonkonnu. It was the only touring NDTC work in the mid-1960s that required multiple set backdrops and an extensive prop list.¹⁶ All of this effort, scale, and the evidence of labor intrigued me, compelling me to search for a deeper meaning within the performance.

¹⁶ "National Dance Theatre Company Technical Information: Commonwealth Arts Festival Tour" (NDTC, 1965), NDTC Archive.

I found my way into understanding *Plantation Revelry* when I read Nettleford's reaction to another West Indian dancer's production. Nettleford was a devoted fan of Trinidadian dancer, director, and designer Geoffrey Holder whose Carnavalesque Broadway shows of the 1970s – like *The Wiz* and *Timbuktu* – he admired as the pinnacle of this musical style of Caribbean performance. In a congratulatory note that he wrote to Holder after seeing *Timbuktu* in 1978 on a trip to New York, Nettleford marveled at "the prideful insolence of that visual candor which you gave us – from the riot of color... to the coral-shelled cod-pieces of the G-stringed gentlemen." These fanciful erotic performances and expressive delights, he argued, were the ultimate form of black rebellion against the constant presence of black death.¹⁷ This defiant decadence encapsulated the efforts of "a set of people whose ethnocide is certain unless it continues in the struggle by every means possible ... and again we are fooling the Great House by not being solemn about it but via mock-minstrelsy which the master is interpreting at surface-level."¹⁸ "Fooling the Great House" through mocking minstrel stereotypes, and turning racial scripts on their head is a tactic of smaddification that exploited critics' tendencies to surface-read black performance. Erica Moiah James describes the energetic and aesthetic qualities of this kind of spectacular masking as "expressive awesomeness."¹⁹ Exaggerated pantomime and glitz hide the heaviness of embodying histories of slavery and the complexity of the movements, which are delightfully and deceptively simple yet inaccessible to outsiders. Holder's protest was a transfiguration of the plantation's own

¹⁷ "Rex Nettleford to Geoffrey Holder," March 1978, NDTC Archive

¹⁸ "Rex Nettleford to Geoffrey Holder."

¹⁹ In her analysis of the lost film *Every Nigger is a Star* Eric Moiah Brown borrows US Black Arts collective AfriCOBRA's descriptive "*expressive awesome*" to identify black diasporic art, film, and performances that use amplify "'shine' and 'surface' not as the result of objectification/commodification but as a generative state of subjectivity and authorship." NDTC danced in this film. Erica Moiah James, "Every Nigger Is a Star" Reimagining Blackness from Post-Civil Rights American to the Postindependence Caribbean," *Black Camera* 8, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 55–83.

regulatory regime of spectacle—spectacles of black pain that turned black bodies into tortured objects—into a demonstration of black mastery. Like Nettleford read this practice of “fooling the Great House” onto Holder’s *Timbuktu!*, the NDTC’s sweet plantation protest lay in the revelers’ ability to slyly trick, and out dance, the powers that be by embodying and thus reclaiming Great House itself.²⁰ Built off of a JBC (Jamaica Broadcasting Company) broadcast of the dance, my analysis of the ways that the NDTC performed racial tropes is shaped by the filmmakers’ decisions to accentuate affect, facial expressions, and skin color in ways that might not be as legible to audiences during live performance.²¹

The dance drama opens with homecoming and a song. The majority of the cast assembles on stage for the first scene set on the urban docks of a Jamaican port city. The dancers are frozen in poses as if they had been stopped mid-conversation. A member of the NDTC Singers, dressed as a black Nanny, is the only performer fully animated as she sings a medley of old Jamaican folk songs in a high concert-style soprano, setting the scene as a nostalgic trip into the past. The cast is assembled to welcome the young creole misses Miss Amelia and Miss Joan—danced in the 1968 season by white American company member Beverly Kitson and principal dancer Patsy Ricketts (considered to be visibly “brown” in Jamaica)—back to their plantation home after attending school in England. As she sings, she awakens the supporting cast. Women dressed in the bright blues and reds of Jonkomu Set Girl costumes, dancers in bandana (or Madras) cloth associated with peasant and laboring women, and shirtless male workers all begin milling around the stage, pantomiming a

²⁰. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

²¹ The films in the NDTC archives lack metadata, but the NDTC’s newsletters show that the company embarked on a project to film as much of its repertoire as possible in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Based on production descriptions and the cast, I date this production to the NDTC’s December 1969 residency at Spelman College. Jamaican documentary filmmaker Phil Harvey of Harvey Films followed the NDTC on tour to film this footage. “Films and Filming,” NDTC Newsletter 10, January 1970, 20.

busy port scene.²² The first scene ends when the plantation mistresses arrive on shore, and the entire ensemble follows them home.

The Creole sisters are re-introduced to a different aspect of Jamaican life as they interact with various members of the plantation household and community – their doting black nanny, their loyal butler, and a series of Jonkonnu revelers who arrive to perform for them. Their story of return unfolds as a Jonkonnu play, with a series of comic narrative scenes danced in the mimetic style of American vaudeville that introduces the racial/social dynamics of the plantation home. The choice of Jonkonnu as the folk form to contain this plantation narrative is significant for several reasons, as both a symbol of black resistance and black/brown racial tensions in 19th century Jamaica. Jonkonnu was a form of mobile theatre that enslaved black Jamaicans and post-
emancipation enslaved plantation workers performed around Michaelmas, the period between the sugarcane growing and harvesting season. Jonkonnu players moved as a masked troupe between sugar estates or throughout towns, dancing to fifes and drums, singing satirical songs, and miming plays.²³ Though the revelers performed for the Great House, extracting a fee for their performances, Jonkonnu was a black creole artform specifically by and for black and enslaved populations.

²² Jamaican bandana—or madras cloth—is usually a red, black, and white tartan-inspired plaid. An imported Indian fabric used to clothe the enslaved, the plaid emerged as a part of Jamaica’s “national costume” in the 1950s, and is associated in popular culture with folklorist and comedian Louise Bennet (“Miss Lou”) who often wore a red plaid “quadrille dress” in her stage performances that referenced working-class women’s daily lives.

²³ Jonkonnu intersects with other forms of Caribbean carnival in its use of public space – or “the road” – as its processional performance grounds, and the use of stock characters such as main John Canoe leading man, Actor Boy, Houseboat Head, Horsehead, and Set Girls. However, like traditional European stage acting, there is a firm divide between the actors and spectators. Jonkonnu visibly references West African recreational festival dancing, Scottish dancing, Morris Dancing, and South Asian festivals such as Dewali. Karima Smith, *Re/telling History: Sistrern’s Ida Revolt inna Jonkonnu Style as Neo/Colonial Resistance*, *thirdspace* 7 no: 1, (summer 2007): 19. Sylvia Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Toward the Interpretation of Folk Dance as Cultural Process,” *Jamaica Journal* 4, no. 2 (1970).

During slavery and after slavery, free “brown” creole Jamaicans, represented by the creole sisters in the NDTC’s performance, disavowed Jonkonnu in order to mark their social distance from the Africanist “primitive” dancing.²⁴ After emancipation, the general distrust and resentment that marked both sides of the black/brown divide in Jamaica continued and arguably became even more strained, exacerbated by the belief that brown-skinned society was loyal to and inheritors of the plantation.²⁵ Resentment and critiques of “brown man rule”—or the political culture of the elite brown few—continued to be a central contention of black political discourse through the 20th century. After emancipation in 1838, Jonkonnu revels declined in popularity for many reasons, including the scarcity of material resources for the formerly enslaved, the growth of Protestant Christianity among black communities to serve as more “respectable” mutual and religious networks, and white planters’ punitive laws against black gatherings that they could no longer regulate.

Jonkonnu did not re-enter Kingston’s mainstages as a nation-wide symbol of “cultural heritage” until the post-independence annual Jamaica Festival, which was headed by NDTC principal Joyce Campbell. The founder of the Jamaican Cultural Development Commission, Campbell also was a driving force in integrating folk dance into high school dance curriculums in 1970 and helped to found the nation's first arts university alongside fellow NDTC members.²⁶ Thus, Jonkonnu, as a national and urban practice, signifies two moments of political change and

²⁴ See Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre*, 236.

²⁵ As Gad Hueman’s research into the status of the free brown population in the 19th century has shown, on the eve of emancipation the majority of the free brown population worked as small shopkeepers, porters, clerks, merchants, and servants, often doing much as the same work as black and brown slaves. Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1981).

²⁶ Sabine Sörgel, *Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2007), 81-86.

the persistence of "brown man rule" in the face of black people's hopes for liberation: emancipation and independence. The festivities in *Plantation Revelry* set decades after emancipation in the mid-19th century, purposely fail to acknowledge any real change or temporal break in the plantation system in the wake of slavery. The fundamental intervention of these revels, Nettleford argued, was that "in the final analysis the patterns of life in the Caribbean today directly descend from the slave period."²⁷ By casting light-skinned creole into the role of masters in this performance scenario, Nettleford draws attention to continuities in both who holds power, and who does the work of creating culture, in the plantation system.

As in *Two Drums for Babylon* and other NDTC compositions that highlight color and class difference, *Plantation Revelry* performs pluralism in Jamaican society through contrasting European or "Africanist" dance styles. Though they are native daughters, marked as "brown" or non-white by their character descriptions if not their casting, the celebratory dance that Joan and Amelia perform when they reach their home is an exaggerated performance of European classicism and white femininity. The cameras keep a tight frame on their upper torso to accentuate the placid smiles on their faces, their fluid *port de bras*, their parasols in one hand, and highly articulated wrist and hand gestures showcase their feminine grace. The cameras pan out as they twirl and *jeté* across the stage, jumping with one leg extended so that their all-white costumes, fitted with virginal lace and ruffles, stretch out to their fullest. Their skirts completely obscure their legs so that they seem to float while others walk, a stylistic choice that obstructs our vision from seeing any visibly "grounded" Africanist movement.

This distance between black Jamaican dance and white European dance is further played up in the "bruckins" section of the dance, the young ladies' first invitation to step into Afro-

²⁷ Rex M. Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Cultural Definition and Artistic Discovery: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, 1962-1983* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 110.

Caribbean movement. Bruckins Party is a celebratory form of dance and music that was initiated in 1834 to celebrate emancipation. Two rivaling sets of dancers imitated Queen Victoria's royal court. Bruckins dancers embody the figurehead that "set them free," and battle over who can perform the sovereign's power with more authority and flair. In *Revelry*, Bruckins Party is enacted as two servant girls enter the stage, giggling and teasing their mistresses by playfully imitating their Europeanized dance. They wiggle their hips back and forth suggestively and invite Miss Amelia and Miss Joan to dance but they decline with a pantomimed girlish giggle, unable or unwilling to mirror their servants' movements. The two maids begin to bruckins "dance battle," adopting a wide diagonal fighting stance. They roll their necks and ripple their backs forward like fighting cocks until they lean all the way in – an exaggeratedly confrontational enactment of bruckins' "thrust and recovery" sequence, in which rival dancers dip their waists and legs toward each other in playful oscillation between fight and flight.²⁸ Eventually, the women lock shoulders and begin a full-on brawl. Their brief altercation ends when their mistresses pull the two servants apart and reprimand them like naughty children.

If 19th-century Jamaican dance acts as the movement structure that helps the audience reimagine the mid-20th Jamaica social order, the dance play seems ambivalent about black and brown women's place in this community. As a ritual, Bruckins repurposes and reclaims the Queen's power to grant freedom, over and over, as many times as needed. Abolition is abstracted into a form of movement so confrontational and complex it is inaccessible to the brown creole female gendered bodies on the stage. Nettleford's choreography instrumentalizes the behavior of working-class women to establish distance between Amelia and Joan's "refined" mannerisms, creating an oppositional relationship between the brown women's restraint and black women's

²⁸ Cheryl Ryman, "The Jamaican Heritage in Dance," *Jamaica Journal* 44 (June 1980).

uncontained lashing out. The performance, transitioning from sexy, hip-centered play to raw aggression plays perfectly into more contemporary stereotypes of black women's bawdiness and belligerence, and at the same time renders Amelia and Joan mere spectators to the dance of emancipation. It serves as a marker for the distance the mistresses must traverse—kinetically and culturally—before truly returning home. That Amelia and Joan cannot “bruck” calls into question not only their belonging but the very terms of their ability to claim post-emancipation Jamaica.

Though unmoved by their maid's invitations join their dance, Amelia and Joan are slowly seduced into the carnival as more villagers arrive to perform for them. A band of townspeople executes a country quadrille set dance. The all-female band of dancers that make up the French Set girls (a 19th Jonkonnu innovation commonly attributed to the slaves of refugees of the Haitian Revolution) dance in neat lines and preen for the mistresses. Male village workers strut with canes in exaggerated imitations of European courtly carriage. While each dance is meant to spark memories of their Jamaican heritage, the mistresses mainly stay to the outskirts of the stage as spectators to the Jonkonnu. It is the black dandy played by Nettleford—bare-chested and fabulously outfitted in a cropped, silky vest with long tails, and matching striped bell-bottoms, and a top hat—that finally convinces the ladies to enter in the fray. He peacocks elegantly around after the women, who scurry away flirtishly. He offers them flowers and bows with a flourish in a way that seems to communicate his swagger rather than humility, and ultimately wins their favor. Slowly Nettleford leads them in a series of rhythmic shifts, moving into a high-energy jig, and a lindy-hop set (or shay-shay). Finally, the women's hips start to push out, and their shoulders pull back, their cores begin to sync with the drumbeat. Instead of pirouettes, their turns become more syncopated; they stand in place rotate to the left and the right, driven by an upward tick of their hips and one foot stamping down to the beat, a deconstruction of the smooth twirls of their opening duet. Nettleford is not only able to master the sister's European-style line dance, but to slowly transform

the shape of their movement. Unlike the housemaids, whose competition over who can dance for the master leads to anger and dissatisfaction, Nettleford's character seduces the women into dancing for his pleasure, as their movements shift to match the beat of his. Their dance is not a coupling as much as an imitation, following Nettleford's pied piper deeper and deeper into his theory of black Jamaican authenticity.

In the final scene of the dance, Miss Amelia and Miss Joan's transformation from emigrants to native daughters is completed with the entrance of a male assembly of dancers, dressed as masked Jonkonnu characters. They sanctify the space, preparing it for the masquerade to take over. These Jonkonnu actors in *Revelry's* closing scenes - which include a masked dancer holding a model Great House on his head, a Horsehead in a massive animal mask, and the John Canoe - are the only characters who don't seem to be hamming physical comedy for the audience or miming emotions for the white mistresses entertainment. Instead, their bodies are oriented towards centerstage or the wings and their gaze is focused down on their own rapid footwork. Their movements become more frantic, the drums intensify, and the camera cuts to a series of quick close up shots, reinforcing a feeling of being lost in the revels. The entire cast joins in and turns to face the audience for the rousing closing number Barbara Requa remembered in our interview. It is a vigorous country jig, the most intricate choreography of the dance drama.

With Miss Joan and Miss Amelia swept up into the revels alongside their household, their creole re-integration is finished, but not complete. While they dance beautifully, the women never entirely lose the stiffness in their carriage, the graceful alignment in their arms and hands, or the straight-backed comportment that sets them apart from the other dancers. No amount of labor, memory, or carnival abandonment allows them to become fully enmeshed into the collective. Constructions of race—and specifically the hierarchies of authenticity within blackness and brownness—materially manifests itself, thickens, and congeals through space-making and embodied

practices rooted in this plantation legacy.²⁹ The sisters' dainty steps, obscured legs, and heavy dresses are markers of their privilege that hinder our ability to see their dancing. Virtuosity here, to borrow from madison moore, is cataloged as "werk," or smaddification as fabulously visible effort. In this an analytic fabulousness and showmanship spectacularizes "reclaimed labor" of black queer performance, an aesthetic that amplifies the pleasure, pain, and danger of being a marked and excessive body.³⁰ Pantomiming pleasure and ease in service of the Great House or the state, leading Miss Joan and Miss Amelia into this levity, does not directly correlate to a feeling of ease in the body.

Rather than playing minstrel for a white master, *Revelry* portrays a performance of black folklore for a brown, creole inheritor of the plantation, whose incomplete integration into the black community forms the main dramatic thrust of the dance work. Much like dancing the Seaga in *Pocomania* and *Two Drums for Babylon*, the dance masked contemporary critiques of the brown creole political establishment through embodying blackness as the answer to Jamaica's political future, in opposition to brown creole Europeaness. Nettleford played with the complex illegibility of Jonkonnu's language of protest and joyful procession, set against the grand but crass scale of the Great House, to argue that the creative genius of black Jamaica lay not in just preserving African survivals but in beating the Europeans at their own standards of theatricality and spectacle. The

²⁹ Arun Saldanha calls this phenomenon "viscosity" of race in social dance and everyday contexts or the material ways that race works in the world through how white bodies "stick" to each other, particular geographies (like the Great House), behaviors, physical movements, and cultural conditions. See Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race* (University Of Minnesota Press, 2007).

³⁰ moore borrows the notion of "reclaimed labor" from Joseph Roach, "Sweating Blood: Intangible Heritage and Reclaimed Labour in Caribbean New Orleans," *Performance Research* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2008): 140–48. madison moore, *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (Yale University Press, 2018), 27.

revivals mapped a course for reading insurgency and pleasure into plantation scenarios that on the surface could be seen as a performance of subjugation.



Figure 20: The Jonkonnu masquerade, photo likely from the 1963 season of dance. Nettleford dances front/center with the Jonkonnu House atop his head. Image Courtesy of NDTC Archive.



Figure 21: The Jonkonnu masquerade, Plantation Revelry's late 1960s revival. Front Row (left to right) Patsy Ricketts, Rex Nettleford, and Beverly Kitson. Photograph by Maria LaYacona. Image Courtesy of NDTC Archive.

The 1968 moment in which the *Plantation Revelry* film was broadcasted also changed the meaning of the dance, reflecting and projecting Nettleford and the NDTC's new position within the political machine. The very fact that the NDTC had the platform and resources to put on such a production at a moment when many artists in Jamaica were struggling for space and survival contradicted Nettleford's depiction of "traditional" festival arts and the NDTC's style as representative of grassroots culture and the experiences of the popular classes. Within his argument about black genius and black belonging, Nettleford also used his platform and power to once again lay the grounds for exclusion in his notions of black Caribbean authenticity, particularly his disavowal of certain working class/female-gendered, migratory, and elite brown creole claims to belonging, even as his success rested on accommodating, dancing, and collaborating with such Caribbean subjectivities. He made a clear distinction between the efficacy of raw, "unrefined" performances of blackness in the maids' muted protest, in opposition to the triumphant and male-centered theatricals of Jonkonnu masquerade. Those who left in self-imposed exile and those who held the traditional privileges of the brown elite remained at the margins, not able to keep up with the pulse of the Afro-Caribbean beat. In Nettleford's vision of leadership, the arts, the brown elite, and the masses alike were to be led by the culture workers who had stayed, and congregated around institutions and practices of nation-building at home.

Plantation and Plot

In the spring of 1969 NDTC confronted a Kingston audience that they could not dazzle with a spectacle or delight with hidden meanings. The NDTC presented a lecture-demonstration at UWI as part of a series of public discussions that brought together leading West Indian artists and academics, titled "Arts in the Caribbean Today." The lecture series was organized by the New

World Group and the new Jamaica chapter of the London-based Caribbean Artist Movement (CAM) led by performance artist/playwright Marina Maxwell and poet Edward Kamau Braithwaite. These two collectives brought together some of the most powerful West Indian cultural brokers to explore the intersections between artistic production and progressive politics in the Caribbean. Very few who spoke out in the session approved of the NDTC's repertoire of works about Plantation America.³¹ Representatives from these groups used the symposium as an opportunity to publicly rebuke the company for making dance that entertained rather than taught, in opposition to the New World Group's notions of black authenticity as anti-capitalist and revolutionary fervor. The symposium room became so tense from the cutting criticism that Braithwaite, Nettleford's friend and a generous dance critic, later wrote apologetically to the company: "I fear that some of the younger members of the group might have thought themselves exposed to unskilled jewelers."³²

New World economist George Beckford voiced a passionate condemnation of the company, which he later expanded on in an essay that was published in the NDTC's Newsletter. He issued a challenge to the dancers to make more "serious" works about Jamaican history. For Beckford, the NDTC's visible efforts to standardize dance training within the company and make productions "pleasing to the eye" (according to their maximalist aesthetic) were potentially dangerous and counter-revolutionary forms of excess. Excellent modern dance technique or high-

³¹ In 1968, Marina Maxwell, a Trinidadian playwright and recently returned "artist in exile" returned to her alma mater UWI Mona to start a chapter of the Caribbean Artist Movement (CAM) London-based group of West Indian migrants that Kamau Braithwaite, Doris Braithwaite and she were hoping to bring to Jamaica. Founded in 1966 by Braithwaite, John De La Rose, and Andrew Salkey, CAM was a loose and diverse collective of visual artists, writers, filmmakers, and dramatists whose project was to debate and define a West Indian aesthetic. CAM became a home and platform for almost every major Caribbean thinker and art-maker working in the United Kingdom and sought to assert a West Indian voice within the British Commonwealth.

³² "Eddie Braithwaite to Rex Nettleford," May 22, 1969, NDTC Archive.

quality production, he insisted, meant nothing to the “ordinary Jamaican” who would not care about theatre “unless the content relates more seriously to him.” He criticized dances that represented the urban poor with levity, satire, or comic pantomime as insultingly lighthearted, or even “socially perverted” promotions of crass or individualistic values. He challenged the dancers to focus on “educating different classes about others and themselves” and dancing histories of 19th-century rebellions and contemporary workers’ movements.³³ Beckford argued that the NDTC’s lighthearted representations of the folk cheaply glamourized the plight of the poor instead of inspiring revolutionary race/class consciousness.

Beckford's vision of national art as revolutionary "class art" reflected a larger conversation in the Third World, and among Caribbean socialists in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, about how art should function as a mechanism for cultural revolution. Beckford was one amongst many within the Jamaican left that advocated for the melding of developmental economics and theatre aesthetics in the years preceding the 1972 election. The Plantation School and Caribbean Black Power movement signaled a new stage of the Jamaican art movement, one that sought to “indigenize” the goals of global leftist anti-capitalist organizing to the Caribbean context, and use these values to guide the creation of national theatre tradition. Blackness in these political settings was not just a racial category but an embodied form of revolutionary morality. It was crystalized in a series of assertions (“black is beautiful), gestures (the raised fist), performance scenarios, references, and clothing. The NDTC found itself at the center of these debates about the proper symbolic and somatic strategies to claim the labors of black creativity.

³³ George Beckford, “Beckford’s Reflections on the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica,” NDTC Newsletter 3, 1968.

Sylvia Wynter, a faculty member in the Spanish department at UWI, was among the frustrated crowd at the CAM/New World debates who were angered by the NDTC's unserious treatment of histories of slavery.³⁴ Wynter's personal and gendered experiences in precisely the kinds of "unserious" production that she and Beckford admonished may have influenced her critiques of black bodies dancing in ways that were "commercial," or that catered to mainstream entertainment standards. In the early 1950s, while completing her Master's in Spanish in London, Wynter toured with Boscoe Holder's (the older brother to Geoffrey Holder) dance company and appeared in several B-List, tropical fantasy films.³⁵ Holder, a former collaborator turned rival of Beryl McBurnie, and his wife/dance partner Sheila Clarke are credited with introducing the limbo into the British public as a party fad. They performed their slick and sensationalized "Voodoo" performances—dramatic possession reenactments and sultry calypso—for nightclub and television, with a chorus of female dancers in midriff revealing tops undulating and shimmying in the background.³⁶ Much like other light brown-skinned, female Caribbean performers of her generation who started their careers abroad, the specter of the *mulatta* as a tropical stereotype overlaid spectator's reception of Wynter's artistry and limited the roles she could play. Similarly, Nettleford's productions often casted women like Wynter in roles that framed brown femininity as liminal or even oppositional to the goals of progressive politics and black liberation. Third World

³⁴ That Wynter was actually in the crowd is my own (educated) speculation. In his genealogy of Jamaica's cultural revolution during the 1960s and 1970s, CAM founder Edward Kamau Braithwaite writes that Wynter's "Jonkomnu" "no doubt came, partly at least, out of the debates current at the university over the significance to our cultural life of the work being produced by the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica (NDTC) under Rex Nettleford." He cites the CAM/New World sessions as an example of this debate. Edward Kamau Braithwaite, "The Love Axe/L (Developing A Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974): Part Three Two Beginnings," *Bim*, June 1978.

³⁵ Monty, "The Girl from Jamaica," *African and the Colonial World* 1, no. 4, December 1953, 12,16.

³⁶ See for instance: *Drum Dance (1956)* (British Pathe: London, 1956), accessed May 1, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq6gMoBo744>.

revolutionary theatre and the black/white racial binaries of the United States offered Wynter a chance to try out a new role, outside of Jamaica's particular colorist hierarchies. Black Power in the US and abroad was far from consistent and straight-forward in its stance of black female liberation, and it often propagated a vision of black authenticity that was "increasingly linked to masculinity in its most patriarchal significations³⁷. Still female-gendered and queer black subjectivities still found ways to express their interests using this new language of Black Power, just as Nettleford, Beryl McBurnie and Ivy Baxter learned to negotiate with brown creole nationalism's ideal performances of class and gender. The alternative ways that Black Power sought to idealistically over-ride colorist distinctions in Jamaica by focusing primarily on class hierarchies, and its potential to reconfigure labor relations for both men and women, appealed to Wynter.³⁸

³⁷ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Duke University Press Books, 2003).

³⁸ Sylvia Wynter was not a feminist, maintaining consistently that for black colonial societies, the hierarchy of race/class superseded patriarchy. However, black women's gendered experiences and slavery's erasure of African kinship structures was a major theme in both her fiction and academic work. She directly attacked Nettleford for his patriarchal and conservative attachment to the black family as the solution to the "problem" of un-wed mothers. See Sylvia Wynter, "One Love: Rhetoric or Reality?." On Wynter and feminism see: Natasha Barnes, *Cultural Conundrums: Gender, Race, Nation, and the Making of Caribbean Cultural Politics*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).



Figure 22: Sylvia Wynter in dance costume (1953). Image from Wynter's cover story for the British periodical Africa and the Colonial World's December 1953 issue. Wynter was interviewed about her burgeoning film career.

Soon after independence, Wynter returned to Jamaica to work for a government cultural agency and start a community theatre troupe. Soon after, she was hired by UWI and connected with the New World Group. Wynter became attracted to the notion of applying their theorization of the plantation to the realm of arts criticism.³⁹ She wrote a series of lushly dense essays disavowing the very kinds of sensationalized and tropicaesque dance performances that she built

³⁹ David Scott, *The Re-enchantment of Humanism: An interview with Sylvia Wynter*. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 4 no. 2 (2000), 146. While Sylvia Wynter is best known in the United States' academy for her long and prolific career as a philosopher and critical theorist, her life as a public thinker began on the stage.

her first career on. In three of her earliest essays published during her time at UWI Mona, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Toward the Interpretation of Folk Dance as Cultural Process,” “One Love – Rhetoric or Reality – Aspects of Afro-Jamaicanism,” and her foundational “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation” Wynter theorized about the ways that the value system of the plantation – particularly the ways it configured the identity of Man in opposition to blackness and imposed a racialized hierarchy on culture – continued to distort artistic production and foreclosed the creation of a national culture that reflected local realities.¹⁰ Wynter argued that space of the “plot” at the frontier of the plantation, or the subsistence farming grounds on which enslaved Africans transplanted their culture and grew creole forms that challenged the market values of the plantation, served as the counterpoint to the plantation logic. Wynter was inspired in part by Amiri Baraka’s notion of the “frontier zones” of United States black culture, idealized spaces where poor black folks were able to retain fundamental expressive black art forms from which Jazz emerged.¹¹ By reclaiming these creative forms of resistance to dehumanization that slaves cultivated away from the overseer’s gaze, Wynter argued that artists could imagine an alternate reality outside of the grotesque, deformed, and warped realities and histories of the plantation. Wynter identified

¹⁰ These essays, alongside Wynter's first major two-part essay "We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Discuss a Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Culture" (1968/1969) form a series, laying out the historical and social relations that on which Caribbean culture was built. While CAM artists referenced Wynter’s ideas of about art as resistance to the plantation as early as 1968, I focus on “Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Toward the Interpretation of Folk Dance as Cultural Process” because hold Wynter’s most apparent crystallization of how dance – rather than poetry and theatre – function as plot culture. Sylvia Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou* 5 (June 1971): 95-102.

¹¹ Sylvia Wynter, “One Love: Rhetoric or Reality?,” 65-66.

As Carole Boyce Davies explores, the culture formed a touchstone for Wynter’s creative output, inspiring for her 1973 theatre project and Jamaica Broadcast Company televised production *Maskerade*. Carole Boyce Davies, “From Masquerade to *Maskerade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project,” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 203-204.

Jonkunnu and other religious danced practices linked to Myal cosmology (Pocomania, Kumina, Revival) as residual products of the plot that Jamaican theatre artists could use to stage anti-capitalist and anti-racist futures. The creativity and nuanced modes of social critique found in Jonkonnu carnival served as "counter-myth" to a creole nationalist origin story of the Caribbean, which attributed all social progress and modernity to the Great House. Wynter favored this festival form because it was an aggregate, coordinated, public form of protest against the market system, and she elevated Jonkonnu as an explosive event above other provisional, dispersed, and strategically hidden modes of "fooling the Great House."⁴²

Wynter's "Plot and Plantation" offered dance and theatre makers and spectators alike a roadmap for becoming "conscious" black subjects, through embodying an openly rebellious tradition of folk blackness, rather than a secretive legacy of resistance. Her work reflects a wider Caribbean Black Power preoccupation with finding narratives of revolution, slave rebellion and guerilla resistance within folk culture to satisfy what David Scott calls a romantic "longing for anti-colonial revolution." While Jamaica achieved independence through diplomatic negotiation, not revolutionary warfare, performing revolution served as a transformative ritual for the creating post-colonial citizens and a black (rather than multi-racial) Jamaica.⁴³ Her theorization also helps us situate the NDTC's productions in the metaphorical plantation creative landscape that she described. Wynter later told David Scott in an interview for *small axe* journal that her "Jonkonnu"

⁴² To think about Nettleford's individualized and embodied visions redress under plantation governance, I draw from Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

⁴³ It's important to note that Wynter did not support true socialist revolution, or even the democratic socialist reforms of the 1970s, and had strong family ties to the JLP. She felt that following in the footsteps of Cuba would be a foolish attempt to apply foreign solutions to a specifically Jamaican cultural problem. Wynter's cultural radicalism coupled with her pragmatism in the national politics further exemplify the diversity of the Jamaican left, and the strong commitment to British notions of civility and "good government."

was an attempt to write an alternative vision of folk culture as underground resistance to counter the dominant conception that she interpreted as being pushed forward by Nettleford and the NDTC, which lacked revolutionary utility because it could be so easily marketed for entertainment value and embraced the Great House's grandiose scale.⁴⁴ In her 1973 essay "One Love," she admonished Nettleford for "reducing the power of cult religion to a prettified exoticism, which smacks of instant folk-art served to suit a black middle-class palate."⁴⁵ Wynter read "prettiness" and delight as a whole-hearted capitulation to white desires. In a parallel logic to what E. Patrick Johnson traces in United States variants of Black Power, her criticism reflects a popular black nationalist association between the black middle-class and inauthenticity, effeminacy, assimilation to white culture, and anti-blackness.⁴⁶ Rather than casting brown creole femininity as the antithesis to black nationalist futurity, the queer, fabulous, frivolous black male body performs the betrayal of the state's vision of post-colonialism. Because, Jack Halberstam writes, "being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant," Wynter and the Black Power movement's disavowal of "prettiness" foreclosed one way of expressing black dance's queer potential and maintained the need to attribute political "use value" to black creative labor.⁴⁷

Debates over what kind of theatre best represented shifting notions of race and nation erupted into protest in 1969, when UWI students occupied the recently built Creative Arts

⁴⁴ "The dominant conception of Jamaican folk Dance was being put forward by Rex Nettleford and his NDTC [National Dance Theatre Company]. Now I think that Rex is one of the most brilliant dancers I have ever seen, but I did not agree with the conceptualization of Jamaica's folk dancers which he based his choreography on. So I set out to write my paper with the idea that I was going to put forward an alternative conceptualization." David Scott, *The re-enchantment of humanism: An interview with Sylvia Wynter*, 160.

⁴⁵ Sylvia Wynter, "One Love: Rhetoric or Reality?", 70.

⁴⁶ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Duke University Press Books, 2003).

⁴⁷ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011), 6.

Center—a performance space shared by campus groups and independent theatre troupes. The student occupation demanded that the university reform its practices of offering performance space to politically well-connected companies like the NDTC or traditional European productions of Chekhov and Shakespeare, while denying performance space to local playwrights and emerging artists.⁴⁸ An emerging West Indian grassroots theatre movement also took up the challenge to create smaller anti-establishment, folk religion-inspired, participatory performance experiments outside the university walls. For instance, CAM Jamaica leader and Nettleford's former Creative Arts Summer School student Marina Maxwell established the experimental, "Yard Theatre" at her home in August Town in 1967. Inspired by the performance theory of Sylvia Wynter and Kamau Braithwaite, Maxwell staged revue-style performances on her front yard and venues around the Kingston metropolitan area that were free and open to passing traffic.⁴⁹ Arguing that formal theatre replicated the excess of the plantation, Maxwell claimed that Third World, revolutionary theatre must be interactive, reference simplicity of what she imagined to be traditional African village religious theatre, and most of all reflect the small scale and intimacy of the provision plot or "yard."⁵⁰ To decolonize the arts, she argued, in a public lecture hosted by the New World Group, "we have to take in the West Indies what I call an 'un-plantation approach to living.' So much of our approach is a plantation mentality approach. If you something big it must be BIG like the

⁴⁸ Sylvia Wynter, "Issues Behind Creative Arts Centre," *The Sunday Gleaner*, March 7, 1970. Timothy Callender, "Timothy Callender to Pro-Vice Chancellor (Care of the Occupation Committee)," February 24, 1970, Louise Bennett Coverley Collection, 1.2.24 (9), NLJ.

⁴⁹ Marina Maxwell, "Yard Theatre: Conscious I- The Medium Is the Message," *Bongo-Man*, no. 5 (February 1970): 14–15. Marina Maxwell, "Towards a Revolution in the Arts," *Newsletter of the Caribbean Artist Movement*, June 1969.

⁵⁰ Mintz defined Jamaica's enslaved population a proto-peasantry because planters required slaves to grow subsistence plots and engage in small-scale agricultural commerce to supplement food rations.

Great House. We can start simpler than this, we can do without a whole heap of things.”⁵¹

Organizations like the NDTC that were rich in institutional affiliations and corporate sponsorship represented what Maxwell understood to be "houseslave" mentality that strove to meet the standards and reap the benefits of alliances with the powers that be. The designation of "house slave" had less to do with its common associations with light-skin, but with the NDTC's affiliation with the state, gender performance, class, and aesthetics.

Beckford, Wynter, and this New Left theatre movement's admonishment to do less, to reduce scale, flash, and spectacle was a response to the "Welcoming Society" stereotype of the Jamaican plantocracy as a space of exceptional violence, debauchery, and decadence.⁵² This disavowal of high society excess rested on prohibitions on how to perform class, sexuality, and masculine presentation. Men involved with concert dance were associated with effeminacy long before the 1960s, and the efforts to make ballet "manly" was central to Ivy Baxter's project of introducing laboring, masculinist archetypes in Caribbean concert dance language. Female and suspected gay male members of the NDTC alike faced constant accusations that they had questionable sexual morals because they chose the life on the stage.⁵³ Thomas and Nettleford's queer sexuality was an "open secret" in Jamaican society. Members of the art world often alluded to their queerness to discredit the NDTC's influence but rarely openly acknowledged their relationships with men, since Nettleford commanded a certain level of respect in the public eye

⁵¹ Marina Maxwell, *The CAM/New World Discussions: Arts in the Caribbean Today*, Reel-to-Reel Tape (Creative Arts Center, U.W.I. Mona, 1969), UWI Archives - LSW.

⁵² Frank Fonda Taylor, *To Hell With Paradise: A History Of The Jamaican Tourist Industry*, 1 edition (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003).

⁵³ Nettleford responded to these accusations in several, and there seemed to be an influx on these rumors in 1968/1969. See: "Rex Nettleford to Dr. Christian," Letter, October 14, 1968. Rex Nettleford, "Rex Nettleford to Betty Rowe," October 3, 1968, NDTC Archive.

even amidst the NDTC's controversies. Nettleford's private correspondence reveals that many times over his career, and particularly in the late 1960s, he confronted colleagues and members of the public who questioned the sexual preferences of his dancers or himself. He never directly denied his queerness, but accused his advisories of malicious intent and mocked their lack of cosmopolitan openness.⁵⁴ However, associations between class identity and embodied black sexual morality affected how the public interpreted the NDTC's style and claims to black identity. Nettleford's ability to code-switch from a countrified patois to an affected Oxford accent, a skill which had been his entrance ticket into the rising black middle-class in the late 1950s, rendered him at odds with the younger generation of radicals' promotion of urban roots affects. His recent class ascent from a peasant background served as grounds to attack the NDTC's petit-bourgeois provincialism and dandyish mannerisms, rather than authenticate their blackness. The seemingly common-sense connections between the groomed, glamorous, or dancing male-gay spectacle, and the bourgeois and imperialist decadence, and were just one of the ways that the Black Power era would shift the terms of inclusion in the black nationalist imagination.

NDTC and the particular sector of black rural migrants that Nettleford and Thomas belonged to saw their self-presentation as part of an alternative moral order or way of embodying the plot. This competing vision is often buried in a historical narrative that naturalizes Black Power as the inevitable rise of liberatory black identification, and erases the legacy of queer life in rural and peasant societies. Nettleford attributed his commitment to facetious presentation and desire for the best-finished product to his peasant upbringing, which he broadly defined as *the* black Jamaican sensibility. Maximalist dressing and exaggerated affect were the materialization of

⁵⁴ For instance, Nettleford and Ivy Baxter warred for decades about Baxter's attempts to warn collaborators and institutions in Jamaica about the company's "sexual credentials." "Rex Nettleford to Ivy Baxter," November 21, 1975, NDTC Archive); Rex Nettleford,

subaltern desires, the optics of black becoming, and a form of everyday smaddification. He scoffed at well-off youth who sported "unkempt" Afros and simple peasant-style or Africanist garments as part of their Black Power protest, interpreting the lack of polish as a performance of class privilege: "all of us who feel going around being crude now is being with the roots is doing a great disservice to the peasants. We don't want to be dirty . . . they're almost puritanical about the body and keeping it clean and such."⁵⁵ While reflecting often restrictive aspiring middle-class modes of performing respectability and affirming patriarchy, this evocation of cleanliness as a value of the "plot" defied urban leftist's assumptions that a "roots" aesthetic was a form of class-warfare that was legible and accessible as a performance of radicalism and black consciousness to all Jamaicans, particularly those whose dark skin-color was already read as a mark of lowered status or poverty. Nettleford's vexed relationship with adopting black nationalism as national identity grew from his insider/outsider status as a dark-skinned, queer, and self-identified "country boy" who had found himself in the company of Jamaica's political elite. The NDTC's commitment to "technique" and "polish" in dances reflected this common, missing black middle-class experience of learning to survive and be seen in the metaphorical Great House.

Nettleford was also wary of the ways that Black Power, much like Rastafarianism, configured freedom as an external and importable resource for the Caribbean. He saw that the pre-occupation with representing Caribbean dance without the artifice of high production value and with "raw" almost ethnographic fidelity was, in fact, a manifestation of a plantation mentality. Applying his own economic metaphors to cultural production, Nettleford argued that root's aesthetics were "all part and parcel of the whole colonial and indeed, plantation experience, where

⁵⁵ Lee Robert, "Interview with Pro. Rex Nettleford."

we are required to be the providers of raw material."⁵⁶ He argued that Caribbean intellectual and artistic products, including the reggae of Bob Marley and the ideology of Franz Fanon, Marcus Garvey, and Aimé Césaire had been repackaged by the United States and sold as another import that West Indians were paying for dearly with their dignity: "Just as our sugar is fed back to us as a prettily wrapped confectionary made in England . . . Black Power was fed back to us as an American invention." As I explore in chapter 5, the NDTC capitalized on the claiming to command the approval of "the folk" who delighted in their polished spectacles and queer shows of charisma, using reports of working class audiences' enjoyment to turn university radicals' accusations of the NDTC being "the establishment" back on them. For instance, Nettleford wrote to the NDTC company newsletter to dismiss the concerns of dancers who were wary of performing *Plantation Revelry* in Trinidad in 1970, the year that the eastern Caribbean islands' Black Power protests reached their peak. Nettleford scoffed at anyone in Port of Spain who viewed the work "from the levels of superficiality and ignorance of its intent and our history":

"...in the final analysis the so-called "Black experience is not a one-dimensional experience but one that is rich, textured and full of contradictions. The contradictions of *Plantation Revelry* will bother middle-class sensibilities. It didn't the peasant population of Grenada who sensed its satire and gave its approval."⁵⁷

In this formulation, Nettleford represented Black Power's Africanist aesthetics as coming out of the metropole, and his own modern dance, cabaret, and flashy folk performances as the dances of the plot. Rather than performing "live fidelity" - the recreation of an allegedly pure, unmediated folk performance as it is experienced in the ethnographic field - Nettleford's sought to magnify and even distort what social scientists or economists sought to categorize and place under

⁵⁶ Rex Nettleford, *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race, and Protest in Jamaica*, Mirror, Mirror (Kingston: LMH Publishing Ltd., 2001), 199.

⁵⁷ Rex Nettleford, "The Eastern Caribbean Tour: A Serious View," *NDTC Newsletter*, 1971, 2.

the microscope for study.⁵⁸ In other words, he felt it was necessary to step away from a meticulous focus on factually verifying a history of revolutionary blackness, and move towards presenting the bold, luminous, spectacular, multi-dimensional fullness of black being. By becoming larger than life, stunningly and complexly human through the labors of smaddification, “too much” for the ground to hold, the black and brown body becomes an excessive and abundant body that resists scarcity narratives that pervade Caribbean black history. Like those in *Plantation Revelry*, these bodies were troubling and ambivalent, performing at once their own oppression and transcendence.

The ways that Rex Nettleford and Sylvia Wynter made sense of the social movements of 1968 through their writing and performance practices illuminate how Black Power discourse, like all nationalist discourses, carried entrenched regulatory somatic mandates, sexual mores, and markers of belonging that went beyond the surface of skin.⁵⁹ The gendered and classed specificity of Wynter and Nettleford’s experiences and their particular spaces within the arts economies in Jamaica influenced their choreographies of blackness, and as a result, the dominant social scripts that were broadcasted to the nation. Wynter and the New World Group attacked the flashiness of folkloric concert dance because they believed it shielded and diminished a West Indian reality, and looked to theatre to provide rituals of multi-class solidarity. Nettleford interpreted the Black Power movement’s rejection of satire and spectacle as reflective of the elite classes’ distance from peasant realities, and the fetishizing nature of their take on roots culture. Both theories of

⁵⁸ Vogel evokes this notion of “live fidelity” – building off of Jose Esteban Munoz’s concept of the “burden of liveness”- to describe 1940s Caribbean ethnographers’ construction of performance authenticity as a fantasy of proximity to the untouched purity of the black voice. See Shane Vogel, *Stolen Time: Black Fad Performance and the Calypso Craze*, First edition (University of Chicago Press, 2018) 70.

⁵⁹ Marina Maxwell, “Towards a Revolution in the Arts,” *Newsletter of the Caribbean Artist Movement*, June 1969. Transcript of *The CAM/New World Discussions: Arts in the Caribbean Today* reprinted for the international CAM community.

liberatory black movement grew out of the plot, or black people's claims to the embodied claims to their land. While Wynter and Nettleford had very different imaginaries of who constituted the everyday Jamaican and what their desires were, they moved together and apart towards the utopian dream of a nation that was not built on plantation inequalities or enslaved by catering to the needs and desires of foreigners.

Conclusion

How to build coalitions for black freedom, and how to embrace both protest and pleasure would remain the central question of the 1970s as performances of black nationalism increasingly became co-opted by the state. In 1969, after Norman Manley, the founder of the PNP died, he passed the party's leadership on to his son Michael Manley. A former leftist union organizer and rising political star in his own right, the younger Manley represented the oppositions' best hope for capitalizing on grassroots disenchantment with the JLP's status quo. While part of the "brown" elite himself, the charismatic and attractive Manley adopted "pro-blackness" as political praxis, associating himself with the *New World Group* intelligentsia, reggae superstars like Max Romeo, and the international cause of Third World solidarity. Manley adopted the biblical name "Joshua,"—signifying his plans to lead his people out of a hopeless place—and the slogan "Better Must Come," the title of a Delroy Wilson ska record that became the official PNP campaign song. The PNP organized political rallies that centered around "Bandwagon" reggae concerts, featured speeches that code-switched between Standard English and local patois, and carried theatrical props such as the "Rod of Correction"—a walking stick allegedly gifted to Manley from Haile Selassie himself—to legitimize their party's affinity with counter-cultural movements.⁶⁰ In January

⁶⁰ For an in-depth discussion of Manley's 1972 and 1976 political campaigns, see Anita M. Waters, *Race, Class, and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1985).

1972 Manley was elected Prime Minister. In 1974 he declared the PNP had become a Democratic Socialist party, inserting the island into the crossfire of the United States' Cold War in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Manley's campaign and landslide win of 1972 in many ways signified the most spectacular performance of culturist "blackism", in the words of Wynter, and roots culture's full entrance into the mainstream. This process of integrating blackness into the racial story of the nation throughout the 1960s—first through Rastafari and Seaga's cultural policy in the early 1960s, and then through radical protest movements in the latter half of the decade—gave citizens a new language for claims-making from the government. Every step that the idealist younger Manley took towards reforming Jamaica's income inequalities led to clashes within Jamaica's deeply tribalist and increasingly violent political landscape. Those seeking to challenge Manley's economic policy were further aided by the US's efforts to destabilize the threat of his socialist government.

As Manley's newly appointed cultural advisor, Nettleford and other founding/early company members such as Bert Rose, Sheryl Ryman, Dennis Scott, Barbara Requa, and Joyce Campbell (to name a few) stepped up as architects of the Democratic Socialist administration's arts policy. They were tasked with building new pedagogical and cultural institutions to support this project of "revolution" in Jamaica's cultural and political life. The lessons that they had learned by trial by fire in the early 1960s helped to transform the NDTC as they moved into the next decade. These arguments about how to create a plot practice – or a space to build black freedom on the grounds of the plantation – would shape the company's repertoire throughout the 1970s.

These rumors and push-back did little to seriously defame Nettleford, whose status as an influential public figure was supported by powerful institutions. His role within Manley's cabinet in the 1970s afforded him the opportunities to build out some of his more progressive plans for expanding access to the arts and "blackening" Jamaican arts education. However, the age of Black

Power did transform the representational framework through which the NDTC had to defend their art, and as well as internal relations within the NDTC. Criticism about the NDTC's representation of black identity and economic exploitation, and further public scrutiny of company member's prominent roles in shaping mainstream Caribbean nationalism through their jobs as educators, National Festival coordinators, and culture ambassadors cracked the very foundation of the company. Creative director Eddie Thomas stepped down in 1969 having grown tired of the constraints of creating national and socially relevant art. He was lured by opportunities in the commercial sector to have more creative control. Thomas had also grown jealous of Nettleford's rising political star in the late 1960s, as his co-founder took on more prominent government cultural advisory roles and overshadowed Thomas as the charismatic public face of the NDTC.⁶¹

The company also grew to incorporate a younger generation of dancers, such as Patsy Ricketts, Thomas Osha Pinnock, Cheryl Ryman, Jackie Guy, all who had left Jamaica to study in Canada and New York. They found dance opportunities at black American dance institutions such as Arthur Mitchell's Dance Theatre of Harlem, Rod Rodgers Dance Company and the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre.⁶² Nettleford wrote that at least two of these returning migrant dancers had become politicized by "black conscious during their time away, and criticized *Plantation Revelry* in 1968 because it 'perpetuated black stereotypes.'" ⁶³ For these dancers and some members of the general public whose education about "plantation America" came through the vector of popular variants of

⁶¹ Rex Nettleford, "Rex Nettleford to Eddie Thomas," August 27, 1968, NDTC Archive.

⁶² Many of these dancers also trained in Jamaica with Neville Black's dance workshop in Kingston. A former NDTC member who became one of Nettleford's closet collaborators after his split with Eddie Thomas, Black worked between the United States and Kingston and specialized in a brash, comic style of jazz dance inspired by his training in the United States. Cheryl Ryman "Interview with Author," Kingston, March 23, 2018.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 108.

Black Power, it became less and less possible for Jamaicans to imagine the plantation as a space of joy and celebration. At least privately, Nettleford started to heed the changing times, and to compromise on his commitment to perceived “frivolity” and queer subversion. He wrote his friend and sometimes NDTC choreographer Neville Black:

“I am constantly observing, learning, re-thinking, re-shaping. But I know I haven't all the answers and I know that all the answers are not in the United States either. Perhaps the hotheads at the University and elsewhere do have a point. Perhaps their cry for relevance and for the use of our own body language does make sense. Perhaps they are right in accusing us all of ignoring too much the riches of our actual life.”

The 1970s saw Nettleford's return to the subject of Afro-Caribbean religion with *Kumina* (1971) and *Myal* (1974), dances that used the stage to expand and open up the ritual circle to the audience, rather than foreclose visual penetration like his earlier *Pocomania*. These dances gained critical acclaim for presenting a vision of roots culture that audiences could recognize and take part in, even if inclusion came at the expense of his biting critiques of color and class divides in Jamaica.

The intellectual clashes between the Jamaican New Left and the NDTC reveal the deep instability of local ideas of blackness in Jamaica. Even though Jamaican historiography often cites color as the nation's major class/political divide, ideology and performance of blackness often subsumed the visual. While complex and often fraught, they also created the possibility for a broad community to unite under the banner of blackness and the plantation as a metonym for imperialist oppression. This performance of the “plot,” and the popularity of global Black Power, reflected a growing acceptance that black diaspora culture rather than the independent state would bring about the change Jamaicans desired.

CHAPTER 5

Kumina

The spirit of Jamaican nationalism in mid-1970s, which saw the revival and transformation of Federation dreams of unity, is best encapsulated in the memory of a singular performance: the NDTC's *Kumina* at Caribbean Festival of the Arts in 1972, Guyana. *Kumina* is the crown jewel of the NDTC's concert dance abstractions of Afro-Jamaican dance religion, which is known as the "ritual trilogy."¹ *Kumina*, local and international critics claimed, marked the NDTCJ's maturation into a truly "national" company, one that neither mimicked Martha Graham's school of American modernism nor neo-African folk movement languages, but forged a specifically Jamaican aesthetic. In the almost fifty years since its creation, *Kumina* has become a national and Pan-West Indian concert dance ritual, an emotional finale to the NDTC's program that crowds demand and expect, much like *Revelations* has become a signature piece that binds the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre's spectatorship together. An ancestor worship dance religion, Kumina is one of the smallest religious communities in Jamaica (in terms of

¹ Dance historian Sabine Sorgel speaks at length about Nettleford's process of researching and abstracting danced-based rituals, such as Pocomania, Myal, and Kumina, in the concert stage in her comprehensive history of the NDTC.. See Sabine Sorgel, *Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica* (Verlag, Bielefeld: transcript, 2007).

number of practitioners), with its base primarily in rural St. Thomas and St. Ann.² Scholarly consensus now attributes the emergence of Kumina to Central African immigrants who arrived in the mid-19th century after the emancipation of slavery to help fill plantation labor shortages left by newly freed Afro-Creoles. Kumina has loomed larger in the national imaginary because it is mythically and inaccurately represented as the base from which all other Afro-Jamaican religions sprung from, even though Pocomania and Myal predate Kumina.³ In Jamaica's the imagined timeline of creolization, Kumina is a deeper, older spirituality because it is less tainted by European influence. Kumina's perceived cultural proximity to the "African source" (devotees self-identify as racially, ethnically, spiritually, and culturally "African," rather than Black, Jamaican, or Afro-Jamaican) and its reputation as a "pure," practice of African survivals in many ways signified a "clean slate," extracted it from the politics of slavery commemoration.⁴

The performance begins after Nettleford in the role of the Kumina King, the master of ceremonies and the audience's spiritual guide, spits out ritual libation to sanctify the stage. The drums break and he slowly shuffles towards stage left as waves of dancers begin to flood in behind him, flowing moving in diagonal lines, grouping into clusters, performing short vignettes before rushing off-stage. *Kumina* has a distinctive shuffle, a short, quick rhythmic step with both feet flat on the ground when the dancer hovers in place, or with one foot ahead and resting on the ball of

² Dianne M. Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 142, 139.

³ See for example "Jamaica History Notes: Information on Jamaica's Culture and Heritage," *National Library of Jamaica*, <http://www.nlj.gov.jm/jamaican-history-notes#kumina>, (retrieved April 18, 2015).

⁴ In comparison to Myal/Obeah, Revival, and Baptism, which scholars like Michael Craton have identified as important institutions that fed traditions of plantation resistance and slave rebellion, Kumina is politically marked as "an ancestral cult, with neutral or pacifist political consciousness on social and economic conditions in Jamaica." Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*: 144.

the foot to propel the dancer forward. Dancers maintain a low center of gravity and flattened backs. They forcefully drive kinesthetic energy both down towards the ground through the feet and outward through the pelvis. Drum brakes cue rapid dips and spins, which are elaborated and drawn out even more in the Company's performance, effectively cutting the trancelike monotony of the heavy footsteps.⁵ The shuffle is a structure that holds, directs, and encourages variants on a single Kumina theme, building until it breaks in a series of spirit possession solos led by the Kumina Queen (originally danced by Patsy Hassan). At the peak of the possession, the entire company rounds up the Kumina Queen in a sweeping ring, then pour across the stage until they are in a line formation. The dances then shuffle upstage and retreat back repeatedly, spinning in unison at the drum breaks. The waves of movement back and forth pull the audience into the ritual space, creating a watery, flowing connection. This is usually the moment when the audience begins to respond. It elicits claps, whistles, calls for reprisals, and standing ovations. Through this act of transference, the spectacular is no longer just the property of the dances. These noises and movements from the seats break into the proscenium space and modify the intense focus of the dancer's energy, expanding the ritual circle throughout the whole room.

Reporting for his hometown newspaper in Bridgetown Barbados in a poetic essay which immortalized this dance as a revolutionary performance, Caribbean Artist Movement leader Kamau Brathwaite wrote that through acts of witnessing and embodiment, *Kumina* separated the Caribbean region from the rest of the world and coalesced its history together. Audience and dancers, he claimed, were tossed together into a chaotic unifying whirlpool of Caribbeaness, "bodies moving in circles of inexorable progress through song though sound through

⁵ Sabine Sorgel, *Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica* (Verlag, Bielefeld: transcript, 2007), 127.

thunder....drawn by a great vortex into the movement of the stage: no longer stage: but lighted pool and island.”⁶ These anti-colonial cultural movements were made even more authentic because they were illegible to outsiders, less commodifiable or likely to be misinterpreted, perhaps, than the NDTC’s more narrative and mimetic works. Unlike Nettleford’s earlier articulation of smaddification as “fooling the Great House”—hiding subversion through knowingly blinding the white spectatorship with flash, nostalgia plantation, and desire—Brathwaite embraced *Kumina* as a transformative performance that affirmed the Caribbean’s humanity and continuities because it elicited immediate and synchronized celebratory reactions in the multi-class local audience, becoming the first NDTC dance to feel like popular culture. Braithwaite explained that *Kumina* was not an echo of European or African-derived dance languages of old, but a new, cultural independence movement made manifest in a majority, multinational Caribbean performance space and spectatorship practice:

“It was not ‘the’ tradition. it was not of ‘the tradition.’ Where were the structures here? They had eroded and obscured the boundaries of form; colonial and capital to boot, and we in Georgetown know, rising to meet them . . . applause acknowledging this little victory in the very heart of our tears.”⁷

What made *Kumina* fit into Braithwaite’s conception of radical black politics in ways that no other NDTC composition had ever before, so much that in his 1977 history of the post-colonial Caribbean arts movement, *The Love Axe/L*, he named identified *Kumina* at Carifesta 72 as the principle moment of West Indian cultural redefinition/transfiguration.⁸ In Braithwaite’s theorization, because this dance was performed in this particular festival space in front of an all-

⁶ Edward Kamau Braithwaite, “Carifesta ’72: Music and Dance,” *Sunday Advocate-News*, November 19, 1972.

⁷ Edward Kamau Braithwaite, “Carifesta ’72: Music and Dance.”

⁸ Edward Kamau Braithwaite, “The Love Axe/L (Developing A Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974): Part Three Two Beginnings,” *Bim*, June 1978, 187.

West Indian audience, it eroded cultural boundaries between the islands and produced porous bodies and minds that were open to a kind of political solidarity that Black Power artists worked to evoke.⁹



Figure 23: Rex Nettleford (center in crown) as Kumina King and Patsy Hassan (front right, in crown) as Queen. (1971). Image courtesy of the NDTC Archive.

This chapter turns from an analysis of the concert stage to an analysis of spectatorship practices to explore how Jamaicans and the Wider West Indies made use of the dance culture, performance tropes, and infrastructure that the NDTC and their colleagues institutionalized. I focus on the labor of building two pan-Caribbean festivals that housed NDTC performances: Carifesta 1972 (Georgetown, Guyana) and Carifesta 1976 (Kingston, Jamaica). I argue that

⁹ While I have yet to find any mention of the Tricontinental or any of its coalition of anti-racist organizations in official Carifesta public relations 1972 literature, the influence of Cuban Revolutionary citizenship and US Black Power no doubt influenced Carifesta's aesthetics and political community, and was even more present in Carifesta 76 (Jamaica) and Carifesta 79 (Cuba). The metonymic performance pedagogy- in which certain black and Africanist bodies come to stand for a community of anti-imperial Global South nations - and porous identifications between individual and other that I layout in this section are influenced by Anne Garland Mahler's theory of the Tricontinental "metonymic color politics." However, I argue that blackness not only held special representational power but subsumed all other racial identifications in the case of Carifesta. See Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Duke University Press Books, 2018).

Carifesta 1976 constituted a collaborative performance of Caribbean and Jamaican history—authored by local and exile artists, the public, and the state jointly though not always in agreement—that was useful for explicating the political tensions and possibilities of the 1970s. As architects of Manley’s new, centralized cultural training programs the NDTC helped to author the frameworks through which West Indians understood black Caribbean aesthetics and the function of the arts in a post-colonial society. I analyze the gestures made by the state to choreograph unity and manifest visions of progress, as well as strategies that audiences had learned over the course of long decolonization period to use the proscenium as a space of protest. By reading dance performances alongside the infrastructure, architecture, and production of the festival space, we can understand how festivals became sites of ideological production that served and helped to sustain the nationalization of Blackness. I am arguing that smaddication is not only generated by individual acts of ownership, but collective practices of space claiming and place building. The architecture (both physical and ideological) and the labor relations that it created shaped the possibilities for imaging dance as a practice of freedom.

Since the 1930s, West Indians had been perfecting a practice of nationalism as a relational performance enacted as spectacular avowals and disavowals of Pan-Africanisms generated from the top-down and hemispheric formal politics. The festival further incorporated notions of struggle, oppression, and cultural mixture into a narrative of national history and progress. Expanding beyond the former BWI and the Caribbean islands, Carifesta built an oppositional coalition against the region’s history of dependency by framing Antillean, Latin American, and African American resistance against imperialism as part of the same struggle. Explicated in the theme of “revolutionary history,” Carifesta 1976 honored Mexico’s Benito Juarez, Venezuela’s Simon Bolivar, Haiti’s Toussaint L’Ouverture, Cuba’s Jose Marti, and Jamaica’s Marcus Garvey as the five men who best exemplified “the constant struggle against all forms of local oppression and

foreign domination,” which the festival’s manifesto marked as “the dominant feature of the history of the Caribbean people.”¹⁰ Carifesta ’72 and ’76 positioned black West Indians’ quest for autonomy at the center of vision of black and multi-racial freedom struggles in the New World. The unprecedented political mobilization of the 1970s agitated and gave non-elite Jamaicans a space to intervene in top-down ideas of national culture in powerfully public and performative ways. The festival’s Pan-Caribbean and Latin American scope further shifted the traditional “national” festival dynamics, magnifying how regional aesthetics shaped how Jamaicans articulated their understandings of their place in the world.

Beginning with a history of Carifesta’s institutional origins in Guyana in 1972, an event that cast a symbolic shadow over the 1976 festivities, I trace the festival from its early planning stages, through the gallery spaces, theaters, classrooms, and city streets that housed Carifesta and its participants. My final analysis of the dance, music, and theatrical shows that made up the eleven-day long event is focused on the dynamics of live performance, using reports of interactions between audience members and participant artists to analyze how Caribbean citizens on both sides of the proscenium divide performed regional solidarity through embodiments of Caribbean cultural continuities, or leveled critiques that asserted the efficacy of local understandings and traditions. Carifesta offers us an archive of experiences, ranging from transformative encounters with performance to the mundane labor of organizers and boredom of waiting audiences, through which Caribbean nationals and Latin Americans wrote and embodied self-making stories. The bounded festival grounds became a space where Caribbean and Latin American states and citizens defined their place in the national and geopolitical imaginary by borrowing, sharing, and performing an expansive form of “the nation” with and for each other.

¹⁰ “Countries Invited to Participate” *Jamaica Daily News*, July 23, 1976.

Porous Bodies

The first Caribbean Festival of the Arts (1972) was the freedom dream of Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, the authoritarian architect of Guyana's co-operative socialism and part of a cohort of charismatically progressive, anti-imperialist, Caribbean leaders that included Manley, Eric Williams, and Fidel Castro. Burnham who was elected in 1966 as Guyana's first post-independence Prime Minister as a moderate and anti-communist leader who was supported by the US government, but in 1970 he declared an entirely new socialist vision for the nation. He sought out alliances with Cuba and the Soviet Union and embarked on a mission to nationalize the bauxite and sugar industries. His new brand gained the support of prominent representatives of the diasporic West Indian left, a group who, among many other political dissents, he would alienate and oppress, as his regime turned progressively autocratic and repressive in the late 1970s.¹¹ When Guyana celebrated its independence day celebrations in 1966, and again in 1970 during ceremonies that marked Guyana's re-birth as a Co-operative Republic, Burnham organized a conference of Caribbean Writers and Artists to gain support for a multi-national spectacle of Caribbean arts, performance, and culture. The Guyanese press marketed Carifesta 1972 as almost an extension of the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Conference held in Georgetown only days before Carifesta commenced, igniting a burst of public works and highly visible building projects to house foreign visitors. Both events were part of a larger developmental, architectural, economic, and political project to announce Prime Minister Burnham's vision of socialist modernity in a nation that had long been considered South America's backwater.

¹¹ Scott, David, "Preface," *small axe* 8 no. 1 (2004), 1-3.



Figure 24: Forbes Burnham in front an image of the Carifesta symbol. (1972).

Figure 25: Carifesta 1972 promotional poster. (1972) National Library of Jamaica.

As an Afro-Guyanese president in a majority Indo-Caribbean country where political affiliation was divided along racial lines, the festival was an opportunity for Burnham to claim Pan-Africanism and black popular culture's claims of modernity as part of his own political vision. Asian and Indo-Caribbean voices (represented in electoral politics in the Indian majority opposition People's Progressive Party) were marginalized and pushed to the background in the racially divisive politics of his rule. The framework of black and third-world autonomy proved to be a useful justification for Burnham's for nationalization of industry, political mobilization, and cultural censorship, which he argued were local triumphs in the name of global, non-aligned anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles.¹² Burnham merged his state-sponsored black power with a

¹² On the dynamics of African nation-building and Pan-Africanism, see Ron Levi, "Zaire '74: Politicising the Sound Event," *Social Dynamics: Cultures of Struggle* 43, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 184-98; Yair Hashachar,

romantic vision of the South American country's Amerindian past. The nationalist mythology of peaceful Amerindians who gifted the values of collective labor, cooperative agriculture, and stewardship of the land to the modern nation signified a transferable indigeneity that all Guyanese could claim.¹³ This Black and Amerindian vision of West Indian futurity was reinforced through the Carifesta 72' symbol, which festival organizers also recreated in the form of a massive float at the Opening Ceremony to serve as the backdrop for Burnham's speeches. It featured a black hand holding the sun—the symbol of the shining future of the West Indies—rising out of an Amerindian pyramid. The Amerindian identity symbolized through this architecture is a noble but statically historical foundation, while a rising black nation is posed to be the inheritor of the region's pre-colonial civilizations. By joining Amerindian and Afro-Caribbean racial stories, Burnham indigenized blackness and naturalized black claims to the land.

This dream of Caribbean unity as a kind of spiritual connection between black people and the land worked well in theory, but was executed with middling operational success. The festival grounds, a meticulously planned "Carifesta Wonderland" in a suburb north of Georgetown, was still very much under-construction several days after the festival began. The organizing committee planned the Festival City as a utopian community built of Guyanese-style wooden stilt houses that served as artists' homes for their 22-day stay. Press releases and newsletters that were sent out to West Indian communities in the islands and throughout the diaspora emphasized that this Carifesta Village would be a completely self-contained, self-sufficient community "with its own Bank, Post Office, Resident Doctor and Nurses on duty, Police Station and Fire Brigade, Laundry

"Playing the Backbeat in Conakry: Miriam Makeba and the Cultural Politics of Sékou Touré's Guinea, 1968–1986," *Social Dynamics* 43, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 259–73.

¹³ R. S. Milne, "Guyana's Co-operative Republic," *Parliamentary Affairs* 28, no. 1975jun (June 1, 1975): 353.

Depot and other services,” and a new arena for performances.¹⁴ However, this perfectly orderly, bourgeois yet rootsy planned environment to showcase Guyana’s cultural and economic development was fated to remain a dream deferred. Caribbean few weeks before the festival started, a Guyanese newspaper reported that festival organizers had all but lost hope of finishing all 250 houses and being able to complete the original design of creating a permanent roof over the main stage. Ironically, while Guyanese Prime Minister Burnham boasted that Carifesta was the manifestation of a Caribbean world free from foreign intervention, his government was forced to request aid from the United States in the form of a massive canvas tent to shelter guests and performers.¹⁵ Guests further complained that the three-week-long marathon of events was marred by organizational mishaps, long delays in the schedule (asserting the Caribbean’s own temporality), over-enthusiastic performers whose lengthy performances were only cut short when technicians cut the stage lights, and the persistence of pesky mosquitoes.¹⁶ The first Carifesta laid painfully bare that building a carefree, carnivalesque atmosphere was expensive and labor-intensive work.

Even as critics gleefully pointed out the festival’s failed infrastructure, excessive spending, or lax scheduling, they romanticized the event as a milestone in Caribbean nationalist consciousness. The narratives about Carifesta 72’s transcendent atmosphere emerged while the celebrations were still underway. According to reporters and participants, these spaces and structures of frantic movement, anticipation, and incompleteness orchestrated spontaneous sites of collision and

¹⁴ *Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts Newsletter*, English Edition, June 1972; Jean King, "A City within a City: Carifesta Wonderland Landscaped by the Curator," *Weekend Post and Sunday Argosy* August 8, 1972.

¹⁵ Rickey Singh, "Carifesta Problem- Foreign Aid Sought: US to Supply Roof for Cultural Centre," *Guyana Graphic* June 8, 1972.

¹⁶ Rodney, *Some Thoughts on the Political Economy of the Caribbean*; E.L.C., "Topic for Today: Carifesta: Its Chance of Success," *Sunday Advocate News* July 2, 1972.

connection that expanded creative possibilities. Artist-scholars like Edward Kamau Braithwaite emphasized a lack of structure, regulation, and foreign power as the defining quality of Carifesta's success. In a series of newspaper articles that were reprinted around the Caribbean, standardizing the narrative of the festival's transcendent success, Braithwaite attributed this space of freedom to the absence of regulatory white spectatorship and United States sponsorship that would otherwise over-determine all other forms of social relations:

“The slave masters were absent. There were no whips at Carifesta. No foreign magistrates of taste or art. No missionaries or sergeant majors. No one had to shoe shine boy, shimmy or show his teeth at the sun over his shoulder. There were no Euro-American camera crews, no dotty anthropologists taking notes.”¹⁷

The case of the Cultural Centre's loan-funded canvas roof reveals that Braithwaite's description of a space free of foreign presence and equal, cooperative labor was more myth than reality; in fact, the Guyana government encouraged US tourists to attend the festival and openly accepted sponsorship and aid from international organizations like UNESCO.¹⁸ However, a Jamaica newspaper remembered that even this borrowed tent roof which “played havoc on acoustics” was “in the spirit of adventure that pervaded the first Carifesta.”¹⁹ Braithwaite and his contemporaries christened Carifesta a collective independence celebration for the region because its conspicuous bureaucratic failures and intentional built-in spaces of informal interaction (through the program structure and urban planning within the festival village) allowed West Indians to

¹⁷ Edward Kamau Braithwaite, “Festival of Creative Arts of the Caribbean,” *The Advocate News*, October 16, 1973; Edward Kamau Braithwaite, Carifesta '72,” *The Jamaican Daily News*, July 23, 1976.

¹⁸ “The Vision of Carifesta,” *Kaie*, December 1971. “Carifesta Cash Take,” *Sunday Graphic*, September 17, 1972.

¹⁹ “The First Carifesta was full of Confusion and Excitement,” *The Jamaica Daily News*, July 23, 1976.

imagine new standards for regional success outside of colonial notions of discipline and ordered performances of Black submissiveness.²⁰

These performances of integration didn't stop at the proscenium – but were integrated into the carnivalesque atmosphere of the city. The visual and written archive reinforced these themes of frantic energy, spontaneous and open exchange, unintentional yet productive messiness. The media coverage all but erased the commercial purposes of Carifesta from its narrative, choosing instead to focus on the festival's spirit aspects. This was especially true in the accounts of visiting islanders, who marveled at the ways that artistic culture laid bare shared Afro and Amerindian Caribbean continuities, creating “...cultural bridges [that] easily spanned sea miles and linguistic distances.”²¹ This lack of national boundaries – meant to create a porous and spiritual connection across divides – was reflected in the community's plan which banned the use of fences, allowing “just hedges, shrubbery and landscaping.”²² While newspaper articles focused on events in the official program, the festival commissioned films of the first Carifesta that were produced in collaboration between the Organization of American States (OAS) film division and the government of Guyana foregrounded small artists' showcases, intimate rehearsals, and street dancing on the crowded thruways of the Festival City. The film's archive of Carifesta focuses almost exclusively on these movements of encounter, women setting out of their houses in their

²⁰ Carifesta was not the first Pan-Caribbean artist festival. The Caribbean Festival of the Arts (CARIFTA) founded by the Puerto Rican Bureau of Tourism had traveled around the region since the 1950s, and several Caribbean nations had taken part in the Commonwealth Arts Festivals in Great Britain during the 1960s. While those festivals were billed as folk showcases sponsored by Tourist Boards or the colonial government, Carifesta was an occasion for the independent Caribbean and a distinctly political institution of Third World solidarity.

²¹ "Jamaica Prepares for Carifesta 1976," *The Daily Gleaner* August 11, 1975.

²² "City for Creators," *Sunday Chronicle*, July 16, 1972.

foam roller curlers watching an impromptu carnival parade by the delegation of Montserrat in the streets, small artists' showcases, intimate rehearsals, informal dance performances, and unplanned jams.²³ Drumming from the Rastafari, Brazilian, and Haitian encampments reportedly woke performers at dawn, and parties in the streets continued late into the night. This continuous revelry reinforced the vision of a city without walls, border laws, or visible policing, made possible by its removal from the center of Georgetown. Racial and ideological conflicts across national lines — from the reasonably benign “fun of watching the Cuban writer beat his breast for Negritude and then clash, via interpreters, with the Haitian, as to who had the greatest right to Black identity” during a planned debate, to the more troubling boycott of Indo-Guyanese performers over misappropriation of funds set aside by the colonial government for repatriation to India—were for the most part brushed aside in recollections as part of the creative friction that constituted the region's multi-racial cultural identity.²⁴ A West Indian narrative in which black culture survived triumphed over white colonization in a creole repetition across the region was expansive enough to envelop a wide range of black Caribbean origin stories and migratory connections, but served to tokenize or delegitimize other kinds of claims to Caribbeanness.

In addition to being a space of open exchange for artists, Carifesta was billed as a sort of anthropological field site, where middle-class artists could receive a live feed of artistic inspiration from the folk. Carifesta PR materials boasted: “Festival City breathes people, grassroot folk that artists love. And the setting is deliberate. For it is important that the artist communicate with folk, a

²³ Brian Stuart-Young, *World of the Caribbean (Motion Picture)*, 1972.

²⁴ “Boycott Plan Still On,” *Weekend Post and Sunday Argosy* March 19, 1972; “Will Jamaica Host the Next Carifesta,” *The Sunday Gleaner* September 10, 1972.

source of inspiration during his three-week sojourn.”²⁵ Even within the proscenium space, gaps in the unfinished walls of the grand theatre allowed the maids, dressers, and construction workers into otherwise middle-class spaces. Journalistic observers drew attention to these laborers as “they craned and gawked and cheered louder than the patrons in the best seats,” describing them as an energizing presence that authenticated staged folk performances for middle-class audiences.²⁶ The actual physical boundaries of the stage were never crossed. The audience knew its place, and the dancers knew theirs. The gaps and imperfections in the arena’s construction, however, allowed the theatre staff to shift the power dynamics of the performance, drawing the attention away from the stage, turning the gaze on the seated audience, and reclaiming their unseen labor.²⁷ And while few unfinished walls and moments of improvisation didn’t dismantle the structures meant to separate social class, regulate performance space, and silence Indo-Caribbean protest, these productive failures of infrastructure and breaks within the proscenium’s structure, rather than the state’s pomp and ceremony, came to symbolize this ideal “Caribbean nation” held within Festival City. Carifesta - both as idea and event constituted in collaboration with artists, spectators, supportive staff, spectators, and politicians - allowed the Guyanese national project and the Caribbean to succeed on its own terms: unfinished, in flux, in the process of self-definition.

For these reasons, it is not hard to imagine why, despite the economic burdens of celebration, delegates from Manley’s New Jamaica expressed hopes that the festival would stop in

²⁵ Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts Newsletter, English Edition, June 1972.

²⁶ "Will Jamaica Host the Next Carifesta."

²⁷ Joseph Roach, “Sweating Blood: Intangible Heritage and Reclaimed Labour in Caribbean New Orleans,” *Performance Research* 13, no. 4 (December 2008): 140–48.

their home island next on its migration around the Caribbean to lend itself to the PNP's goals for spreading sentiments of solidarity. A group of prominent artists and writers met together before leaving Georgetown to create a set of recommendations for institutionalizing the event. They created a Carifesta Secretariat to ensure that the festival would be staged tri-annually, and to oversee the creation of folk archives, traveling exhibitions, and artist residencies in-between the festival. Seemingly by unspoken consensus, newspapers across the Caribbean drew on the entrenched Federation-era supra-island bureaucratic legacies and agreed that in order for the event to grow and mature the next Carifesta would be staged one of the "big islands" – Trinidad, Cuba, or Jamaica – which already had the performance spaces, capital, or tourist infrastructure to shoulder the costs. English-born Jamaican nationalist artist Edna Manley (mother of Michael Manley) reported to *The Gleaner* that though the scramble for Carifesta should not disrupt the goal of Caribbean unity ("I do not think that we should be aggressive or fight for it"), the festival could prove to be a tremendous stimulant to regional and national artistic production and Jamaica's tourism industry.²⁸ At the next meeting of the Caribbean Free Trade Community (CARIFTA) in October 1972, Jamaica's bid to host the next Carifesta was officially accepted.²⁹

The collective memory of Carifesta '72 – itself a performative narration of an integrated regional history – would continue to be evoked and re-embodied through the 1970s, becoming part of a regional repertoire of unifying spectacles. Carifesta and performances of Caribbeanness like *Kumina* laid a framework for performing Caribbean internationalist citizenship – based on a

²⁸ "Carifesta a Tremendous Stimulant to the Arts Says Edna Manley," *The Daily Gleaner* September 15, 1972.

²⁹ CARIFTA would become CARICOM – the Caribbean Community and Common Market, in 1973. "History of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)," *Caribbean Community Secretariat*, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://archive.caricom.org/jsp/community/history.jsp?menu=community>

shared Afro-Caribbean and Amerindian past and anti-imperialist politics – that in many ways perfectly aligned with Manley’s vision of Jamaica as a small island with a significant influence in the Third World Sphere. It also set the stage for how performances of South Asian identity would be represented in the festival, as a historical or religious dance heritage rooted in far-way India, rather than representative of contemporary Indo-Caribbean creolized cultures indigenous to the Caribbean, or contemporary progressive socialist politics. Far from being a stable or calcified notion of national and diasporic unity, the cracks and failures that constituted its productive incompleteness made Carifesta an agile and malleable score for performance across time and space. Within Jamaica, Carifesta’s purpose and the kinds of stories about Afro-Caribbean history would continue to adapt and shift, as it was put to work for Manley’s state in crisis.

Heavy Manners

Manley announced to the press in June of 1975 that it was time to start preparing for Carifesta in 1976, a proclamation that came a year later than initially anticipated because of the high volume of artists and arts administrators throughout the Caribbean who had committed to the Second World Black and African Festival of the Arts (FESTAC) in Lagos, Nigeria.³⁰ This delay gave the event greater weight and urgency for the PNP, as the festival would coincide with what was already a violent and contentious general election season. Drawing on Caribbean discourses of arts and nationalist development from Garvey to Burnham, the PNP set out create a spectacular performance of national discipline, an open and free space that could facilitate spontaneous exchange, and perhaps most of all, the enactment revolutionary cultural consciousness up to the task of proving that despite Jamaica’s troubled democracy, it still was a regional leader.

³⁰ What would become FESTAC 77 was originally scheduled for November 1975.

The state's performance of these Carifesta's politics began as they very publicly prepared for the event. In a press conference with his newly gathered Carifesta Steering Committee that included Jamaican theatre director and freshly appointed Carifesta Director-General Wycliff Bennett, Dance Director Rex Nettleford, and nominees from the all of the major government Ministries. Manley promised that Carifesta would be celebrated in a grand scale that reflected what Jamaicans had since Federation considered to be their relatively advanced development and role as a regional leader. While approximately 1,000 overseas performers from 28 countries had participated in the first Carifesta, early projections estimated that 5,000 performers from 35 countries would take part in the second, including the new addition of headlining musical acts from Central America and the southern United States.³¹ The committee was quick to assure the public that instead of being contained in an enclosed urban community within the capital city, Jamaica's Carifesta would be an island-wide event. By October 1975, a 55-member advisory/steering committee that read as a who's who of Jamaican art and politics established a hydra-like Carifesta Organization. It consisted of both full-time staff members and volunteers who worked from 34 sites in Jamaica and traveled between Carifesta offices in every participating nation.³² In London and the USA, additional committees were established within consulate offices to liaise with West Indian communities abroad.³³

³¹ Notably absent from the Carifesta 1976 invitation list was Chile and Brazil. At Carifesta 1972, while under the leadership of Salvador Allende, Chile had sent several delegates. Yoruba cultural performers from Bahia represented Brazil. Wycliffe Bennett and Hazel Bennett, *The Jamaican Theatre: Highlights of the Performing Arts in the Twentieth Century* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2011).210

³² "Phrase One of Operations for Carifesta '76 Completed," *The Daily Gleaner* October 28, 1975; *The Jamaican Theatre: Highlights of the Performing Arts in the Twentieth Century*.213

³³ "Carifesta Plans Outlined to Jamaicans in U.K.," *The Daily Gleaner* March 25, 1976; "Boro President Sutton Proclaims Carifesta Day," *New York Amsterdam News* June 26, 1976.

There was no attempt to hide the effort and planning that it took to coordinate so many moving parts, and to train so many bodies, in hopes of creating a successful event from the public. As one article that explicated (in almost mundane detail) the breakdown of administrative duties between the previously-established year national Jamaica Festival Committee and the new Carifesta Committee pointed out, "Jamaicans naturally expect festival... But festival is not so automatic. It demands great planning, organization, and a great expenditure of human effort to mature this event every Independence day."³⁴ The committee's structure, fundraising, and inner workings were major news items in the press, constituting a dizzying PR performance intended to communicate bureaucratic effectiveness, planning, thrift, and inclusivity.

The Committee worked to ensure that their festival would far extend the scale, grandeur, and geographic reach of the first Carifesta. They worked and publicized preparations as if the government had something to prove, and they did. In 1974, the PNP declared that Jamaica would follow a policy of Democratic Socialism, a political shift that led to a mixed economy dominated by the state sector and pursued a list of social justice-oriented reforms.³⁵ Early examples of the PNP's reforms included levies on foreign companies in the bauxite industry, a free secondary education system, national minimum wage, land reform, support for small farmers, and state-run housing projects.³⁶ Manley's reforms did not dismantle the longstanding tradition of clientelist

³⁴ "Structure and Functions of the Festival Commission," *The Star*, July 22 1976.

³⁵ Jamaica, *The Private and Public Sectors In Our Economy*. (Ministry Paper No. 16) (1977). I define the Third World as an anti-imperialist political project rather than a developmental state or geographical space. See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, ed. Howard Zinn, A New Press People's History (London: The New Press, 2007).

³⁶ See: Stephens and Stephens, "The Political Economy of Jamaican Development." Richard L. Bernal, "The IMF and Class Struggle in Jamaica, 1977-1980," *Latin American Perspectives* 11, no. 3 (1984): 63. On the legacy of Manley's trade union leadership and labor reforms see Anthony Bagues, "Michael Manley, Equality and the Jamaican Labour Movement," *Caribbean Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 2002).

government corruption in national politics, and despite his rhetoric of socialism, he never attempted to disentangle Jamaica from the world economic system or expropriate any private property. Still, these ideological breaks from the opposition party's pro-capitalist stance and foreign policy rapprochement with Cuba cost Manley the support of local elites and the allies within the United States government. From 1975 onward, an ongoing deficit in the nation's balance-of-payments was intensified by a fall in world market prices for sugar and bauxite, and capital flight amid fears that Jamaica would follow down the path of its Cuban allies placed limits on the PNP's social welfare programs.³⁷ In planning Carifesta during his year-long campaign for his second term against JLP candidate Edward Seaga, Manley needed to prove that despite economic set-backs he could organize a disciplined and unified voter base by peaceful democratic means to progress as his campaign "Forward Together" slogan promised. ³⁸

While the 1960s JLP administration sought to bring black citizens into the nation by promoting local folk forms, the PNP's socialist and Third World-aligned platform responded to the JLP's failure to adequately address the global black counter-culture of the 1960's. The new administration integrated supranational feminist, Black Power, and anti-imperialist rhetoric into their language of black authenticity.³⁹ Manley appointed Nettleford, a longtime supporter of his family's political dynasty and a close personal friend, as the Cultural Consultant to the Prime Minister and the Chairman of his Exploratory Council of the Arts in 1972. Nettleford's job was to restructure, rebrand, and consolidate the various private and state-run art institutions that received Government funding under the auspices of the Institute of Jamaica. At the helm of the nation's

³⁷Waters, *Race, Class and Political Symbols*, 152.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 77.

most powerful and long standing research institute, founded in 1876 as a symbol of benevolent colonial governance, Nettleford was finally able to bring together the independent theatre, dance and research communities he had helped to nurture into a cohesive program of “Jamaicanization,” to address foreign influence in cultural institutions and the entertainment industries. Nettleford’s effort to “indigenize” the cultural industry in the same way Manley sought to nationalize some industry thus brought together both the JLP and PNP’s cultural initiatives: using folk and popular forms to build a commercial and volunteer-based culture industry to promote local heritage and regional Afro-West Indian unity as the roots of “authentic” national culture.

Alongside the Institute of Jamaica’s longstanding library network and children’s arts programs, Nettleford led new initiatives in the early 1970s to teach African history as part of elementary education, rebuild the African Folk Museum (formerly “an exotic tourist attraction”) into the research-based African-Caribbean Institute of Jamaica, and create educational public programming in newspapers, radio, and television.⁴⁰ In the late 1960s, NDTC’s first generation of principal dancers, Shelia Barnett, Barbara Requa, and Bert Rose, combined their respective private dance studios and physical recreation training expertise to form the Contemporary Dance Centre (CDC)- the primary training and recruitment body of the NDTC. In 1976, the CDC became enveloped under Nettleford and Manley’s larger project of a national Cultural Training Center (CTC, now Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts), which centralized Kingston’s major theatre “movements” and the PNP’s urban arts outreach into one complex. The complex, consisting of a Drama, Theater, Dance and Music school, became the premier vocational training center for artists in Jamaica. It enrolled a little over 300 full and part time

⁴⁰ Institute of Jamaica, ed., *Cultural Policy in Jamaica: A Study / Prepared by the Institute of Jamaica, Studies and Documents on Cultural Policies* (Paris: Unesco, 1977) 38.

students per year, the vast majority of which were women. While the CTC sought to equip “personnel to meet the professional demands of stage performance and the recording studio,” its main goal was to produce a “multiplier effort” to train teachers to work in schools and grassroots community projects, much like the Federation era, regional Creative Arts Summer schools.⁴¹ Carifesta 76 built on this vision of Afro-Caribbean identity, showy displays of cooperative economics and anti-dependency funding models, as well as spectacles of a cohesive nationalist mission and unity within the artist community.



Figure 26: Carifesta committee members supervise the construction of a sugar works water wheel float, one of the Carnival floats that paid tribute to Jamaica’s current and past sugar industry.

Manley renewed his father’s Federation era emphasis on the arts as a modality of social citizenship, and Carifesta served as a showcase for his vision of Jamaica’s racial story and version of socialist reform. The Organizing Committee relayed to the public that planning an event on this

⁴¹ Institute of Jamaica, ed., *Cultural Policy in Jamaica: A Study / Prepared by the Institute of Jamaica, Studies and Documents on Cultural Policies* (Paris: Unesco, 1977) 44-46.

scale would require mass mobilization, strong direction, and almost military discipline, perhaps the ultimate test of national unity that the young country had encountered so far. Under the leadership of Bennett (who one Committee member characterized as “meticulous” and a “charming bully”) promotion for Carifesta ‘76 began in earnest in October 1975, calling for the participation of Jamaicans across the island and throughout the diaspora to donate their time, money, or creativity.⁴² Bennett’s publicity office bombarded the *Daily Gleaner*’s pages with advertisements announcing the island wide competition for a new Carifesta symbol and logo. The Director General also called for designs for masquerading bands, tableaux, floats and dramatic scenes for the closing Gala and two-day “Carnival of the Nations” that would move throughout Kingston’s streets and the National Heroes’ Circle in the city center.

The “Carnival” float parade was billed as an opportunities for the general public to participate in Carifesta’s spectacles. It allowed bands of Jamaicans and representatives from all participating nations to contribute floats that highlighted their country’s unique history. Jamaican’s Jonkunno processional tradition did not have the same international clout or draw tourists like the Carnival season in Trinidad or Brazil, and so the organizers co-opted these traditions under the banner of regional unity and set out to transform Kingston into “a carnival Rio or Port of Spain.”⁴³ Advertisements calling for float submissions provided a lengthy list of appropriate themes “relevant to Jamaica’s history or the Jamaican way of life” for Jamaican participants to use as inspiration for floats. Suggestions for historical themes avoided direct reference to British colonialism, highlighting a more distant “Spanish Tradition in the Caribbean” instead.⁴⁴ Perhaps the festival focused on

⁴² Bennett and Bennett, *The Jamaican Theatre*, 216.

⁴³ "Merry Go Round," *The Daily Gleaner* Decemeber 15, 1975.

⁴⁴ "Designs Invited for Carifesta," *The Daily Gleaner* October 29, 1975..

Jamaica's period of Spanish rule because it provided further grounds to claim the Cuban, Mexican, and Bolivarian resistance against the empire within the festival's imaginative retelling of history. Participants were also encouraged to perform expressions of racial harmony and Afro-Caribbeanness reflected in the theme "Out of Many of People" (Jamaica's national motto), slave and labor rebellions, The Middle Passage, The Maroons, and the theme of "African Survivals," in reference to Melville Herskovits' anthropological studies of New World black cultures, providing a common basis of blackness in the diaspora.

Beyond creating spectacles and stage productions for the festival, the Carifesta organizers also sought to coordinate publicity displays of their technical competence and public service. The committee provided free technical training and professional programs to equip young people to fill much-needed positions as support staff for events in both the capital and in provincial areas, framing the festival as one part of Nettleford and Manley's cultural training program's initiatives to address unemployment and institutionalize artistic standards. The *Jamaica Daily News*, a pro-PNP newspaper, advertised that the lasting benefit of Carifesta was not only its patriotic pedagogy but the practical skills of stage management, lighting, sound techniques, "Front of the House Management," and wardrobe management, all of which would lead to a more professionalized workforce.⁴⁵ The Jamaica Festival Commission also committed itself to addressing the Jamaican music industry as an area of "development" through the Festival Song competition, by providing music industry training, exposure, and employment opportunities for amateur and established artists.⁴⁶ Jamaicans of all ages were urged to attend Carifesta events as part of their Democratic Socialist civic education, in order to learn patriotism, become more "well-rounded persons," and

⁴⁵ "Lasting Benefits of Carifesta '76," *The Jamaica Daily News* July 23, 1976.

⁴⁶ Ibid. "Development of Music," *The Star*, July 22, 1976.

cosmopolitan world citizens.⁴⁷ A *Gleaner* article also promoted the event as a form of domestic cultural tourism, marking it as “the cheapest way” to interact with other cultures and receive a free “cultural education.”⁴⁸ This project further expanded the early mandates of the Creative Arts School to establish Jamaica as the very center of the English-speaking Caribbean’s theatre community because of its arts infrastructure, disciplined citizenry, and ability to draw the diversity of Caribbean experience into its orbit.

Making sure that foreign guests showed up to witness the city’s mobilization and beautification efforts was a pressing concern for Carifesta organizers for several reasons. Expanding the number of Carifesta participating countries and targeting states outside of the Commonwealth was considered crucial for the festival’s credibility as a truly internationalist and cosmopolitan event. In Wycliffe Bennett’s memoirs, he writes that organizers deemed the participation of Haiti, Mexico, Cuba, and Venezuela absolutely crucial, perhaps because of the prominence of their revolutionary histories and despite – in the case of Haiti and Mexico – the authoritarian and anti-leftist contemporary policies of Jean-Claude Duvalier and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional.⁴⁹ To ensure their presence, organizers decided to “appeal to each nation’s sense of hero worship” through their choices of L’Overture, Bolivar, Juarez, and Marti to join Jamaica’s own Garvey as the festival’s honorees.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "Carifesta Can Create a Sense of Patriotism ," *The Daily Gleaner*, August 2, 1976.

⁴⁸ "Carifesta Cheapest Way to Get Nations Together- Clayton," *The Daily Gleaner* June 11, 1976.

⁴⁹ Bennett and Bennett, *The Jamaican Theatre: Highlights of the Performing Arts in the Twentieth Century*. 210.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

This celebration of brown and black military/political figures who fought to support independence was counterbalanced by a parallel political rhetoric that came to prominence during Manley's second election campaign: a call to control and discipline the unchecked violence and unsanctioned informal politics of poor brown and black Kingstonians, and particularly supporters of his opposition. In 1975 and 1976, a wave of violent crime hit Kingston and radiated throughout the province of St. Andrew, perpetrated by rival JLP and PNP affiliated gangs. During the period between November 1975 to June 1976, gun-related violence resulted in 130 murders, and over 3039 violent crimes were reported.⁵¹ The national and international hysteria over murder and crime in Kingston rose to its height in January 1976 during the meeting of the International Monetary Fund in Kingston, when instances of arson and outbreaks of violence rocked the public housing community Trench Town, a known stronghold of PNP supporters. In May of the same year, another case of arson destroyed a tenement yard on Orange Lane in Trench Town, killing 11 people (including seven children) and displacing 500 others.⁵² Seaga blamed the public disorder on the failures of Socialism. He announced to the *Gleaner* that JLP-sponsored cultural groups from Tivoli Gardens had recused themselves from Carifesta competitions for fear of their safety, and accused the PNP of harassing his constituents.⁵³ The use of imported guns, seemingly strategically planned attacks, and the targeting of government security forces led the PNP to turn to accuse the CIA of intervening to destabilize the Democratic Socialist project.

⁵¹ Ministry of National Security Jamaica, *Review of State of Emergency* (Ministry Paper no. 22) by Keble Munn (June 7, 1977).

⁵² Waters, *Race, Class and Political Symbols*, 145. Michael Manley, *Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery* (London: Writers and Readers Published Cooperative Society Ltd., 1982). 135-6.

⁵³ Winston Spaulding, "Disturbing" Letters to the Editor, *The Gleaner*, August 2, 1976.

In addition to the violence, right-wing propaganda also stoked a Red Scare, spinning the government's support of Cuba into evidence of an imminent hostile communist take-over. For instance, conservative *Gleaner* columnist William Strong wrote in an opinion piece for *The Star* to advocate that security forces "double-check all Cubans" arriving at Carifesta for bombs and weapons before entering Jamaica, because "it would be a folly to believe that they are all a hundred percent politically trustworthy wholly devoted to the Cuban Revolution and its great leader Fidel Castro."⁵⁴ In his public speeches and political memoirs, Manley compared *The Gleaner's* strong editorial turn in favor of the JLP with the psychological warfare the CIA waged within Chile to help to fell the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende three years prior.⁵⁵ He accused the JLP of being agents of the US's retributive destabilization campaign in response to Jamaica's alliances with Cuba and support for the Angolan fight for decolonization. Keble Munn, the Secretary General, identified the violence in Kingston as "urban terrorism"—senseless attacks that were external to the social body rather than symptom of Jamaica's clientelist political culture—and the PNP declared a State of Emergency in June 1976.⁵⁶ Manley used the patois term "to put under heavy manners" to refer to the State of Emergency's strategy of "disciplining" and threatening gunmen into submission, a phrase that came to embody the "tough on crime" persona that he propagated during his election campaign.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ William Strong, "You Can Quote Me: Fine-Screen and Double Check All Cubans in Jamaica," *The Star*, July 27, 1976.

⁵⁵ Manley, *Jamaica: Struggle in the Periphery*, 223.

⁵⁶ Ministry of National Security Jamaica, *Review of State of Emergency*.

⁵⁷ Waters, *Race, Class and Political Symbols*, 146.

The local and foreign press' reporting on the violent conditions in Kingston was damaging in many ways for a government already facing economic troubles. Hotel rooms remained vacant as rumors of the island's instability slowed North American tourist traffic, leading the Jamaica Tourism Bureau to declare that the 1976 season was "arguably the most difficult the industry has faced, and certainly the most crisis-ridden one with which the Public Relations Department had to deal."⁵⁸ This decline in tourist traffic and blow to Kingston's foreign reputation caused many countries to back out of Carifesta, including the headlining New Orleans brass bands set to perform in opening Gala, for fear of the violent political climate. By July, only twenty-four of the thirty-five countries which had originally been invited to attend the festival stood fast in their decision to send delegates.

While the violence, rumors of violence, and presence of the military in Kingston was an international public relations disaster, the PNP was quick to spin the State of Emergency into an opportunity for the regional and the black diaspora to take a stand against United States intervention. The committee urged citizens to show bi-partisan solidarity to support local and international artists. Organizers embarked on a series of public relations tours to visit heads of state around the Caribbean and business associations in Kingston to encourage participation as a gesture of good faith in the government. Speaking to a group of prominent philanthropists at the Four Seasons in Kingston, Carifesta General Secretary Pearl Wright told her audience that "We must make up our minds to show the world that we have confidence in Jamaica," and requested that they "not give friends from overseas a bad picture of Jamaica" since these negative impressions would not only hurt their nation, but other participating Caribbean countries as well.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁸ Jamaica Tourist Board, *Jamaica Tourist Board Annual Report 1976-1977*, 3.

⁵⁹ "Show Confidence in Jamaica through Carifesta 1976," June 16, 1976.

committee and their public relations machine maintained that the arts were “a unifying force in building a wholesome society.”⁶⁰ The push surrounding Carifesta also kickstarted an attempt to connect and identify Jamaica with North American-born blacks, initiating what the Jamaica Tourist Board’s (JTB) marked as its “first concerted effort to attract the U.S. black market to come to Jamaica.” They placed advertisements in African American magazines and newspapers to target US Black travelers.⁶¹ A full-page color advertisement in *Ebony* summoned Black Americans to the party of the season with their southern Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American neighbors. “Everyone is going to be there,” the ad’s text promised, “Now we’re inviting you!”⁶² In the period leading up to and during Carifesta, Gleaner society columnist Kitty Kingston spotlighted Carifesta vacationers, like black New York civil servants Audrey Harvey and Hilda Ford, to highlight the black diaspora’s confidence in Jamaica. The visitors attested to the warmth of the Jamaican people, affirmed that Kingston was indeed safe, and expressed satisfaction that “they decided to ignore the advice of people in New York [who] told them not to come here.”⁶³

Government officials were quick to assure the public and foreign visitors reports of uncontrolled Black violence were not only grossly over-exaggerated propaganda, but that the State of Emergency made Kingston even safer.⁶⁴ Kingston was safe, they argued, because the violence

⁶⁰ In reference to Carifesta’s official statement of “Aims and Objectives” which were as follows: “1) To expose the peoples of the region to each other’s culture through creative activity, thus deepening their knowledge and awareness of the native aspirations of their neighbors; 2) To forge through cultural participation, closer relationships between peoples of the region; 3) To demonstrate the importance of the arts a unifying force in building a wholesome society; 4) To develop the content of our regional culture as well as its aesthetic forms.” “Aims and Objectives“ *The Star*, The Star Carifesta Supplement, July 22, 1976.

⁶¹ Jamaica Tourist Board “Jamaica Tourist Board Annual Report 1976-77,” 1977.

⁶² “Carifesta 76 in Jamaica!” (Advertisement), Jamaica Tourist Board, June 1976, *Ebony*.

⁶³ Kitty Kingston, "Personal Mention: Carifesta Visitors," *The Gleaner* August 3, 1976.

⁶⁴ "Carifesta Preparations Explained," *The Daily Gleaner* February 22, 1976.

was confined to a small and isolated section of the capital where criminal elements resided. In fact, organizers and advocates for the festival argued, not only was everything “normal” in Kingston, but the festival had been much improved through the presence of the military.⁶⁵ Bennett argued that the National Security Forces would act as convenient protection over the committee’s intricate orchestration: “The State of Emergency in Jamaica will provide an even safer atmosphere for the full development of the Carifesta program which involves long hours of rehearsal and detailed technical preparations,” and assured that “security would be comprehensive, but unobtrusive.”⁶⁶

Even as they strained to put on their best face for foreigners and convince locals of their government’s efficacy, Carifesta’s toughest audience was Jamaican nationals abroad. The festival organizer’s call for expatriates to come home was a particularly fraught gesture given rising elite and middle-class migration over fears of Cuba-style socialism and urban violence, forming tense relations between Jamaicans at home and in the diaspora over nationalist loyalty. Taunting these deserters and detractors, Manley famously said in a 1975 speech that “anyone who wants to become a millionaire in Jamaica my advice to them is to remember that planes depart five times daily to Miami.”⁶⁷ This ambivalent push and pull between welcoming back Jamaican migrants and characterizing them as disloyal and oppositional to a project of national sovereignty added new dimensions to the state’s ideal performance of Jamaicaness. Rejecting the West Indies longstanding identification with the experience of migrancy, this 1970s narrative promoted the virtues of staying within the country and performing a certain kind of stalwart and laborious civil duty had become part of a new institutionalized revolutionary citizenship.

⁶⁵ Editorial, “Carifesta,” *The Daily Gleaner* August 14, 1976.

⁶⁶ “Carifesta Preparations Explained.”

⁶⁷ “No one can become a millionaire here-PM,” *The Gleaner*, July 16, 1975

The night before Carifesta opened to the public, Manley gave an independence day speech to the nation, taking a moment to address issues of national importance before the international festivities commenced. The Prime Minister addressed the “gloomy period” of the previous months during which his country had been battered by “economic problems, political problems, industrial problems, and the frightening specter of a wave of crime and of manipulated and planned violence.” Manley chastised the disloyal expatriates who had left the island for greener pastures, but congratulated his supporters who had stayed for having gained a new political consciousness. He claimed that they were “beginning to understand History” and the cyclical nature of freedom through the collective experience of national struggle: ⁶⁸

“We received our Independence fourteen years ago. We were, perhaps, fortunate not to have to struggle for it as others have had to struggle. But all progress rests upon struggle finally. And now we are striving to make a reality of that independence. And my observation is that the mass of people understand that our problems are a necessary[,] perhaps a delayed [,] part of the struggle to build a real nation.” ⁶⁹

The next day during the Carifesta Opening Gala in the national stadium, The Fabulous Five band performed a cover of Jamaica reggae artist Pluto Shervington’s 1975 anti-migration anthem, “I man born ya (I Was Born Here).” The song quoted Manley’s “five flight a day to Miami” speech admonishing deserters, and perfectly exemplified this ethos of nationalism as stalwart labor. In a tepid endorsement of the nation’s progress, Shervington admits in the second verse “*But when you stop and check out the facts, its a whole heap of things Jamaica lack,*” but questions the loyalty and commitment of those who left: “*but when you run from a problem it neva solve.*” Voices raised around the stadium to join in the chorus which had a PNP rallying cry “*But I man on ya, I man born ya, I nah leave ya fi go a America.*” The performance was divisive. It

⁶⁸ "Problems Necessary in Struggle to Build- Pm," *The Daily Gleaner* (August 2, 1976).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

isolated some returning migrants but affirmed to others that the struggles surrounding the year of 1976 were a marker of long awaited revolutionary cultural change that had been promised by Federation and deferred after Independence.⁷⁰

The PNP's and nationalist-oriented journalistic representations of Carifesta seamlessly integrated the international festival into its socialist discourse of political self-reliance, economic nationalism, and Third World political awakening. They looked back with hope to Carifesta '72, which modeled a uniquely Caribbean way to work towards the unfinished goal of full cultural autonomy. For Manley's People's Political Party and their stake in the upcoming December 1976 elections, Carifesta was a moment to reflect on the ways that Jamaica's independence was incomplete. The unifying discourse of the festival became an opportunity to mobilize citizenry, present a disciplined and organized socialist state to outside detractors, and transform chaotic violence into a rallying cry for patriotic fervor. The PNP marked political violence as an outside enemy that was disbanded from the national collective, and against which Jamaica could wage its own revolutionary war. The party assured the public that these rogue and violent black fugitives who deviated from law and order could be neatly controlled and contained into tenement yards and ghetto streets far away from visitors' eyes.⁷¹ Just like the five militant and anti-imperialist nationalist heroes—Bolivar, Toussaint, Juarez, Marti, and Garvey—whose enormous papier-mâché effigies would be paraded through the opening Gala, this war against violence was ideologically integrated into the orchestration of celebration. Heavy Manners as retributive militarized justice, and collective discipline became the strategy for building the conditions for merriment.

⁷⁰ Stella, "Partyline," *The Star*, August 7, 1976.

⁷¹ Manley used Cold War discourses that marked the enemy as both external and foreign to legitimize the state's legal civil war on its citizens, in line with Agamben's notion of a "state of exception." Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, Stato Die Eccezione.English (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

The Jump-up

Caribbean intellectuals and artists often expressed anxiety that their attempts to bring about a liberatory Caribbean consciousness through a recognition of the region's inherited cultural potential was lost on the common man, particularly the urban working or popular classes who they believed had been trained to see their culture through the eyes of the colonizer. Nettleford and his NDTC cadres expressed similar concerns, though their lack of faith was primarily directed towards the respectable middle-classes, rather than the working poor. As Nettleford expressed in a publicity interview for the first Carifesta, the high stakes of a successful spectacle is that it could lead West Indies to finally "accept themselves as they are rather than basing their entire ethos on criteria imported from elsewhere."⁷² For elite nationalist artists across the Caribbean, the Carifestas were thus an experiment to see if popular audiences would embrace a supranational political solidarity that the intelligentsia promoted as part of the moral justification for struggling under socialism. This theoretical binary between outcomes of live performance—one of cultural autonomy or colonization, acceptance or rejection, success or failure—gave way to a more complex spectrum of meaning-making and participatory experiences in practice. Audiences mixed vocalizations of idealism and ambivalence as they reacted in pleasure or playful protest over performers representations of the Caribbean experience.

The Carifestas of the 1970s (held in Guyana, Jamaica, and Cuba in 1979) left behind an astonishing wealth of written documents in the form of official publications that included literary anthologies and documentation of public literary forums.⁷³ Caribbean writers, including but not

⁷² *World of the Caribbean* (Motion Picture), directed by Brian Stuart-Young (1972, Guyana, Guyana Information Services, 16 mm film), New York Public Library Performance Arts and Research Collections.

⁷³ "Carib. Publications for Carifesta '76," *The Daily Gleaner*, November 27, 1975.

limited to Édouard Glissant of Martinique, Derek Walcott of St. Lucia, Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Alejo Carpentier of Cuba, and of course Barbados's Edward Kamau Braithwaite not only helped to plan and propagate the festivals, but were inspired by the gatherings to produce foundational literature about the nature of Antillanity.⁷⁴ Official publications and newspaper records can only tell us so much about spectators' views of Carifesta 1976, particularly given the restrictions on inflammatory speech leveled by the State of Emergency and the strongly anti-PNP sectarian voice of *The Gleaner*. Still, focus on reports of interactions between audience members, journalists, and participating artists contributes to an analysis of how Caribbean citizens on both sides of the proscenium divide performed regional connectivity through embodiments of Caribbean and Latin American cultural continuities, or leveled critiques that asserted the efficacy of local understandings and traditions. Throughout the eleven-day event, Jamaican spectators articulated their own grassroots notions of smaddification and standards of criticism based on performers' virtuosity, opportunities for public/audience participation, and cultural authenticity.

Official Carifesta rules and regulations evidenced a clear notion of what did not constitute "authentic Caribbean culture" according to the theatre establishment. In his travels around the Caribbean in preparation for the festival, Bennett expressly requested that countries present art that redressed the historical devaluation of the "achievements" of black and brown inhabitants of

⁷⁴ See essays on Carifesta in Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael J. Dash, xlvii, 272 p. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989); Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and The Postmodern Perspective*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992); George Lamming, "Rex Nettleford Cultural Conference U.W.I. Jamaica, March 1996 Opening Address," *Caribbean Quarterly* 43, no. 1-2 (March 1997): 1-15.

the region.⁷⁵ Bennet's instructions that "...Shakespeare or Moliere or Bach or Beethoven," or any other acts of solely European origin would not be tolerated stood as a firm criterion for submissions.⁷⁶ What constituted a successful "truly Caribbean" and authentic performance, however, remained a topic of lively and shifting debate.

Federation era middle-class artists and theater professionals often described their first encounters with Afro-Caribbean art as a transformative moment, allowing them to embrace their black identities and discover Caribbean continuities.⁷⁷ However, audience members in the 1970s reacted with a range of emotions that ranged from rapture to ambivalence, exhaustion, boredom, and annoyance.⁷⁸ For instance, after attending repeated folk dance performances all set to Afro-Caribbean beats, one respondent to a Gleaner public pool survey complained that there was too much of a focus on the African past. "There was the same jump up and the almost similar rhythm," expressed the polyrhythm-fatigued audience member who felt less than liberated by the repetitions in black cultural representation, "and if that was expressing 'roots' or African connection then there was some monotony about it."⁷⁹ This informant and several others cited dances from the Spanish-speaking New World, such as the "Mexican group," (presumably the Ballet Folklórico del Ministerio de Turismo) that performed in the Grand Market to rave reviews. The interviewees

⁷⁵ Coming from a man who had staged Kingston's Centennial celebrations in the National Arena to mimic Greek and Roman classical theater, Bennett's colleagues across the region may not have considered him to be the most self-reflective advocate for the cause.

⁷⁶ "Jamaica Prepares for Carifesta 1976."

⁷⁷ Choreographer Ivy Baxter's first encounter with Kumina drumming and its obvious similarities to African musical forms, an experience that she describes as the moment when her "real Jamaican eyes were opened" which, is emblematic of these genre of narratives. See Sorgel, *Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica*.76-77.

⁷⁸ This analysis of live state-sponsored performance draws on Clare Croft, *Dancers as Diplomats: American Choreography in Cultural Exchange* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷⁹ "According to 'Gleaner' Survey - Carifesta-Festival Seen as Success," *The Daily Gleaner*, August 4, 1976.

cited the folkloric troupe as a crowd favorite because it was a welcome break from the established Afro-Caribbean drum tempo and movement language.⁸⁰ Audiences were aware of the organizers' often didactic approach to performance curation, and often rejected the pedagogical offerings of the artistic elite, demanding instead to be surprised and kept on their feet.

Cuba's modern dance offerings were mentioned in the same poll as a hit, as the company embodied a tension between the familiar and strange that Carifesta audiences valued. Barbara Gloudin, a pantomime script writer and Gleaner journalist who wrote the *The Star's* patois gossip columnist under the pseudonym Stella, reported that the Cuban modern dance showcase was the place to see and be seen: "The place pack up so full, whether it was the advance word that the Cubans can dance like fire or because some people curious to see what Cubans look like, but it was a big audience."⁸¹ Audiences were curious to see Eduardo Rivero-Walker, an Afro-Cuban choreographer of Jamaican descent, and make comparisons between his Danza Contemporánea de Cuba and the NDTC's interpretations of modern dance. Jamaicans and folks from across the Caribbean lined up to witness these revolutionary bodies, using dance to imagine what life under Fidel Castro's socialism might be. While Jamaicans were dazzled by Cuba's highly trained artists, some might have been skeptical about the revolutionary government's myths of racelessness because they recognized in the Cuban delegation a similar labor/color divide as at home.⁸² As

⁸⁰ "Carifesta and the Kingston Syndrome," *The Daily Gleaner* August 12, 1976.

⁸¹ Stella, "Partyline," *The Star*, July 31, 1976.

Nettleford and Rivero-Walker's would form a long friendship and artistic partnership, particularly after he formed his own company *Teatro de la Danza de Caribe* in 1988. They trading works like Rivero-Walker's *Sulkari* and Nettleford's *The Crossing*, which became permanent fixtures of their respective company's repertoire.

⁸² Devyn Spence Benson, *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

Gloudin had pointed out in her editorial about racial tensions during Carifesta '72, while Castro had declared that Cuba was officially a raceless society, of the Carifesta participants chosen to represent the nation "...most of the dancers, men, and women, were black. Those who spoke for the Literature and Culture were not."⁸³ This racial make-up of the Cubans massive 80 person delegation was scarcely different in 1976. Regardless of if the dancers' identified as "black" (Rivero-Walker would likely be classified as some variant of mixed-race in Cuba's racial spectrum), the remnants of pre-revolutionary color/class hierarchies were reflected in which Cubans were chosen to represent the national body, or to be the revolution's intellectual voice.

While polls in *The Gleaner* and *The Star* are one way of gauging audiences' reactions to performance strategies and tropes that were billed as representative of "the spirit" of the "Caribbean people," the audiences also made interventions in real-time during performances. Though mediated by film and writing, we can get a rough sense of their audible and physical reactions as well as the kinds of performance scripts that had been socially encoded to express unity, approval, reignition, boredom, and countless other affects. The first Carifesta and the long-standing tradition of local annual independence day festivals had already molded the public's expectations for an actively participatory (if still regulated and coordinated) audience experience, one in which the wall between stage and audience was purposely blurry. For instance, music and folk dance performances or even large stadium Galas might end with the aforementioned "jump up." This call for audience members to dance in the seating area or join performers on stage as the show reached its crescendo had been a ritual of Caribbean concert dance since Beryl McBurnie's post-show dances at the Little Carib Theatre in the late-1940s. Newspaper columnists and reporters often judged the success of performances through their ability to draw audiences into embodied

⁸³ Barbara Gloudin, "Will Jamaica Host the next Carifesta?," *The Sunday Gleaner*, September 10, 1972.

interactions such as these, alongside other spontaneous auditory articulations of approval or dissatisfaction.

Audiences made distinctions about what constituted tribute to another nation's culture or crass appropriation, according to the virtuosity of performance and its emotional resonance, and shared their approval through their physical reactions. During the Guyanese folk dance exhibition, the dancers ended with a staged Afro-Guyanese social dance that Jamaicans recognized as akin to "kind of bruckens" done especially well, creating waves of relational experience so clear that even children sensed the complex historical connections within the Caribbean coalesce and condense into the dancers bellies and bottoms and feet. Stella reported that the dance became an invitation to showcase continuities: "Jamaican small bwoy from the audience got onstage and strut their stuff wild. The evening ended with *direct unity*."⁸⁴

In another example of successful borrowing during the Carifesta "Pops show" (a multi-round inter-Caribbean/Latin American popular music contest) the crowd jumped to their feet for Jamaican star Carl Dawkins' renditions of American soul music and "fancy footwork." By the end of Haiti's Bossa Combo's English-language calypso and mento-infused anthem for Carifesta "they had the audience jumping up and down in the aisle" in approval.⁸⁵ Borrowing extended beyond popular culture. The Trinidadian choir's touching rendition of Argentinian composer Ariel Ramírez's Spanish mass with Andean influences, *Misa Criolla*, was considered a highlight. This general acceptance of the piece was perhaps a result, as an article pointed out, both because of the performer's skill and the composition's accessibility. It had already been made familiar to and

⁸⁴Stella, "Partyline," *The Star*, July 31, 1976.

⁸⁵Howard McGowan, "In the Spirit of Togetherness... Third World, Bosa Combo, Carl Dawkins Steal Carifesta Pop Show," *The Daily Gleaner* August 2, 1976.

accepted by Jamaican audiences in NDTC's 1971 ballet of the same name, and thus was ripe for borrowing.⁸⁶ The spirit of shay-shay, the joy of seeing Caribbean culture not just repeated and but remixed, with variations of themes sonically layered in real time, still got the people moving. These mongrel mixings, muddy in their lineage and flagrant in their references to non-government-sanctioned cultural influences – like the United States hits that traveled to Jamaica through radio broadcasts, television, and the bodies of migratory workers – asserted their own local additions to intellectual discourses of creolisation and modernity. In these moments, columnists evoked language that recalled Carifesta's official diplomatic objectives, such as art's ability to transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries and create a "mood of togetherness" to affirm the audience's pleasure and the success of the performers.⁸⁷

In stark contrast, master playwright Derek Walcott's comic musical about the Rastafarian Movement, "O Babylon," was deemed a flop. According to the program notes, Walcott based his depiction of the Rastafari on secondhand ethnographies, including Nettleford's analysis of Rastafari as in *Mirror, Mirror* and the fictional writings of Jamaican novelist John Hearne.⁸⁸ In her memoirs, Carifesta advisory committee member and theater director Yvonne Brewster admitted, "The play itself was wonderful," but she argued that it was doomed from the start because of the actors' strong Trinidadian accents and even recounted her futile attempts to dissuade Walcott from staging the play in Jamaica. As per her ominous prediction, the play was not greeted with the full house that a recognizable figure like Walcott had grown accustomed to, because "the audience regarded Rastas with Trinidadian accents as travesties and there was no way round their often quite vocal

⁸⁶ "Grand Market Ends," *The Star*, August 4, 1976.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Carolyn Cooper, "'What the Backside All You Want?': Interrogating Rastafari in Derek Walcott's *O Babylon!*," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 15, no. 1/2 (2006): 196.

opposition to what they regarded as ridiculous."⁸⁹ The actor's failed accents were not the only puzzling or absurd aspect of this future Nobel-Prize winning writer's production, which included a ganja-induced dream sequence in which the Rastafari fly back to Africa on a marijuana joint rocket, but the production failed in large part because the language of the script also lacked recognizable standards of Rasta authenticity as rootedness to the place. Cooper argues that Walcott's attempt to clumsily translate "dread talk" or the orality of Rastafari into "universal" English rendered the particular poetry of Rastafari language both ridiculous and incomplete: "The Rastafari have invented a grammar and a syntax which immure them from the seductions of Babylon, an oral poetry which requires translation to the language of the oppressor. To translate is to betray."⁹⁰ Because the Rastafari constituted a nation within the Jamaican nation, separated through rites and dread talk's poetic opacity, any attempts to make the religion transparent constituted a misrepresentation and a loss of meaning. The audiences could not recognize themselves in Walcott's attempts to translate Afro-Jamaican experience for an international audience.

While the rituals and language Rastafari may not have been transparent to most Jamaicans, responses to *O' Babylon* by middle-class writers reveal how the movement had grown into a powerfully visible presence, and an increasingly claimable aesthetic because of performances like the NDTC and Manley's cooptation of the reggae sonics and optics. These spectators imagined themselves privy, and even partial owners, of the dread talk and dread culture. Stella also wrote off "O Babylon" with a *patois* dismissal: "Well, me never like it...something just didn't click. Maybe it was because we up here have lived with the Rastafarian revolution and seen the movement take all

⁸⁹ Yvonne Brewster quoted in Bennett and Bennett, *The Jamaican Theatre*, 218.

⁹⁰ Carolyn Cooper, "What the Backside All You Want?", 228.

the shapes and forms, why Derek's idea of it didn't turn us on."⁹¹ Stella's response and her claims to have "lived with," intimately, Rastafari's presence reveals how both the artistic elite and public-at-large had begun to claim Rastafari revolution in the 1970s as a narrative of the nation's own racial and cultural revolution – their Haitian or Cuban revolution. A *Star* review of the play didn't target the offensive accents, but a less tangible failure: the play's inability to hold a mirror to life, or the nation's collective memory about the emergence of Rastafari, which it argued "art is supposed to do." The author concluded: "although it would make a success in overseas territories, here we were able to detect its weaknesses."⁹² Making a localized, nationalist argument analogous to Kamau Braithwaite's claim that only Caribbean spectatorship could legitimate the success of NDTCJ's *Kumina*, Jamaicans also asserted their unique ability to judge authentic representations of their culture.

Also worth mentioning is a performance that never came to fruition. On the second day of Carifesta, *The Star's* front page read "Rodney to Speak at Mass Rally."⁹³ The title referenced the return of Dr. Walter Rodney to Jamaica, an event that had long been awaited by many of his staunch supporters: students, the UNIA, Rastafarian groups, intellectuals and journalists who advocated on his behalf since his ban from the country in 1968. Rodney, the Guyanese intellectual and historian, symbolized multi-class, transnational Caribbean Black Power and anti-imperialist protest perhaps more than any other figure in his time. While the Jamaican government never officially lifted his exile before his death in 1979, the occasion of Carifesta allowed for protestors to adopt the festival's discourse of Caribbean unity to petition the government to allow him to return

⁹¹ Stella, "Partyline," *The Star*, July 31, 1976.

⁹² Archie Lindo, "Carifesta '76: An Excellent Display of Talent," *The Star*, August 4, 1976.

⁹³ "Rodney to Speak at Mass Rally," *The Star*, July 24, 1976.

for the event. Facing pressures both from the left and counter-protests against his return from JLP supporters, The Minister of Security allowed Rodney to visit Jamaica "under the strict condition that he did not engage in any public speaking."⁹⁴ Whether Rodney was ever officially scheduled to speak at the Mass Rally is unclear, and the major newspapers were virtually silent about his return. A news item from the New York-based *Black News* reported that "Brother Rodney" was indeed scheduled to speak at Carifesta, but that Edward Seaga had personally intervened to block the participation of the inflammatory leftist professor.⁹⁵ However, we can still assume that on the day of the rally, *The Star* was aware that Rodney would not be present. Perhaps, we could read this headline as a protest performance in its own right, a disruptive spotlight that directed away from the politicians' podiums to illuminate the desires of a community awaiting their hero's return.

The final nights of Carifesta fell on a rainy weekend that broke Kingston's summer drought, and spectators moved out of the stadiums and concert halls, pouring into dance halls in droves. Despite the weather "nightclubs in the city were packed to capacity," *The Star* reported, and had to turn folks away. ⁹⁶ People took to the wet streets that were still being paroled by the security forces for the final jump-up, sound systems blaring. The form of the concert broke, and impromptu carnivals released *circles of inexorable progress through song through sound though thunder: torso flung back from pelvis: the feet shuffling freely forward, wave upon wave of the dancers.*⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York ; London: Routledge, 2003):229.

⁹⁵ Adeyemi Al-Muququdim, "Caribbean Scope," *Black News* 12 no. 14, 12.

⁹⁶ Star Reporter, "What a Carifesta," *The Star*, August 3, 1976.

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By examining these glimpses into Carifesta '76, we can begin to see the ways that audience participation and journalistic dialogues about live performance challenged and resisted reductive elite fantasies about the desires of the urban poor and "folk." Drawing from a wealth of Caribbean sources, audiences asserted their own opinions about what nationalist art "was supposed to do" and who it should reflect, referencing trans-national, trans-local, and local ways of viewing and interpreting what they saw onstage. Rather than understanding Caribbean cultural autonomy as a single moment of national becoming and emancipatory performance—as festival organizers' most optimistic discourses hoped—audiences' and artists' melding of ideas of tradition and experiences of modernity reveal how independence was something that could be rebooted, remixed, and ritually re-enacted to suit ever-changing popular desires.

Conclusion

In a preface to *Small Axe* in 2003, David Scott reflected on novelist Andrew Salkey's *Georgetown Journal*, the memoirs of his trip to Guyana in 1970 for the Caribbean Writers and Authors Conference, the mythical birthplace of the Carifesta '72 movement. Describing Salkey's ambivalence toward the Conference and its goals, he identifies "a sense of watching—querying—an expectation, maybe even the exposed anxieties of a generation's longing for release from false emancipations."⁹⁸ Scott's insight into Salkey's tentative participation in this alliance between artists and the Guyanese state reconfigures independence as a state of disillusionment and longing for otherwise, broken by brief moments of collective hope that continually fall short of its transformative promise.

A few months after Carifesta '76, this political moment when Democratic Socialism could be considered a feasible path towards "true" independence came to an end. Manley's simultaneous

⁹⁸ David Scott, "Preface," v.

embrace of Black Power rhetoric and fear of Black rebellion, so perfectly orchestrated in the grand spectacle of national security that accompanied Carifesta 1976, led the PNP down a cautious path of concessions to capitalist Cold War powers. Saddled with debt and a failing economy that left them unable to fund their ambitious employment and housing programs, the PNP government began loan negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) shortly after Manley's electoral victory in December 1976, and made their first two-year agreement in 1977.⁹⁹ The IMF's "reforms" were catastrophic in that they called for lower wages, higher interest rates, and a reduction of the state's role in the economy, essentially undoing any progress toward social equality that Manley had gained. The government's inability, and at times refusal, to meet the IMF's stringent demands worsened Jamaica's economic state and led to Manley and the PNP's fall from grace. In 1980, the Manley lost to Edward Seaga in an election even more violent than the last, ushering in the nation's full integration into the neo-liberal world order.

What can we make of Carifesta 1976 in hindsight, knowing that all of the planning, labor, creative engagement, and documentation that built this celebration of cultural collaboration and economic nationalism amongst the Latin America and the Caribbean nations couldn't overcome the region's exploitation in the global system? In Glissant's commemorative tribute to Carifesta '76 in *Caribbean Discourse*, he theorized a notion of defeat or capitulation as a condition for sublime unity. From Glissant's orientation in the French Caribbean, the festival's ability to bring about a "collective consciousness" of history and regional solidarity was best realized in the tragic figure of Toussaint L'Ouverture, who died in the French prison as his emancipation war waged on. He notes, "One can go so far as to argue that the defeats of heroes are necessary to the solidarity of

⁹⁹ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 78; Richard L. Bernal, "The Imf and Class Struggle in Jamaica, 1977-1980," 64.

communities."¹⁰⁰ This notion of the power of hero's defeat could be extended to another moment in the National Stadium, almost five months after the end of Carifesta, when a gunshot-wounded Bob Marley took the stage for his 'Smile Jamaica' concert to urge Jamaicans stand up for their own rights in the face of leaders that would surely fail them. Glissant's focus on L'Ouverture, who didn't live to see his revolution to completion, points to the ways that collective and relentless struggles for emancipation, and subsequent failures, unite Latin America and the Caribbean as a region. Glissant's helps us see a performance of history within Carifesta that is achingly and fantastically queer, that takes creative expression seriously as a form of political activism, and that refuses to accept established models of resistance.

Like Salkley and many of the observers whose voices make up this story, we should be wary of the ways that Caribbean governments used the framework of struggle, failure, self-reliance, and ritual renewal that Carifesta '76 offered to support a state of exception and bolster projects of nation-building that were often exclusionary. However, these very frameworks were useful for citizens as well. Carifesta artists and audiences took part in a kind of democratic community that was bounded, uneven, and rife with conflict, but rooted in the participatory ethos that constitutes the very core of Caribbean festival culture. They claimed the structures and the institutional support that the event offered—be it cultural training, the platform of festival contests or free entrance to shows—to choreograph the written and embodied narratives, behaviors and affects that constitute social citizenship.¹⁰¹ They embraced performances of ambivalence as practices of simultaneous flight from and engagement with the state. Through Carifesta '76, we can see the ways

¹⁰⁰ Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. Michael J. Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 68.

¹⁰¹ Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

that the NDTC and their colleagues ideological formations of what it meant to be a Caribbean citizen shaped the arrangements through which Jamaicans dreamed about the future, made sense of instability, sought entertainment and pleasure, and enacted their personal and collective histories.

CONCLUSION
Gerrehbenta



Figure 27: Gerreh dancers bow to the Horsehead masquerade. The NDTC closed their 2018 season performances with Rex Nettleford's Gerrehbenta (1983). Bryan Robinson Photography 2018.

It is July of 2018 and I am in the audience for the opening night of the NDTC's 56th season of dance. We are gathered in the Little Theatre in Kingston, where the waxy red plastic folding seats are slowly filling with ticket-holders well after the program has begun. This well-dressed crowd is mostly composed of NDTC elders, family, friends, and loyal seasonal devotees, and they treat the theatre possessively and affectionately, as they are at home. In between dance numbers the room is abuzz with talking—folks reaching across the aisles to greet familiar faces—as

their conversations voice skepticism and excitement to witness the company's new direction. The company has undergone some radical changes in the decade after Nettleford's passing, and this summer is the NDTC's first performance season with new Creative Director Marlon Simms at the helm. Though Simms had been with the company for 19 years, his appointment marked the first of the "new generation," or non-founding members, to take the reins of the company since independence.¹ What vision of Jamaica would the NDTC reflect in the 21st century?

A drumbeat begins and the restless energy of the room steadies. I realize that we have all been waiting for the final dance, the only composition by "the professor"—as Nettleford is commonly referred to in this group who knew him personally—to be restaged that night. Ritual and reggae continue to be the NDTC's bread and butter, the themes that keep critics happy and audiences in the seats. Gerrehbenta, the closing number, is ritual-inspired work that was first performed in 1983. It is a dance about death. Gerrehbenta combines several mortuary rites from Hanover and Westmoreland provinces that were "revived" through the efforts of the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission (JCDC) – the gerreh, the dinkimini, and the Yoruba-derived etu.² It is a capital "P" Production, a processional that moves with a driving force. The dancers are accompanied by a drum core and the NDTC Singers, who belt out wake songs that are both jubilant and solemn. Flowing costumes in Caribbean sunset colors and a towering masquerade of a

¹ After Nettleford's death in 2011 Barry Moncrieffe transitioned into the role of Artistic Director, before passing the baton to Marlon Simms.

² Rex M. Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Cultural Definition and Artistic Discovery: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, 1962-1983* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 153.

Jonkonnu Horsehead overwhelm the eyes. Cobbling different stages from wakes, or “deadyard ceremonies” in Jamaican lexicon, Gerrehbanta layers the movement language of loss into a kind of defiant ecstasy. While familiar to most, the dance still hits hard and stuns the crowd. They whoop and clap and cry. I am startled by my own tears, the tightening and expanding of my heart.

In the Little Theatre, the collective joy is tempered by what I identify as post-colonial melancholy. The world beyond the proscenium has changed dramatically in the 56 years since independence gave birth to both the NDTC and the belief that West Indies simply needed self-discovery and self-confidence to reach their full potential. Throughout the 1980s, Prime Minister Seaga’s full embrace of free-market capitalism put an end to the import-substitution policies that led to the growth of a black middle-class in the 1960s and 1970s. The JLP’s sought to reinstate law and order through a militaristic police presence in urban centers. Their anti-crime campaigns carried distinctly anti-black social messaging, leading to a widespread feeling of alienation and distrust of the government amongst many Jamaicans across social class. The neo-liberal dismantlement of the social welfare-state further damaged the populace’s trust in state-run institutions’ abilities to take care of people’s basic material needs. The Dudus Affair of 2010 (a chain of events incited by the United States’ request to extradite powerful West Kingston drug don Christopher “Dudus” Coke, resulting in a prolonged and violent stand-off between joint US and Jamaica military forces and Dudus’ loyal followers) signified for many the government’s complete inability to provide and protect. This sentiment of distrust is in part a continuity of Jamaica’s queer and ambivalent relationship to the state that I trace back to the colonial period, but Jamaica’s hybrid model of drug don/state rule is particular to the 1990s and early 2000s.³ The Dudus Affair

³ Furthermore, the 2018-2020 State of Emergency on the North Coast proved that this form of governance is no longer unique to Jamaica’s capital city.

revealed to the world that a fairly autocratic form of garrison gang governmentality had rendered the state's power all but obsolete in many parts of Kingston.⁴ Many Jamaicans, therefore, recall the period of this study both nostalgically as the birth of Caribbean black nationalism, and pessimistically as the moment when Jamaica became known as a violent and conflict-ridden society with a failed state security apparatus.

The NDTC is still a volunteer company, though dancers have inherited a material safety net that Nettleford secured for prosperity before he died. It includes some subsidized housing for dancers, corporate sponsors who help to fund annual seasons, close ties to university and youth arts training intuitions programs, and long-term patrons amongst the artistic elite. However, middle-class migration, widening class social divides, and changing models of international corporate arts funding have shifted some of these cross-class patron-client relations in the 21st century. In her 2002 ethnographic essay about the NDTC, Deborah Thomas explored some of the ways that neoliberal economic restructuring during the 1980s and 1990s transformed theatre culture in Jamaica. She wrote about how many of the newer generations of dancers—particularly young men who were actively recruited from poorer neighborhoods into the Edna Manley School of Dance to make up for the company's chronic lack male dancers from the 1980s on—lacked a full-time white-collar job to support their dancing. Professionally trained in the very school system that the NDTC inaugurated in the 1970s, dancers of all social class backgrounds have begun to push against the tradition of imagining dance as a free, public service to the nation.⁵ The first

Rivke Jaffe, "Notes on the State of Chronic: Democracy and Difference After Duded," *NWIG: New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 85, no. 1/2 (2011): 69-76.

⁴ Amanda Sives, "Changing Patrons, from Politician to Drug Don: Clientelism in Downtown Kingston, Jamaica," *Latin American Perspectives* 29, no. 5 (2002): 66-89.

⁵ Deborah A. Thomas, "Democratizing Dance: Institutional Transformation and Hegemonic Re-Ordering in Postcolonial Jamaica," *Cultural Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (2002): 512-50.

generation of NDTC dancers came from a range of different backgrounds, but they all reaped the benefits of increased black and brown social mobility of the post-federation era. Without Nettleford's powerful, if at times overbearing, direction guiding the company's creative footprint and funding model, the NDTC now has an unprecedented opportunity to re-evaluate what it means to represent the nation.

The everyday soundtrack to Jamaican life has sped up from syncopated bass lines to blaring drum machines. Dancehall has replaced reggae as the counter-cultural soundtrack of the neoliberal age, and in the 21st-century, dancehall blended with Afro-beats, hip-hop, soca, Bollywood, and reggaeton as a testament to the underground and mainstream currents of globalization. While dancehall's themes of defiant capitalist individualism, "slackness" (sexual looseness and public indecency), and gang and gun violence caused a moral panic amongst respectable society in the 1980s and 1990s, it reflected the new aspirations of poor and working-class Jamaicans - unchecked by 1970s state values of cooperative socialism or middle-class morality. Its forms (much like the shay-shay) were cosmopolitan and migratory. Rooted in videography, its spectacles were made to delight the camera.⁶ The NDTC has been slow to integrate the dancehall movement language into their repertoire, preferring to leave the mantle of innovating concert dance to newer companies.

Still, 21st-century currents are visible in the NDTC's catalog, particularly the slightly gimmicky competition style of contemporary dance disseminated on YouTube and American network television shows like "So You Think You Can Dance?" If analyzing how the NDTC

⁶ In the 21st century, new media and the internet has transformed Jamaican's relationship with global blackness into prismatic micro-cultures that interface with the state in surprising new ways- whether it be the emerging protest culture within increasingly differentiated and at the same time integrated Afro-beats/Soca/Dancehall/Reggaeton culture complex, or TikTok trends in which online DJs sample, remix, and create dance trends to political speeches.

approaches smaddification—or practices of amplification and spectacle— provides a metric for assessing what a generation desires for its future, might this turn towards screendance aesthetics harken a complete break from state-sponsorship, as they reach for compensation and recognition in the global market? In this elite crowd on this hot summer night, it's clear that folks are not sure what to make of these amalgamations, or how they fit into the vision of Jamaican dance that the NDTC has worked to build.

The NDTC's classic repertoire was in many ways a social contract with their audiences, a series of expectations built through response and relation, through conversations with community (both national and transnational) about how to perform authentic Jamaican blackness. This community consensus was largely oriented around the cult of Nettleford, the man who captured the post-colonial dreams and complex creole identifications of his time. Many of the founding members of the NDTC (who hold court in the back of the proscenium, watching over our heads) are aware to the point of concerned vigilance of these changing orientations. When I talked to these elders in the weeks and months that preceded the opening night, they expressed fear that the young choreographers are distant from the folkloric source material. ⁷The 21st-century NDTC lacks the same tradition of firsthand anthropological “fieldwork” as part of the company training that the founders and late-1970s/1980s “bridge generation” of teachers and social welfare workers experienced, traditions that the elders feel must be respected before they are creatively dismantled. Most of all, the founders despaired that the NDTC's new choreography has lost the company's signature total theatre aesthetic and Caribbean expressive opulence that structured their criteria for dancing black beauty and Jamaican pride. Even more important than the preservation of a specific Jamaican dance language, the founders stress the importance of cultivating smaddification as the

⁷ Bert Rose, Interview with Author, Kingston, March 13, 2018; Barbara Requa, Interview with Author, Kingston, August 2, 2018; Cheryl Ryman, Interview with Author, March 23, 2018.

nation's unique contribution to the global dance world. With the company seeking to attract a younger generation of Jamaican patrons and dancers, and to expand their international reach through an online presence, an abstract idea of the "nation" or West Indian region may no longer be the new NDTC's intended audience or ideal aesthetic community.

This project has sought to historicize how Jamaican dancers dreamed, legislated, argued, and moved blackness into being and into something that they could take bodily ownership of. The NDTC's praxis of embodiment, which functions in dialectic with both the poetics and formal politics of the 1960s and 1970s, is a process of embodying black futures that has been repeated across the black diaspora in response to the disappointments of post-colonialism. Jamaican dance was constantly informed and transformed by the black internationalist interventions. While the NDTC's repertoire enriched a deep and continuous dialogue with anti-colonial and post-colonial theoreticians, the NDTC's black radicalism was and is not legitimized because of its fugitive, progressive, popular, or anti-racist underpinnings, or invalidated by its alliances with capitalism and the state. There is no way to move that is inherently liberatory or "black." There is no magic ritual, no key to Africanist purity; rather there was a constantly transforming relationship with the past that structured their desires for materializing free futures. NDTC's dance was made queer and radical through response and relation, and through conversations with community (both national and transnational) about terms of black authenticity.

The vision of blackness that the NDTC crafted was as beautifully flawed and incomplete as the dream of Caribbean unity. It was laden with the baggage of empire, the tensions of Federation, the trauma of the plantation, and broken dreams of revolution. More than merely paying tribute to this generation of Caribbean movers and their remarkable intellectual and artistic work around performance, the body, joy, and emancipation, this dissertation waded into the deep waters of the creative incoherence, radical internationalism, and bitter contention that marked the process of

decolonization. Making oneself large and layered was one way to “hold” these contradictions of black life. Today, Caribbean sovereignty remains incomplete, migration to the United States has become even more deadly and fraught, disease and environmental devastation target the world’s most vulnerable, and climate change has emerged as a new kind of neocolonial violence. My tears at *Gerrehbenta* equally stemmed from feelings of mourning and hope. We are still trying to dance our freedom into being. The deadyard dance through the wake of destruction continues without rest, a long march towards coming into our own.

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