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Stages of Liberation:  
Ritual, Nationalism and Women's Cultural Production in Jamaica's Pre-independence Era

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for my mother, father, and brother

and the memories of

Una Marson

Enid Chevannes

and

Ivy Baxter

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## ABSTRACT

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Karima Atiya Robinson

This dissertation examines the development of a black theater aesthetic in Jamaica as the colony prepared for independence. I define my theory of myalisation to explain how middle class theatre audiences participated in the Afro-Jamaican religious rituals of the lower class and how their participation signaled the development of a Jamaican national consciousness. I examine the lives and theatrical works of three Jamaican women artists (Una Marson, Enid Chevannes, and Ivy Baxter) in order to demonstrate the role of women in the creation of a Jamaican national identity. I reveal how Afro-Jamaican religious rituals are gendered and how women's participation in these rituals was perceived by colonial officials as a sign of rebellion, erotic pleasure, and proof of insanity. I unpack how artists Una Marson, Enid Chevannes, and Ivy Baxter critiqued these gendered stereotypes and challenged other troublesome discourses around gender through performance. Playwright Una Marson's *Pocomania* written in 1938 serves as the inspiration for and model of my theory of myalisation. Marson's play exposes the life of a middle class woman who has an intense longing for connection with her African identity. She finds solace by participating in Revival meetings, but is condemned by her family. Marson eloquently shows the conflict between the middle and the lower class as well as rival belief systems at work. Her play actually performs aspects of Revival ritual on stage and inculcates her middle class audiences into ritual participation. Marson's play marks the beginning of the process of myalisation as middle class audiences will over time become more and more accustomed to witnessing and experiencing the Jamaican rituals practiced by the lower classes. Playwright Enid Chevannes continues the process of myalisation in the 1950s through the performance of her plays where the practices of obeah, nine night, and visions from ancestors are represented. Choreographer Ivy Baxter embodied many popular political ideas of the 1950s through the performances of her Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group. She also explores the power of ritual by having dancers replicate Revival ritual on stage. I reveal how these performances helped create and define a Jamaican theatre aesthetic.

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are too many to name and some wish to remain anonymous, I express my sincere gratitude to them collectively for their time, their trust in me, and their belief in the importance of the project. Without them, this project would not have been possible.

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## Preface

My introduction to Jamaican theatre began in the fall of 1993. I had recently graduated from Wellesley College with a double major in English and Africana Studies. I left Wellesley knowing that I wanted to be a writer and that I had a passion for the theatre, literature, and history of the African Diaspora. While I knew what my interests were, I was uncertain how to parlay my passion into a career. I had attended college close to my home town of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was longing to travel abroad. I applied for a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship to study post-colonial theatre and national identity in Jamaica and Zimbabwe.

Upon arrival in Jamaica I had one contact, a friend of a friend, and I knew little about Jamaican theatre. I was interested in how post-colonial countries used theatre to create national identities. I contacted professors at the University of the West Indies and eventually created a list of theatre practitioners who might be helpful. My informants all commented on the ‘golden age’ of theatre in Jamaica, the 1970s, mentioning artists like the late Errol Hill, Dennis Scott, and Earl Warner, who had created theatre utilizing Caribbean folk forms on stage. I quickly realized that what was unique about the period was that the artists were exploring Caribbean folk forms and sacred rituals and inventing ways to incorporate them into the dramatic structure of their plays. In the 1970s, the government and non-profit organizations were generously funding a wide range of artistic endeavors. After the 1980 election and the implementation of a new economic plan for the country, these funding sources quickly dried up. By the time of my visit in the early 1990s, neither theatre practitioners nor scholars could invite me to exciting productions of new works. Instead, they sent me to the archives to read the plays created in the

1970s and to study the folk forms that were used in the creation of an 'authentic' Jamaican theatre.

I had never been to an archive before and was entranced by the wealth of information. I wandered through the archives, taking copious notes on a host of Jamaican folk forms, plays, and playwrights. I was utterly hooked on historical research, though I had no idea what I would do with that information. Nonetheless, I enthusiastically gathered prodigious quantities of it.

Years later at Northwestern, I struggled to decide on a dissertation topic. I was interested in the similarities and differences among African, Caribbean and African American theatre, but my ideas were too broad for a manageable project. While I was very involved with the African Studies program at Northwestern and intrigued by African theatre, I eventually remembered an old box of papers from Jamaica hidden in the corner of my closet. I opened it for the first time in years to find my hand-written notes on Jamaican theatre, audio tapes of interviews, and a large stack of photocopied materials from the archives. I knew that I had found my topic: the use of folk forms in Jamaican theatre to construct a national identity.

When I returned to Jamaica in 2001 I realized that, while everyone knew about the contributions of Errol Hill and Dennis Scott, there were female theatre practitioners who used folk forms in their work. These women playwrights and choreographers were rarely referred to in published literature on Jamaican theatre. I began to explore the work and careers of a number of these women. I found that, despite the failure of scholars to mention them and the absence of published versions of their plays, there existed an abundance of material on them in the archives. I discovered that some of these forgotten women were creating work as early as the 1950s and that the well-known poet Una Marson was producing plays as early as the 1930s. My topic came

into focus as I decided to study what these forgotten women had to say about the nationalist movement of which they were a part and how they used folk forms and theatre to convey their views. As my topic became clearer, I decided to focus on the representation of sacred ritual on stage by women artists before independence.

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

This dissertation, “Stages of Liberation: Ritual, Nationalism and Women’s Cultural Production in Jamaica’s Pre-independence Era,” examines the development of Jamaican national identity through the lens of staged performance in the decades leading up to Jamaica’s independence from Britain. My project focuses on women artists and their contribution to the deployment of ritual performance as a marker of Jamaican national identity. I analyze Una Marson’s play *Pocomania*, Enid Chevannes’ plays *Superstition* and *The Vision*, and Ivy Baxter’s dance-theatre piece *Pocomania* in order to argue that these women defined how ritual performance and spirit possession could be performed on national stages to embody the rhetoric of nationalism.

In this dissertation I demonstrate how artists in Jamaica during the nationalist period (1938-1962) used folk forms, specifically sacred ritual, to support the process of decolonization by de-westernizing Jamaican middle-class theatre going audiences. I argue that these practices had a serious effect upon Jamaican people as they prepared for nationhood as they were mobilized by middle class artists to communicate nationalist ideologies. These folk forms and their translation to the previously Eurocentric space of the theatre supported the notion that the Caribbean was capable of producing its own forms of high art and culture. In the political realm this cultural assertion fueled the struggle for independence and supported claims of cultural and political maturity and readiness for self-governance.

I introduce the concepts of myalisation and myal-theatre to explain how staged ritual and spirit possession in the context of theatrical performance maintains a transformative power for

both the performers and audience members. I argue that spirit possession that takes place within the theatre inculcates middle-class theatre goers, who usually are not ritual participants, into an Afro-centric belief system at a time when the colony was breaking away from Britain politically and culturally. Through these ritualized theatre performances, the Jamaican middle-class' affection for British culture is, over time, supplanted by an acceptance of and appreciation for African culture in Jamaica and an Afro-Jamaican world view.

The series of rebellions in 1938 were a response to harsh economic conditions across the Caribbean and signaled to British and Caribbean people alike that social and political restructuring was essential to the survival of the region. Labor unions, political parties and social welfare organizations soon sprang up across the region, all pressing for change and searching for a means of achieving self-governance. By 1962, Jamaica and Trinidad celebrated their independence. Most of the other islands followed suit soon thereafter. Between 1938 and 1962, a period of intense social and political transformation, the creation of an 'authentic' Caribbean culture played a critical role in the dissemination of nationalist ideologies to the people. This shift in the cultural landscape was particularly visible in the theatre, where a new performance aesthetic emerged along side the political movement in Jamaica.

I define myalisation as the process by which the Jamaican middle class dismisses the historical stigma associated with myal-based rituals and comes to embrace and even promote the performance of these rituals on national stages and for national events. Myalisation suggests a shift in the political and social climate of Jamaica and, more importantly, points to a spiritual change in belief and cultural identity.

Myal-theatre is staged performance that reenacts a myal-based ritual and employs the ritual as the cornerstone of the plot. In myal-based plays or dance-theatre pieces, the protagonist is fully engaged in an emotional struggle and seeks out the ritual as a source of healing and resolution to a problem. The audience identifies with the protagonist and is actively engaged in the ritual in hopes for a positive outcome for the main character. By identifying with the protagonist, the audience participates in a ritual that they would otherwise not be exposed to or appreciate. Myal-theatre, through the performance of ritual and demonstration of its power in the lives of the main characters, transforms the theatre space into a ritual space where participant and observer become one. The audience is left with a greater understanding of how and why Afro-Jamaican rituals hold power in the community.

My title, “Stages of Liberation,” refers to the role of the theatrical stage in the cultural and political history of Jamaica. It also refers to the stages of development in Jamaican theatre in the twentieth century. Una Marson’s 1938 play *Pocomania* coincides with the 1938 rebellion. The year 1938 is a cultural, social, and political milestone and marks a major shift in how Jamaicans see themselves. Within a chronology of Jamaican theatre, Marson’s play stands alone as the beginning of the process of myalisation in Jamaica. From 1950-1962 middle class artists actively researched Jamaican folk forms and infused their work with the nationalist ideology in order to create a Jamaican national identity. From 1962-1980, artists grappled with the shortcomings of independence. They critically reexamined the past in light of the neo-colonialism of the region. In this dissertation I will examine Marson’s *Pocomania* and the first phase of development of Jamaican theatre, 1950-1962. In the book project that I hope will emerge from

this dissertation, I will address plays and dance theatre pieces from this second phase of Jamaican theatre history in the twentieth century, 1962-1980.

By Jamaican national identity I mean a celebration of cultural artifacts unique to Jamaica in high art venues and national events. These artifacts unified the people and became a source of pride for Jamaicans who had previously celebrated only British or American culture.

My use of the term “folk” in this study is borrowed in part from Robin D.G. Kelley’s “Notes on Deconstructing ‘The Folk.’” Kelley states:

A cultural studies approach would insist that terms like ‘folk,’ ‘authentic,’ and ‘traditional’ are socially constructed categories that have something to do with the reproduction of race, class, and gender hierarchies and the policing of the boundaries of modernism. ‘Folk’ and ‘modern’ are both mutually dependent concepts embedded in unstable historically and socially constituted systems of classification.... Moreover, ‘folk’ either signifies what people imagine to be preindustrial survivals or, when one is not talking about Europe, the cultural practices of the Other ...that have not been mass marketed.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of Jamaica, the word “folk” implies those forms of expression that have their origins in Africa. These forms have evolved over time and reflect the experiences of African slaves in the New World and their on-going interactions with various African, European, Indian, and indigenous Carib ethnic groups. The particular types of folk forms under scrutiny in this study are those that utilize religious ritual and embody an African or Afro-Jamaican world-view. I am not interested in the performance of these religious folk forms in and of themselves. Rather, my interest lies in how these Afro-religious folk forms are represented outside of their original sacred spaces and how their representations reflect the changing political climate. I seek to

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<sup>1</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, “Notes on Deconstructing the Folk,” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1402.

understand how and why uninitiated artists (playwrights, directors, actors, choreographers, and dancers) represent these forms in theatrical spaces.

Artistic representations of the folk in Jamaica suggest a new relationship between the lower and middle classes. The middle-class artists and researchers have less first-hand experience of folk forms than the lower classes but instead have the privilege of studying, translating for high art venues, and appreciating them. The lower class practitioners are temporarily elevated from the status of peasants to that of educators in their “field.” While the terms “folk” and “modern” are “mutually dependent concepts,” to echo Kelley, the folk informs the modern. For example, Ivy Baxter’s creation of a specifically Jamaican high art dance form required the appropriation of American modern dance, European ballet technique, and the folk movement vocabularies of Jamaica. In order to create this form, Ivy Baxter studied with professional dancers in England and the United States and lower class farmers and manual laborers in Jamaica.

The staging of Caribbean folk traditions in the twentieth century reflects the region’s history of domination and resistance. This rediscovery of folk forms is a regional phenomenon and not unique to Jamaica. Because these forms were suppressed during and after slavery their performance on theatrical stages and in public spaces in the decades leading up to independence was a direct challenge to these hegemonic forces. The performance of these forms also signified the reclaiming of an African past and a rejection of the cultural imperialism of Great Britain and the United States.

I limit my study to Jamaica in order to better understand and contextualize the folk forms that are being utilized by women in performance. Jamaica, unlike Guyana and Trinidad, does

not have large Indo, Carib or other Asian populations (although it does have small Indian and Chinese populations). Focusing on Jamaica allows me carefully to examine the complex history of Afro-Jamaican religious rituals and the representations of these rituals as their forms and the artists' attitudes toward them shift in the twentieth century.

I will demonstrate how the creative process and the work itself promote an ideology that seeks to undermine the notion that colonized peoples have no culture of their own. These works are revolutionary in that they create a space for the collective imagining of a present that is elastic, with temporality stretching and collapsing to incorporate the past and the future into the present. This type of imaginative work informed and supported the nationalist movement.

The scope of this project includes three women artists creating work before 1962. My study of their work has led to my theory of myalisation. I will demonstrate how I arrived at this term and apply it to the careers and creative work of Una Marson, Enid Chevannes and Ivy Baxter.

All of the women under discussion were pioneers of Jamaican theatre and dance in different ways. Una Marson was a poet, playwright, journalist, political activist. In 1938, she became the first black Jamaican playwright to utilize a Jamaican ritual on stage. Her career as a journalist and writer propelled her into international black intellectual circles. I hypothesize that her position as an outspoken nationalist and feminist is negotiated and articulated on stage.

Enid Chevannes holds the rare title of founder, producer, director, and playwright of her own theatre company, The Ivory Club, in the 1950s and 60s. Chevannes was a divorced single mother and a schoolteacher who was not only politically outspoken but directed a company

whose mission was to contribute to the development of a national cultural identity. I will examine how Chevannes uses folk traditions to question the validity of the Afro-Jamaican world view.

Ivy Baxter was in 1950 the first Jamaican choreographer to introduce Jamaican folk dances, in combination with ballet technique, to the stage. She was a colored (or light-skinned), middle-class Jamaican woman who never married and was not politically outspoken. Due to her commitment to what was then called “barefoot dancing,” she is often referred to as a “restrained rebel” who found a voice for her political views in the dances that she choreographed.<sup>2</sup> Baxter’s revolutionary approach signaled a move away from European dance traditions, while her performances mirrored the broader context of the colony’s move toward self-rule.

My criteria for selecting these three women as the subjects of this study, although there were seven other women playwrights<sup>3</sup> and two other women choreographers working in this period, are that they had significant careers in the arts and managed to create substantial bodies of work that included representations of ritual and supported the development of a national identity. As playwrights and choreographers, each of these women was responsible for the initial vision of her performances and played a large role in their production and direction. This level of control in the creation of the final product implies that these women were making an artistic statement in response to the social climate and the forces of nationalism.

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<sup>2</sup> Rex Nettleford, “Ivy Baxter—Restrained Rebel,” *Jamaica Gleaner*, January 17, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> The ten women playwrights of the late colonial period in Jamaica that I have come across are: Elsie Benjamin-Barsoe, Vera Alberta Bell, Louise Bennett, Esther Chapman, Enid Chevannes, Dorothy Cundall, Cicely Howland, Greta Lyons, Una Marson, and Dorothea Simmons. For a list of their plays see Errol Hill’s “Plays of the English-speaking Caribbean,” *Bulletin of Black Theatre* 1, no. 2 (1972).

I analyze theatre and dance performances together because in African performance traditions, there is no separation between the performance of dance and drama. The same holds true for performance in the Caribbean, as noted by several scholars in the Caribbean, including Errol Hill, Rex Nettleford, and Kamau Brathwaite. Ivy Baxter's dance pieces are also evidence of this, as they are described as being 'very dramatic.' She often commissioned scripts and music for her performances before she began her choreography. Much of her work has a clear narrative structure, and some pieces include text spoken by dancers in performance.

Ritual practices were repressed during the slavery period because they were perceived as activities that united and empowered slaves to resist, and because they appeared to sanction the sexuality of black women, which colonial officials sought to control.<sup>4</sup> Theatre scholars Kole Omotoso, Honor Ford Smith, Errol Hill, and Judy Stone have discussed the relationship between Afro-Jamaican ritual, theatre, and national identity formation in the Caribbean.<sup>5</sup> However, no one has studied the relationship between the gendered colonial discourse on these rituals and representations of gender and ritual in cultural production in the twentieth century. For the three women understudy in this dissertation, there is little scholarship on their contributions to Jamaican performance.<sup>6</sup> Through my analysis of representative works by these women, I

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<sup>4</sup> Honor Ford-Smith, "Caribbean Women and Social Change: Some Aspects of Our History," *A Caribbean Reader on Development*, ed. Judith Wedderburn and Don Mills (Kingston: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1987), 158.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the following texts, each author has a number of articles on Caribbean theatre: Kole Omotoso, *The Theatrical into Theatre: A Study of Drama and Theatre of the English Speaking Caribbean* (London: New Beacon Books, 1982); Honor Ford Smith, *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1986); Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); Judy S.J. Stone, *Theater (Studies in West Indian Literature)* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Ivy Baxter, *The Arts of an Island: The Development of the Culture and of the Folk and Creative Arts in Jamaica, 1494-1962 (Independence)* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1970). Delia Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-65* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998).

uncover and analyze gendered discourses of spirit possession and nationalism on stage in Jamaica.

The significance of this project lies in its ability to recover the lives and works of women artists who have been omitted from Jamaican theatre history. The prominence of the archive and use of oral history in this project is equally significant to Caribbean Studies where much of the history of the Caribbean, particularly related to women, remains buried in the archives waiting to be recovered and analyzed.

Political activist, poet, and playwright Una Marson is cited as the first black Jamaican woman playwright and dubbed the foremother of a Jamaican theatre aesthetic, although her plays remain unpublished and have received little critical attention by theatre scholars.<sup>7</sup> Caribbean theatre histories have discussed the works of a number of post-independence women playwrights, including Sylvia Wynter, Carmen Tipling, Pat Cumper, Barbara Gloudon and the Sistren Theatre Collective. While the work of these women has been produced, and even documented in some cases, many of them have yet to receive the critical attention they deserve. So while many people have heard of the work of Una Marson and are aware of the more recent Jamaican women playwrights, on the whole this tradition remains understudied. Furthermore, the Jamaican women playwrights who immediately followed Marson are virtually unknown.

For all of these pioneers combined, there are only a handful of newspaper articles, five scholarly articles, one autobiography, and one biography documenting their contributions to

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<sup>7</sup> Elaine Savory Fido, "Finding a Way to Tell It: Methodology and Commitment in Theatre About Women in Barbados and Jamaica," *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women in Literature*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 336.

Jamaican performance.<sup>8</sup> My research has uncovered no evaluation of the significance of Chevannes' work, despite the publication, at least, of one of her four plays. I speculate that one reason for the lack of scholarship on Jamaican women in theatre is that almost none of their plays have been published. The absence of publishers' attention to women playwrights was most likely due to the male-centered ideology of nationalism and the desire to promote male artists who were seen as the primary architects of national identity.

My study seeks to be the first critical study of Jamaican women in performance during the pre-independence period. Caribbean theatre scholar Elaine Savory in her article, "Registering Connection: Masking and Gender Issues in Caribbean Theatre" (1999), relies on published plays as the basis of her analysis, while acknowledging that the vast majority of published plays are written by men. This suggests that my study will draw attention to and begin to fill this gap in Caribbean theatre historiography. I hope my dissertation will influence how theatre historians interested in the role of performance in colonial contexts view women artists in the Caribbean.

While there is a growing body of work that examines Caribbean history, politics, and culture from a feminist perspective,<sup>9</sup> there remains the impulse in much scholarship on the

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<sup>8</sup> There are four scholarly articles and one biography on Una Marson's life and career: Erika Smilowitz "Una Marson: A Woman Before Her Time" in *Jamaica Journal*; J.E. Clare McFarlane "Una Marson" in *A Literature in the Making* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Pioneer Press, 1956); Honor Ford-Smith, "The Value of an Angry Woman: The Importance of Una Marson" in *Sistren Research Papers* (Kingston: Sistren Research Library); Alison Donnell "Sentimental Subversion: The Poetics and Politics of Devotion in the Work of Una Marson" in *Kicking Daffodils: Twentieth Century Women Poets* ed. Vicki Bertram (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); and Delia Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson 1905-1965*. Critical work on Ivy Baxter consists of two significant newspaper articles and one academic article: Rex Nettleford, "Remembering Ivy Baxter, Dance Pioneer," *Sunday Herald*, Jan. 17, 1993; Rex Nettleford, "Ivy Baxter—Restrained Rebel" *Sunday Gleaner*, Jan. 17, 1993; and Alma Mock Yen, "Remembering Ivy Baxter: Her Life and Her Legacy," *Caribbean Quarterly* 47, no. 1, March 2001.

<sup>9</sup> I list here some of the texts that have emerged since the 1990s that place gender at the center of their analysis of Caribbean history and culture: Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women*

Caribbean to ignore the contributions of women artists. Nettleford's *Caribbean Cultural Identity* (1978), Cudjoe's *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (1980), Harney's *Nationalism and Identity* (1996), and Meek's *Narratives of Resistance* (2000) are examples of impressive studies on the relationship between culture and politics in the Caribbean, yet they downplay the importance of women artists and the role of gender in the construction of the formation of national or Diasporic identities in the Caribbean. Their analyses privilege issues of blackness and resistance.<sup>10</sup> My examination of colonial legislation and descriptions of rituals reveals a consistent, sexualized image of the black Jamaican woman writhing on the ground in a state of spirit possession. Furthermore, in the post-emancipation era, the discourse shifts from anxiety about the disruption of labor and its economic ramifications to anxiety about the sexual and mental vulnerability of white women who might enter these ritualized spaces. The white population of Jamaica also believed that these ritual practices were a breeding ground for mental instability and insanity. They saw these ritual performances as a form of madness and feared that their women would be 'infected.' I trace how the politicized and sexualized discourse on Afro-Jamaican religious ritual informs twentieth century cultural production. Further, I examine how three women artists navigate this troubled terrain in their work.

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*and Literature* (Trenton: African World Press, 1990); Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Rhonda E. Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago, A History* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1994); *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> A few significant texts on Caribbean culture and politics that omit the significance of women's cultural production are: Rex Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica, An Essay in Cultural Dynamics* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1978); Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980); Stefano Harney, *Nationalism and Identity: Culture and the Imagination in a Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Zed Books, 1996); Brian Meeks, *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, The Caribbean* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000).

The significance of this project is that it engages Jamaican gender studies, theater/dance history, colonial discourse on resistance, and the history of Jamaican political movements in conversation with each other. This type of multifaceted investigation is crucial to understanding Caribbean cultural production. My critical discussion of women artists whose work has not previously been analyzed supports a further re-reading of colonial discourse for evidence of how such discourse is gendered. Through analysis of a wide range of archival material and oral histories of this cultural phenomenon, I demonstrate the importance of this type of evidence in interdisciplinary scholarship on Jamaican cultural production. While this study focuses on Jamaica, it speaks to wider bodies of scholarship in the Caribbean.

My theoretical and methodological framework for this project is a product of a number of different disciplines. Theories of performance and ritual support my exploration of the use of Jamaican rituals in the plays and dance performances by the three Jamaican women discussed earlier. Richard Schechner's *Between Theatre and Anthropology* demonstrates the relationship between the restored behavior of ritual performances and the restored behavior of theatrical performances. I borrow from and build upon the work of several theorists, namely performance studies scholars Margaret Thompson Drewal and Richard Schechner, theatre scholars Sandra Richards and Beverly Robinson, as well as Caribbean literary critics Catherine Nelson-McDermott and Kamau Brathwaite. This body of theory will shed light on how audience participation within the context of ritual takes a different form from that of the theatre and will illuminate how these differences contribute to the collective memory of Jamaica and contribute to a national identity. Dance historians Susan Manning and Yvonne Daniel inform my analysis of dance and its relationship to nationalist projects.

Because my study asks questions about how identity is performed and about how theatrical performances contribute to the construction of that identity, the methodology that I employ in this study is historical ethnography. This tool is the most useful for my purposes, because it allows for complex readings of historical texts and for a variety of evidence to be considered. The archival evidence that I examine includes unpublished plays, playbills, critical studies of these plays, critical essays on dance performances, newspaper reviews, video and photographs of performances, biographical data on the primary subjects of my study, colonial legal records and correspondence, newspaper articles on major political figures and issues, and ethnographic studies of rituals that have been adapted to the stage. In addition to archival research, I have gathered oral histories from members of the dance and theatre communities in Jamaica, including playwrights, choreographers, directors, dancers, and actors who participated in the various productions that I am studying. I have also interviewed ritual participants who were part of the ethnographic processes conducted by artists in my study.

In both the archival research and the oral histories that I gathered, I analyze these texts on a number of levels. In addition to a close reading, I attempt to understand the play as an embodied experience for both actors and audiences within a specific theatrical or public space and within a specific historical moment. My theory of myalisation emerges from my study of Jamaican plays and dance productions.

My methodology includes limited ethnographic study and observation of contemporary ritual practices in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and attendance at contemporary revivals of performances from the period under consideration. This observation and participation allowed me some insight into both how contemporary rituals operate and how they are transformed or even edited

for theatre audiences. I consider the bodies of the folk practitioners, the artists who represent them, and their theatre audiences. In my reading of a range of texts I articulate their ideological narratives as well as the embodiment (or not) of those ideologies. My research question is: how did staged performances of ritual become icons of national identity? Part of the answer I believe lies in the representation of these forms on the bodies of non-practitioners. In this dissertation I analyze these representations and read them as embodied experiences in relation to the historical moment in which they were produced. When examining a dramatic text, I will utilize the testimonies of participants and newspapers reviews of performances in order to understand the text as the blueprint for a live event.

Another aim of this work is to discuss how religious ritual signified slave resistance and how its staged performances celebrate that resistance. James C. Scott's work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* is useful in understanding these rituals in their original context as well as how their staged performances outside of that context function as a sign of resistance in a different way.

The hidden transcript of customary rights and outrage is a source of popular poaching providing that we realize, at the same time, that the practical struggle... is also the source for a backstage discourse of customs, heroism, revenge, and justice.<sup>11</sup>

In this dissertation I unpack how the hidden transcript of ritual during the period of slavery is altered by public performances in the 20th century. These practices that used to suggest insubordination are later referenced and celebrated at political and cultural events. I demonstrate

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<sup>11</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 191.

this by analyzing performances of ritual alongside political events or politicized moments in history.

Robin D. G. Kelley's "The Poetics of Anticolonialism" that serves as the introduction to the 2000 republication of Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, is a useful example of scholarship on the African Diasporic experience that will support my study of women artists in the late colonial period. Kelley suggests that Césaire's understanding of surrealism, Negritude, and black political identity formation advocates a new imagining of political and social possibilities that are linked to the imaginative work required by art. He insists that the processes of creating art and the resulting cultural product are revolutionary because both require imagination and the articulation of something that did not exist before. Kelley claims that Césaire was not arguing for a syncretism, hybridity or even creolization of culture, but instead for an examination of history, a reflection on the past that can propel a people into the future. Enid Chevannes' *The Vision* questions how we remember the past. Chevannes actually re-stages the past and creates a romanticized image of slavery where the masters are forced to acknowledge their dependence on their slaves and where slaves are rewarded for their knowledge with the gift of freedom. This reexamination of the past is a commentary on the Jamaican futures that these women envision.

Kelley argues that Césaire did not insist on a physical, psychological, or ideological return to an African past, but the creation of an imaginative space to explore new possibilities, quite literally the creation of a new world. Ivy Baxter's performances of 'barefoot' dancing turned the Jamaican performance world on its head, as suddenly what was considered unrefined and backward was recast as high art and respectable. Kelley's reading of Césaire is useful to my

study of women artists in Jamaica because it offers a critical approach, which situates art squarely at the center of any revolution, thereby defining a relationship between art, ideology, and politics. For the purposes of this project, the theatre is the space where these women's interpretations of Jamaican society are created and articulated.

Understanding the history of Jamaican theatre leading up to the twentieth century is crucial to realizing the significance of the women understudy and how their plays changed the theatrical landscape. Here I provide a brief history of Jamaican theatre and theatrical conventions in order to later demonstrate how these women were innovators.

Jamaica has a long colonial theatre history as a theatrical hub, with touring companies from England and America staging English classics throughout the island from 1655 up until 1929 with the arrival of cinema to the island.<sup>12</sup> Richardson Wright's *Revels in Jamaica, 1682-1838* (1937) and Errol Hill's *The Jamaican Stage 1655-1900* (1992) have documented the British colonial theater history of Jamaica during slavery and in the immediate post-emancipation era.<sup>13</sup> In 1733, the first British theatre company arrived in Jamaica and performed John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. Visiting companies performed for English or European settlers and their guests on the island.<sup>14</sup> The American Company of Comedians settled in Jamaica for thirteen years to perform many of Shakespeare's works, farces, and pantomimes. They had a significant impact on theatre on the island, as they laid the groundwork for a long theatre tradition by outfitting theatres in Kingston, Spanish Town and Montego Bay; recruited local

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Fowler, "A History of Theatre in Jamaica," *Jamaica Journal* 2, no. 1 (March 1968): 53-59; Errol Hill, "Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies," *Caribbean Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Dec. 1972): 9-40.

<sup>13</sup> Richardson Wright, *Revels in Jamaica, 1682-1838* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1937) and Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1992).

residents into their company; and staged the first plays about Jamaica, often inspired by antislavery efforts in England.<sup>15</sup> The early plays by The American Company often included comic, one-dimensional black stock characters, a tradition that would continue into the mid-twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

This American and British influence has greatly shaped Jamaican theatre and its performance traditions in the twentieth century and sets Jamaica apart from the other islands of the Caribbean. Jamaica's rich theatre history, documented by Errol Hill, Richardson Wright, Ivy Baxter, and Honor Ford-Smith, informs my study of women creating performance in Jamaica's pre-independence period.<sup>17</sup> Jonkonnu (also John Canoe), Christmas Morning Concerts, and Jamaican Pantomime are three examples of Jamaican performance genres that demonstrate the intersections of African, European, and American performance traditions in Jamaica. Jonkonnu is a performance form created by the slave population that combines movement and archetypal figures from West African ritual practices with elements of the British Mumming tradition and European theatrical conventions. Christmas Morning Concerts are an indigenous twentieth-century invention that took the form of a variety show utilizing Jamaican speech, slapstick comedy, and borrowed elements from American vaudeville performance. The evolution of pantomime in Jamaica demonstrates how a British theatrical form inspired the development of original music, scripts and dances and fostered the acceptance of a variety of Jamaican folk traditions on the proscenium stage.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 76-8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>17</sup> See Richardson Wright's *Revels in Jamaica*, Errol Hill's *The Jamaican Stage*, and Ivy Baxter's *The Arts of An Island*.

The development of Jamaican Pantomime from 1941 to 1962 parallels the subject of my study, because women played a prominent role in all aspects of its production. Greta Fowler was the producer of pantomimes of this period and president of the Little Theatre Movement. A number of women wrote original scripts, directed or co-directed productions, and choreographed dance pieces, including Louise Bennett and Ivy Baxter. While much of this early history of Jamaican Pantomime lies just outside the frame of this study, the success of the Little Theatre Movement under the leadership of Greta Fowler had a profound impact on the development of performance in Jamaica and of women in performance. Not only did it bolster the early career of choreographer Ivy Baxter, but it may have also served as a model for the formation of both her company, the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group, and that of Enid Chevannes, The Ivory Club.

Another contributing factor to cultural production in Jamaica in the late colonial period was the establishment of the University of the West Indies in 1948 and the creation of an Extra-mural Drama Department. A second and third University of the West Indies campus was established in Trinidad (1961) and in Barbados (1963), and one could argue that the founding of these institutions on these other islands had a direct impact on their subsequent cultural production. The University brought students and staff from across the Caribbean to Jamaica and became the setting for the examination of a range of Caribbean experiences, as the region moved toward Federation in 1958. The University funded travel for drama tutors throughout Jamaica and the region to collect folklore and train other practitioners. It also provided space for the creation and development of plays and access to materials for the creation of props and other technical equipment for productions. The Extra-mural Drama Department at the University became the cultural hub of the pre-federation artistic movement. It attracted scholarships from

the British Council for students to attend the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and funding from the United States Information Service to bring American theatre practitioners to Jamaica to hold workshops. The department offered evening and summer courses that eventually inspired the founding of The Federal Theatre by Errol Hill.<sup>18</sup> The University of the West Indies in Jamaica in this period was a nexus between the nationalist sentiments of the people, Caribbean intellectuals poised for Federation, and an artistic community eager to create a new identity for the region.

In addition to these institutions that played a central role in the development of the arts in the region, there were the series of pan-Caribbean arts festivals, later known as CARIFESTAs, which were held on different islands beginning in 1952 and continuing into the present. The specific CARIFESTAs that inform this study are the Caribbean Folk Arts Festival of 1952 in Puerto Rico and the inaugural celebrations of the Federation of the West Indies in 1958 in Trinidad where Ivy Baxter performed with her dance company.

Theatrical production in the late colonial period had a political function in Jamaica. While it was often a form of entertainment, political leaders were well aware of the value of performance as a way to inform the public of the political views of a new party or organization and as a mechanism for the recruitment and maintenance of members. For example, Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association staged plays, some of which were written by Garvey, with the Edelweiss Performing Group at the UNIA headquarters in Kingston. Journalist Frank Hill, a leader within the People's National Party (PNP), staged the play *Upheaval*, about the labor riots of 1938 that marked the beginning of the anti-colonial movement in Jamaica. The

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Nine of Ivy Baxter's *The Arts of an Island* on Jamaican Theatre.

youth membership of political organizations created dramatic skits to convey the ideology of these organizations to the next generation.<sup>19</sup>

After the 1938 rebellion, the British began to decolonize the region in the 1940s and 1950s by creating institutions of self-government through the Colonial Development and Welfare Act and the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission. They also granted universal suffrage to Jamaicans and hosted conferences on the formation of the Federation of the British West Indies. This is the period when diasporic performances of Caribbean folk creations began to circulate, and the careers of choreographer Ivy Baxter and playwright Enid Chevannes were at their highest, as they incorporated Afro-Jamaican rituals into theatrical performances.

As the momentum of nationalism took hold, artists and intellectuals sought to promote images of Jamaican culture that reflected the African origins of the colony's black majority. As early as the mid-1920s, visual artist Edna Manley had begun sculpting images of Black Jamaicans. Her *Negro Aroused* (1935) and *Pocomania* (1936) quickly became icons of the early nationalism movement in Jamaica.

Indeed, with their powerful, insistent rhythms, which frame the essential leit-motifs of the head turned back, straining upwards toward a vision, or downwards in suppressed anger, *The Prophet*, *The Diggers*, *Pocomania*, *Negro Aroused*, have become nothing less than the icons of that period of our history, a period when the black Jamaican was indeed aroused, ready for a new social order, demanding *his* place in the sun (emphasis his).<sup>20</sup>

In the same period, Marcus Garvey was deported from America. In 1927 he reestablished his UNIA headquarters in Kingston where he fought, with limited success, to cultivate economic and

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<sup>19</sup> Linnette Vassell, "Women of the Masses: Daphne Campbell and 'Left' Politics in Jamaica in the 1950s," in *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Verene Shephard, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 320.

<sup>20</sup> David Boxer, Director/Curator, *Edna Manley: The Seventies. A Survey of the Artist's Work of the Past Decade* (Kingston, Jamaica: Stephenson's Litho Press Ltd., 1980), 4.

political independence among black lower- and middle-class Jamaicans. Musicians across the island created Mento in the 1930s as a specifically Afro-Jamaican form of popular music. The influence of Black American ragtime, swing, and blues was felt in Jamaica in this period. By the late 1950s musicians turned away from the borrowed big band sound, returned to the rhythms of Mento and created the widely popular Ska, a predecessor of reggae music.<sup>21</sup> Playwrights and choreographers in search of Black Jamaican themes of resistance enacted a range of Afro-Jamaican religious rituals on national stages. These rituals became source material for the construction of a national identity. My project closely examines the gradual shift in attitude regarding ritual practices by the black middle class in relationship to nationalism.

In Chapter One, “Myalisation of the Middle Class,” I examine Jamaican history in order to trace the origins of the religious practice Pocomania and discuss the oldest form of Afro-Jamaican religious worship, Myal. I also analyze the colonial discourse on Afro-Jamaican religious practices and their association with slave rebellions and resistance. I utilize this historical background to construct my theory of myalisation and myal-theatre and discuss how I apply this theory to the case studies in the following chapters.

Chapter Two, “Una Marson’s *Pocomania* as Myal-theatre,” critically analyzes this play which was the first to utilize an Afro-Caribbean religious folk tradition on stage. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how her play *Pocomania* informs my concept of myal-theatre. In 1937-38 a series of labor riots occurred across the anglophone Caribbean. In Jamaica the rebellion sparked the process of decolonization and resulted in the formation of political

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<sup>21</sup> Verna Reckord, “From Burru Drums to Reggae Rhythms” in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 236-7.

organizations and labor unions that would eventually become the backbone of Jamaican party politics. I explore the relationship between the political rebellion of the labor riots of 1938 and the first public performance that depicted the folk as a survival of slave resistance. I chart Marson's career as a playwright and political activist who worked for the League of Colored Peoples in England before returning to Jamaica to found the Kingston Drama Club in 1936.

In my third chapter, "Enid Chevannes' Vision of Jamaica," I trace the life of Enid Chevannes, who was a schoolteacher, committed theatre director, and founder of The Ivory Club. She chose to run her company as a registered non-profit organization, complete with a Constitution and rulebook. Her plays *Root of Evil* and *Turned Tables* give female protagonists the freedom to speak up for themselves and comment on social and class divisions, gender issues, and Afro-Jamaican belief at a moment when Jamaica is about to achieve independence. Chevannes' *The Vision* and *Superstition* explore the realm of the supernatural. *The Vision*, based on a historical occurrence, demonstrates how Anglo-Jamaicans of necessity bought into the Afro-Jamaican belief system and benefited from it. *Superstition* examines the problems and necessity of an Afro-Jamaican belief system in a poor rural community.

Chapter four, "Ivy Baxter's Jamaican Folk," examines the dissemination of the Jamaican folk through dance-theatre performances. I document the career of Ivy Baxter, her ethnographic studies of the Jamaican folk, and her performances across the Caribbean. I discuss the political process of decolonization in conversation with the circulation of the folk that takes place through her career. Ivy Baxter's position at the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission supported her research of Jamaican folk dances.

I compare Marson's representation of this ritual practice with Ivy Baxter's *Pocomania*. Baxter has written about how she and her dancers fell into a trance while performing this piece for audiences. I compare the representations of this ritual in these pieces and analyze the implications of these performances that signified both female sexuality and a new mode of artistic expression related to the creation of a national identity.

The concluding chapter crystallizes the major arguments of my study and relates them to my theory of myalisation as a useful lens through which to examine ritual performance in Jamaican theatre. It offers recommendations on how the methodology applied in my study can support a wide range of research on neglected areas of Caribbean and performance scholarship. Finally, I discuss how the process of myalisation continued to evolve after independence in Jamaica, and I consider how the dissertation will be developed into a book.

CHAPTER TWO  
MYALISATION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

I is proud of me Church even though when de spirit move me and I feel to cry out you don't like it, but I is proud of me Church and I don't wish to lef it. ...If you all don't want me in de Church well unno can do what you like. I not moving, I not stopping me meeting. Beside, you can tek me name off de register but you can't stop me from come to Church.<sup>22</sup>

--Sister Kate, from Una Marson's  
*Pocomania*

In Act One of Una Marson's *Pocomania*, Revival leader Sister Kate defends her spiritual practice to two leaders of the Elizer Baptist church, Reverend Peter Craig and Deacon Manners. The Reverend and the Deacon have heard rumors of "evil doings" in Sister Kate's yard where her ceremonies take place and they wish to remove her from their community. Instead of moving her "church" or ending her meetings, Sister Kate defies the Reverend and the Deacon by defending her practice. Even though she is a Revival leader, she is also, like many members of her small rural community, a member of the local Baptist church led by Reverend Craig. When they threaten to remove her name from the church roll, she insists that they cannot stop her from attending. She places her "church" alongside theirs and will not choose one over the other. In this play Marson imaginatively uses ritual and spirit possession to examine Jamaican attitudes about the island's African heritage and class. As a lower class woman, Sister Kate struggles to make ends meet. Because the Revival rituals that she practices are illegal, she could serve time in prison if the police were alerted. Marson eloquently captures the frustrations of women who

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<sup>22</sup> Una Marson, *Pocomania*, in Una Marson Manuscript Collection. (Jamaican National Library: Kingston, Jamaica, 1938) 7-8.

seek a spiritual and metaphorical connection with their African heritage through ritual performance. Her play examines the social consequences of their participation.

In this dissertation I trace narratives of resistance and representations of gender through a previously untold history of cultural production in Jamaica. I begin with an analysis of the colonial discourse and legislation against Afro-Jamaican religious rituals. I start here to answer the questions: Why did these religious forms, which were outlawed in the colonial period, take center stage in pre-independence Jamaica? Why is it that religious rituals, which in the colonial discourse are preoccupied with women's bodies in a state of spirit possession, become an icon of national identity in Jamaica in the twentieth century? What role does gender play in representations of spirit possession on national stages?

I answer these questions by demonstrating that the colonial discourse on Afro-Jamaican religious rituals is gendered. Secondly, I argue that gender also lies at the very center of representations of these rituals on national stages. Finally, within staged representations of ritual, gendered representations of spirit possession serve as icons of Jamaican national identity. This project addresses the question of how gender functions in theatre and dance-theatre productions that represent spirit possession. I focus on women artists, while examining gender roles and how women's bodies in a state of spirit possession function on stage.

British colonial officials in Jamaica observed a causal relationship between Afro-Jamaican religious practices and slave rebellions, revolts, and runaways. Colonial descriptions of these practices and the subsequent legislation against them reveal an anxiety about the violence of revolts and the economic impact of the disruption of labor caused by runaways during the period of slavery (1655-1834). The colonial discourse on Afro-Jamaican rituals

reveals that they were outlawed because of their association to slave rebellions and the appearance of base morality in their supposed sanctioning of the sexuality of black women. After slavery, the anxiety shifts to a fear of white women becoming “contaminated” by what colonial officials perceive as the unchecked black sexuality suggested by ritual performance. The proscribed status of these rituals created a widespread stigma against them, especially amongst the black middle class.

The Jamaican folk tradition of Jonkonnu, established during slavery, was eventually outlawed due to its association with rebellion. This practice remained hidden for over a century and was nearly eradicated, when it was summoned back into the public eye in the mid-twentieth century.

Practiced by blacks, Jonkonnu dates from at the least the late seventeenth century, when slaves were given a few days of rest before the arduous task of harvesting sugar cane began. After the masquerade was banned in Kingston in 1841 because of the “commotion” it allegedly caused in “decent” people’s heads, this masking tradition withdrew into the rural areas of Jamaica where it remained almost clandestinely practiced until the 1950s, when the *Gleaner* newspaper revitalized widespread public interest through its sponsorship of festival competitions.<sup>23</sup>

Banned in 1841 by colonial officials, the practice was revived by an invitation to perform in Kingston for an island-wide festival in 1950. My study examines why and how these forms were shunned by the middle class but eventually became socially acceptable in the decades leading up to independence. Like the literature on myal-based religious practices, the colonial discourse on Jonkonnu comments on rebellions that followed the masquerades and on excessive noise.

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<sup>23</sup> Sandra L. Richards, “Horned Ancestral Masks, Shakespearean Actor Boys, and Scotch-Inspired Set Girls: Social Relations in Nineteenth-Century Jamaican Jonkonnu,” in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carol Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

In the first section of this chapter, “A Genealogy of Afro-Jamaican Religions,” I briefly trace the history of African religious thought and practice in Jamaica. I lay the groundwork for the rest of the chapter by exploring this history and naming the many types of practices that have emerged over time from Myal, the oldest African religious practice in Jamaica. This review supports my later theoretical assertion of *myalisation* as a ritual process of transformation that takes place within and outside of sacred ritualized spaces.

The second section of this chapter, “Gendered Colonial Discourse on Afro-Jamaican Rituals,” examines archival texts from the period of slavery and travel literature from the early twentieth century that attempted to document the political, social, and assumed sexual function of these sacred ritual practices. Here I chronicle the type of language and rationale that colonial officials chose when they sought to document and outlaw these practices.

In the final section of this chapter, “Ritual on Stage: Defining Myalisation and Myal-theatre,” I explain how these rituals came to symbolize the emerging nation in the mid-twentieth century and introduce the terms *myalisation* and *myal-theatre*. Given the history of these rituals, I demonstrate why careful attention must be paid to the representation of spirit possession as a trope of nationalism and the sexualized image of women’s bodies in this state.

I hypothesize that through the pre-independence period (1938-1962) the female body in a state of spirit possession symbolized the emerging nation reclaiming its African origins. Like the Negritude Movement that began in Paris in the 1930s and other nationalist movements, black intellectuals perceived the nation as feminine and black, and as having been raped, plundered, and victimized by white male authority and hegemony.

## A GENEALOGY OF AFRO-JAMAICAN RELIGIONS

The history of Pocomania is embedded in the history of slavery and colonial rule in Jamaica. In this section I briefly examine this complex history and explore the primary characteristics of the practice. This analysis supports my subsequent discussion on how and why this practice was understood as a threat to slavery as an institution. There are four periods in Jamaican immigration history which contribute to its religious history that are particularly important to discuss: the development of Maroon communities beginning in 1655; the extended period of importation of African slaves under the British from 1655-1810; the arrival of “free” African indentured laborers to Jamaica from the Congo region between 1840-1865; and the arrival of African American Baptist missionaries to the island in 1860 to propagate Christianity. Each of these periods adds another layer to what have become contemporary understandings of Pocomania. By 1930 borrowing among three groups of afro-Jamaican religious communities was a common practice: descendants of the Maroons, descendants of the free Africans of St. Thomas, and the general population that practiced a hybrid of West African religious forms and Christianity.

When the Spanish ruled Jamaica from 1494 to 1655, they imported a relatively small number of Africans as enslaved labor. When the British arrived and seized control of the island in 1655, the Spanish freed their slaves. The Spanish had hoped to return with an army to defeat the British and reunite with their slaves. These Spanish ex-slaves became known as Maroons. The word is derived from *cimarrón* in Spanish meaning “wild” or “untamed.”<sup>24</sup> Maroon communities rapidly increased in size due to runaway slaves from plantations created by the

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<sup>24</sup> Clinton V. Black, *The History of Jamaica* (Kingston: Livingston, Churchill, 1989), 36.

British. These communities were quickly identified by their Akan language, cultural traits, and religious beliefs. The Maroons created self-governing communities that were attractive to many enslaved people. Contemporary Maroons in Jamaica still practice many rituals that are found in the Akan ethnic group in West Africa, what is now modern day Ghana and Ivory Coast.

The British, who gained control of the island in 1655, drew their enslaved labor from the Kromanti of the Gold Coast (Ghana), the Ibos from Benin, Nigeria, and Mandingoes from Senegal and Gambia.<sup>25</sup> The British kept their slaves in separate communities from the Maroons who lived in the rugged mountain terrain. Occasionally, the Maroons made efforts to emancipate slaves on the plantations below or permitted runaways into their communities. The growing enslaved African communities from the Gold Coast, Benin, Senegal and Gambia working on British-run plantations began to refer to their collective religious practices and beliefs as Myal.

Myal is the cornerstone of Afro-Jamaican religious thought. It is a form of religious worship that enslaved Africans in Jamaica recreated from memory. *Myal* literally means “spirit.” It has a strong association with Obeah from the Asante word *obayifo*, meaning “sorcerer.”<sup>26</sup> Myal and Obeah are two sides of the same spiritual coin. These religious practices utilize ritual magic and spirit possession. Myal has a positive connotation, suggesting that the magic is being worked for healing or for the good of the individual or community requesting it. Obeah is understood as evil magic that will bring harm to someone. The meaning of the terms, Myal and Obeah, depends on the context and the identity of the speaker. There is room for interpretation as a slave may have used Myal for the good of the community,

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<sup>25</sup> Black, 73.

<sup>26</sup> Mervyn C. Alleyne, *The Roots of Jamaican Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 83.

and this may have meant causing harm to an overseer or plantation owner. The overseer would call these spiritual practices Obeah, whereas, the slave community using them for survival would call them Myal.<sup>27</sup>

After Emancipation in 1838, free Africans emigrated from the Congo region of Central Africa from 1840-1865 to meet labor demands. The Free Africans settled in the parish of St. Thomas and practiced the Kumina religion that utilizes the dancing and drumming practices of the Bantu speaking peoples of the Congo. The arrival of the Free Africans in the 1840s and their Kumina practice inspired a myal-revival among the newly emancipated black population of the island. Kumina and myal religious practices shared similar elements like drumming, dancing and spirit possession. While the upsurge in myal ceremonies suggests that some Kumina practices and ideology were incorporated into existing Myal practices, they each remained distinct religious traditions that occasionally borrowed and shared from each other. These Free Africans also developed a relationship of mutual respect, cultural sharing, and exchange with Maroon communities who had resisted British colonization and slavery for centuries.

African American Baptist missionaries came to Jamaica as early as 1783 and established the Native Baptist churches. They facilitated the transformation of Myal whereby Christian symbols and rites like the use of the Bible, Christian hymns, and baptism were incorporated into Myal ceremonies.<sup>28</sup> The Great Revival of 1860/61 enabled myal-men and myal-women to become ministers. This movement legitimized Myal by transforming their

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<sup>27</sup> Alleyne, 83-4.

<sup>28</sup> For more on African American missionaries in Jamaica see Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood's *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830*, (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill and London, 1998); and Diane J. Austin-Broos's *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1997).

practices into a worship service similar to those of the African American Baptists, and a new form of religious worship was born in Jamaica: Revival.

The Baptists, alone among churches, were willing to grant positions of leadership to slaves, and Myalmen seized the chance to set up their own “churches” where they could practice their forms of worship and celebrate their beliefs under the guise of Christianity.<sup>29</sup>

Jamaican colonial authorities suspected a tainting of Christian belief and assumed that their faith, as members of the Church of England, was being used to mask “African superstition” among the slave population. Sister Kate in Una Marson’s *Pocomania* is an example of a “church” leader who skillfully blends aspects of African American Baptist tradition into a long established Myal tradition in Jamaica.

What this history of forced and voluntary migration has meant for African-based religions is that these traditions have a wide range of African influences that evolved over time, as new ethnic groups of African labor were imported and settled into different regions of the island. This history of migration also intersects with the establishment of Christian churches. Myal, Kumina, Revival, and Revival Zion are all terms related to religious beliefs initially held by enslaved Africans and then modified over time in response to Christianizing missionaries and changing political conditions. The oldest of these terms is Myal.

Myal-men and myal-women, newly ordained as ministers of their own churches, made myal more legitimate because of the power invested in them by the African American missionaries. Though these new ministers practiced a myalised form of Christianity, Jamaican authorities continued to persecute them. Cultural historian Mervyn Alleyne describes Myal as “the nineteenth century antecedent of twentieth century Pukumina and Revival.”

Myalism as a name later fell into disuse, and “revival” came to designate the religious practices of ordinary Jamaicans. ...Pukumina is the closest descendant of Myalism; Revival or Revival Zion and various forms of Baptists show greater degrees of Christian influence.<sup>30</sup>

Today *Pocomania*, which literally means “a little madness” in Spanish, is considered a derogatory term used to describe this religious practice. The Spanish derivation of the word

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<sup>29</sup> Alleyne, 97.

<sup>30</sup> Alleyne, 99 and 101.

suggests that it was a term given to this tradition by Spanish colonizers who maintained control of the island before it was captured by Britain. In spite of this linguistic connection, religious historians maintain that there is no hard evidence to confirm that Pocomania was a term given to an African religious practice observed by the Spanish in Jamaica.<sup>31</sup> The term Pocomania came to mean the “more African” form of Revival. In the mid to late twentieth century, Pocomania was understood as a derogatory term and was replaced with Pukkumina suggesting that the form has been influenced by all of the aforementioned forms, most notably Kumina and Revival.

Alleyne explains the relationship between these closely related religious practices.

Religions identified by names such as Revival Zion, Pocomania (called here Pukumina), Convince, and Kumina are merely zones abstracted from this [African spiritual] continuum and are themselves subject to variation. An individual is located not at a point but at a zone of greater or lesser range on both the religious and the linguistic continuum... the introduction of Christian forms into African cosmology can be viewed as a solution to the problem of how to legitimize religious practices in the eyes of the ruling class while forging instruments of group cohesion and identity, also for use in resistance and revolts.<sup>32</sup>

While Alleyne accurately describes the overlapping relationships between these practices, three distinct traditions remain in Jamaica and participate in cultural sharing of songs, dances, and religious beliefs: the Maroons’ Akan-based practices, the Free Africans’ Kumina, and the myal-based practices that have evolved into Pocomania, Pukkumina, Revival, and Revival Zion.

During slavery these religious practices served as a site for community among the slaves and fostered rebellion by locating ultimate authority beyond the slave master. The practices also embodied a sense of history and dignity of African peoples prior to enslavement. Thus the religious practices and anything associated with them served as a sign of resistance and a threat

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<sup>31</sup> Black, 25 and 36.

<sup>32</sup> Alleyne, 91.

to slave holders. The stigma surrounding Myal, and the legal ramifications of participation in any of these religious forms, caused myal-based religions to become secret practices of the slave population.

At the very core of all of these religious practices is the belief that communication with ancestors is essential to the survival of the community. This communication is carried out through spirit possession, ritualized role-playing, drumming, song, dancing, and feasting. Studies of Revival practice in the mid-twentieth century reveal the specific elements that have been passed down from generation to generation in Jamaica. An examination of these elements provides the necessary background to understanding how and why these practices became gendered in the minds of colonial officials. While this approach may appear anachronistic, reviewing what these practices actually look like in the present provides essential clues to imagining what the rituals might have looked like in the past. Acquiring a sense of how these rituals are actually performed informs my reading of colonial records that sought to eliminate the practices.

Cultural historian Martin and Patricia Mordecai describes the primary characteristics of Revival, today the most common descendant of myal-based practices. Within each group, gang, or band there are leaders called Shepherds, Shepherdesses, or Mothers and a set of officers who perform specific functions for the band. Members of the band and their leaders meet at night at a sacred and secret location called “the seal.” The seal is usually a simple clearing in the midst of a densely wooded area. It sometimes has a thatched roof and a few wooden poles for support. In

urban areas, meetings take place in the backyard of a modest dwelling, and more recently Revival meetings take place in churches.<sup>33</sup>

The primary goal of Revival meetings is to “call down the spirits” to possess the devotees. Dance is central to the meeting, as it is the vehicle through which spirits enter the bodies of the devotees. Immersion baptism in a small pool in a church or a designated natural body of water is also central, demonstrating Revival’s American Baptist influence. Another common feature of a meeting is “setting or raising a table.” A long table covered in white cloth is carefully set with candles of specific colors, each color having a symbolic meaning, as well as flowers, food items, plates, cups and saucers and other ceremonial objects. Each object is symbolic and the table as a whole represents what is being asked for by the band, i.e. healing, protection, reconciliation, etc.<sup>34</sup>

Here I give an abbreviated sequence of events that comprise a meeting based on my 2003 fieldwork in a poor neighborhood in Spanish Town, about one hour west of Kingston and published ethnographic materials from Jamaica. This description is an attempt to create for the reader a visual image and kinesthetic understanding of the various elements that comprise the ritual. This will inform the following section and the subsequent chapters on how the rituals are reenacted on stage in the twentieth century. The meeting involves a procession of the members into the sacred space, sometimes with each holding a candle. As each person enters, money is given to an officer and then the member lights one of the many candles on the table as the procession continues around the long table. Those in attendance sing once they light candles and take their seats. Members are encouraged to testify and/or suggest the next song. Officers of the

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Mordecai and Pamela Mordecai, *Culture and Customs of Jamaica* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000), 159.

<sup>34</sup> Mordecai, 160-161.

church, or gang read Bible verses. Leaders of each group or band in attendance must be welcomed and must make a statement of thanks for the invitation. Visitors are welcomed if there are any. The first half of the service that I attended reminded me of my African American Baptist church upbringing, including the same songs found in New National Baptist Hymnal, the order, and content of the service. After an hour or two, the tone and the energy of the gathering changed.

The proceedings became less formal and the members began to move counter clockwise around the table. Their steps became stomps and their singing became groans.<sup>35</sup> Ivy Baxter in *The Arts of an Island* describes the bodily movements and heavy breathing that takes place preceding spirit possession. She explains the tramping and cymballing, which are elements unique to Revival meetings.

Tramping, laboring, or drilling takes place when [worshippers] move around in a circle, counter-clockwise.... [As they step, bent forward] they exhale more forcibly than the corresponding intake, as the body rises. [In time] the lungs become hyperventilated, the consciousness becomes less. After performing the reacting counter motion of wheeling or rapid spinning some persons may fall... the shepherd stands in the middle of the circle and cymbals ... [that is] he complements the beat of the tramp by recital of tongues or syllables in the form of a chant.... The possession stage...is...accompanied by only the guttural breath sound of the trampers and the cymballing.<sup>36</sup>

Earl Leaf, in his travel diary/ethnography on Jamaican dance, describes what happens in some cases during and after spirit possession takes place. The duration of the event depends on the purpose of the ceremony and can vary from several hours to several days.

The ceremony often continues for days. Some 'brothers' and 'sisters' work themselves into a state of coma, falling on the ground where they remain for days without eating or drinking. On returning to consciousness they are seated before a

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<sup>35</sup> Karima A. Robinson, *Field Notes* (Kingston, Jamaica) 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Ivy Baxter, *The Arts of an Island: The Development of the Culture and of the Folk and Creative Arts in Jamaica, 1494-1962 (Independence)* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1970), 143.

feast table called a “rising table” and are asked to relate, in every detail, their experiences in the spirit world. During the trance they are, it is believed, given the gift of prophecy and are able to speak tongues they could not speak during their conscious moments.<sup>37</sup>

Once the members have experienced possession and returned to consciousness, hymns are sung until the participants have regained their composure. The ceremony that I attended ended with a lengthy prayer of thanks from an officer of the church followed by the benediction from the minister. This brief sketch of a Revival ceremony exposes how both African and Christian elements have been handed down to contemporary practitioners over time.

Pocomania is a term that has lost popularity over time, even though the practice survives in the form of Revival. In the 1930s when Una Marson wrote her most significant play, *Pocomania*, this was the acceptable way to refer to this set of religious practices and beliefs. Marson’s *Pocomania* (1938), Edna Manley’s sculpture *Pocomania* (1936), and Ivy Baxter’s dance-theatre piece *Pocomania* produced in the 1950s all attest to the level of acceptance of the term and its cultural significance. In addition to being an important religious practice and marker of Afro-Jamaican identity, Pocomania, as my next section demonstrates, was also a socially and politically loaded practice in Jamaica.

#### THE GENDERED COLONIAL DISCOURSE ON AFRO-JAMAICAN RELIGIONS

In this section I define the relationship between slave rituals and slave rebellions by examining secondary literature and colonial records prohibiting myal-based rituals. Afro-Jamaican ritual practices inspired fear in the hearts and minds of slave owners. Women’s participation in such activities inspired writing that focused on women’s bodies in a state of spirit possession and sexualized these religious activities. I unpack how these practices were

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<sup>37</sup> Earl Leaf, *Isles of Rhythm* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1948), 59.

sexualized and politicized over time. Laws passed after emancipation were more concerned with the sexual potency of these practices than their revolutionary potential during the period of slavery. By the early twentieth century, cultural forms created during slavery had been commodified into sexualized nightclub entertainment.

Slavery in Jamaica intensified in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when the British realized the great wealth that came to sugar cane planters who owned vast amounts of slaves and land. Sugar became a profitable, yet labor intensive crop, while the slave trade gained momentum in order to enable planters to meet the demand. As a matter of economics, slave owners pushed their slaves to their physical limits in order to continue to maximize their profits. Field slaves on sugar plantations were divided into gangs, with the strongest men and women taking on the most physically demanding tasks such as clearing the fields. Children and elderly were also put into gangs to carry out less demanding tasks like collecting feed for animals and light gardening. Domestic slaves were provided with better living quarters, larger quantities of food and clothing, and worked under easier conditions than field slaves.<sup>38</sup>

The living conditions for slaves were extremely poor and contributed to their deteriorating health and high mortality rates. Slave quarters for field slaves were comprised of huts or barracks made of wood and dirt floors. These small and cramped spaces housed little furniture aside from a mat or bed, as well as a pot and utensils for cooking. They were often overcrowded which contributed to the spread of diseases including malaria and ringworm. Slave owners allocated food and two units of clothing per year to their slaves. The clothing did not last beyond the first few months and most slaves conducted their daily tasks in a state of semi-nudity.

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<sup>38</sup> Black, 75.

Their food was usually produced on small plots of land near slave quarters dedicated for this purpose. In many cases owners reclaimed these plots for planting sugar cane and imported food for slaves instead of growing it on their property. Slave owners provided medical care for slaves, with many large estates having a resident doctor on site. Education was not a priority, except in the case of religious instruction because overseers believed that it made slaves more docile by encouraging discipline and obedience.<sup>39</sup>

Harsh punishment was doled out for even small infractions of the slave code, as the ratio between whites and slaves increased from 1:10 to 1:20 as the sugar industry and the demand for other agricultural crops like coffee, tobacco, indigo, and cocoa increased throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> “Punishment for what would now be regarded in most cases as minor offences, ranged from death to the cutting off an arm or leg, and terrible floggings.”<sup>41</sup> Severe laws were passed to control the slave population who greatly outnumbered whites on the island. The belief among whites was that slaves had to be continually terrorized to some extent in order to prevent them from rebelling and destroying the white population.<sup>42</sup>

Historian Richard Burton describes a slave rebellion and its relationship to an African derived ritual in Jamaica. Tacky’s Rebellion of 1760 was designed and coordinated by a group of “salt-water” enslaved Africans most likely of Akan origin.

It was preceded by the taking of oaths and by ritual dancing akin to the Ikem dance performed in Ashanti society on the eve of war and aimed, like similar African-dominated revolts before it, at a “war of racial extermination and the establishment of an ethnic autocracy on Ashanti lines.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Issac Dookhan, *A Pre-Emancipation History of the West Indies* (Trinidad: Longman Trinidad Ltd., 1971), 71-73.

<sup>40</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 20-25.

<sup>41</sup> Black, 75.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Burton, 25.

Whites understood the rebellion as a result of the practice of Obeah among the slaves. They passed a law that year to stamp out any evidence of ritual magic among the enslaved Africans. The 1760 rebellion, and measures carried out following it, are examples of the delicate balance that whites sought to achieve in controlling their enslaved population. Because they were so severely outnumbered and relied on slave labor for their wealth, whites had to take measures to maintain absolute control and yet not antagonize their slaves to the point of rebellion. Because of the tropical climate and their susceptibility to disease, wealthy British land owners, unlike their North American counterparts, chose not to immigrate to the West Indies but preferred to function as absentee landlords. Slave owners simultaneously enforced laws on the books to maintain order and sought ways to make the system more humane overall. Sunday was a day when slaves could tend to their own plots, chores and families. With the decline of the number of slaves imported into Jamaica beginning in 1800, slave owners began to slowly loosen the restrictions on what slaves could do with these days off.

Slave leisure served as a crucial part of the social contract between slave owners and slaves. Owners believed that leisure time for slaves increased their overall health and productivity, quelled rates of property destruction, and provided social stability. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries slaves were granted leisure time during inclement weather, Sundays, and Christian holidays. With the end of the importation of slaves to Jamaica in 1808, slave owners provided leisure time to preserve the health of their slaves and prevent runaways. Eventually, slaves considered leisure time a right, and not a privilege. In the moral economy of slave/slave owner

relations, overseers granted “free” time in exchange for compliance to slavery as an institution.<sup>44</sup> The slaves used their leisure time to travel to other plantations and towns, attend family gatherings, as well as to engage in sexual relations, economic exchange, covert political organization, festivities, and devotional practices. For the slaves “[c]ulture was a primary area of anti-slavery discourse, and dances took centre stage in the social and institutional infrastructure of resistance.”<sup>45</sup> Slave owners understood the potential relationship between leisure time and revolt. They responded by intensely monitoring and attempting to control how slaves used this time.<sup>46</sup>

Historian Hilary McD Beckles suggests that large scale slave gatherings served as a site for the expression of general disaffection for their position, and slaves engaged in detailed revolutionary planning. Slave owners understood these gatherings and almost everything associated with them (the dance styles, spirit possession, and drumming) as political events and cast them as occasions for sexually deviant behavior by their slaves.

African dance styles, even of a devotional or sacred nature, were sexualized and de-intellectualised by Whites who found the interface of languid and jerky movements aesthetically problematical. Some, however, were sufficiently sensitive, or paranoid, to interpret African dance performance, then, as anti-slavery ritual constructions that ridiculed their slave-owning world and promoted revolt. Eurocentric sexualisation and politicalisation of African dance performance produced two distinct types of literature: one that generated sociomoral representations of the African inherent character; the other that sought the identification of attitudes and practices of insubordination and resistance.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hilary McD Beckles, “War Dances: Slave Leisure and Anti-slavery in the British-Colonized Caribbean,” in *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom: Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa, and the African Diaspora*, ed. Verene A. Shepherd (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 233.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

Slave rituals were targeted by colonial officials and slave owners alike for their amoral representation of the black sexualized body and as a precursor to revolt. Within political debates on slavery in Britain and the colonies, slave dancing symbolized liberated black bodies, understood by the pro-slavery camp as a lack of morals and demonstrative of the chaos of a society populated by free blacks. To slave communities, these dances represented temporary physical and spiritual liberation. They provided an opportunity for communication across plantations that facilitated the organization of rebellion.<sup>48</sup>

The fear of slave insubordination was played out on a number of fronts, namely political debates on slavery, descriptive colonial writings, and legal discourse prohibiting sacred or secular slave gatherings. Whites responded to these dances in a variety of ways. Some islands or even plantations outlawed slave gatherings, while others banned the use of the drum, which they believed was used for subversive communication.

Slave owners in Barbados were first to legislate, in 1688, setting a pattern for other English colonists to follow. One hundred years later, William Dickson reported from Barbados that the sound of the “coromantian drum” still brings “terrors” to the White community who “panic” on the few occasions that it is heard.<sup>49</sup>

This quote illustrates the early pattern of outlawing certain slave-initiated activities. It also demonstrates the extreme anxiety among the white settler population regarding slave rituals and the accurate perception of the relationship between ritual and revolts. Much of the slave’s cultural activities became criminalized and centrally important to legislative bodies.<sup>50</sup> Alleyne discusses these laws and provides an excerpt.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 226-7.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 231.

[V]ery early laws were passed banning the assembly of large numbers of slaves on Sundays and holidays. An act passed in 1696 (and confirmed in 1699) ran as follows:

And for the prevention of the meeting of slaves in great numbers on Sundays and holidays, whereby they have taken the liberty to contrive and bring to pass many of their bloody and inhuman transactions: Be it enacted by the aforesaid authority, that no master, or mistress, or overseer, shall suffer any drumming or meeting of any slaves, not belonging to their own plantations, to rendezvous, feast, revel, beat drum, or cause any disturbance.<sup>51</sup>

The language of this legislation, “bloody and inhuman transactions,” suggests that whites understood these slave gatherings to be amoral cannibalistic rituals. Further the law implies that drumming is a nuisance that will not be tolerated, as it symbolized the operations of what slave owners deemed to be an inferior humanity.

Over time slave owners and legislative bodies came to understand some of the psychology and social behavior associated with ritual practices. A law from 1857 is an example of the type of legal language used to condemn Obeah in any form.

Whereas doubts may be entertained as to the meaning of the words “Obeah” and “Myalism:” And whereas the practice of what is termed Obeah and Myalism is found to promote superstition, to cloak criminal intentions, and to endanger human life within this Island, and it is requisite to give increased power for the punishment for the same:...

- I. That from and after the passing of this Act, any person who shall for false, crafty, or unlawful purposes pretend to the possession of supernatural power, or who, by threat, promise, persuasion, or action, shall induce or attempt to induce, any other person to believe that he can, by the exercise of any such supernatural power, bring about or effect any object, or carry out any design of his own, or of any other person, or, for the purpose of carrying out any such design or object, shall falsely, cunningly, or unlawfully make use of omens, spells, charms, incantations, or other preternatural devices, shall be deemed and taken to be an Obeah or Myal man, or a diviner in Obeah and Myalism; and the words “Obeah” and

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<sup>51</sup> Alleyne, 82.

“Myalism” shall be understood to be of one and the same meaning and the like offence.<sup>52</sup>

By equating Myal and Obeah, colonial officials dismissed any healing properties that Myal holds for the people who believe it. To some extent this law suggests that colonial officials note the power and effect attributed to these practices, while condemning them at the same time. The language above reveals that lawmakers believed that Obeah empowered slaves to resist plantation authority due to the circulation of numerous tales about Obeah working against slave owners. The story of Nanny of the Maroons using Obeah to make her buttocks bullet proof and shield her people from the fire power of British forces is just one example. By drafting such a law, colonial officials at least partially subscribe to a belief in the power of these practices.

Women played a significant role in sacred and secular slave activities. In myal-based rituals they were the majority of the congregation and were more likely than men to experience spirit possession. Minister of Welfare and Development (1962-67) and later Prime Minister of Jamaica (1980-89), Edward Seaga in his ethnography of Pocomania underscores the large numbers of women who dominate Pukkumina bands and maintains that few women become leaders within their bands.<sup>53</sup> For this reason, colonial officials took note of women’s participation in slave leisure activities. They sometimes viewed women as ringleaders of these activities and often mistook religious ecstasy for sexual ecstasy written onto the bodies of black women. One case of rebellion in Montego Bay involved a female slave, Mary Ann Reid.

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<sup>52</sup> Chapter XXIV An Act to Explain ...the More Effectual Punishment of Obeah and Myalism. (Spanish Town, Jamaica: National Archives of Jamaica, 1857).

<sup>53</sup> Edward Seaga, “Revival Cults in Jamaica: Notes Towards a Sociology of Religion,” *Jamaica Journal* 3, no.2 (1969): 5. Some scholars prefer the Pukkumina spelling, especially after the mid-1960s when the term Pocomania was understood as derogatory. I use Pocomania because the artists that I study used this term when it was socially accepted.

In 1824 fourteen slaves were brought to trial in Montego Bay and faced the charge of rebellious conspiracy. The transcripts of the case reveal that the slaves testified that the planning took place at three or more dances and pre-Christmas parties, some as early as August. The slaves were accused of violating two counts of the island's slave code that stated that it is a criminal offense to attend meetings without the knowledge of the slave owner or overseer, and that it is criminal to attend a meeting for an unlawful and dangerous purpose. Of the fourteen slaves charged, one was a woman, Mary Ann Reid. Two of the dance parties in question were held at her house. "Mary Ann's home was described as a regular dance venue with slaves from distant estates attending to drink rum and dance into the early hours of the morning."<sup>54</sup> Some of the male slaves were punished by being promptly removed from the island and would remain in exile for life. Others were sentenced to hard labor and corporal punishment. "Mary Ann 'in consideration of her sex' was ordered to serve four months hard labor in the workhouse."<sup>55</sup> This is an example of how leisure activities supported the facilitation of revolt and how colonial officials closely monitored them.

The inclusion of Mary Ann in this conspiracy trial leads one to question the role that she might have played in encouraging the men to carry out the more violent aspects of the revolt. It is likely that she provided the ideological support and possibly an alibi necessary for the success of the mission. One also wonders whether she had planned to take a more aggressive role in the revolt fulfilling the notion of the "rebel woman" similar to Nanny of the Maroons or Nanny Grigg of Barbados.<sup>56</sup> Either way, the inclusion of women in the active participation of anti-

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<sup>54</sup> McD Beckles, 241.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 163.

slavery politics is significant, as the sexualization of these practices gets mapped onto the bodies of black women like Mary Ann.

Very often the religious ecstasy of spirit possession is described with women's bodies as the primary vehicle of possession. At the same time, the experience of religious ecstasy is mistaken for erotic pleasure by white Jamaicans. For the remainder of this section I examine a number of colonial texts that describe Afro-Jamaican rituals in sexual terms in order to clarify that they were feared not just for their violent political potential, but also for their perception of sexual potency. I analyze excerpts from William Makin, Martha Beckwith, and Earl Leaf's writings on Jamaican religious practices in the 1920s and 1930s. These writers all encounter the perceived sexuality of these practices, especially in relation to women's bodies, but they address this issue in different ways. Ethnographer Martha Beckwith and cultural historian Mervyne Alleyne provide evidence of how slave leisure time in the form of dance parties or sacred rituals is assumed to provide sexual release for the slaves.

Garner, writing about the period between the British conquest in 1655 and the Great Earthquake of 1692, says:

Two or three days were given at Xmas (sic) and also at Easter, which the slaves called pickanniny Xmas. What holidays they had were usually spent dancing. These dances were almost invariably of a licentious character.<sup>57</sup>

Alleyne cites Waddel who in 1863 published an account of a Myal ceremony he observed that places women's bodies at the center of such gatherings.

We found them in full force and enjoyment, forming a ring, around which were a multitude of onlookers. Inside the circle, some females performed a mystic dance, sailing round and round, and wheeling in the centre with outspread arms, and wild looks and gestures. Others hummed or whistled in a low monotonous tune, to which the performers kept time, as did the people around too, by hands and feet

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<sup>57</sup> Alleyne, 106.

and the swaying of their bodies. A man, who seemed to direct the performance, stood at one side, with folded arms, quietly watching their evolutions.<sup>58</sup>

In Waddel's description women are "mystic" suggesting an ancient spirituality and at the same time they are "wild" indicating the primitive bordering on the erotic. In what appears as a moment of spirit possession for the women at the center of the ring of onlookers, the male religious leader or Shepherd stands to the side.

In the following passage spirit possession, Christianity, Devil worship, and sexuality all converge. Alleyne, quoting Curtain on the history of Revival, draws upon accounts of missionaries from the 1860s.

In the early days, the new convert was usually struck prostrate on the church floor; but as the movement progressed other manifestations were introduced, and these bothered the missionaries. There were oral confessions, trances and dreams, 'prophesying,' spirit-seizure, wild dancing, flagellation, and mysterious sexual doings that were only hinted at in the missionary reports. One missionary accepted the explanation of a follower that two different spirits were taking possession of the converts—the Spirit of Christ and another, diabolical spirit trying to undo the Divine Work.<sup>59</sup>

This passage indicates that missionaries had a problem with how Christ was being worshipped by their new converts. The missionaries worried about a corruption of their faith. This passage leaves readers wondering whether the missionaries actually witnessed a sexual act. Or, had they observed religious responses that they interpreted as sexual? Or were the missionaries simply too modest to give a full account of the sex acts of Revival practitioners? These passages demonstrate multiple readings of Afro-Jamaican ritual practices: from the revolutionary, to the sexual, to the insane, to the divine. Yet, most white observers consistently view them as a form of insubordination and sexual deviance.

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<sup>58</sup> Alleyne, 99.

<sup>59</sup> Alleyne, 100.

In the twenty first century, the stigma about Afro-Jamaican ritual practices remains. The rhetoric, however, has shifted from a fear about slave revolt to a fear about sexual deviance and hysteria in women. British journalist and pulp fiction writer William J. Makin's descriptions of spirit possession within Pocomania ritual in the late 1920s and early 1930s are dramatically violent. As a journalist, Makin likely published his findings in local newspapers and eventually published them in his book *Caribbean Nights* published in 1939. His comments are representative of a middle class, white male observer of Jamaican ritual.

A wild scream tore the air. A woman, shaking and jerking her body in epileptic fashion, ran out of the throng of watchers and hurled herself towards the table. They caught her, just as she reached him [the shepherd]. He made some mystic passes over her head with his long sleeves, and the two women who had rushed in pursuit dragged their captive away. She was held like a sack, a yard away from me. Her whole body was jerking convulsively. Queer animal noises were emerging from deep down in her fertile African loins. The noise was horrifying. But the singing grew louder and drowned it.<sup>60</sup>

In a similar case he explains: "Another disheveled woman, tearing the clothes from her body in her frenzy. People rushed towards her, but she flung herself to the ground and lay there writhing. The same gulping noises came from her throat."<sup>61</sup>

In both of these examples by Makin, animalistic noises and erratic movements emerge from women's bodies. These passages can be read in a few ways. His focus on women suggests that women were the first members of the crowd to become possessed. Perhaps Makin believed, like his Jamaican peers, that women were more vulnerable to spirit possession than men, or that women were the only participants to be possessed in a dramatic manner. These passages also

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<sup>60</sup> William Makin, *Caribbean Nights* (London: R. Hale Ltd., 1939), 105.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

demonstrate a sexualized male gaze on the black female body. He imagines that her noises are generated in her “fertile African loins.”

Makin’s derogatory references to the one woman’s “African loins” and another’s ripping her clothes off, from her body point to the perception held by white observers of the inherent sexuality of these African religious rituals. Makin’s description of the entire crowd of worshippers in a state of possession also suggests the violence of the “primitive.”

Like a massacre with machine-guns, black figures dropped and writhed all about me. The sounds that came from these figures biting the earth were as bad as any battlefield. I stepped cautiously backwards into the shadows, looking anxiously for my companions. I was quite prepared to find them also in the spirit. It was impossible to resist the wave of madness that was overwhelming this black throng.<sup>62</sup>

Makin conjures the violent imagery of a bloody battlefield and suggests a revolutionary danger by de-personifying everyone in the scene except for himself and his companions. In the first two examples he is clearly interested in women’s bodies in a state of spiritual ecstasy. When “the spirit” possesses the entire assembly of male and female participants, Makin collectively de-personified them into components of one war-like machine raging in battle. His anxiety may be twofold. He fears his own vulnerability of becoming a part of this “black throng.” Secondly, he fears that he suddenly may become the target of this bloodthirsty mass. Makin has embraced both the sexual and revolutionary mythology of these rituals that have been handed down to him by history.

After this moment, Makin begins to make his escape from the meeting. He leaves for fear of his own vulnerability of being swept up in the black throng around him. He orders his companions to drive him away from the scene, which they do with regret. Makin explains their

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

disappointment in leaving at this moment. His companions insisted that the ritual was not over until all have been possessed, slowly recover from the spirit, and are released by the Shepherd, who officially concludes the ceremony. His desire to leave immediately suggests that he no longer believes that his whiteness or non-belief in the ritual will protect him from the violence of spirit possession.

In *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folklife*, ethnographer Martha Warren Beckwith documents her ethnographic fieldwork, conducted during four summers between 1919 and 1924, on the beliefs and customs of the black peasant populations in the rural areas of Jamaica. She includes chapters on burial practices, understandings of the spirit world, Obeah, Myal, Revivalists, Pukkumerians, and Maroons. In analyzing gender in relation to spirit possession Martha Beckwith is told about the sexuality of Afro-Jamaican religious practices, and her informant names women as the sexual subjects in question.

A Scotch clergyman told me that he once followed the sound of the drum to such a meeting and found two or three of the women quite insensible and foaming at the mouth. He had to strike them smartly to get them out of the hypnotical condition into which their emotion had thrown them. It is said that the excitement aroused at these meetings works itself off in sex indulgence, but I do not know any facts about this.<sup>63</sup>

The clergyman identifies the cause of women's trance-like behavior as emotion. I will return to this point in the next chapter when analyzing Una Marson's play *Pocomania*, as there is often a perceived slippage between emotion and a demonic spirit that takes hold of women during rituals. While Beckwith finds no evidence to support the clergyman's claim of sexual indulgence, there is the repeated suggestion of the sexual potency of the dances and the frenzied

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<sup>63</sup> Martha Warren Beckwith, *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), 160.

excitement of spirit possession particularly in relationship to women. White Jamaicans described these rituals to her as orgies and not religious worship at all. In spite of a lack of evidence to support or deny the claim, the claim of sexual activity at Revival meetings is made and believed by the upper and middle class white and black population in the early twentieth century.

Beckwith attempts to get to the heart of the matter by observing a ritual led by Margaret Williston, a leading Mammy of a Revival group.

Once Margaret Williston began to breathe with a short sharp intake that sounded like the bark of a dog, an exercise which is called 'trooping' and which, if persisted in, will produce in the worker that semiconscious condition so favorable to the communication of spirits, and hence so coveted at a really successful Revivalist meeting. Margaret, however, on this occasion fully recovered herself and soon led in prayer. At another time she bowed halfway to the ground, and once she revolved completely around. Such movements are considered by no means indecorous but are rather prescribed indications of fullness of spirit.<sup>64</sup>

She describes the bodily actions of a woman in possession. Here there is a noticeably absent erotic gaze upon the black female body in this state. Instead Beckwith is careful to note how Margaret's physical movements symbolize a depth of spirituality and not a lack of morals or an indulgence in erotic pleasure.

Indeed there is some overlap between sacred and secular dance forms in Jamaica in the early twentieth century. Photographer and travel writer Earl Leaf documents how some sacred Jamaican dances and traditional folk dances became sexualized in the nightclub scene in Kingston in the 1930s. In the nightclubs, club owners and performers deliberately sexualized folk dances in order to bring in larger crowds, entertain tourists, and ultimately increase their income. In the "field" however, "non-initiated" visitors to Revival meetings and other sacred

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<sup>64</sup> Beckwith, 162.

ritual gatherings are a rare occurrence. It is less likely therefore that the dances witnessed in this environment were altered, or sexualized, for economic or other social benefit.

Colin G. Clarke's study *Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692-1962* carefully documents the shifting demographics of this city over time. From his work, I surmise the possible make up of the nightclub crowds in different parts of the city in the period leading up to independence. Clarke's chapter on the demographics of Kingston in 1943 is particularly useful here. Whites or Chinese most likely owned the nightclubs and bars in Kingston in this period. The Chinese were given greater opportunities to trade with the British and establish retail business in Kingston and had more capital to purchase or start up businesses than other groups.<sup>65</sup> "It was a well established procedure for the Chinese to launch newcomers in business, and an initial period spent as a shop-assistant usually provided training for management and, ultimately, ownership of a grocery, laundry, restaurant, or bar."<sup>66</sup> The class status of patrons of the clubs depended on the neighborhood in Kingston where the club was located. Half Way Tree Road was and is the point in the center of Kingston that has historically separated uptown from downtown Kingston. Even though neighborhoods and populations have shifted over time, this has remained a class dividing line between the lower class and the middle class, with the middle class living north of Half Way Tree Road in suburban and residential areas. Many clubs were for patrons of a range of races and colors especially north of Halfway Tree, while certain clubs were known for being more "seedy" than others. Neighborhoods south of Half Way Tree Road supported brothels and were considered dangerous for white men, as noted by Makin and Leaf in their accounts.

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<sup>65</sup> Colin G. Clarke, *Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692-1962* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 75.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

In this period musicians and dancers traveled together as nightclub acts and performed for patrons of different classes and colors depending on the neighborhood of the bar or club. The same nightclub act performed at a number of clubs in one night or a string of nights, from Thursday to Saturday, for different audiences. The nightclubs in Kingston were mainly for the local crowds. At this time the tourist industry was developing along the north coast in Montego Bay and Ocho Rios where clubs and performances were specifically designed to entertain tourists. The sexualized dances that Leaf and Makin describe in Kingston could just as easily have been performed by different groups along the north coast, as the sexuality of black women on display would have drawn large tourist crowds as well. The audiences for these dances were diverse because the performers traveled throughout the city. In certain upscale venues, however, they may have toned down the sexuality of some pieces, so as not to offend their clientele.

There was a large preponderance of women throughout most of the rapidly growing tenements and the upper-class suburbs: this was particularly marked near Half Way Tree where most households employed domestic servants and provided the very occupations for which most female migrants were searching.<sup>67</sup>

Clarke documents the influx of migrant workers from the rural areas to Kingston looking for work, and women outnumbered men in this respect. Una Marson's first play, *At What A Price* (1932), examines the life of a young black woman leaving her family in the rural areas to find work as a secretary in Kingston. In this period there is also an over representation of adults from ages 20-45 in the city. The large imbalance between men and women in Kingston at this time suggests that many women were unmarried or that they chose to migrate to the city leaving their husbands and children in the country. Also, common-law marriages among blacks at this time

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 55.

were more the rule than state-sanctioned marriages. Because of this fact it is difficult to assess who was married and unmarried based on the way that the data was collected at the time.

Women sought employment in domestic work, clerical work, or higglers or market women in the local markets.

Ethnomusicologist Verena Record documents the early music scene in Jamaica and the development of reggae music in Kingston.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the music scene in Kingston began to change. The big bands were breaking up, with individuals seeking 'greener fields' abroad or in the developing tourist mecca on Jamaica's north coast. This led to the absence of most of the musicians who had jammed at ghetto sessions.... In Kingston, society halls, such as Forrester's Hall on North Street, and amusement parks were the venues of usually jam-packed events where the underprivileged danced their troubles away to the heavy, thumping, rhythm-and-blues sounds of America.<sup>68</sup>

While the scene was indeed changing, there was still an intense nightclub scene in the city and the underprivileged were hearty participants in the types of venues that Earl Leaf and William Makin describe in their travels throughout the city looking for examples of nightclub acts featuring black dance.

Earl Leaf discusses the local dances observed in the Jamaican countryside and in the nightclub scenes in Kingston. In The Springfield Club in Kingston a Pocomania dance is performed. The dance is staged in such a way that it borrows from a range of performance modes including minstrelsy and vaudeville to entertain a middle class audience of all skin tones.

Among the dancers is:

...the irresistible Rudolph, better known as Sarsaparilla, who blackens his already coal-black face with charcoal and burnt cork. Pocomania, 'a little crazy,' one of

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<sup>68</sup> Verna Record, "From Burru Drums to Reggae Rhythms: The Evolution of Rasta Music," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spenser and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 237.

the more familiar of the Obeah dances, was first on the program. Singing and chanting and dancing, the hall was filled to the bursting point with music and rhythm. Daisy enters into a sort of trance when she dances, seemingly oblivious of her surroundings and audience—apparently undisturbed even by the loony antics of Sarsaparilla who caricatures and burlesques her dances. The choreography of this number was of the highest professional order. Though the costumes were home-made and most of the dancers work part-time, I felt that this Pocomania number was ready, as is, for presentation to metropolitan audiences in America and Europe.<sup>69</sup>

Even in this adapted and polished version of Pocomania, the female dancer Daisy appears to be in a state of spirit possession, while the fully conscious Sarsaparilla provides comic relief to balance the intensity of the ritual. In the highly professional performance, the possessed Daisy, takes center stage.

Colin Clarke says little about the actual nightclubs, but he does mention the religious beliefs of many blacks in Kingston at the time.

Many Negroes in Kingston, therefore, belonged to unorthodox sects which stood in direct line of cultural descent from the Native Baptists. According to Henriques, the 'native' as opposed to the orthodox religious groups, relied 'entirely on lower class support, and are served by black 'clergy.' In origin they may be Jamaican, as in the case of the Bedwardites, or American as the 'Church of God;' in ritual they approximate more to the cult groups than to the orthodox churches.<sup>70</sup>

The sources mentioned above and Makin's and Leaf's accounts make clear that Kingston in this period had a growing population of migrant workers from the rural areas consisting primarily of single women looking for work in a diverse, yet segregated city. The city was one of believers accustomed to viewing and participating in Afro-Jamaican religious practices. Therefore, it is easy to imagine unemployed women turning to nightclub dancing as a means of income or a second job. It is also conceivable that women in this position would take the dances familiar to

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<sup>69</sup> Earl Leaf, *Isles of Rhythm* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1948), 85.

<sup>70</sup> Clarke, 68.

them from their participation in religious services and alter them with sexual undertones to more easily secure work in a competitive market.

The secular space of the nightclub helped produce a sexual interpretation of these dances. The religious history of these dances indicates that women's bodies were already sexualized within a sacred context. The fact that these women were dancing alone, usually without a male partner or a male escort, gave the appearance that they were single and therefore sexually available. Finally, the presence of alcohol, available to the patrons and performers, served as a social lubricant for all parties. These factors make it possible to read these dances, in this context, as sexual.

In the following passage Leaf describes a sexualized mento dance.

Originally a folk dance with a love theme, it became a sex-dance when brought to the cities. The *mento* seems designed to excite and relieve certain localized desires. It has a series of rhythmic movements, mostly in the haunches, stomach and solar plexis. Occasionally one sees a touch of the *rumba* in it but whereas the *rumba* is fast and has much quick foot-work, the *mento* has slow seductive movements such as the rolling belly, the swaying hips and the closing of eyes when auto-intoxication occurs.<sup>71</sup>

In the translation of this dance from the rural areas to urban areas, the love theme of mento dance has evolved into a sex dance. What's lost in the translation is the original meaning of the dance: love and commitment. Urban night club patrons, unaware of the original meaning or context of the dance, misinterpret the dance as being about sex without the obligation of commitment. Leaf is so drawn to this dance and the lead dancer that he invites the lead female dancer to his table for drinks and comments on her voluptuous breasts, suggesting that he hopes for a romantic liaison with her that evening.

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<sup>71</sup> Leaf, 78.

Leaf gives another description of a sexualized mento dance. In the following, the dancer leaves less to the patron's imagination.

One golden-skinned girl stag, dancing with a different partner each number, seemed intent upon ravishing each of them on the dance floor. Her complete costume consisted of a red turban, red high heeled slippers and a very short, thin cotton dress with not a stitch underneath. The garment hugged every shapely curve of her hips, thighs and breasts so that she seemed more alluringly naked than mere nudity could have been. Dancing with sensuous abandon, teasing and tantalizing each new boy to the point of frenzy, she seemed the personification of dark rapture.<sup>72</sup>

He suggests the girl's promiscuity by including the number of dance partners she sent into "frenzy." Frenzy is a curious word choice given that the traditional form of the dance suggests both the sexual and spiritual potential of the dance. The description of her costume is a far cry from the traditional mento wear for women, which consists of long white dresses and head wraps. The turban suggests ritual attire while the short tight cotton dress references the nightclub atmosphere. Part of the confusion about the sexualization of these dances on the part of the viewer is compounded when in urban nightclubs these same traditional folk dances are deliberately sexualized by the dancers to appease the expectations of their audiences and increase the profits of club owners. Even while these sexualized folk dances are becoming an increasingly popular form of entertainment in urban areas, the more traditional forms of these dances still cause fear and concern among the white population in rural areas.

Laws passed to condemn ritual practices in the early twentieth century take on a different tone than their predecessors of the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The following letter is an excerpt from a set of correspondence regarding the Revivalism Prohibition Law of 1931.

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<sup>72</sup> Leaf, 83-4.

Hon: Colonial Secretary:

There is a very real difficulty in attempting any definition of “revivalism” or “shakerism” and in defining the line between what is “shakerism” and the normal practices of some other forms of religion. I take it, therefore, that the St. Vincent legislation recognised that difficulty and in order to get over it provided that the decision of any Resident Magistrate as to whether the customs and practices on any particular occasion are revivalism or shakerism should be final, thereby imposing on the Resident Magistrate a very wide discretionary power, his decision being a question of fact; I do not think that an appeal Court would normally upset his decision on questions of fact.

Whether the Colonial Office will approve of such legislation, which is somewhat drastic, is a question which might be ascertained. I certainly do know that in the Windward Islands and in the Bahamas these practices have a very deleterious effect on the persons who indulge in them and there were loud and persistent complaints from all sections of the community, hence the introduction so far as I know of legislation in St. Vincent.

Attorney-General<sup>73</sup>

This letter demonstrates the extreme anxiety colonial officials felt regarding African-derived religious practices as a threat to the colony. Again, the loud and persistent complaints are not just about noise but suggest the intense fear that the drumming evokes in the white community. The evidence reveals that while officials failed to agree on a definition of Revival, they ultimately decided to grant unlimited power to the Resident Magistrate and trust that he will “know it when he sees it” and exercise his authority to eliminate it.<sup>74</sup> There are conspicuous and inconspicuous reasons for this legislative measure. The correspondence also mentions the nuisance of the noise caused by Revival meetings and the “deleterious” effects of spirit possession. But these are not the only reasons for allowing an extreme use of power by the Resident Magistrate. The correspondence struggles to define what is “normal” and identify which sanctioned religious practices must be protected. It also attempts to distinguish them from

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<sup>73</sup> Jamaican Colonial Correspondence, (Spanish Town: National Archives of Jamaica, 1931).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

the abnormal “pseudo”-religious forms of the black lower class population that must be eliminated.

In 1930 a concerned citizen, Dr. Hudson, urged lawmakers to ban Revivalism in his parish of Westmoreland. Although almost nothing is known about Dr. Hudson’s background or standing in the community, what is indisputable is that his series of complaints initiate official correspondence and research on laws throughout the British West Indies. That is, he believed that Revival was responsible for the spread of insanity in the area. This set of correspondence, which includes letters from Hudson, the Colonial Secretary, and the Attorney General, prompts officials to conduct research on similar laws in British West Indies, including the Bahamas where the religious practitioners were referred to as “Shakers,” as well as Grenada and St. Vincent. The Inspector General is assigned the task of inquiring into the specific nature of the disturbances across the island so that the law will be comprehensive of all elements of the problem. In his report, which describes the phenomenon in all parishes, he identifies four problems that must be rectified.

First is the problem of insanity, which takes place on two fronts. He views spirit possession as a form of temporary insanity that takes place during the ritual meetings themselves. Within ritual performance, participants experience hysteria and become “temporary lunatics, losing all self-control and sense of discretion.”<sup>75</sup> Then, there is the danger that some of these people become permanently insane. He cites the high numbers of peasants occupying local insane asylums as likely former members of these “societies.” This distinction between

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

temporary and permanent insanity is significant, and I will return to this issue in my next section on Myalisation while discussing the effects of staged performance of ritual on theatre audiences.

Elaine Showalter documents the rise of the insane asylum in Britain and its relationship to gender in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. She identifies three critical phases of development in attitudes about psychiatric care and gender: Psychiatric Victorianism from 1830-70; Psychiatric Darwinism from 1879-1910; and Psychiatric Modernism from 1910-1980. The first phase, Psychiatric Victorianism, is characterized by the construction of insane asylums in the 1840s and 50s with women quickly becoming the majority of the patients. Women in this period were moved out of homelike mental institutions and attics into asylums. This history in Britain is mirrored in Jamaica with the construction of an insane asylum in Kingston in 1857. The following is an excerpt of a law passed in Jamaica that describes how the new asylum shall be run. I have selected items that address women and criminals.

XII. So soon as the new Lunatic Asylum shall be ready for the reception of females, and notification thereof shall have been published by direction of the Governor in Executive Committee in the *Jamaica Gazette* by authority, or any other newspaper, the females of unsound mind who shall then be in the Public Hospital shall be transferred to the said new Lunatic Asylum.

XIII. All persons of unsound mind charged with the commission of felony, and acquitted on account of insanity, or who shall be found to be insane at the time of arraignment, or who, under the authority of any Act now or to be in force may be committed or removed to a Lunatic Asylum. ...

XVII. The Medical Superintendent shall, immediately on the admission of any person as a lunatic into such Asylum, make an entry with respect to such lunatic, in a book to be kept for that purpose, to be called "The Register of Inmates[.]"<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "The Statutes—Revised Edition. Acts of Queen Victoria" in *Laws of Jamaica 1857-1865*. (Spanish Town: Jamaica Archives), 146-148.

While special mention is made of female inmates throughout the document, the language of the law suggests that lunatics of both genders will be housed in one facility where medical and other colonial officials will supervise and monitor them. The assumption is that they are a threat to society and are unable to care for themselves. All insane patients are referred to and labeled as “inmates” suggesting that the institution will be run more like a prison and that the patients will be treated like criminals.

Dr. Hudson of Jamaica writes to lawmakers in 1930 advocating for a new law to control Afro-Jamaican religious ritual practices. His concerns and attitude align him with Showalter’s description of Psychiatric Darwinism, even though he is writing after 1910 and could be technically categorized, according to her timeline, in her Psychiatric Modernism period (1910-1980).

Following Darwin’s theories of inheritance, evolution, and degeneration, an emerging psychiatric Darwinism viewed insanity as the product of organic defect, poor heredity, and an evil environment. Seeing the lunatic as a degenerate person of feeble will and morbid predisposition, Darwinian therapists took a dim view of the effectiveness of asylum care and paternalistic therapy; instead, they redefined their role as that of psychiatric police, patrolling the boundaries between sanity and madness and protecting society from dangerous infiltration by those of tainted stock.<sup>77</sup>

In his series of letters to government officials, Dr. Hudson acts as a psychiatric police officer, documenting a series of infractions between what he identifies as normal and abnormal behavior and reporting his findings to the authorities. “The matter is important as revivalism is spreading and doing greater harm if possible amongst our people each day that it is allowed to continue without some check being placed on it.” Hudson insists that these people be threatened by the

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<sup>77</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

law to stop their “evil” practices or suffer detention either in the local jails or asylums. He views ritual practitioners as morally corrupt and that the colony must contain them before they spread their views and practices to others. He is particularly concerned about white women who are vulnerable to insanity. His concern is not fueled by a decrease in productivity about the black population as the demand for sugar cane was in a decline, and there were high rates of unemployment among the black population in the 1930s in Jamaica. On the contrary, he worries about the large numbers of poor black Jamaicans with too little to do and the possible proliferation of Revival societies.

In another complaint, Dr. Hudson states that the extreme noise (drumming, stomping, singing, and shouting) that is heard all night is a terrible disturbance. The poor moral character of the group leaders (myal-men and myal-women turned ministers) whom he determines as “lazy and conniving con artists,” deserve jail time to encourage them to seek legitimate occupations. Finally, the Inspector General concludes that Revival is in fact Obeahism cloaked in Christianity, rather than a corruption of Christianity. This “fact” makes Revival all the more dangerous and makes it difficult to prosecute because of its use of Christian symbols, hence the need for the Resident Magistrate to make a final determination.<sup>78</sup>

Dr. Hudson in yet another complaint urges the end of Revivalism in his parish and submits a final and desperate plea to lawmakers to act swiftly. In his last letter he reveals a concern that is not mentioned in any of the previous exchanges.

Sir,

Further to my letter to you dated 2<sup>nd</sup> October last on the subject of the prevalence of Revivalism in this Parish, I regret that nothing was done to deal

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<sup>78</sup>“The Statutes—Revised Edition. Acts of Queen Victoria” in *Laws of Jamaica 1857-1865*. (Spanish Town: Jamaica Archives).

with the matter at the Autumn Session of the Legislative Council. ... A few days ago two men came to me and told me that their wives have joined the local Society and are out nearly every night as late as 11:30 p.m. and will listen to no reason at all and that this will surely bring discord in the homes as they intend to deal strongly as far as they are able in this matter with their wives.

I assure you Sir, that this matter should not be left over longer than is possible. Children of all ages I have seen myself late at nights going to these meetings, some of them little older than infants in the literal sense of the word.

I do hope that in the coming Session of the Legislative Council next Spring that you will have the Law drafted and put in force without further delay.

Yours faithfully,  
Dr. Hudson<sup>79</sup>

The above letter presents two additional reasons why he fears the power of Revivalism, one that he hesitated to mention from the beginning of his campaign: the participation of middle class black or white women and children. The race of the two men who come to him to complain is not clear. I assume that they are white because if they were not, a descriptive term like black, Negro, or field worker would have been added. The lack of racial or class marker leads me to conclude their whiteness.<sup>80</sup> If they are white women, the implications are that the wives of respectable middle class men will become members of these religious “societies” thereby becoming vulnerable to spirit possession, which is viewed as a form of temporary and possibly permanent insanity. Because Revival practice is also believed to be a space for the sexual desires of women to be freely expressed and met, the participation of married women in these rituals brings discord into the home. Secondly, his personal experience of witnessing children attending meetings indicates a fear for their exposure to what he feels is a harmful influence on

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<sup>79</sup> Letter to the Colonial Secretary from J.W.N. Hudson, Dec. 22, 1930, in *Jamaican Colonial Correspondence*, (Spanish Town: National Archives of Jamaica, 1931), 22.

<sup>80</sup> My conclusion is troubled by the fact that black middle class Jamaicans of this period did not feel the need to identify themselves in terms of color. For example, in Marson’s play *Pocomania*, she does not indicate the race of any of her characters. Her first visit to London in the 1930s made her more aware of racial prejudice and difference.

them. The fear of children being exposed is that they will not adhere to the race and class boundaries of society and will be socialized into an Afro-Jamaican worldview.

In the end, Dr. Hudson's anxiety about the need to control women's sexuality strikes a nerve with lawmakers and the act is finally passed. Ultimately it appears that it is the vulnerability of women within these practices that persuades the council to grant the Resident Magistrate unlimited power to decide what is "deviant" religious practice. Within one month of Dr. Hudson's last letter the Revivalism Prohibition Law of 1931 is passed and signed into law. The earlier discourse about the dangers of insanity or the nuisance of the noise associated with Revival is not the primary concern of lawmakers. The punishment for the offense includes imprisonment with hard labor for men and women found participating in Revival meetings. A brief review of colonial anxieties in Asia will help to further explain the anxieties of the Dr. Hudsons of Jamaica.

In her analysis of gender, race, and morality in colonial Asia, Ann Stoler examines how gender-specific sexual sanctions supported constructions of the categories of "colonizer" and "colonized" by defining positions of power and policing the boundaries of race.<sup>81</sup> In the British colonial imagination, the men of color possessed unlimited sexual desire especially for white women. This ideology fueled anxiety around the protection and safeguarding of white women and fears of racial mixing.

The arrival of large numbers of European wives, and particularly the fear for their protection, followed from new terms and tensions in the colonial contract. The presence and protection of European women was repeatedly invoked to clarify racial lines. It coincided with perceived threats to European prestige, increased

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<sup>81</sup> Ann Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia," in *The Gender Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*, ed. Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 14.

racial conflict, covert challenges to the colonial order, outright expressions of nationalist resistance, and internal dissension among whites themselves.<sup>82</sup>

In the Caribbean, European women were introduced to the islands in significant numbers as early as the 1670s. “Unsatisfied with the numbers of white women on the island, planters in Barbados repeatedly called for ‘loose wenches’ to augment the white population.”<sup>83</sup> This trend of importing white women for breeding exclusively with white planters quickly spread to the other islands. Colonial officials in Jamaica believed that Revival meetings were spaces that cultivated insane behavior among the black population. The threat of white women voluntarily entering this sphere and falling under the influence of the practice, making them sexually available to black men, elevates the matter. This threat convinces officials to increase the policing of these practices as well as the severity of punishments for such criminal offences.

The need to protect the virtue and reputation of white women and carefully guard the boundaries of race, class, and gender roles drove the anxiety of colonial officials in Jamaica and the settler class. Fear of racial contamination and loss of respectability forced husbands to “deal strongly as far as they are able with their wives.” The suggestion of domestic discord and potential violence is clear.

Colonial officials had four primary complaints about ritual performances: their association with rebellion, insanity, sexual liberation of black women, and the fear of miscegenation if white women became involved in these practices. In the next section I will analyze how and why these forms became central to the rhetoric of Black Nationalism in

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<sup>82</sup> Stoler, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 74.

Jamaica and the significance of how they are represented on national stages by middle class artists.

#### RITUAL ON STAGE: DEFINING MYALISATION AND MYAL-THEATRE

Caribbean dramatist and theatre scholar Errol Hill discusses the necessity of theatre that colonized people recognize as part of their heritage (as opposed to the culture of the colonizer) in order to form a national cultural identity. He advocates for the use of Afro-Caribbean rituals and folk traditions on stage to achieve this purpose.<sup>84</sup> While he has contributed a body of work examining how and why a range of folk forms should be incorporated into theatrical performances, I focus on the specific work that African-derived sacred rituals associated with Myal can achieve when dramatized on stage. In this section, I define the terms myalisation and myal-theatre. Then, I explain how I arrived at these terms. The theoretical framework for myalisation is born out of a necessity to discuss the evolution of theatre in the Caribbean in the nationalist era. In this period there is a radical shift in theatrical performance from a range of European and American theatrical imports or imitations to theatre deeply rooted in the Afro-Caribbean folk culture. While this shift has been documented in Caribbean theatre histories,<sup>85</sup> the intersection of the sacred ritual and theatrical performance within the context of a nationalist movement has not been critically examined.

The performance of Afro-Jamaican sacred rituals, both on and off stage, is inherently theatrical due to its many performative elements, just as it is inherently political because of the repressive circumstances surrounding these performances that I discussed in the previous section.

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<sup>84</sup> Errol Hill, "The Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies," *Caribbean Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1972): 15.

<sup>85</sup> See Errol Hill's *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) and Judy S. J. Stone's *Theatre (Studies in West Indian Literature)* (Macmillan Education, 1994).

I use the term theatrical to suggest that the rituals possess elements like music, song, dance, sacred symbols or “props,” and a myriad of “characters,” that is, ordinary people who take on new roles within the context of ritual. The representation of Afro-Jamaican religion on stage is a complex phenomenon because the practices themselves were considered taboo due to their revolutionary potential, deviant sexuality written onto the black female body, and assumed relationship to insanity. For colonized peoples, these performances facilitate a re-examination of Jamaica’s African legacy, while stimulating collective memory and an articulation of anti-colonial and nationalist discourse.

Theatre historian Judy Stone chronicles the development of Caribbean theatre and names Jamaican playwright, poet, journalist, and activist Una Marson’s play *Pocomania*, produced in 1938, as the first known example of a play that focuses on myal-based religious ritual and includes Caribbean folk forms on stage. Stone says of Marson:

Her most important play, a milestone in Jamaica’s theatrical history, was the 1938 *Pocomania*. ... An exploration of how this socially unaccepted form of worship affected an ordinary middle-class family, Marson’s was the first play to bring pocomania onto the conventional stage. *Pocomania* is also notable as one of the early experiments in incorporating both folk songs and folk dances into a West Indian drama.<sup>86</sup>

Marson's play is heralded as the forerunner of contemporary Jamaican theatre that utilizes a range of folk traditions on stage. I argue that this staged version of *Pocomania* initiated the process of the myalisation of middle-class Jamaican national stages and marked the stage as a space for women to participate in the nationalist discourse.

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<sup>86</sup> Stone, 21.

I define myalisation as the conscious development of an appreciation for and participation in myal-based religious practices, not for the purposes of religious worship as associated with any particular religion, but for social, political, economic, cultural, or spiritual (in the sense of profoundly meaningful or transformative) reasons. In the context of my study, myalisation is the process by which the Jamaican middle class comes to participate in theatrical performances that incorporate myal-based rituals, which they would otherwise not engage in or respect. Their initial motivation for participation in dramatizations of myal-based rituals as audience members and performers is for the purpose of constructing a national identity and participating in the nationalist project. In the context of my study, the process of myalisation includes fieldwork on the part of middle class artists in an effort to understand part of their Afro-Jamaican culture; the adaptation of these rituals for use in cultural products for the stage; and performance of these products on stage. Part of this process also entails the training of non-ritual practitioners to perform and/or view myal-based and ritual-like performances in theatrical settings. Both the performers and the spectators are taught how to participate in these dramatizations of Myal. This type of theatre has the ability to present, dramatize, or explain the spiritual reasoning of how and why a specific myal-based ritual (like Pocomania) fulfills a social function in the community. I am using Myal as a broad umbrella term that encompasses Myal's on-going relationship to the religious practices of the Maroons and development of Kumina by the Free Africans.

Myal-theatre is not simply the representation of ritual on stage but theatre that places myal-based rituals within a context of an individual's life or the life of a community trying to solve a problem i.e., a community attempting to communicate with ancestors. It enables middle-

class theatre-going audiences to shift their views of what is acceptable on stage and creates in them an appetite for myal-based performances. In this period of Jamaica's history (1938-1962), the middle class was the primary theatre-going audience. The middle class was socialized to accept the colonial taboo of myal, which myal-theatre sought to destabilize. Because the ritual is modified and enacted for non-religious purposes in theatre, distance between audience and performer can be created, thereby protecting audiences from the physical vulnerability of spirit possession and consequent stigma associated with ritual participation. For example, attending a myal-theatre production is acceptable, while attending a Revival ceremony for the middle class is not. Myal-theatre takes place in a sanctioned cultural space designated for aesthetic appreciation, while a myal-based ceremony unfolds in a ritual space located in a rural area or lower class neighborhood. Borrowing from performance studies scholar Richard Schechner, I argue that while myal-theatre appears to maintain some distance between performer and audience, theatre audiences become participants in the healing of the community through the dramatized ritual on stage because they witness the *transportations* of the performers.<sup>87</sup> Their participation in a series of transportations ultimately leads to the *transformation* of national stages in Jamaica. I will return to this point later in this section.

While Marson's 1938 *Pocomania* was a landmark, it was not until the 1950s that playwrights and choreographers would once again take up the challenge of incorporating Afro-Jamaican religious rituals and folk forms into theatre, and it was not until the 1970s that the use of such theatrical devices became the accepted norm. The very transformation of the Jamaican performance aesthetic from classical European and American works to original plays based on

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<sup>87</sup> Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 120-21.

Caribbean folk culture is the result of myalisation. To historicize the transformation of Jamaican theatre, Una Marson's 1938 *Pocomania* marks a beginning point in the processes of myalisation. The 1958 Federation Day Celebrations in Trinidad and Tobago, a nationalist and folkloric event in the Caribbean, marked the convergence of Caribbean politics and culture that included a spectacular display of folk forms and myal-based rituals on national/Pan-Caribbean stages. Given my definitions of the terms myalisation and myal-theatre, I will now trace the theoretical threads that I tie together to support my theory of myalisation.

For my analysis of ritual and its relationship to performance, I turn to the work of Margaret Thompson Drewal who identifies some of the reasons why ritual has become a popular area of study, particularly among intellectuals and artists examining Africa and African Diasporic peoples.

Within its rules, patterns, and processes, ritual at once encapsulates the world of social relationships and the cosmos. For anthropologists and historians of religion, ritual has been a model *par excellence* of the return to the whole, a romantic longing for a mythical time and place where communality, coherence, connectedness, collective conscience, and efficacy characterized the social order.<sup>88</sup>

Here Drewal notes a longing for a connection to the past that is embodied in ritual. This longing is particularly relevant to intellectuals in the Caribbean, including Marcus Garvey, Aimé Césaire, and C.L.R. James, who were searching for a way to refute their oppressive British colonization and to perform a reconnection to Africa. In this way, the Afro-Caribbean ritual becomes a means of acknowledging the present experiences of a society that has been transformed by several

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<sup>88</sup> Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers Play Agency (African Systems of Thought)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), xv.

African and European peoples, while simultaneously psychologically and psychically returning to Africa by performing their collective memory of that past.

Black middle class intellectuals from Africa and the Caribbean were traveling to Europe and the United States for their education. In the major cities they were meeting each other and discovering their commonalities in spite of their different points of origin. A significant example of their meeting and exchange of ideas was the development of the Negritude Movement in the 1930s by Léopold Senghor of Senegal, Aimé Césaire of Martinique, and Léon Damas of Guiana who all met in Paris. They understood their shared colonial experiences under the French, and they each returned to their homelands to develop varying strains of the movement which valorized blackness and their African heritage.<sup>89</sup>

Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and his vision of The Black Star Line embodied his philosophy of global black liberation that included political independence from European and Euro-American powers as well as economic independence for black individuals and nations. Through his newspaper *Negro World* and his numerous public lectures, the Jamaican-born Garvey espoused his vision of Pan-Africanism in which Africa became the literal and symbolic land of opportunity for peoples of African descent worldwide. His short-lived venture, The Black Star Line, sought to provide jobs for peoples of African descent, promoted trade between black people in the United States, the Caribbean, and West Africa and carried black passengers to a range of destinations without the fear of racism or discrimination. The Black Star Line represented both a return to Africa (Liberia) and a first step toward the economic freedom that Garvey knew was essential to any vision of liberated peoples.

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<sup>89</sup> Mercer Cook, "Voices of Negritude: The Expression of Black Experience in the Poetry of Senghor, Césaire and Damas (Review)," *The French Review* 46, no. 2. (Dec. 1972): 427-428.

His company had several thousand stockholders who were members of his organization in several countries and were hopeful about the economic success of the company and this symbolic journey back to Africa, even though Garvey's troubled *Phyllis Wheatley* never set sail for Liberia.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to Garvey's Black Star Line and its short-lived success of the 1920s, an event that mobilized and unified peoples of African descent globally in the 1930s was the Italo-Ethiopian conflict of 1934-1936. Prior to the conflict, Ethiopia already occupied a symbolic site of ancient royal lineage for black peoples in the New World. Biblical references to Ethiopia symbolized black people's connection to God, and black people in the New World elevated Ethiopia to an international symbol of black pride. In the 1930s Ethiopia was one of only two black sovereign nations which governed themselves, the other being Haiti, giving black people a symbol of nationalism. Garvey solidified a relationship with New World black peoples and Ethiopia in a letter to His Majesty Ras Tafari in 1930 commenting on the significance of his coronation. This correspondence sparked the development of Rastafarianism in the Caribbean.<sup>91</sup> The conflict then between Italy and Ethiopia captured and maintained the attention of black intellectuals and ordinary people of Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and beyond. British West African intellectuals firmly believed that Britain and France would intervene and prevent what they believed was an obvious injustice against Ethiopia.

Disenchantment with the League of Nations, coupled with the disillusionment with the diplomacy of the colonial powers during the crisis, led the articulate nationalists to begin seriously to reconsider their relationship with Britain and the

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<sup>90</sup> Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Dover, Massachusetts: The Majority Press, 1986), 151-167.

<sup>91</sup> Rupert Lewis, "Marcus Garvey and the Early Rastafarians: Continuity and Discontinuity" in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer; and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 146.

whole doctrine of the ‘civilising mission.’ Their nationalism shifted from the idea of working within the trusteeship concept to a more militant anti-white pan-Africanism.<sup>92</sup>

Intellectuals in the United States and the Caribbean including W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, C.L.R. James, Marcus Garvey, to name a few, and the memberships of organizations like the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the National Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP), the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (of which Una Marson was a member) were well aware of the racial implications of the conflict.<sup>93</sup> The black world literally watched, petitioned, raised money, and prayed for Ethiopia’s success. Would Africa’s only independent nation survive? And if not, what implications would Ethiopia’s defeat have for other black colonies in Africa and the New World? Black Nationalist and Pan-African sentiment took hold of both black intellectuals and common folk, as they painstakingly watched the defeat of Ethiopia. This defeat signaled the awakening of new efforts to fight for political independence from European powers.

One result of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict was that Africa then gained even more significance as a source of inspiration for black people in the New World, as the colonizing mythology/discourse was eroded and replaced with the harsh realities of racism in the minds of the people.

The appropriation of African religious and musical expression, when combined with indigenous and European influences, would serve to erase distinctions between high and low cultures in many Latin American and Caribbean nations by the middle of the twentieth century, well before cultural studies and post-

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<sup>92</sup> S.K.B. Asante, “The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict: A Case Study in British West African Response to Crisis Diplomacy in the 1930s,” *Journal of African History* 15, no. 2 (1974): 302.

<sup>93</sup> William R. Scott, “Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict 1934-1936,” *The Journal of Negro History* 63, no. 2 (April 1978): 118-134.

modernism were in vogue.... A common feature of cultural analysis by Afro-New World intellectuals has been the location of folk culture, music, and the corporeal arts at the center of their analysis, focusing on the incorporation of black subjectivity into a national/popular lexicon.<sup>94</sup>

Africa became both an ancient and a modern political unifying force for peoples of African descent. The performance of African cultural retentions in the New World represented a political awareness and symbolic resistance to European domination. In Jamaica middle class artists sought out African retentions and translated them into various art forms that supported the nationalist movement. Theatre artists adapted ritual to the stage and created new plays to replace the existing European repertoire on stage.

The late theatre scholar Beverly Robinson discusses spaces utilized for ritual performance in the African Diasporic experience. She outlines the ways in which the slave ship, the New World plantation, the pulpit, and the proscenium stage are all part of a continuum of performance spaces in which ritual as a means of survival lies at the heart of these performances. These four spaces are related to the historical circumstances of Africans in the New World. Robinson discusses how displaced and enslaved Africans ritualized new spaces through the use of rhythm, dance, song, storytelling, games, humor and masking to recreate the feeling of “home” in their new environments.<sup>95</sup> The retained cultural knowledge of Africans in the New World included ritual dance performance. “Dancing worshipers replayed specialized muscular movement, motor behavior over and over, as ‘muscle memory’ in sacred dance/music

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<sup>94</sup> Michael Hanchard, “Cultural Politics and Black Public Intellectuals,” *Social Text* 48 (Autumn 1996): 99.

<sup>95</sup> Beverly J. Robinson, “The Sense of Self in Ritualizing New Performance Spaces for Survival,” in *Black Theatre Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora*, ed. Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker II, and Gus Edwards (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 336.

ceremonies, as well as in other nonritual dance/music events.”<sup>96</sup> Many of these modes of performance were created to promote self-esteem, pass on survival skills to others, and comment on working and living conditions. The determination to survive, physically and emotionally, is a driving force in many of the rituals she names and all of them require rhythm, either from drums, hand-clapping, foot-stomping, or in the cadence of the voice.

Rhythm has a special relationship to ritual performance and spirit possession.

Anthropologist and dance scholar Yvonne Daniel explains how ritual drumming affects the dancing body and evokes a state of spirit possession.

Much of ritual drumming ...assumes a progression of emotive patterns as rhythms are sounded, repeated, and intensified. ... This drum music steadily initiated and supported a growing intensity within the dancing body, which eventually created other states of consciousness.<sup>97</sup> ... Worshipping performers dance to the rhythms, to the codified mathematical relationships of sound, because they induce transcendence, transformation, and spiritual performance. Emotional responses have been associated with particular pitches, intervals, and chords from all over the world.<sup>98</sup>

Daniel notes the mathematical pattern of drum beats induces various emotional states and can alter the consciousness in the dancer. If these patterns are adhered to, regardless of location, they will have similar effects. In this way enslaved Africans were able to recreate sacred spaces through ritual performance.

The drum beats of myal-based rituals traveled with performers from the sacred spaces of Revival churches to the Ward Theatre in downtown Kingston, as artists hired “authentic” drummers from these religious groups to perform on or off stage during the show.

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<sup>96</sup> Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2005), 92.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel, 87.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

Drumming is an integral part of formal ceremonials. In combination with the crowd excitement, singing, darkness, candles, circular rhythmic dancing, and other ceremonial aspects, drumming engenders an atmosphere in which possession has become the expected, desired, and usual behavior. This is by far the most common immediate stimulus for possession.<sup>99</sup>

Robinson makes the point that although the physical location of some ritual performances has changed over time due to shifting historical and social circumstances, the consistency of the aforementioned factors, including drumming and dancing, allows for a continuity in the desired result (i.e. spirit possession, communication with ancestors, and community building).

Drumming then has a clear relationship to the physical manifestation of spirit possession and Robinson articulates how rhythm, dance, and song transform (or ritualize) new spaces.

Therefore, sacred drumming, whether it takes place in a church or a theatre, could have a similar effect of spirit possession regardless of location.

Renowned Jamaican author and sociologist, Erna Brodber's 1988 novel *Myal* inspired a body of Caribbean literary criticism, which challenged post-colonial theory. Brodber's novel addresses issues of imperialist, cultural, and social "spirit thievery." Brodber uses this term to describe how the character, Mass Levi psychically rapes young Anita to revive his failing sexual abilities, as well as how Ella's foreign husband rewrites and misrepresents memories of her childhood home by turning them into a minstrel-like show for the town. In both cases, these men rob the spirits of young women who in turn, resort to the practices of Myal to reclaim themselves and heal their community.<sup>100</sup>

Due to the content and the title of the novel, literary critics sought to place the sacred practices of this forbidden religion at the center of an analysis of the text. Catherine Nelson-

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<sup>99</sup> Walter Mischel and Frances Mischel, "Psychological Aspects of Spirit Possession," *American Anthropologist: New Series* 60, no.2 (April 1958): 251.

<sup>100</sup> Catherine Nelson-McDermott, "Myal-ing Dialectics: Beyond Colonizing Discourses," 54.

McDermott in her article “Myal-ing Criticism: Beyond Colonizing Dialectics” uses the term myal-ing interchangeably with healing. While I am borrowing concepts from her article, my term myalisation differs from Nelson-McDermott’s *myal-ing*.

Nelson-McDermott suggests that Brodber’s novel creates “a theoretical space in which the [colonial] centre might not hold.” The novel constructs a “community which both deals with the problems of the colonial dialectical space and moves beyond them to begin building a non-colonized, and non-colonizable, social space.”<sup>101</sup> She claims that the novel, which operates within a larger body of Commonwealth fiction, “rewrite[s] the colonizer” and thus has the potential to create “a comprehensive theory of ‘possibilities’ of existence beyond the colonial dialectic.” In the novel *Myal* this religious practice is the method used to resist spirit thievery. Myal has the power to recover both those who have perpetrated spirit theft (spiritual/psychic violence) and those who have been victimized by spirit thieves.<sup>102</sup> By placing the religious practices and power of Myal center stage, Brodber’s novel *Myal*, and the critical response to it, open up theoretical possibilities for Caribbean literary studies. This article claims a space for reader’s participation in reversing the injustices of colonialism.<sup>103</sup> She explains the revolutionary workings of the novel.

In the process of repeatedly replicating exchanges in which the theoretical and applied nature of imperialism is laid bare, the text writes over the reader’s understandings of these issues as well, inviting a readerly complicity in the dismantling of the Empire. The text undertakes to reify a process of perception

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 53-4.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>103</sup> Pin-chia Feng, “Rituals of Rememory: Afro-Caribbean Religions in *Myal* and It Begins with Tears,” *MELUS* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 149; Tabish Khair, “‘Correct(ing) Images from the Inside’: Reading the Limits of Erna Brodber’s *Myal*” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 37, no. 1(2002): 121; Neil Ten Kortenaar “Foreign Possessions: Erna Brodber’s “Myal,” the Medium, and her Message” *Ariel* 30, no. 4 (Oct 1999): 51; Puri Shalini “An ‘other’ Realism: Erna Brodber’s *Myal*,” *Ariel* 24, no. 3 (Jul 1993): 95.

and expression alternation which “short-circuits” the system currently responsible for organizing perception.<sup>104</sup>

Descriptions of ritual performance in the novel invite the reader’s complicity in the process of “dismantling of Empire.” The literary criticism of this novel has created a discourse in which Afro-Jamaican religious practices themselves have the potential to become the theoretical tool by which the literary text is analyzed. This suggests a methodological shift in scholarship whereby the scholar must engage the practice of Myal itself. The cultural and theoretical underpinnings of Myal must be fully understood first, through ethnographies, religious histories, oral histories, and archival materials and then, this knowledge must be applied to a close reading of the text, possibly in conversation with other theoretical frameworks.

One of those theoretical frameworks can be found in Richard Schechner’s discussion of performers and spectators in *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. Schechner’s theory supports my analysis of the performance of ritual on stage and my definition of myalisation. Schechner describes acting as transportation, whereby the actor temporarily assumes another persona and temporarily exists within a performative reality. When the performance is over, the actor returns to the same point where he left his ordinary reality and resumes his ordinary personality. Schechner calls this temporary state transportation.

For Schechner, spirit possession is a process of involuntary transportation, and acting for the theatre is voluntary transportation. When addressing the issue of myal-based rituals on stage, and spirit possession being a central element of Myal, I question: what happens when an actor is absorbed (voluntarily transported) into a character that is overcome by a spirit? In other words, what happens when voluntary transportation becomes involuntary in the moment of theatrical

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<sup>104</sup> Nelson-McDermott, 62.

performance? In the chapters that follow I explore these questions in scenes where spirit possession is written into the script. Regardless of whether or not spirit possession actually occurs, the audience is deeply engaged by this possibility and drawn into the ritual taking place on stage. Schechner's concept of transportation raises many questions regarding acting and trance that I will unpack in my analysis of the productions under study in this project.

Schechner's concept of transformation, on the other hand, describes initiates who are permanently changed or transformed by an initiation ritual from one social status to another. Once they have undergone this ritual, they cannot return to their previously held status. Transformations also occur as the result of a series of transportations or temporary shifts in persona. "Each separate performance is transportation, ending about where it began, while a series of transportation performances can achieve a transformation."<sup>105</sup> An actor who becomes famous for repeatedly playing the same role and eventually takes on this character in his daily life is an example of how repeated transportations can result in a permanent transformation.

In ritual transformations, like initiation rites, spectators have a stake in the change of status of the initiates and the transformed initiates hold their attention. For theatrical transportations, spectators are also invested in the depth of the transportation as a testament of the actor's ability. "When the performance is over, the transported have been returned to their place of entry and the transformed have been changed."<sup>106</sup>

My analysis of Una Marson's play *Pocomania* serves as a theoretical model for analyzing theater which dramatizes the religious practices of Myal in an effort to reclaim and validate an Afro-Caribbean identity and demonstrates the oppressive forces of colonialism. Unlike the

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<sup>105</sup> Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, 126.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

literary work *Myal*, however, the collective nature of performance engages audiences and performers and allows for the possibility of transportation in the theatre. Marson's play creates a space where audiences and performers actively participate in Nelson-McDermott's claim of "the dismantling of Empire" through a representation of both the oppressive workings of colonialism and the countervailing representation of racial dignity signified by the sacred ritual on stage.

During ritual performances on stage, the audience occupies a precarious position. In ritual performances there are roles that worshipers enter into, including the role of spectator. Ethnomusicologist J.H. Nketia describes the usual sequence of events regarding possession dances in West Africa.

The rest of the community of worshipers generally take up varying roles. They are not debarred from taking turns at dancing in the dancing ring at suitable moments or joining in the singing. Their chief role, however, is to act as spectators—to help, encourage and congratulate performers and generally show their appreciation of the efforts of the dancers and the gesture of the gods when signs of possession are noticed in a medium.<sup>107</sup>

According to Nketia's analysis there is an active role for spectators within ritual performance. When these performances are adapted for the stage, the audience occupies the position of active spectator. However, their involvement can vary considerably given the social climate of Jamaica and the usual norms of middle class theatre goers. The intense taboo surrounding these rituals and their complex history in Jamaica created in some audience members a real fear of active participation in these events.

However, it must be recognized that, for some individuals, possession is also associated with negative values or is negatively reinforcing. This is reflected in the considerable number of participants who make seemingly intense and elaborate efforts to avoid possession. For the most part, this avoidance pattern is not complete since the individual continues to return not only to the ceremonies

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<sup>107</sup> J. H. Nketia, "Possession Dances in African Societies," *Journal of International Folk Music Council* 9 (1957): 6.

but also to the center of activities within which the chances for becoming possessed are greatest. ... The anticipated negative consequences of possession are so strong that the individual avoids the ceremonies altogether or, more commonly, joins that large proportion of people who constitute an interested but relatively uninvolved audience, carefully maintaining their distance and intent on the feasting and entertainment aspects of ceremonies rather than on personal involvement with the drumming and dancing.<sup>108</sup>

Mischel and Mischel describe an avoidance pattern by those who perceive spirit possession as a negative result of attending such ceremonies or myal-theatre. There is both a need to avoid this undesirable result and a desire to return to the site and witness the event. I think that theatre-going audiences experienced both a desire to witness and a need to avoid the possibility of spirit possession. Therefore, there might have been a range of responses to the early myal-based theatre performances, as some openly cheered and clapped for the skillful execution of ritual dances, while others held back as passive observers out of fear of possession.

On a cultural level, and perhaps of a major import, is the perceived conflict between this kind of 'African' activity and the increasingly sought values and activities of the more middle class segments of the population, particularly of the European groups. As acculturation continues and associated with this, at least in part, is the aversion to the complete abandon—rolling on the ground, dirtying oneself, and the like---displayed in possession. This, and the fear of loss of self control, may in turn be related to fears and conflicts, with varying degrees of awareness, about expressing potentially undesirable behaviors publicly or even partially admitting them to oneself.<sup>109</sup>

Audiences were left in the awkward position of having identified with the middle class female protagonists who eventually succumbed to spirit possession, and of being conscious of their own bodily vulnerability to possession while witnessing the enacted ritual on stage. Even audience members, who appeared to be holding back physically, were watching intently for any signs of "real" possession among the actors.

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<sup>108</sup> Mischel, Walter and Frances Mischel. "Psychological Aspects of Spirit Possession," *American Anthropologist* 60, no. 2 (April 1958): 257-258.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

Myal-theatre then is a combination of a number of elements brought together in a theatrical setting to create a specific cultural phenomenon. The ritual elements imported into the space, including drumming, dancing, and song effectively ritualize this secular space. But myal-theatre does more than reenact ritual on stage. It performs that ritual within the context of a community and enables middle-class audiences to identify with a protagonist like themselves. The narrative of the play references the complex and vexed history of these rituals by acknowledging the taboo surrounding them. The protagonist must circumvent the imposed sanctions against the rituals in order to participate. The distance between audience and performers creates the illusion of safety from the threat of spirit possession on the part of audience members. All of these conditions combined create the ideal environment for myal-theatre. Theatre scholar Sandra Richards in her work on playwright Femi Osofisan discusses the parameters of traditional African theatre.

Thus, the triangulation of actor proficiency, within a host of complementary theatre signs; affective, spectator response; and a shared, extra-theatrical ideological and epistemological context, produces a potentially stunning moment in which not only is an action imitated, but a collective consciousness also is embodied. Should this moment occur, one has an instance of contemporary, traditional African theatre.<sup>110</sup>

Her definition emphasizes the equal importance of the actor, spectator, and ideological context at a live event. Because the Afro-Jamaican practice of myal originates from a number of West African religious practices, Richards' articulation of traditional African theatre supports my definition of myal-theatre. This triangulation with the context of the play about Afro-Jamaican religious ritual qualifies it as myal-theatre.

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<sup>110</sup> Sandra L. Richards, *Ancient Songs Set Ablaze: The Theatre of Femi Osofisan* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1996), 10.

To further complicate this issue of trance and transformation is the role that gender plays in possession ritual. Margaret Thompson Drewal discusses gender ideology and spirit possession in her work on Yoruba ritual practices.

Whereas it is primarily women who nurture the gods, men in Yoruba society mask. Yoruba construct performance roles like they construct gender, that is, based on the anatomical and biological features involved specifically in procreation. This is consistent with the stress in Yoruba society on progeny and the perpetuation of the lineage through the reincarnation of the souls of forebears. In masking, men cover and conceal their exteriors. But when women are 'mounted' by a deity in possession trance, the spirit of that deity enters her 'inner head,' her interior.

Men, in becoming possession priests, are therefore like women in their relationship to the deity; they are receptacles. Crossing gender boundaries, male priests cross-dress as women, and priestesses possessed by male deities select out forceful, direct dynamic movement qualities ordinarily associated with men.

Here again the sexual metaphor comes into play. The male is contained during intercourse, just as he is by the spirit's cloth in masking and just as his palm nuts are by the calabash or bowl. In contrast, the female contains during intercourse and pregnancy, just as she does the spirit deity at the onset of possession trance and just as the container holds the male initiate's palm nuts. What is represented in both cases is the union of spirit and devotee, in each instance by the corresponding metaphor that plays on the binary oppositions of inside/outside.<sup>111</sup>

Drewal's observation of how the Yoruba conceptualize gender in their society and within ritual is useful in questioning the place of the female body at the center of bodily spectacle within Jamaican religious ritual. Because the Yoruba construct the female body as the primary nurturer and receptacle of ancestral spirits, this helps explain why female images dominate the colonial literature on ritual practices from the previous section and simultaneously supports the re-appropriation of this image by women theatre artists in the Black Nationalist era.

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<sup>111</sup> Drewal, 184-185.

The possibility of gender flexibility within religious ritual further complicates this discussion. Yvonne Daniel provides an account of gender elasticity within a Cuban Yoruba ceremony.

The man [in a state of possession] was now considered “female,” since he was incorporating a female *oricha*. Both men and women can alter gender in this way. Women, if they receive male *oricha* energy, manifest maleness and are treated ritually as males. Likewise, men who manifest female *orisha* energy are treated as women in the ritual setting. This is also the case in Haitian Vodou where gender is situational and flexible (emphasis hers).<sup>112</sup>

Daniel’s point suggests that, even though colonial descriptions of myal-based rituals has fixated on the black woman’s body in possession, the issue of gender must be treated with care, as the spirits themselves have gendered properties that can alter how ritual participants are viewed during ceremonies. The gender of the actors playing ritual participants and becoming possessed must not be overlooked as it is part of the process of myalisation of Jamaican theatre.

For the remainder of this chapter I briefly review the theoretical threads that I bring together to define myalisation. I retrace my steps in order to add Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s term Afro-Creole and explain how it relates to myalisation.

Robinson’s article on ritualized performance spaces in the New World and Nelson-McDermott’s analysis of the novel *Myal*, which creates within it a “non-colonized, and non-colonizable, social space,” taken together imply that the performance of rituals born on New World plantations and pulpits, when dramatized on proscenium stages, also have the potential to create a non-colonizable social environment. Plays that, like Brodber’s novel, perform both the colonial discourse and reveal the inner workings of Myal on stage have the potential to destabilize the colonial center in the minds and bodies of performers and audiences. The

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<sup>112</sup> Daniel, 23. Daniel defines *orichas* as “‘spirit families,’ African ‘nations’ or cosmic forces in Cuba.” See p. 1.

performance of a banned ritual and the enacting of transformation over time allow participants to become active national citizens, as opposed to passive colonial subjects.

Robinson's delineation of ritualized performance spaces (the slave ship, plantation, pulpit, and stage) and my observations regarding acting and spirit possession, performers and audiences suggest a historical layering of ritualized performance spaces and types of transportation. Nelson-McDermott's assertion that the reader is implicated in the reversal of colonial authority by reading *Myal* creates the possibility for spectators of myal-theatre to be implicated in the multiple transportations taking place in the theatre. My argument about myalisation is that each performance of a theatrical event that represents myal-based ritual is, in itself, participation in a ritualized event on a couple of levels. The myal-theatre going experience is a transportation for the performers and audience, and myalisation is the result of a series of transportations that result in a permanent transformation. This transformation is an initiation rite for the colonized subject undergoing a process of cultural re-orientation that creates a national consciousness.

This cultural re-orientation, or myalisation, can also be understood within the process of creolization. Edward Kamau Brathwaite's discussion of creolization in *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* centers on the history of colonization and cultural interactions between Europeans and Africans in the Caribbean. Here he defines the processes of creolization.

A cultural process of both ac/culturation and inter/culturation. Acculturation being the yoking of one culture to another and interculturation being the

unplanned, unstructured but osmotic relationship proceeding from this yoke. The process of creolization becomes the tentative cultural norm of the society.<sup>113</sup>

For Brathwaite, the term *Euro-Creole* refers to middle or upper class Caribbean people (black or white) who attempt to recreate for themselves aspects of European culture in the Caribbean. An example of *Afro-Creole* culture would be the *Africanization* of Christianity in the Caribbean (or the Myalisation of Christianity). He acknowledges the later presence of the Chinese and East Indians in the post-emancipation period and suggests that this Asian population in the Caribbean begins to construct an *Indo-Creole* culture, which builds on the dynamic cultural exchange between the African and the European at the heart of Creole culture.

For my purposes the terms Euro-Creole and Afro-Creole are useful in marking the shift in Jamaican staged performance from an attempt to recreate European and Anglo-American theatrical performances for middle and upper class Jamaican audiences to a full-fledged national effort to restage African derived rituals and folk forms. I use the term myalisation to discuss this process, suggesting that spirit possession is a key component of this shift from a Euro-Creole to an Afro-Creole performance aesthetic. I suggest that staged spirit possession enables temporary transportations for both the performers and audiences and that the cumulative effect of a long series of theatrical transportations results in a transformation of middle class theatre practitioners and audiences. Through performance, the previously Eurocentric space of the proscenium theatre is transformed into an Afro-Creole space. Referring back to Robinson's work, the rituals that have shaped the African Diasporic experience on the slave ship, the New World plantation, and the pulpit, find their place on the Caribbean proscenium stage in the mid-twentieth century.

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<sup>113</sup> Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974), 6.

The colonized subject when fully myalised realizes cultural independence. The myalised subject rejects the culture of the colonizer in favor of a culture that is closer to her/his lived or historical experience. To use Schechner's and Brathwaite's terms, myalisation is the process of a colonized Caribbean subject undergoing a series of theatrical transportations that result in a permanent transformation from the cultural position of a Euro-Creole to an Afro-Creole. Participation as an actor or spectator in voluntary or involuntary myal-transportations (myal-based theatrical performances or myal-based rituals) is part of the process of the myalisation. One result of myalisation is the deterioration of the taboo surrounding myal-based rituals.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter illustrates the density of the meaning layered onto Afro-Jamaican religious rituals that can be traced back to the first Africans who entered the hold of a slave ship bound for Jamaica. Simultaneously these rituals embody impending revolt, a cauldron of unchecked female sexuality, and the social decay of a society in the clutches of psychological instability. Through colonial observation and the prohibition of these rituals, women's bodies have claimed a space in the center of this discourse. In the chapters that follow on Una Marson, Enid Chevannes, and Ivy Baxter, I chart the myalisation of Jamaican theatre. I will demonstrate how Marson, Chevannes, and Baxter re-appropriated the image of the black woman in a state of spirit possession as an icon of national identity and mobilized this potent image of revolution, sexuality, and insanity on stage.

Marson's career as a social worker and political activist informs her creative work as an artist. Her play, *Pocomania*, opened just months before the Jamaican rebellion of 1938 in which record numbers of women participated. She carefully demonstrates the workings of colonialism

by juxtaposing the impoverished Revival Leader Sister Kate in opposition to Reverend Craig and Deacon Manners in her play. Her protagonist Stella Manners struggles for a way to maintain her middle class status while connecting with the pulsating drum beat of Africa that she hears and feels within Revival ritual. The image of Stella dancing and falling into a trance recurs in *Pocomania* and sets a precedent for this image, which is repeated in Chevannes' plays and Baxter's dance-theatre pieces as well. This image of the woman's body in possession is an integral part of the myalisation of the Jamaican stage. Through repeated performances of this image, the national stages themselves are transformed into African ritual spaces, becoming the scene of transformative spiritual experiences for the players and audience alike.

CHAPTER THREE  
UNA MARSON'S *POCOMANIA* AS MYAL-THEATRE

Una Marson's 1938 production of *Pocomania* is the first known example of Caribbean theatre that utilizes Afro-Caribbean religious ritual in its dramatic structure.<sup>114</sup> The play examines the material reality of Revival practitioners and the psychological longing for Africa by the black middle class. The play reveals the oppressive forces of colonialism in society and asserts Afro-centric and nationalist ideologies by presenting the material reality of those who practice the ritual. For these reasons, Marson's landmark play is also the first known example of myal-theatre in Jamaica. *Pocomania* performers and spectators participated in ritualized dramatizations of Myal in the physical space of the theatre. The theatre-going experience itself was ritualized. The result of this ritualized experience was that the landscape of Jamaican cultural production and national psyche were all *transported*, to borrow from Schechner, with each performance. The long-term effect of this type of performance was the permanent *transformation* or myalisation of the Jamaican national stage. In 1938, Marson's *Pocomania* initiated the process of myalisation of Jamaican theatre.

I argue that this play constructs the conflict between the Baptist church and Revival practitioners in a way that comments directly on the political necessity for self-rule in a colony soon to be rocked with the social upheaval of the 1938 rebellion. Marson reveals the determination of women to fight the constraints of Victorian constructions of gender and the confines of colonialism to pursue their spiritual needs. Her play metaphorically pits Africa against Europe, with women of different economic classes negotiating this creolized terrain of

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<sup>114</sup> Judy S. J. Stone, *Theatre* (London: Macmillan Caribbean Education, 1994), 21.

Jamaica in the 1930s. *Pocomania* performs Stella's myalisation and sets a precedent for the myalisation of other members of the middle class Jamaican society.

In this chapter I will provide the necessary background information that will support my analysis of Marson's *Pocomania*. In the three brief sections that follow, I will identify the theatrical traditions operating in the early twentieth century, discuss the significance of the 1938 rebellion, and highlight aspects of Marson's biography. These sections serve as a backdrop to Marson's play and will later support my claim of how she changed the landscape of Jamaican theatre. The last section of this chapter is an in-depth analysis of *Pocomania* and its mode of operation within the genre of myal-theatre.

#### SETTING THE SCENE: JAMAICAN THEATRE

This section identifies the types of theatre presented to theatre-going audiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and discusses plays and theatrical events performed prior to Marson's *Pocomania* (1938) that help locate that work and its audience in their historical context, including the American tradition of minstrelsy in Jamaica, local historical dramas, and the pivotal role of Marcus Garvey's plays.

In the mid-nineteenth century, American blackface minstrelsy was introduced to Jamaica by American minstrel troupes who traveled to Jamaica to perform. Theater historian Errol Hill discusses the first minstrel performances in Jamaica beginning in 1849, in which local musicians donned blackface and sang Negro melodies together with American performers. They offered their audiences comic singing, minstrelsy, opera, Ethiopian dancing and burlesques.<sup>115</sup>

Jamaican performers developed two branches of the minstrel tradition, both originally retaining blackface makeup. The singing troupes, however, soon dropped the mask as

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<sup>115</sup> Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 267-9.

they began to add native folk songs to their repertoires. The comedians, however, kept it as they paired off into a string of duos...who produced highly entertaining and original skits, mock trials, and farces using the Jamaican vernacular and making pithy comment on the sociopolitical scene to universal acclaim into the mid-twentieth century.<sup>116</sup>

The development of two strands of minstrelsy in Jamaica might be due in part to the introduction of black American singers to the island who performed without blackface. In 1888 the Black American Tennessee Jubilee Singers performed southern songs for Jamaican audiences to sold-out houses. They returned in subsequent years by popular acclaim.<sup>117</sup> From the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, the performance of black stereotypes in the form of minstrelsy was wildly popular in Jamaica. These comic and degrading performances of black identity were common for theatre-goers in Jamaica and were accepted on some level by black audiences. At the same time, southern American music by black performers was also popular in the late nineteenth century, suggesting that Jamaican audiences had an appetite for tasteful and non-stereotypical performances by black performers in the same period.

As in the minstrel tradition in Jamaica, historical dramas reproduced many of the same stereotypes of black characters on stage. The historical drama *A Soul's Sacrifice* (1921) by Alexander McGregor James was a melodrama set in 17<sup>th</sup> century Jamaica. The play showcases the usual stereotypes (the benevolent British settlers, the ruthless Spaniards, a devil worshipping obeahman and a black maid) and performs the familiar narrative of the British conquest of Jamaica from the Spanish.<sup>118</sup> This play is an example of the more serious dramatic pieces that functioned ideologically in the same vein as minstrelsy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Stone, 17.

Honoring, celebrating and documenting the actions of heroes were important parts of the building of nationhood in the Caribbean. These plays fulfilled the role of a historical model for independence. Inspired audiences attempted to implement a similar spirit of determination in their fight for political freedom.<sup>119</sup> C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1936), based on the Haitian Revolution, premiered in London with the original title *Toussaint L'Ouverture* and Paul Robeson in the lead role.<sup>120</sup> The revolutionary spirit of these plays was also found in Edelweiss Park, the cultural headquarters of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Kingston.

Garvey's time in Jamaica from 1927-1935 had a significant impact on the island's political, social, and cultural landscape. Cultural historian Beverly Hamilton discusses his contribution to the arts in Jamaica. Edelweiss Park quickly became a hub of entertainment for the lower class and the political rallying point for Garvey and his message. The scheduled entertainment for every night of the week rotated among an array of dance, plays, music, vaudeville acts, comedy, variety shows, elocution, films, and fairs.<sup>121</sup> The UNIA trained artists, showcased talent, and hosted cultural events. "It [Edelweiss Park] also maintained its own cultural units: two choirs, one sacred, the other secular; a dance troupe known as the Follies; two orchestras and a band."<sup>122</sup> The organization hosted annual, island-wide elocution contests, and one year Una Marson won the coveted prize of first place.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Stone, 13. Judy Stone lists other plays on the lives of Caribbean heroes and three on the Haitian Revolution: C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1936); Aimé Césaire's *La Tragédie du Rio Christophe* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1970); and Derek Walcott's *Henri Christophe* (Bridgetown: Barbados Advocate Co., 1950).

<sup>120</sup> Stone, 19. Una Marson left London in 1936 after a ten year stay. It is unclear if she saw this particular production or not.

<sup>121</sup> Beverly Hamilton, "Marcus Garvey and Cultural Development in Jamaica: A Preliminary Survey" in *Garvey, His Work and Impact*, ed. Rupert Lewis and Patrick Bryan (Trenton: African World Press, Inc., 1991), 90.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Garvey firmly believed that black people must develop their own aesthetic. He also believed that the black artist had a social and moral responsibility to create works that were socially uplifting. For him, artistic development and political power were part of the same process of global black liberation.<sup>124</sup> “Let the canvas come to life with dark faces; let poetry charm the muses with the hopes and aspirations of our race; let the musicians drown our sorrows with the merry jazz; while a race is in the making and steadily moving on to nationhood and to power.”<sup>125</sup>

Garvey was a promoter of the arts and an artist in his own right. In Jamaica he expanded his literary talents beyond poetry by writing, directing, and acting in his own plays. Altogether he wrote seven plays and three mock trials.<sup>126</sup> In 1930 Garvey staged three of his plays in Edelweiss Park, *The Coronation of an African King*, *Roaming Jamaicans*, and *Slavery—from Hut to Mansion*, on three consecutive nights.

The first play, with scenes set in Senegal, Dahomey, the Sudan, London, Paris, Washington and New York, crystallized Garvey’s world struggle for a free and independent African nation providing an ancestral home for all African and African-derived peoples. The second play depicted the life of migrant Jamaicans who were forced by economic conditions to leave their homeland and find work in the United States, Panama, Costa Rica, Cuba, Haiti, and other foreign lands. The third play described the horrors of slavery and the slave traffic, the agitation for freedom, emancipation, and progress thereafter. Garvey’s view of black life was always epic and his use of the stage to delineate this view in graphic portrayals was an important part of his strategy to bring his message to grassroots Jamaicans.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. Hamilton cites an editorial by Amy Jacques Garvey, originally published in *Negro World* July 10, 1926.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>127</sup> Stone, 18, citing Errol Hill’s essay “The Emergence of a National Drama in the West Indies” in *Caribbean Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1972).

His plays, while portraying the epic nature of the black diasporic experience, are also noted for their departure from the usual stereotypical characters of the Mammy and the Uncle Tom.<sup>128</sup>

Una Marson was influenced by his work as a political figure and journalist, as well as by his philosophical writing in *Negro World*, his plays, and his support of emerging playwrights. It appears that Marson modeled herself on Garvey in her efforts to establish herself as a journalist, a poet, playwright, and social activist.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REBELLION OF 1938

Between 1935 and 1938 the Caribbean suffered severe labor unrest. There were strikes and rioting by sugar workers in Saint Kitts and British Guiana, charcoal burners in Saint Lucia, oilfield workers in Trinidad, dockworkers in Barbados and Jamaica. At one level these disturbances were a spontaneous outburst of the laboring classes for fair wages and improved working conditions. But at a deeper level the riots represented the first concentrated attack upon colonialism, the first stirring of a people to assert their readiness for self-determination and nationhood.

--Errol Hill<sup>129</sup>

The harsh economic conditions of Jamaica in the early twentieth century were the catalyst for the social unrest of 1938. From 1918 to 1920 there was a sharp increase in the cost of living in Jamaica. By 1935 there were more laborers than jobs available and wages dropped significantly, especially for domestic workers and field laborers. Added to this, the Great Depression impacted the sugar and banana trades, the primary crops exported from Jamaica. Peasants and plantation wage-earners lived in extreme poverty, barely fighting off starvation.<sup>130</sup>

By 1935, the first labor strikes and riots presaging the 1938 rebellion had begun. From January to June of 1938, Jamaica experienced a relentless wave of violent demonstrations.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>129</sup> Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900*, 272-3.

<sup>130</sup> Aggrey Brown, *Color, Class, and Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1979), 94.

Colonial officials responded with armed attacks against the people. The Frome riot in the parish of St. Thomas in May was one of the most severe confrontations.

The Frome dispute was not a peaceful work stoppage. A mob armed with the standard equipment of sticks and cutlasses stopped traffic, set canefields on fire, charged the general offices, and attacked company officials. Within two days, four were dead, thirteen in hospital, and 105 in jail. Large police reinforcements were rushed from Kingston to patrol the company property and disperse rioters. With more than 100 constables on hand and the estate under continuous patrol, the demonstrations ceased.<sup>131</sup>

May and June saw the worst of the rebellion, as work stoppages, strikes, and hunger marches by the unemployed, dock workers, plantation workers, and chauffeurs sprang up in nearly every parish of the island. Their demands were the same: workers wanted better wages and the unemployed wanted work.<sup>132</sup>

In 1937, future Prime Minister Alexander Bustamante had become treasurer of the Jamaica Workers and Tradesman's Union. When the rebellion began in 1938, he negotiated with officials on behalf of jailed workers. He quickly became known as the "labor leader" and unapologetically took up the cause of the poorest people in the country despite his upper class upbringing.

When, on May 23, 1938 the Inspector of Police ordered a crowd of Bustamante's followers to move, and in a symbolic and spontaneous gesture they refused to do so, the Inspector ordered his men to fire. Bustamante stepped forward, bared his chest and told them to shoot him but to leave the defenseless alone. He took a calculated risk with death... At that moment the crowd sensed that he was challenging the enemy, standing up to them as man to man, triumphing over them, because he would come to terms with death itself. The police, too, sensed that if they had shot him, they would have been torn to pieces by the crowd.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 95. Brown cites O.W. Phelps "Rise of the Labour Movement in Jamaica," *Social and Economic Studies* 9 (December 1960): 423.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 105. Brown cites Sylvia Wynter's *Jamaica's National Heroes* (Kingston: Jamaica National Trust Commission, 1971), 40.

Outspoken and known for his outlandish behavior, Alexander Bustamante had been advising an organized and hostile group of wharf workers who were considering a strike. When the workers did strike, his perceived leadership among the workers led to his arrest. When Bustamante was jailed for his involvement with the labor disputes, his cousin and successful barrister (and also future Prime Minister) Norman Manley pleaded his case in court and kept the momentum of Bustamante's crusade alive while he was incarcerated.

In the early 1930s, Norman Washington Manley noted the domination of the lucrative banana trade in Jamaica by a multinational American company, the United Fruit Company, and an English shipping company. By 1935, Manley and a group of businessmen formed a co-operative, the Jamaica Banana Producers' Association, to capitalize on Jamaica's leading cash crop and compete with the Americans. A contract for the Jamaica Banana Producers' Association was agreed upon after months of overcoming roadblocks with local government officials and difficult negotiations with the president of the United Fruit Company, Samuel Zemurru. Months after Manley's negotiations with Zemurru about the desperate conditions of the banana farm workers in Jamaica, Zemurru offered a percentage of the profits from the United Fruit Company to establish an annual fund to be governed and organized by Manley to assist the poor rural people of Jamaica. By 1938, Manley had decided to donate his services as a lawyer to advocate for higher wages for groups of workers in court. At the time of Bustamante's arrest, the wharf workers came to Manley to fight for Bustamante's release and an increase in their wages.

While Manley succeeded in getting Bustamante released, his legal maneuverings could not stop the rebellion already underway. The social unrest of 1938 marked the beginning of the

end of the colonial domination in Jamaica.<sup>134</sup> Strikes by wharf workers, sugar cane workers, and subsequent riots by peasant communities across the island called for the establishment of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) named after the strike leader. Lawyer, political ally, and cousin of Bustamante, Norman Manley formed the first political party in Jamaica, the People's National Party (PNP).

The colonial response to the rebellion was twofold. Local Jamaican officials called for an increase of the police force, an internal intelligence system, and a unit of constables to handle island-wide emergencies. The British government observed similar social unrest in several other West Indian colonies and established the Royal Moyne Commission to investigate the underlying economic and social reasons for the disturbances in the islands.

Among the Moyne Commission's recommendations to the colonial office were the following: the establishment of a West Indian Welfare Fund to aid in the expansion of social services; self-government; extension of the suffrage; the encouragement of trade unionism and more liberal labor laws; establishment of a labor department in each colonial government; and minimum wages and workmen's compensation laws.<sup>135</sup>

One of the commission's objectives was to identify ways for peasant communities to be economically and politically empowered to take on a larger role in governing themselves. The Moyne Commission noted the role of peasant and middle class black women in the Garvey and Rastafarian movements as well as their participation in the peasant labor force and the 1938 rebellion. The Moyne Commission placed the blame for the economic and social conditions of the black lower classes, not on the island's long history of slavery and colonialism, but on the high number of children born out of wedlock and single parent, female-headed households.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 81-92.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 107.

These unofficial families were understood by the state to be the downfall of Jamaican society. Local officials believe that the Jamaican woman in particular had to be taught how to do her duty as a housewife and mother if the suffering of this class of people was ever going to end. In 1944 the Jamaica Federation of Women (JFW) was established to make this class of women more respectable. Their mission was to remove black women from the fields and civil service positions and place them in the domestic realm where they were to rely on their husbands to provide for them or work as domestic servants for white housewives.<sup>136</sup> To achieve this, the JFW conducted mass marriages. This allowed for long-term couples and families to become “official” by providing a state sanctioned marriage license and marriage ceremony or a “white wedding” in the Western tradition. The discourse of respectability is significant here, as the JFW was charged with making the black woman not into a “lady,” but certainly more lady-like. I will return to this discussion of the Jamaica Federation of Women in my next chapter on Enid Chevannes.

Norman Manley founded the Jamaica Welfare Ltd. in 1937 and carefully considered a set of principles that would guide the work of the organization. Manley and Bustamante set out to improve economic conditions for workers and to achieve political reform. Each program strived to raise the standard of living and encouraged group action, self-reliance, and leadership.<sup>137</sup> Manley chaired this organization for ten years until its name was changed under the leadership of Alexander Bustamante, who renamed it The Jamaica Social Welfare Commission.

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<sup>136</sup> Joan French and Honor Ford Smith, *Women, Work and Organizations in Jamaica, 1900-1944* (Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1987); and Linnette Vassell, *Voluntary Women's Associations in Jamaica: The Jamaica Federation of Women, 1944-1962* (Jamaica: Master's Thesis, University of the West Indies, 1993).

<sup>137</sup> Philip Manderson Sherlock, *Norman Manley* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 78.

In 1944, the new constitution granted universal suffrage. Jamaicans could from then on elect representatives to government, while the island remained an English colony.<sup>138</sup> This step toward decolonization signaled the lasting impact of the 1938 rebellion.

The year 1938 may well come to be recognized by historians as marking the beginning of a new phase in the social and political development of Jamaica, if not of the West Indies as a whole. Inevitably the emergence in Jamaica, in that year, of a labour movement, aggressively expressing the needs of the working class, and the beginnings of trade union organization, meant the direction as never before of public interest to problems of work and wages, unemployment and poverty.<sup>139</sup>

As a result of the rebellion, two formative leaders in Jamaican politics each started their own unions that would evolve into the two dominant political parties in Jamaica. The British began to work with Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley toward the common goal of self-government.

#### UNA MARSON: POET, DRAMATIST, JOURNALIST, AND ACTIVIST

We must encourage our own black authors who have character, who are loyal to their race, who feel proud to be black and in every way let them feel that we appreciate their efforts to advance our race through healthy and decent literature.

--Marcus Garvey<sup>140</sup>

This section provides a brief overview of Una Marson's life and demonstrates how she committed herself to the empowerment of black people through her creative work, journalism, and activism. It reviews her work as a journalist and activist and then move into a discussion of her creative work as a poet and playwright. I argue that the life and works of Marcus Garvey

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<sup>138</sup> Brown, 107-8.

<sup>139</sup> Edith Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Families in Three Selected Communities of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1957), 1.

<sup>140</sup> Hamilton, 91. The excerpt from *The Negro World* editorial is also quoted by Tony Martin in *Literary Garveyism*. Martin credits Garvey with this statement on page 8.

influenced her, while at the same time she strove to find her own voice as an artist and a black woman. All of her talent and her many occupations reveal a consistent commitment to sharing the views and concerns of black women in a public forum.

Una Maud Victoria Marson is most remembered as a dynamic, talented, hard working, charismatic, and sometimes blunt personality. She was a journalist, broadcaster, activist, social worker, poet and playwright. Her life was one of great achievement in the face of numerous personal, political, and financial hardships. A fierce nationalist and feminist, she was, friends and scholars have argued, a woman before her time.<sup>141</sup>

She was born in 1905 in Santa Cruz in the parish of St. Elizabeth, located in the southwest region of the island. Her father was the Rev. Solomon I. Marson, a Baptist minister as well as a Justice of the Peace, and her mother, Ada Mullings, was a housewife. They raised Una with her two older sisters and three younger brothers.<sup>142</sup> Una won a scholarship to attend a boarding school, Hampton High School, in Malvern, in the parish of St. Elizabeth. Marson was one of the few scholarship recipients and one of a few black girls to attend the white-majority, all-girls school. Hampton High taught the humanities and social sciences, but not the hard sciences. Her attendance at Hampton High fulfilled a social and familial responsibility for a certain black respectability. Her parents' death curtailed her education at Hampton. She was forced to move to Kingston and work as a secretary. Eventually, she secured work as a reporter for *The Gleaner*. In Kingston, she participated in Marcus Garvey's UNIA sponsored elocution

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<sup>141</sup> Erika Smilowitz, "Una Marson: Woman Before Her Time," *Jamaica Journal* 16, no. 2 (1983).

<sup>142</sup> Delia Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-65* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998), 2.

contests at Edelweiss Park, sometimes competing against the likes of comedian Eric Cupidon who was known for his female impersonations.<sup>143</sup>

At the age of 23, she was the first Jamaican woman to own and edit her own magazine, *The Cosmopolitan*, the official organ of the Jamaica Stenographer's Association from 1928 to 1931. Black stenographers were struggling for the right to work in businesses dominated by whites. Their struggle came to be understood as part of the larger anti-colonial struggle, where black Jamaicans were demanding better employment opportunities. Marson's magazine provided a forum to address the rights of workers, youth and women. It published short stories, poetry, and social commentary on a range of local and international issues.<sup>144</sup> "Our chief aim," she wrote in the premier issue of May 1928, 'is to develop literary and artistic talents...Our ambition is to do all we can to encourage talented young people to express themselves freely.'<sup>145</sup> She boldly expressed her forward-thinking views in the pages of *The Cosmopolitan*. The Great Depression had an economic impact on Jamaica. A sharp decrease in subscription sales to *The Cosmopolitan* caused financial problems for Marson that led to the end of the magazine in 1931. Her work as a journalist included her editorials and reporting for *The Cosmopolitan* as well as *The Daily Gleaner*, *The Sunday Gleaner*, *The Jamaica Standard*, and *Public Opinion* under the pseudonym "The Torch."

She lived in England for roughly 10 years of her life in the 1930s and 1940s. In London, she became the secretary of the League of Coloured People, founded by Jamaican activist Dr. Harold Moody. The League was committed to fighting the injustices that Caribbean and African

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<sup>143</sup> Honor Ford-Smith, *Una Marson: Black Nationalist and Feminist Writer* (Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1987), 3-4.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>145</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers: Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. Bernth Lindfors and Reinhard Sander (London: Gale Research Inc., 1995), s.v. "Una Marson."

immigrants faced in England. The organization published a newsletter called *The Keys* and later *Newsnotes*, both of which Marson edited. *The Keys* and *Newsnotes* had international circulations of over two thousand and covered stories on racial discrimination in Europe, America, Africa and the Caribbean.<sup>146</sup>

In London, Marson was often called upon to speak before women's organizations.<sup>147</sup> In 1935, she was part of a delegation that addressed the Twelfth Congress of the International Alliance of Women in Istanbul, Turkey. Marson spoke eloquently of her Jamaican upbringing, which taught her to respect everything British and the shock of the racial discrimination she faced during her years in London. "Marson reportedly brought tears to the eyes of her largely European audience, and according to the *Manchester Guardian*, she 'astonished the Conference by her intellectual vigour.'"<sup>148</sup> This quote could be read as flattering. However, it is also a manifestation of the racism that she faced in Europe as well as England. The crowd was surprised by her intelligence because they did not expect such eloquent remarks from a woman of color.

During this time Marson took up a post at the League of Nations just as the crisis between Italy and Abyssinia (later Ethiopia) broke out in 1935. Marson worked tirelessly on this issue, constantly informing herself, the League of Nations, and the League of Colored Peoples about the details of the conflict. *The Keys*, like Garvey's *Negro World*, provided extensive coverage of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict to its readership. By the end of the year, Britain supported Italy in the Hoare-Laval pact to the detriment of Abyssinia. Emperor Haile Selassie of Abyssinia decided to end the fighting with his surrender and exile to England. Soon after his

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<sup>146</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, 54.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>148</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers.*, s.v. "Una Marson."

arrival, Marson became his press secretary. She handled thousands of pieces of correspondence and arranged countless meetings for the Emperor. She was committed to preserving this black nation's independence, and played a pivotal role in this campaign. She accompanied Haile Selassie to the League of Nations when he went to speak about Abyssinia in 1936.<sup>149</sup> She had hoped that the League would intervene on Abyssinia's behalf, but it did not. Marson was extremely disappointed by this outcome and sank into a severe depression.

After this extremely active period of intense work as Haile Selassie's Press Secretary, followed by the great disappointment of the League of Nations' decision, Marson began to feel the physical and psychological effects of the campaign. She demonstrated signs of a nervous breakdown and decided to return home to Jamaica. When she arrived in 1936, Jamaica was in the midst of the development of trade unionism and emerging political parties.<sup>150</sup> She published a number of articles in *The Jamaica Standard* on women in the workforce.

In 1938, she returned to England to raise money for the Jamaica Save the Children Fund, an organization that she co-founded with Amy Bailey in order to support the economic development of poor children and their families. This was the same year as the 1938 rebellion in Jamaica. Marson later testified before the British investigators of the Moyne Commission. She addressed the issues of common law unions, child support from fathers, and racism within social service clubs in Jamaica. Marson recommended that common law unions be recognized by the colonial government, taxes for bachelors be waived to enable them to support their children, and black women be allowed to organize themselves (as opposed to white women organizing and

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<sup>149</sup> Ford-Smith, *Una Marson*, 6.

<sup>150</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*, s.v. "Una Marson."

conducting social work on their behalf.)<sup>151</sup> Her activism in Kingston and London was mirrored by her creative work as a poet and playwright in the 1930s and 1940s.

As an artist, she published four volumes of poetry and wrote and produced three plays. By 25 she had published her first volume of poetry, *Tropic Reveries* (1930), and been awarded the prestigious Silver Musgrave medal from the Institute of Jamaica in the same year. Other volumes of poetry followed, including *Heights and Depths* (1931), *The Moth and the Star* (1937), and *Towards the Stars* (1945). Her work was written from a specifically black and female perspective that was unique at the time, as she wrote passionately about racial prejudice, desire, frustrated love, and the loneliness of being a single woman.

Her first two volumes of poetry have been criticized as being “highly romantic.” A speaker who is willing to sacrifice her own will for that of her absent lover fills *Tropic Reveries* and *Heights and Depths* with poems about unrequited love. Some of these poems evoke the troubling image of volunteer slavery as a testament of her devotion to her lover.

In vain I build thee stately mansions fair,  
And set thee as my king upon the throne,  
And place a lowly stool beside thee there,  
Thus, as thy slave to come into my own.

In vain I deck the halls with roses sweet  
And strew the paths with petals rich and rare,  
And list with throbbing heart sounds of thy feet,  
The welcome voice that tells me thou art near.

In vain I watch the dawn break in the sky  
And hope that thou wilt come with coming day:  
Alas, Diana calmly sails on high,  
But thou, king of my heart, art far away.

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<sup>151</sup> Ford-Smith, *Una Marson*, 7. She cites Walter Edward Guinness Moyne, *West Indian Royal Commission Report—Evidence, 1938-39* (London: Public Record Office, 1945).

In vain one boon from life's great store I crave,  
No more the king comes to his waiting slave.<sup>152</sup>

Much of these two collections was overlooked or dismissed by critics as too sentimental,<sup>153</sup> but later critics heralded Marson for her experimentation with form and language in these collections.<sup>154</sup>

In her third volume, *The Moth and the Star*, written in 1937 after she spent several difficult years in England, Marson's voice and focus changed. In this collection her tone is angry and abrupt as she explores issues of race, color, discrimination, and prevailing images of black womanhood in Jamaica and abroad. She experiments more with the use of Creole language, American blues rhythms, and meter.<sup>155</sup>

I hate dat ironed hair,  
And dat bleaching skin,  
Hate dat ironed hair  
And dat bleaching skin  
But I'll be all alone  
If I don't fall in.<sup>156</sup>

Another poem from the same collection reads:

I am black  
And so I must be  
More clever than white folk  
More wise than white folk  
More discrete than white folk  
More courageous than white folk.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Allison Donnell, "Sentimental Subversion: The Poetics and Politics of Devotion in the Work of Una Marson" in *Kicking Daffodils: Twentieth-Century Women Poets*, ed. Vicki Bertran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) 116-7. Una Marson's "In Vain" is reprinted from *Tropical Reveries* (Kingston, Jamaica: Gleaner, 1930).

<sup>153</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*, s.v. "Una Marson."

<sup>154</sup> Donnell, 119.

<sup>155</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*, s.v. "Una Marson."

<sup>156</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, 48. Una Marson's "Kinky Haired Blues" was originally printed in *The Moth and The Star*, (Kingston, Jamaica, 1937).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 55. Una Marson's "Black Burden" was originally published in *The Moth and the Star*.

She is still praised for this collection by critics, and these poems are most often cited in reference to Marson's work as a revolutionary writer and the mother of Jamaican literature.

Her use of Creole was considered a significant innovation for her time. Regarding the thematic shift from her first two volumes of poetry to her third volume, one biographer characterized her in the following way: "She moved away from Georgian influence towards the writing of black (usually female) experience."<sup>158</sup> Marson was a member of the Jamaican Poetry League led by J. E. Clare McFarlane. The League symbolized a formal and conservative black voice on universal themes that Marson adhered to in her first two volumes. Marson's third volume of poetry is a departure from the Poetry League and its aesthetics.

In 1938 in England, Marson became a broadcaster for the BBC and produced a show for Caribbean service men to send greetings to their families abroad. She transformed the show *Calling the West Indies* into a literary program with a special segment called *Caribbean Voices*, a one-half hour program of poetry, plays, and short stories by Caribbean writers read on the air. Over two hundred authors including V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, and Derek Walcott gained exposure through this radio program, although not all under her direction.<sup>159</sup> Her work with the BBC catapulted her into celebrity status in Jamaica and in the black community in London.

In 1945, Marson published her fourth volume of poetry, *Towards the Stars*. In this collection, she republished poems from previous works and added new poems that focused on

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<sup>158</sup> Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 720.

<sup>159</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*, s.v. "Una Marson."

the war experience and racial issues. Her tone regarding racial oppression in this collection is far angrier than in previous volumes.<sup>160</sup>

She suffered a second emotional breakdown in England. This time, she returned to Jamaica with the financial help of J.E. Clare MacFarlane of the Jamaican Poetry League. “After this she never regained the vigour of the early years. There were long periods of silence in her writing followed by bursts of activity.”<sup>161</sup> In Jamaica, she was active in the Poetry League of Jamaica and worked as an organizing secretary for the Pioneer Press.<sup>162</sup> The press published twenty-five books including *Dialect Tales and Anancy Stories*, which includes some of Marson’s previously published poetry.<sup>163</sup> The Press printed low-cost booklets for children on a range of topics including autobiography, biography, children’s stories, natural history, and nation building.<sup>164</sup> Pioneer Press published her last work, *Poetry for Children by Poets of Jamaica*, in 1958.<sup>165</sup>

Marson’s plays, like her poetry, evolved over time from the closely biographical to the overtly political. In 1932, she wrote her first play, *At What A Price*, co-authored by Horace Vaz. The play was first performed at the Ward Theatre in Kingston. Burnett Webster directed it and replaced the original title (*Burnt Wings*) with *At What A Price*. It ran there for two or three performances. Marson held rehearsals at her home. It was a low-budget production; none of the actors were paid for the performances.<sup>166</sup> This play had a second production at London’s Seala

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>161</sup> Ford-Smith, *Una Marson*, 7.

<sup>162</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*, s.v. “Una Marson.”

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>164</sup> Ford-Smith, *Una Marson*, 7.

<sup>165</sup> Virginia Blain, *The Feminist Companion*, 721.

<sup>166</sup> Ford-Smith, *Una Marson*, 5.

Theatre in 1933 that she starred in and directed.<sup>167</sup> “...*At What A Price*, Marson’s first play, should probably be considered the first truly Jamaican play in that it was written by a Jamaican about Jamaican issues and performed with Jamaican actors.”<sup>168</sup> The play was a fundraiser for the League of Colored Peoples.

The play’s protagonist is Ruth, a girl from the “country” who comes to “town” (Kingston) in search of better economic opportunities. She leaves behind her boyfriend and her parents. Eventually, she is seduced by her boss, a traveling salesman, impregnated, and abandoned. Unable to care for her child alone in the city, she returns to her parents. Marson reveals the color and class distinctions of Jamaica in the play when the middle class family she stays with in the city mocks the vernacular of Ruth’s rural family. This strong female character chooses not to marry her boss because of their class differences and because he was blackmailed into his marriage proposal. She denies his offer on principle.<sup>169</sup> Reviews for the production in Kingston were positive and encouraged the young dramatist to continue to create new works for the theatre.

According to the *Jamaica Times* Una Marson had ‘branched out...successfully in drama’... ‘it is to her credit and ours and may be the beginning of a Jamaican dramatic literature. ...There are some remarkably good flashes of humour in the play and Miss Marson has steeped herself in local colour and used it with discretion and insight.’<sup>170</sup>

Upon her arrival back in Kingston, Jamaica in 1937, she recommitted herself to the development of national literature. She founded three organizations: The Kingston Drama Club, The Readers

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<sup>167</sup> Erika Smilowitz, “Una Marson: Woman Before Her Time,” *Jamaica Journal* 16, no. 2 (1983).

<sup>168</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*, s.v. “Una Marson.”

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>170</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, 44. She cites article ‘Drama Wise Author Writes Local Play’ *Jamaica Times*, June 18, 1932, 23.

and Writers Club, and The Save the Children Fund for the economic development of poor children and their families. With the Kingston Drama Club she produced her second and third plays, *London Calling* (1937) and *Pocomania* (1938). She secured a place for artists and writers to meet in the evenings. The club meetings were attended by both black and white artists who broke down racial barriers in the artistic community in Kingston.<sup>171</sup>

Her second play, *London Calling*, is about a Jamaican student living in London. The play chronicles and attempts to make light of the racial discrimination and prejudice that she and her fellow black students faced in their daily lives. The students enjoy an opportunity to mock the British by overplaying stereotypes of African and Caribbean natives as uncivilized savages. The play is a commentary on racial prejudice and strategies that one must adopt in order to overcome them. Beloved Jamaican poet and actress, the late Louise Bennett appeared in the play. Marson's last and most famous play, *Pocomania* (1938), will be discussed at length in the next section.

In the 1950s, Marson traveled to Washington D.C., where she married at the age of 55. Her husband was an African-American dentist, Peter Staples. They separated after little more than a year and eventually divorced. In her twenties and thirties, Marson had written about the limitations of marriage for the independent-minded woman. At mid-life, her views had begun to change, and she took a more conservative view of a mother's place in the home. Biographer Delia Jarrett-Macauley writes about the failure of her brief marriage.

Becoming old-fashioned herself, Una revealed a lack of confidence in her own sexuality and distaste at sexual pleasure and sexual liberalism...Her own 'dissatisfaction with life' was probably now of a sexual nature. With desires and needs between husband and wife neither understood nor met, so much was

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<sup>171</sup> Ford-Smith, *Una Marson*, 6. This quote is from an interview of Archie Lindo by Ford-Smith, 1987.

probably being repressed. ... Some people have suggested that Peter Staples required a stabilizing influence from his second wife: Una could not, or perhaps would not, accommodate his needs.<sup>172</sup>

Jarrett-Macauley hints at a sexual incompatibility between the two and leaves it to the reader's imagination to determine the exact nature of the separation between the two. In my own fieldwork in Jamaica in 2003, informants mentioned to me (off the record) that some believe that Marson was conflicted about her sexuality and may have at times been attracted to women.

After her separation, Marson again fell into a deep depression and was hospitalized in Washington D.C. When she returned to Jamaica, she had difficulty finding work as a journalist. She revived her interest in The Save the Children Fund and began a semi-autobiographical book on social development in Jamaica that she never completed.

Her writings from this period are largely unpublished; they included a review of *Porgy and Bess*, which she castigated as "revolting as a slice of typical Negro life in America," and a piece on her humiliating experience trying to get a cup of tea in a segregated Washington, D.C., restaurant.

She died of a heart attack in 1965. Some contemporary critics have hypothesized, based on her long-term struggles with depression, that she committed suicide.<sup>173</sup>

Marson's life of hardships, determination, and multifaceted creativity would come to inspire a new generation of writers in the Caribbean. Her radio program *Caribbean Voices* would continue to be broadcast for years after her last visit to England. Her poetry and plays would change the literary and dramatic landscape of the Caribbean. While there were many differences between Una Marson and Marcus Garvey, they shared similar characteristics of

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<sup>172</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, 204-05.

<sup>173</sup> Ana M. Echevarria, *Performing Subversion: A Comparative Study of Caribbean Women Playwrights* (Dissertation, Cornell University, 2000), 71.

struggle, talent, and the ability to capture an audience with their message, both in print and in person. Garvey's poem "Mission" echoes the sentiment of Marson's life in many ways.

I'm struggling far afield today,  
 Son of a lowly race;  
 Fortune her gifts must yield to me  
 In spite of my black face.  
 I'm fighting my people's cause today  
 To down an ancient wrong,  
 And to lift this yearning race of mine  
 In lofty tale and song.<sup>174</sup>

The following section demonstrates how Marson's play *Pocomania* begins the process of myalisation of Jamaican theatre and serves as a model of myal-theatre.

#### POCOMANIA AS MYAL-THEATRE

The Ward Theatre, the largest in the Caribbean, with 950 seats, a pale-blue edifice with white-iced trims, was in a whirl of excitement. Here they were again, the best and the brightest of Kingston's intelligentsia, preparing to present the first performance of the Kingston Drama Club. The scene was contemporary Jamaican and the huge cast a curious combination of men and women; the posh set dressed in blazers and summer frocks, or gowns made by Suxanne Foster's professional outfit, the others wearing the long, white robes of the pocomania cult members, some stitched by Una herself. There were musicians and dancers, singers from the East Street Baptist Fraternal, and hangers-on, including the sixteen-year-old Winston White who, hearing the weird and wonderful pocomania songs emitting from the Ward one night, had slipped in and joined the fun. Una, a quietly firm producer, had just signalled with a look and nod that silence was required backstage.... Una, looking glorious in 'a white Paris evening gown with double train and sequins dotted over,' was later presented to the Governor, Sir Edward Denham.<sup>175</sup>

*Pocomania* was performed in Kingston, Jamaica in January of 1938 during the early stages of the bloody 1938 rebellion. Originally scheduled for a three-night run, the play was

<sup>174</sup> Tony Martin, *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1983), 8-9. The poem 'Mission' by Marcus Garvey was originally published in *Negro World*, December 2, 1922.

<sup>175</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, 129. She cites the article "Social and Personal," *Jamaica Times*, January 29, 1938, 4.

extended for two additional weekends at the Ward Theatre due to its success and popularity among middle and upper class theatregoers. Reviews of the play indicate that the cast was racially mixed and that audiences particularly enjoyed the scenes where the Revival practitioners discussed their social problems and performed aspects of Revival meetings on stage.<sup>176</sup>

I read Marson's play as a sign of resistance to middle-class respectability, Victorian constructions of gender and colonialism in Jamaica. The play pays homage to the lower class, which continues to practice Revival despite the legal risks and social taboo. *Pocomania* is an artistic statement of defiance of middle class Jamaican culture and a critique of her own upbringing, as Marson's father was a Baptist deacon. Her play is a battle cry for self-rule in Jamaica.

The historical moment of this play, just as the island was about to erupt with violence due to the discontent of the lower class, is telling, as Marson was acutely aware of the social and political environment of Jamaica as these tensions were brewing. This play was written in 1937, the same year that Marson's *The Moth and the Star* was published. This, her third volume of poetry, is considered her most volatile as it echoed the sentiment of the Nationalist movement from a black woman's perspective. Marson wrote *Pocomania* and *The Moth and the Star* after her first extended stay in England where she faced the racism of the British firsthand and after she had worked tirelessly alongside Haile Selassie to try to liberate Abyssinia from military defeat by Italy. After Abyssinia's crushing blow at the League of Nations, an exhausted Marson returned to Jamaica to recuperate and address the brewing social problems on the island. The lower class fought against high unemployment, lack of educational opportunities and for

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid. Marson's *Pocomania* was also performed in London.

essential social services. These creative works are Marson's response to racist and classist turmoil at home and abroad.<sup>177</sup>

The British hold on Jamaica's cultural imagination symbolized its political control over the colony. The seemingly complete rejection of colonial authority and cultural domination was a necessary step toward the creation of an alternative governing logic for the society. The rebellions of 1938 in the Anglophone Caribbean marked the beginnings of a heightened nationalist period (1938-1962). Jamaican artists cultivated an acceptance of the African retentions on the island to counter the British cultural influence, particularly among the middle class. A complete reversal of the stigma of Myal was part of the nationalist project in Jamaica. Historically, Myal-based practices survived because of the practitioners' ability to transgress social norms. Myal-based rituals then became a powerful symbol of resistance in this period. Cultural production was the means by which the colony symbolically prepared itself for a transfer of political power and began to imagine itself as an independent nation.

Theatre scholar Susan Bennett analyzes the constitution and role of theatre audiences in performances. Her review of literature on the subject indicates the homogeneity of theatre audiences in general, based on studies from a range of cultures. Level of education, income, occupation and age are the most significant factors that determine the demographics of a theatre audience.<sup>178</sup> I began this section with a passage that documents Marson's audience as "the best and brightest of Kingston's intelligentsia" and "hangers-on," associated with the musicians of the East Street Baptist Fraternal, of a lower class, due to the church's location in downtown

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<sup>177</sup> See Alison Donnell and Sarah Lawson Welsh, *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1996) for reprints of Marson's poems.

<sup>178</sup> Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 87-88.

Kingston, far south of Half Way Tree Road.<sup>179</sup> Her audience, then, was slightly mixed in terms of class, but overall, the performance was an elegant affair.

A crucial aspect of audience involvement, then, is the degree to which a performance is accessible through the codes audiences are accustomed to utilizing, the conventions they are used to recognizing, at a theatrical event. Intelligibility and/or success of a particular performance will undoubtedly be determined on this basis.<sup>180</sup>

The play received overwhelmingly positive reviews. Some reviewers expressed a lack of familiarity with Revival ritual and admitted their inability to comment on the authenticity of the ritual's representation. Still, they enjoyed the portrayal of the Revival meetings and encouraged Marson to include more scenes with these characters. They acknowledged that the play represented a new type of theatre in Jamaica and applauded Marson for producing a work that relates to a unique part of Jamaican culture.<sup>181</sup> The reviews reveal that audiences recognized that they were seeing a new set of theatrical conventions at work, supporting the argument that Marson initiated the process of myalisation in Jamaica by introducing a new genre of theatre.

The "Christianization" of Myal allowed a range of Afro-Jamaican religious practices to survive. When Myal is performed on national stages, it is the African origins that are highlighted, while its more recent Christian transformations are downplayed. Staging Myal in a sense "re-Africanizes" the practices, because it places its African origins at the center rather than the margins where they were previously relegated. In this context, Myal has the ability to reclaim its power and regain its place at the center of Jamaican society. Myal on stage in Jamaica then "Africanizes" a formally Eurocentric space in the colony, the proscenium stage.

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<sup>179</sup> Jarrett-Macauley, 129.

<sup>180</sup> Bennett, 104.

<sup>181</sup> Reviews of Marson's *Pocomania*: Lindsay P. Downer, "Pocomania," *Public Opinion*, January 22, 1938, 9; "'Pocomania'—A Commentary," *Public Opinion*, January 15, 1938, 10; T. S. P. "Pocomania," *Plain Talk*, January 22, 1938, 5; "Pocomania," *Plain Talk*, January 29, 1938, 5.

The healing properties of Myal survived its Christianization, although in different forms. Like Myal men, Revival leaders are also considered healers and are believed to have knowledge of plants and herbs that can be used for medicinal and spiritual healing.

Myal men probably originated as ‘bush doctors’ or healers of Africa transplanted to the Caribbean and the use of herbs for healing and protection has been cited as an important function of the cult. ... Myalism, as such, probably no longer exists, but many of its elements have been absorbed into Revivalism which itself gained its greatest impetus from the Great Revival.<sup>182</sup>

Myal is also associated with the release of emotions that can heal an individual or a community.<sup>183</sup> The reenactment of Myal-based rituals on stage then has a similar healing effect on performers and audience members.

Una Marson’s play, *Pocomania: A Three Act Play of Native Life in Jamaica*, portrays the life of Stella Manners, a black Jamaican woman whose deep affinity for Revival, practiced by the uneducated lower class of her community, jeopardizes her middle class status. Raised by her father, a widowed Deacon of the Elizer Baptist church, Stella grew up missing the nurturing of her mother. The emotional void left by the absence of Stella’s mother is filled by her relationship with Revival leader Sister Kate and the haunting sound of Revival drums. Her fascination with the mesmerizing drums begins in childhood and continues into her adult life. As a young woman, she compromises her chances of marriage to a “respectable” middle class gentleman because of her love of Revival. Marson’s play pits middle class respectability and emotional reserve in opposition to a world dominated by an Afro-Jamaican sensibility, the embodiment of the Divine, and the emotional release of ritual performance. By the play’s end, it

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<sup>182</sup> Olive Senior, *A-Z of Jamaican Heritage* (Kingston: Heinemann Educational Books (Caribbean) Limited, 1983), 113.

<sup>183</sup> Martha Warren Beckwith, *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folk Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1929), x.

is clear that Stella must choose between Revival, spinsterhood, and possible poverty or marriage and middle class respectability. Stella chooses marriage, but Marson's ending is unclear as to whether or not she gives up Revival entirely.

*Pocomania* opens to the sound of drums beating in the distance. The stage curtain rises on a darkened children's bedroom with moonlight streaming in from outside, as Stella and Dawn Manners sleep in their beds. Six-year-old Stella is fascinated by the drums. To her sleepy sister Dawn, the drums are a nuisance and she is pleased that their father, Deacon Manners, intends to do something to get the Revival meetings moved away from their home. Within the first passages of the play, the tension between Christianity and the "native" Jamaican practice of Revival is revealed and the young Stella and Dawn have already chosen sides. Dawn calls Sister Kate "dreadful" because she leads the all-night drumming. Stella unhesitatingly defends Sister Kate.

Stella: O, I don't think they are dreadful. They must love God to sing to Him all night under the stars. I wish I were a star so I could look down at them and see what they are doing.

Dawn: They are singing and shouting and dancing about.<sup>184</sup>

This passage reveals Stella's child-like innocence about the practice, her curiosity, and her romantization of Revival. In spite of her ignorance, she frames Revival as a form of religious worship, just as Sister Kate and her followers do in subsequent scenes. While she does not know exactly what the practitioners are doing, Stella interprets the ritual as praise. Dawn takes on the views of her father and believes that the all-night drumming is simply noise, foolishness, and a nuisance created by uneducated, poor, and dark-skinned people. Stella and Dawn's two young

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<sup>184</sup> Una Marson, *Pocomania*, Una Marson Manuscript Collection, Jamaican National Library, Kingston, Jamaica, 1938, 1.

godbrothers, David and John, enter the bedroom. They all comment on the drumming, which has increased in volume.

At this point in the script the stage directions read:

[Stella] listens intently to the drums and then sways her body and does a queer dance. Dawn gets up in bed to watch her. The two boys watch her intently. When she is nearly finished she sways as if about to fall and the others spring to catch her and put her in bed.<sup>185</sup>

This moment is about the creation of a ritual. The drumming, Stella's dancing, and her attentive audience of Dawn, David and John transform the bedroom into a sacred space. Her sister and two godbrothers' attentiveness to her dance mirrors the audiences' active participation, as they all witness the power of Revival. Audience and performers participate in the ritual and all have a stake in its outcome. In this case, Stella is the initiate who undergoes a transformation during this ritual. This scene can be read as Stella's initiation into Revival, or as a rite of passage. Her status has changed from curious child to ritual participant. Her sister Dawn, godbrothers David and John, and audience members undergo a temporary transportation as they witness this ritual and return to themselves at the end of the ritual unchanged.<sup>186</sup> A long series of transportations, myal-theatre-going experiences, over time creates a transformation of the Jamaican performance aesthetic and audience's "horizon of expectations." While Bennett does not give an explicit definition of the term, she is referring to the set of expectations that the audience holds upon

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>186</sup> Literature on Pentecostalism suggests that spirit possession (speaking in tongues) is confirmation of a spiritual initiation into the religion. No practitioner can be considered a full member until they have had this experience. Spirit possession itself is a sign of the transformation.

entering the theatre. These expectations are based on the reputation of the theatre, the artists involved, the genre of theatre, and familiar codes of interpretation.<sup>187</sup>

The children call the nurse, who proceeds to rub bay rum on Stella's head, hands, and chest to revive her.

Nurse: O, the drums, the drums. All day long Miss Stella can think of nothing else but drums in the night. (She rubs her hand and chest with bayrum) Miss Stella, what is the matter? ...

Stella: Nothing, only I felt queer.<sup>188</sup>

Stella convinces the nurse to promise to take all of the children to see "the people out there, where the drums are."<sup>189</sup> Both Stella and the nurse fall asleep as the drums beat softly in the background. The exchange demonstrates that ritual knowledge and Revival meetings are part of Jamaican culture that all classes are aware of, although they may not be participants in these rituals. The fact that the children's nurse enters and uses bay rum to revive young Stella demonstrates how ritual knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next and from one class to another. The nurse, as a member of the lower class, has access to the Revival meetings that the middle class does not. Only trusted members of the lower class would know the time and location of meetings, because of the secrecy surrounding Revival meetings due to their illegal status. The nurse, who is responsible for disciplining and supervising the children, knows whom to ask about Revival meetings in the area. The stigma of Revival prohibited the middle class from participating. The nurse, at the risk of her job, eventually fulfills her promise to take the children to observe a meeting from a distance. Stella's ability to manipulate the nurse is the

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<sup>187</sup> Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, 126-130. Schechner discusses the terms transportation and transformation. Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, 48. She discusses her use of the phrase "horizon of expectations."

<sup>188</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 3-4.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

beginning of a pattern that will continue throughout her life. As an adult, Stella will cajole those who control her in order to gain access to Revival meetings.

This prologue demonstrates the cultural stigma of Revival among the middle class, whose children understand from an early age that it is something to be avoided and condemned. This dichotomy is part of Jamaican culture, where class status determines attitudes about ritual performance. As a child, Stella's fascination with Revival is viewed as a negative symptom of her age, which the family hopes she will grow out of when she realizes its class implications. Stella is willing to go against the grain of middle class respectability and bargain with those in power in order to get what she wants.

Marson's prologue is an example of myal-theatre because all of the elements of the play are dramatized in miniature. Myal is central to the plot. The entire scene is structured around the presence of Myal in the form of Revival near the Manners home and the children's response to it. Stella and Dawn's difference of opinion reveals the tension, cultural divide, and stigma surrounding Revival in Jamaica. Secondly, this scene stages Myal with its performance of drums, Stella's dancing to the drums, and her emergence out of the trance thanks to the Nurse's use of bay rum. All of the characters on stage are involved in Myal in this scene, even young Dawn who denies its power. Dawn, David, and John mimic the audience who carefully watch Stella's transformation. The audience members are participants in Myal because, like the other children in the room, they witness Stella's possession.

Caribbean theatre scholar Elaine Savory notes the complexity of staging spirit possession. She points to the ritual knowledge that is held by both actors and audience, arguing that although the possession is being staged, all participants are aware that possession could “really happen.”

Possession, the entry of a god into the living body of a celebrant, which is witnessed by many in the Caribbean at religious rituals, is a complex issue for the dramatist. Even if the actor has no fear of undergoing the experience of pretending to possession (with the risk of actually becoming possessed), the audience is going to be watching with the possibility in mind that this could be real or become real. Even middle-class actors can retain a sense of caution about the portrayal of the dead on stage or in certain rituals. But precisely because there is [,] through the idea of possession [,] the meaningful notion of multiple selves and connection to an ancestral past ... it is a particularly useful theatrical mode.<sup>190</sup>

For many Caribbean audience members, there is a sense that the performed ritual has real power and that the possibility for intervention by the spirit world is a real one. This possibility thus elevates the action on stage and allows the audience to become participants in the ritual. They are witnesses to the events and can later testify to their truth.

Through the use of ritual and spirit possession, audiences participate in Revival ritual and witness Stella’s journey as it takes place on stage.

No truly indigenous theatre can afford to ignore the role of the audience or, rather, the relationship between audience and performer. We have seen that in ritual drama, audience members are participants in the unfolding action primarily because they have an interest in the outcome of the performance.<sup>191</sup>

In the case of Una Marson’s *Pocomania*, the audience and performers are constantly aware of the delicate balance of performance and reality that is being demonstrated before them. Part of the fear and fascination held by the audience, as well as Dawn, David and John, is the possibility that they might be similarly possessed. The audience occupies a position similar to the children.

<sup>190</sup> Elaine Savory, “Strategies for Survival: Anti-Imperialist Theatrical Forms in the Anglophone Caribbean,” in *Imperialist and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama, and Performance*, ed. J. Ellen Gainor (London: Routledge, 1995), 246.

<sup>191</sup> Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage*, 286.

The first scene of Act One portrays a heated confrontation between the Revival Leader and Baptist church officials that represents the central conflict of the play. The scene takes place in Sister Kate's yard, where she and her followers are preparing for a meeting that evening. Sister Kate requests that the choir hush and that the drums are not played too loudly in order to conceal the Revival meeting taking place on her property. She fears police harassment and possible imprisonment. Deacon Manners (Stella's father) and Reverend Craig of Elizer Baptist Church enter Sister Kate's yard to confront her about the members of their church who also attend her meetings. The Reverend and the Deacon insist that they are losing members and, more importantly, financial offerings because the congregation is poor and cannot afford to support both a church and a Revival band. They ask her to relocate her home and her meetings as a way to resolve this financial competition. Sister Kate boldly refuses to move her home or meetings and insists that their financial difficulties are their own problem. Sister Kate exposes their greed and their desire to maintain a monopoly over their impoverished parishioners. Marson's criticism here is that the Baptist Church is more concerned about profiting from the Caribbean people than improving their spiritual welfare.

Religious historian Dale Bisnauth and anthropologist Edith Clarke examine religious outlets for black Jamaicans. Their studies reveal that black Jamaicans had a range of options and that it was quite reasonable for practitioners to regularly attend two or more types of religious worship services. Bisnauth demonstrates the segregation of religious communities by denomination and color.

The distribution of church membership in Jamaica showed a race and colour bias as well. ...As the Established churches of the British realm, the Anglican and Presbyterian churches enjoyed great prestige. The urban membership of the Methodist church in the island was almost exclusively coloured. ... [T]he

coloured nature of the Methodist congregations contrasted sharply with the urban membership of the Baptist church which was almost exclusively black. The membership of the Baptist church was responsible for that church's reputation that it was a 'poor man' church. The reputation, in turn, might have helped to make the Baptist church attractive to the blacks who knew themselves to be a poor people.<sup>192</sup>

Clarke's study reveals the range of choices for religious worship available exclusively for black Jamaicans in the rural area of Sugartown.

The diversity of Sugartown was further exemplified in the number of religious sects and cults which were represented. The Jehovah Witnesses attracted a considerable following among the middle and lower class of permanent residents. Others were described as Evangelists, Independent Baptists, Balm-Yard Healers, and practitioners of pocomania. But almost anyone might become 'converted' and set himself or herself up as a preacher and attract a congregation. ...[M]eetings were held in the open, on street corners or in yards, lit by kerosene flares. Many of the leaders were women and wore a distinctive head kerchief when they 'went preaching.' All the cults had this in common: that they concentrated on ritual and allowed and encouraged active participation by the congregation. Meetings were the occasions for both the building up and the release of emotional tensions and there was also evidence of the establishment of cult ties between members. Visiting preachers would be given hospitality for weeks on end and treated with great deference and respect.<sup>193</sup>

By pitting Reverend Craig and Sister Kate against each other, Marson reveals that their black parishioners find value in attending both an established British denomination as well as the myal-based ritual forms like Revival. Given the harsh economic conditions that black Jamaicans faced in the 1930s, it is clear that Reverend Craig's "poor man" Baptist church would suffer at this difficult time. Marson highlights the poverty of the Reverend Craig's Baptist members, who struggle to make financial contributions to both the church and the impoverished Sister Kate.

Once Sister Kate has exposed their greed, the church leaders retaliate by couching their opposition in terms of theological pronouncement. The Parson and Deacon threaten Sister Kate

<sup>192</sup> Dale Bisnauth, *History of Religions in the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica: Kingston Publishers Limited, 1989), 196-7.

<sup>193</sup> Edith Clarke, *My Mother who Fathered Me*, 144-5.

by stating that her meetings are the work of the Devil, evidenced by the shouting and jumping that accompany spirit possession. Sister Kate attempts to defend spirit possession as a form of praise and worship of the Lord. This conflict which began as a financial dispute escalates into an argument about what spirit possession symbolizes: Devil worship or Christian praise. In order to gain support for their cause, the Parson and the Deacon use their power as religious leaders of the Baptist Church to condemn Sister Kate on spiritual grounds. They call on religious discourse to win their battle for their own financial benefit.

In her defense, Sister Kate threatens to take the Parson to court to refute his claims of “evil” activity at her meetings. Anthropologist Martha Beckwith discusses the laws against Revival and how practitioners also used the legal system in their defense.

The Negroes are sudden and vehement in vituperation. They are extraordinarily litigious and run easily to court with their grievances, where cases of defamation and tongue-lashing are as common as those of petty thieving—more so than of actual assault—and are as patiently considered by the court, composed as it is of the best class of resident whites on the island. The Negroes are quick to take offense, and they work not only thus openly but in secret ways to effect their revenge.<sup>194</sup>

Sister Kate’s aggressive stance points to her awareness that the very definition of Revival, in relation to more mainstream forms of Christianity, is hard to prove in a court of law. Sister Kate is also a member of the Elizer church and as such has the social standing and respectability that comes with this membership.

In a counter attack, the Parson and Deacon force her formally to leave the church by removing her name from the church roll. This move jeopardizes her acceptance in society and in heaven. They claim that her followers have come to them for spiritual guidance for problems

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<sup>194</sup> Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, 68.

resulting from Sister Kate's "unholy practices." The men advise her to purify her "church" by ridding her meetings of their African/Myal contents, and demand that she remain out of the Baptist Church until she has satisfied their conditions.

Sister Kate's defiance of middle class male authority is evident in the following exchange.

Sister Kate: If you all don't want me in de Church well unno can do what you like. I not moving, I not stopping me meeting. Beside, you can tek me name off de register but you can't stop me from come to Church.

Parson: Very well, Mother Kate, but I beseech you to see that you abstain from all appearances of evil at your meetings and do not take away my people from my church; there are many outside.

Sister Kate: Well, Parson, it is your business to hold you congregation, and all de same I don't think you and your deacons have de right to condemn me and put me out de church. ...

Parson: When you can come to me and say that your meetings are purified and pleasing in the sight of God, then we will take you back in the Church.

Sister Kate: Amen.<sup>195</sup>

This confrontation between Sister Kate and Parson Craig and Deacon Manners is the personification of the dichotomy between Protestant worship and the Africanized Christianity of Revival.

This sobering scene reveals the reality of Protestant worship as legally and morally acceptable in Jamaica in opposition to the loud drumming and physical contortions of the body associated with spirit possession and Revival. This exchange between Sister Kate and the Deacon and Parson demonstrates the bias that they have against her as a Revival leader. It also demonstrates her ability to refute the authority that they have as church leaders and middle class

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<sup>195</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 8.

white and black men of the community. Sister Kate does not appear to be threatened by their condemnation, as she stands firmly on her own moral ground as a spiritual leader. She defends herself in a moral court and is willing to do so in a court of law if necessary to refute the allegations put to her by the men. Her ability to dismiss male authority is key in this play and stands in stark contrast to Stella who struggles to defy her father, Deacon Manners, and later her admirer David, a well-educated doctor. In spite of her tough talk, Sister Kate fears that she will lose credibility among her followers and members.

Once the Parson and Deacon leave, Sister Kate's members come out of hiding and sing and shout and dance to encourage her with the power of her practice. They comfort her by insisting that her followers will remain loyal because their love of Revival allows them to express themselves freely in worship. Soon after Sister Kate's confrontation with the Reverend, a young woman falls to the ground in frenzy as the drums play.

The stage directions read:

(Sister Kate gets up and spins around. Takes her switch from its place beside the door and stamps about the singers. She stops before one girl, drags her forward and shouts)

“Join de chorus  
 We feel it flowing o'er us  
 You is no chile of Satan  
 So get the spirit  
 And shout, Sister, shout  
 Hallelujah, Amen  
 Shout, Sister Shout.

(She starts in singing, Kendal conducting and singing too. Great enthusiasm, Sister Kate uses switch around. All burst into chorus and swaying rhythm, the particular girl [moves] forward gradually working herself up to frenzy and falling on the ground—drums join in, very bright and stirring.)<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 9.

The scene ends in song and the ecstasy of ritual.

The audience is left to decide whether Revival is a form of Devil worship, as the Deacon insists, or a way for the common people to praise the Lord as Sister Kate argues. Throughout the rest of the play, this question is raised as Stella, a middle class woman with a good Christian upbringing, cannot resist participating in Revival, even with all of its social costs.

In the next scene we see that Stella has matured into a spirited young woman. Her conservative family struggles to understand her unconventional ideas. Stella and her sister Dawn discuss Stella's prospects for marriage. Stella is in love with John, her god-brother, who is in England studying to become a lawyer. Dawn teases her that her ideas about life are non-traditional and that she may be too "fast" to consider marriage. They quickly drop the subject, as it appears that Dawn does not want to embarrass her sister. Stella reveals that she hopes that she and John will marry someday and move to the city. Stella is a passionate young woman who is terribly bored by the quiet country life. Marson has created a protagonist whose attitude about life conflicts with Victorian attitudes held by the Jamaican middle class. Dawn worries that her free spirit and her liberal views on premarital sex, marriage, and her frustrations with the confinement of middle class life will hamper her ability to fit into middle class society.

Their father, Deacon Manners, enters with the news from England that Stella's boyfriend John is very ill, close to death. Later in the scene we learn that John has passed away. Stella is distraught. In her grief she questions the reasons for suffering and loss. During this moment of reflection, the haunting drums of Revival underscore the loss of her potential husband John. Throughout the play Marson uses Revival drumming to signal to the audience the continuous, but forbidden, emotional release of Revival in the lives of this family.

In the next scene we see that Stella has found a spiritual mother in Revival leader Sister Kate. The grief-stricken Stella visits Sister Kate. Stella asks about the drums, their African origins, and the meaning of spirit possession. She is helplessly drawn to Revival and is trying to understand why. As a child, Stella had longed for a “mummie” who could explain the meaning of the mysterious drums of Revival to her. Una Marson, as a high school student, also experienced the great loss of both of her parents and this aspect of her life must have informed her creation of the character Stella. Stella complains that the nurse dismissed her questions by saying that the ceremony is not for children. Stella, while acknowledging that her father was present in her life, objected to the fact that he did not explain things to her. “Stella: O, my Daddy never tells us the meaning of things. He only says, ‘God says so,’ or ‘Jesus says so,’ or ‘I say so.’”<sup>197</sup> She longs for the love and nurturing of a mother as well as for an alternative to the male authority that her father exercises over her.

Sister Kate freely discusses the taboo subject of Revival with Stella. Stella learns that the rhythms of the drums have been passed down from father to son over the generations, starting with slaves from Africa. In the following exchange, Stella begins to understand the drums of Revival.

Stella: I don’t know whether I like them [the drums] or not. They frighten me a little but they certainly fascinate me.

Sister Kate: Fascinate, Miss Stella? Dem is more wonderful dan dat! Troo de drum de spirit speak—de Lawd Himself speak to de soul of him people.

Stella: Is it the drums that make the people shout and groan and roll unconscious on the ground?

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<sup>197</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 3.

Sister Kate: ...It is de debils in dem mek all dat noise and de debil tear dem and trow dem on de groun' before dem come out of dem.

Stella: So if you don't have devils in you it does not happen?

Sister Kate: Dat right mam. But don't worry you pretty little head about sech likes. Only if you say a wod fe dem, say to Parson, fer I afraid him an you pappa gwint send dem away.<sup>198</sup>

According to Sister Kate, through the drum both the *spirit* and the *Lord* speak to his people, yet the *devil* is the cause of spirit possession. Her statement points to how even Revival leaders have been influenced by the Christian rhetoric of evil in relationship to spirit possession.<sup>199</sup>

Sister Kate edits her narrative about Revival depending upon her audience. In the previous scene in the folk song, spirit possession was framed as “You is no child of Satan/ So get the spirit.”<sup>200</sup> Here it is reframed for the middle class Stella, who is still an outsider to the Revival gang. In this exchange with Stella, Sister Kate takes this opportunity to try to gain tolerance from Stella's father, the Deacon, and the Parson. But Sister Kate does not realize that Stella has experienced spirit possession. Sister Kate frames spirit possession in this way to reassure Stella that she is safe from the possible dangers of possession in the future. Sister Kate alters her narrative to protect her religious practice from social persecution. She is also wise enough to tailor her answers to the listener's level of understanding.

At the end of this scene, Stella offers Sister Kate money after the two discuss the harsh economic conditions that Sister Kate and members of her community face.

Stella: ...Now, tell me, how are you off for money.

Sister Kate: We here struggling mam and de good Lawd is

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<sup>198</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 4.

<sup>199</sup> Mervyn Alleyne, “The Worldview of Jamaicans,” *Jamaica Journal* (1978): 2-8.

<sup>200</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 9.

eber mindful of we. Plenty of de young gels can't get noting fe do.

Stella: I know, it is dreadful, and I feel so helpless. ...  
(opens her purse and takes out a coin) Here is a help for you.<sup>201</sup>

Here Stella acknowledges the harsh economic conditions that the lower classes face. When the rebellion erupted in May 1938, the middle class claimed that they had no knowledge of the extent or severity of the poverty in the island. For many of the middle class, the uprising was completely unexpected.<sup>202</sup> In this passage, Marson demonstrates that she is aware of the situation and that the middle class is in a position to help the impoverished.

Through the Revival practitioners, Marson critiques the class-divide in Jamaica and the inhuman poverty of the peasants who are beginning to rise up in revolt. Sister Kate and her followers question Stella's interest in Revival as a respectable woman of the middle class. They identify both the positive and negative attributes of being members of a lower class. In her introduction, Martha Beckwith comments on the process of acculturation in Jamaica. "In every case where a sophisticated and a backward race meet, the problem lies not with the folk who absorb and re-create but with the upper classes that absorb and imitate."<sup>203</sup> I believe that Marson holds this view, as her play allows the lower class to speak to her middle class audience about the social and economic conditions that they face. In her play, the upper class attempt to imitate British tastes and lifestyles, while Stella absorbs the lifestyle of Sister Kate. The practitioners' discussion reproduces dominant social values and attempts to reverse stereotypes about Revival and their own class status. Most importantly, they embrace Revival because they can express

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<sup>201</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 16.

<sup>202</sup> Brown, *Color, Class, and Politics*, 94-5.

<sup>203</sup> Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, xi.

themselves without reservation. They claim that the middle class does not have the physical stamina to handle the strain of spirit possession or all night meetings.

The middle class accuse the poor of living in sin if a couple cohabitates without marriage. The practitioners reposition this discussion in economic terms. For them, the absence of a state-sanctioned marriage really speaks to their lack of money for a proper “white wedding.”

[T]he legitimatizing of a marriage relation by a church wedding distinctly raises the social prestige of the pair, but there is no social obloquy attached to concubinage and considerable advantage to be gained thereby, for if the relation proves unhappy, the two can part without formality.<sup>204</sup>

They trace the absence of marriage to the unbearable economic conditions of the colony. The men do not have the funds for a wedding because they do not have the proper training or skills for better work. Unemployment rates are incredibly high and there are few educational opportunities for the middle class and none for the lower classes.<sup>205</sup> Inherent in this dichotomy between Revival and sanctioned Baptist worship are the tensions between respectability and commonness and the class divisions in Jamaica.

Revival practitioners are persecuted and live in fear of being reported to the police for holding Revival meetings. They worry about a new law prohibiting Revival and what affect it will have on them and their meetings. This concern is mentioned throughout the play. Brother Kendal sings a song about the contradictions of a Christianity that does not support different forms of worship.

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>205</sup> Clarke, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, xli-xliii. In her study of rural communities in Jamaica, Clarke discusses how historically studies on economic conditions in Jamaica in the early twentieth century were organized around analysis of households. These studies fixated on the disparities between single-parent households and two parent households as well as the income earned by single women versus two parent households with possibly two incomes. In these studies, the institution of marriage, or lack thereof, and the problem of illegitimate children are discussed as the primary cause of poverty. Clarke’s study seeks to correct this misunderstanding by taking into account common law marriages and by examining employment opportunities and wages as determining factors in poverty.

Brother Kendal: Sings

Met my Deacon de oder day  
 Give him my right han'  
 As soon as ever me back was turned  
 He scandalize my name  
 Call dat religion, No, No.  
 Call dat religion, No, No.  
 Call dat religion, No, No.  
 Scandalised my name.

Met my broder de oder day  
 I gave him my right han'  
 As soon as ever my back was turned  
 He scandalized my name  
 Call dat religion, No, No, etc.<sup>206</sup>

This song highlights Sister Kate's earlier claim that the Baptist Church is unconcerned with spiritual redemption and Christian charity.

The conflict between the classes is gendered. Revival leader Sister Kate struggles to refute the claims and power of the male leaders of the local Baptist Church. As the story unfolds, Stella Manners' power to resist the clutches of her middle class upbringing is usurped by her childhood friend, doctor and suitor, David.

In the following scene, her admirer David and the Parson suspect that Stella is participating in Revival meetings and they attempt to catch her in the act. One year after John's death, Stella's godbrother David has become romantically interested in her. He confides in the Parson that he is concerned because Stella is still grieving the loss of John and rejecting his advances. David fears that her emotional distance from him is the result of her participation in Revival meetings. As a medical doctor, he believes that she has a psychological illness, "Pocomania." This term is understood in Jamaica today as a derogatory word for Revival, but it

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<sup>206</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 19. Brother Kendal is referring to the "right hand of fellowship" spoken of in Baptist churches. Its acceptance binds people together as church members and to codes of behavior involving Christian charity.

is used in the play as a medical condition related to Revival participation.<sup>207</sup> David attempts to explain to the Parson why Stella is attracted to Revival and not the Baptist church.

Craig: ...The strange power of these revivalists is a matter that has been occupying my mind for the past twelve years. It is very unusual for a girl of Stella's upbringing and education to fall in with such an obviously obnoxious cult.

David: It isn't strange. It appeals to the emotions. You see, your churches are cold and strict and severe—not attractive enough. Besides, what is there in this district to interest anyone with a grain of imagination. And you know Stella has always craved for excitement. I am afraid the Church does not fill the essential need.<sup>208</sup>

David qualifies the church as “cold and strict and severe” in contrast to the attractive excitement of Revival, which allows for emotional expression and feeds the imagination. David is articulating a clash of cultures and sensibilities here. The severe British culture that has been forced upon black Jamaicans for centuries will no longer suffice. If we think of Stella and Una Marson as women before their time who do not fit into the prescribed norms of Jamaican society, David is then describing a new Jamaican woman, or a new Jamaica, who demands a connection with an African sensibility. David reveals that the British model of Jamaican culture fails to fulfill an essential need and is therefore no longer adequate. The lower class will soon rise up and demand more of the middle and upper classes, and even more from the British, as the status quo will soon prove to be inadequate.

David and Parson Craig conspire to catch Stella at a meeting. David leaves to look outside for Stella. The Parson hides in a dark corner of the room and witnesses Stella enter with

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<sup>207</sup> I have found no evidence to relate Pocomania as a named psychological disorder. However, Joseph K. Long cites Pocomania, Obeah, and Myal among the “native” healing practices in the Caribbean and suggests that with further study, these can be saved from oblivion and used as an alternative to western medicine. Joseph K. Long, “Medical Anthropology, Dance, and Trance in Jamaica” in *International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research Bulletin* no. xiv (1972): 17-23.

<sup>208</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 21.

the maid Sarah. Sarah helps Stella change quickly into a long white robe. Stella places a white turban on her head then quickly rushes off stage. David enters and the Parson instructs him to follow her. At the end of this scene, David enters carrying Stella's limp body. She fainted during the Revival meeting and he carried her home.

Now that David has witnessed Stella's participation in Revival, he and the Parson strategize about how to end her attendance at Revival meetings. Theorist Michel deCerteau defines strategy.

I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated....It is also a mastery of places through sight. The division of space makes possible a panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and "include" them within its scope of vision. To be able to see (far into the distance) is also to be able to predict, to run ahead of time by reading a space.<sup>209</sup>

The Parson's and David's ability to plan their "attack" on Stella and to observe her change her clothing and her participation in a Revival meeting demonstrates the power that they hold over Stella who desperately attempts to subvert them.

The next scene pits Revival in opposition to marriage, as David wants to propose while Stella only wants to talk about attending an important Revival meeting. Stella has recently returned after six months from Malvern, where she stayed at a hospital or mental asylum and was treated for psychological problems. Stella's diagnosis by David denies her control of her body and the power to make decisions for herself. She is forced to take medicine prescribed by him even though she has no "pocomania" symptoms. He and Stella's family believe that her cure lies in having her avoid circumstances that could provoke strong emotions.

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<sup>209</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 35-6.

Later in this scene, we learn that Sister Kate has recently died. Stella was forbidden to see the sickly Sister Kate before her death. Stella wants to attend Sister Kate's nine night or wake. She asks David to escort her out of fear of being caught and sent back to Malvern. Sister Kate's death is seen as an emotional strain on Stella to which she must avoid succumbing. During the course of this scene, Stella questions what David and the others think about her moral and mental state. She debates him on the futility of a life without passion.

David: All for your own good. My dear, you must not encourage violent likes and dislikes; that leads to obsession; balance is the thing.

Stella: Like everything in an ordinary, placid way, never [to] be greatly moved or stirred, never really give full vent and let go?

David: Not exactly, my dear, letting off steam now and then is a good thing, but you will find that strong emotions wear you out. The placid people live longest and are happiest.

Stella: Well, I don't want to live long and I don't want to be happy.<sup>210</sup>

Although she is able to challenge David's thinking on some issues, Stella is still unable to come and go as she pleases. She feels that she needs his "permission" and support against her family to attend Sister Kate's nine night.

David does not want to discuss nine night or Revival but marriage. In the following exchange, Stella appears to exhibit girlish behavior at a moment when her womanhood is questioned by David who wishes to propose.

Stella: You are mean! I know you think I am still just a silly hysterical girl who will be upset by the sound of the drums. I tell you, I am not—I have grown up.

David: And yet you will not tolerate a discussion on love? I have no alternative but to admit myself for the second time out-paced by Pocomania.

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<sup>210</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 25.

Stella: O David, it is not that. Believe me, it has no hold on me now. But I do want to see the Ninth Night—can't you understand.

David: I can understand that you want to have your own way.

Stella: O, very well. I shan't ask any more favours of you.

(She gets up.)

David: Stella, please darling, do listen to me.

(She walks out quickly.)<sup>211</sup>

In this exchange, the actors and directors have careful choices to make, as the tone and body language of the actors determine whether Stella is in fact being childish or is exhibiting the anger of a mature woman. Here Stella is getting impassioned. It is unclear whether she is simply manipulating him in order to attend the ceremony or claiming her own voice. Her words could be played as defiant or childlike. In either case, does she truly require the permission that she asks for? Has the confinement in Malvern in fact reduced her to this childlike behavior? Is this the only tactic she has left?

The space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver 'within the enemy's field of vision,' as von Bulow put it, and within enemy territory.<sup>212</sup>

Stella is treated (or sentenced) to a life without passion, excitement, or simulation for six months until she has fully "recovered." After she is diagnosed, Stella is unable to challenge the male authority of her father and her soon-to-be fiancé David. Stella must now operate within full view of those who confine her.

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<sup>211</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 27.

<sup>212</sup> Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37.

After Stella exits, David gathers her family and puts the question to them. Should Stella be allowed to attend the wake-like ritual, or nine night, of Sister Kate? Although her sister Dawn is present, she says little. The men, David and Deacon Manners, debate the issue. David wants to humor Stella and insists that the death ritual is it not simply nonsense. He may also believe that giving her an opportunity to grieve for Sister Kate will break the hold that Revival has on her. Stella's father, Deacon Manners, firmly denies Stella's request as her father and a leader in the church. He forbids it. Because David is not yet married to Stella, he has no real say in the matter, and her father makes this clear in his final and stern "no." All of the members of the family leave the room except for David. He considers defying the Deacon and supporting her in going to the nine night. The stage directions read: "(David stands perplexed—drums beat softly.)"<sup>213</sup> He decides to sneak out with Stella to attend the nine night. Because of her class, gender and non-confrontational approach, Stella resorts to emotional blackmail to gain access to the nine night through David. She plays on his desire to marry. David also might be more willing than her father because he hopes that she will someday accept his proposal. His use of the word "darling" is strategic as an appeal to romance rather than forcing her acquiescence.

In the last scene of the play, Stella and David attend Sister Kate's nine night and Stella is forced to choose between Revival and David. They observe the words of praise, the singing and feasting that are all part of the ritual. A few of the men have too much to drink, a fight breaks out, and the nine night ends on a sour note. David and Stella are left alone. Stella is shaken by the fight and renounces Revival. David takes this opportunity to ask her to choose love over the

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<sup>213</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 29.

madness of Revival. Her choice is between Revival, spinsterhood, and likely poverty—or marriage and middle class respectability.

If she chooses Revival, she would not make a suitable wife for the young doctor David or any other man of her class. She would likely live as a spinster and be financially dependent on her father or sister. She would also be subjected to extended periods of psychiatric treatment in Malvern. Marrying David allows her to maintain her middle class status. Stella chooses marriage, but Marson's ending is unclear as to whether or not Stella gives up Revival entirely.

David: No more Pocomania then?

Stella: No more Pocomania. I was always really frightened of it, but I had to have something.

David: I shall try to give you something better.

Stella: A little madness?

David: Yes, I suppose love can be called that as well. We all need a little madness in our lives perhaps.

Stella: Now you have admitted that, it will be so much easier to love you.<sup>214</sup>

One can interpret Stella's promise to turn her back on Revival in a number of ways. This may be her strategy to marry David, securing her place in middle class society, while continuing to secretly participate in Revival. Or Stella's declaration of her denouncement of Revival is true. She hopes that the passion, excitement, and emotional release that she has been looking for will be found in her marriage to David instead of at Revival meetings.

Stella accepts the possibility of a romance with David and claims that her interest in Revival has now died with Sister Kate. She chooses the security and respectability of marriage.

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<sup>214</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 34.

But, Stella has learned an important lesson from Sister Kate about the necessary deception and the survival of this illegal practice. Her emotional manipulation of David in the previous scene about attending Sister Kate's nine night was successful as she succeeded in getting "permission" to attend and he agreed to go with her for "protection." She can love David in the end because he is willing to defy the authority of the father with her. It is his defiance of social norms that may make him suddenly attractive to her.

As a middle class man who is not married to Stella, David defies the Deacon's authority. Like the lower class practitioners of Myal-based rituals who continually defied colonial authority throughout Jamaican history, David joins Stella in defiance of authority. He risks the Deacon's disapproval, contraction of "Pocomania," police harassment, and three months of incarceration according to the Revival Prohibition of 1931 in order to join Stella in an adventure of subversion.

Marson's ending is tricky. On the surface, it appears that Stella has renounced her love of Revival in order to conform to middle class standards and marry happily. But in an earlier moment when she discussed marriage and Revival with David, she made a provocative statement, that when reread alongside Marson's seemingly simple ending, suggests that Stella still embraces and will continue to embrace Revival in spite of her class status. She says to David: "You are mean! I know you think that I am still just a silly hysterical girl who will be upset by the sound of drums. I tell you, I am not—I have grown up."<sup>215</sup> The phrase, "I have grown up" can be interpreted as Stella's maturity on a number of levels. From her recent medical confinement due to "Pocomania," she has endured a difficult life lesson. She has experienced the full extent that the middle class will go to keep her within their social dictates.

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<sup>215</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 27.

From Sister Kate, she has learned four important lessons. She has finally discerned the African origin of the drums that fascinate her and the role of spirit possession in their lives. She has also learned how to manipulate those with authority over her in order to continue her practice. In Sister Kate, Stella found a mother figure that she always wanted, and even though Sister Kate is dead, Stella has gained the self-esteem that comes with having a connection with a parent. She has also discovered in Revival (and possibly marriage) an arena in which she can express herself fully.

In this last scene, she has successfully manipulated David with a greater success than her father, the Deacon. With David as her husband, she will have financial and social security. With him she also knows how to get her way and yet be discreet about her involvement in Revival so that their reputation will not be damaged.

Although all of the characters in this play are exposed to Revival, and therefore the power of Myal, only Stella embraces the process of myalisation. She is the character who enters the ritual space as a participant in spite of the stigma surrounding the practice and repeatedly risks spirit possession by doing so.

The process of myalisation of Jamaican theatre began with Marson's *Pocomania*. In the colonial discourse on myal-based rituals, anxiety about the dangers of revolts was coupled with fears about women's sexuality and a deviant psychology remaining unchecked. Plays in the genre of myal-theatre celebrate the spirit of revolt associated with myal-based rituals and thereby validate an Afro-Caribbean identity. In the case of Marson's play, the spirit of rebellion is found in Sister Kate, who refuses to move her Revival meetings, and in Stella, who manipulates those around her in order to attend meetings. In myal-theatre, myths about women's sexuality and/or a

deviant black psychology are challenged or overthrown. Marson subtly plays up Stella's liberal ideas about pre-marital sex, while she actively challenges the assumption of her mental illness brought on by spirit possession. By the play's end, Stella has convinced her doctor and boyfriend, David, that even his participation in Revival will not cause a mental "episode."

Myal-theatre not only performs aspects of a myal-based ritual on stage, but it also places that ritual performance in context and demonstrates how this ritual is integral to the plot. Marson's play has four scenes which perform aspects of Revival on stage: the prologue, the confrontation between Sister Kate and Reverend Craig, the scene where Stella is caught at a Revival meeting, and Sister Kate's nine night. Each one of these scenes moves the plot forward by demonstrating how and why it is a source of spiritual renewal for some and a problem for others.

Not only are these ritual practices visible and integral to the plot, the logic of why the ritual is practiced is revealed. In this case, Marson creates a psychological reason for Stella's participation. Stella has experienced a great deal of loss in her life and as a result is in search of something or someone to fill the emotional void left by her mother, her boyfriend John, and Sister Kate. Whenever Stella experiences a moment of grief, the drums of Revival are heard in the distance. The drums function as a source of both spiritual renewal and defiance.

In the prologue just before Stella is possessed, she wonders what it would be like to have a mother.

Stella: What is it like to have a Mum? I would like to know.

David: It is nice to have your own Mum to tuck you up in bed.

Stella: Yes, it must be very, very nice. (pauses and listens to the drums, sways to the rhythm) I want to dance to this music, is that bad?

Dawn: Of course, it is a sin. Those people out there are singing songs and dancing while the drum plays.

Stella: O, but they must be happy.<sup>216</sup>

Whenever Stella is in a state of mourning, she finds comfort by dancing to the drums. The loss of her mother that underscores Stella's life can be read as a metaphor for the perpetual displacement from Africa by the middle passage that dominates the African Diasporic experience. Ritual and the ability to ritualize new spaces is part of the African experience in the New World and is an attempt to recreate a homeland in the psyche of those of African descent in the present.<sup>217</sup>

From the perspective of the ritual practitioners, Revival symbolizes a connection with ancestors that is steeped in African tradition. According to Nelson-McDermott, ritual is a "non-colonized, and non-colonizable, social space" outside of the constraints and oppressive forces of daily life.<sup>218</sup> Ritual recreates an African "home" in the minds of practitioners; it facilitates the emotional survival of people of African descent.<sup>219</sup> Stella feels "at home" when she attends Revival meetings. The drums, spirit of community, and spirit possession soothe her troubled soul and provide her with a vehicle for self-expression.

Like Erna Brodber's novel *Myal* (1988), myal-theatre performs the oppression of colonialism. Marson does this by creating a conflict between Revival leader Sister Kate and Stella's father, Deacon Manners. The church leaders Parson Craig and Deacon use their power

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<sup>216</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 3.

<sup>217</sup> Beverly J. Robinson, "The Sense of Self in Ritualizing New Performance Spaces for Survival" in *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora*, ed. Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker, II, and Gus Edwards (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 336.

<sup>218</sup> Catherine Nelson-McDermott, "Myal-ing Dialectics: Beyond Colonizing Discourses," 53-54.

<sup>219</sup> Beverly J. Robinson, 336.

to try to end the practice of Revival. In addition to this religious oppression, Marson openly critiques the class divide in Jamaica. Revival practitioners speak about their poverty and lack of opportunities to improve themselves. Sister Kate and Stella are two women who hold opposing social and class status. Ironically, it is Sister Kate of the lower class who has more control over her own body and freedom than Stella, who longs not only for the freedom to participate in Revival, but for the courage to defy male authority.

Myal-theatre in its content and performance destabilizes the colonial taboo surrounding myal-based rituals. The participation of a middle class black woman in these rituals begins the slow process of chipping away at the stigma surrounding them. Stella's ability to convince David, a medical doctor, that there is no harm in attending a death ritual for Sister Kate makes audiences question whether "Pocomania" is a legitimate medical or psychological condition as David has previously held.

Young women experience spirit possession three times in this play: In the prologue Stella, as a young girl; in a later scene, one of Sister Kate's young female followers; and finally Stella again, offstage at a Revival meeting witnessed by David, who carries her unconscious body back on stage.

Marson's representation of spirit possession focuses on the woman's body, but it is an image that she purposefully desexualizes. The image of Stella as a grown woman in possession is not shown to the audience. This ritual happens offstage with David as a witness. This is the exchange between Parson Craig and David when David returns from the Revival meeting carrying Stella.

David:           (voice off) Craig, Craig.... Where are you?

(Craig starts up and goes towards door. Enter David carrying Stella's body in his arms)

Craig: .....Is she hurt.....?

David: She's fainted. It was foul – indescribable! Get some brandy, and I'll get her to her room.<sup>220</sup>

No description is given of the event or the physical contortions of bodies in trance. By omitting a description and revealing only young girls in possession, Marson desexualizes her representation of Revival. Marson focuses instead on the aspects of spiritual renewal in relation to spirit possession and avoids images of deviant sexuality in the play.

In the matter of spirit possession, it is readily seen how this most significant transformation of an individual's appearance and conduct can be interpreted in drama and dance. Summoning the presence of supernatural beings through the trance state speaks to the traditional belief in ancestral spirits who protect the community, and in guardian spirits of all living things who demand to be recognized and revered by human beings.<sup>221</sup>

Marson's *Pocomania* emphasizes the spiritual aspect of Revival and carefully avoids the sexual stereotype.

Marson demonstrates the relationship between this practice and a spiritual reconnection with Africa. Marson makes this point throughout the play with the drum that is heard in nearly every scene. It is made explicitly in the scene between Stella and Sister Kate.

Stella: Do you know the drummer?

Sister Kate: Know Josiah, mam? Josiah who is beating drum fe de meeting dem from he is a little boy. Him used fe beat de drum fe me when I was on me foot. Lawd, he can beat it sweet mam.

Stella: Who taught him to beat it like that?

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<sup>220</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 24.

<sup>221</sup> Hill, *The Jamaican Stage*, 285.

Sister Kate: No him puppa, mam.

Stella: And who taught his father?

Sister Kate: Him puppa, dat is Josiah gran fader come here a little boy pon slave ship from Africa.

Stella: I see.<sup>222</sup>

Within the context of Jamaican theatre and the gendered colonial discourse on myal-based rituals, the process of myalisation takes on political overtones. Stella's questions about the source of the Revival drumming and Sister Kate's answer comes at a moment when Jamaican society is about to undergo a radical transformation. Many questions will be raised about the social and economic problems. Stella knows that there is something missing from her middle class life. From Sister Kate she learns that this void is filled by her African heritage. The process of myalisation is about the reclaiming and celebrating the power of this heritage to cure social ills.

African peoples of the Diaspora were increasingly becoming aware of political conflict and oppression in present day Africa. Activists and intellectuals like Marson, Garvey, James, and Cesaire were writing about a global black oppression in this period and making sure that their message reached the masses. Recognition of a spiritual and historically significant African heritage, as well as an allegiance to current political issues facing blacks worldwide, was beginning to dominate Black intellectual output and cultural production. Marson's play depicts the social and economic imbalance in Jamaican society and calls for great change. In the coming months, the island would erupt and experience lasting social and political shifts.

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<sup>222</sup> Marson, *Pocomania*, 16.

## CONCLUSION

*Pocomania* earns its reputation as the first Caribbean play of the twentieth century because it breaks with a long tradition of theatrical conventions from Europe and America, in particular the comic portrayals of blacks on stage.<sup>223</sup> It is the first full-length dramatic play to use Creole, situate lower class black characters in serious roles, and perform an illegal ritual. The play also utilizes a range of folk songs and dances on stage. The play demonstrates how and why the middle class engage in this illegal practice and the price they pay for it. To write and produce an unconventional play like *Pocomania* in the 1930s is an example of Marson's bold and pioneering nature. "It also publicly dramatized a conflict facing many middle-class black women. In this sense it represents a rupture with a dramatic scene dominated by an upper-class view of black working-class culture."<sup>224</sup> One of Marson's biographers writes of *Pocomania*,

This longer, more developed play, which used Jamaican songs and dances, fully integrated Jamaican culture into the dramatic interest, a major accomplishment. As Ivy Baxter... has commented in an unpublished 1982 interview, '*Pocomania* was a break in tradition because it talked about a cult from the country,' and, as such, it represented a turning point in what was acceptable on the stage.<sup>225</sup>

Each performance of myal-theatre facilitates a transportation of the actors and audience members during a performance. Myalisation occurs when these transportations happen frequently enough and consistently over time to transform the theatre space, performance aesthetic, and audience expectations.

The next chapter analyzes how playwright and school teacher Enid Chevannes utilized myal-based rituals and belief in her plays *Superstition* and *The Vision*. In these plays, she continued the process of myalisation that Marson began by producing significant dramatic works

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<sup>223</sup> Hill, *The Jamaican Stage*, 282.

<sup>224</sup> Ford-Smith, *Una Marson*, 6-7.

<sup>225</sup> *Twentieth-Century Caribbean and Black African Writers*, s.v. "Una Marson."

that explore Obeah and Afro-Jamaican belief around dreams and ancestors in order to acculturate audiences to this new genre of theatre in Jamaica.

CHAPTER FOUR  
ENID CHEVANNES' VISION OF JAMAICA

Playwright and director Enid Chevannes pushed middle class audiences to rethink their attitudes about Afro-Jamaican belief, gender, and class. Her body of work spoke to the feminist movement and political climate of the 1950s and early 1960s. Chevannes examined the construction of womanhood in the new nation in her plays, through which she simultaneously enacted a cultural shift from a Euro-creole theatrical tradition to an Afro-creole aesthetic.

In the 1950s, Jamaican theatre artists began to represent Afro-Jamaican culture on stage. The much loved actors Louise Bennett and Ranny Williams radically transformed the longstanding Euro-centric tradition of British pantomime on stage in Jamaica. They incorporated black characters and storylines, the use of the vernacular, and a wide range of folk forms, including Revival, to create a wildly popular Jamaican version of Pantomime that brought black audiences into the theatre, many for the first time.<sup>226</sup> Theatre artists and playwrights Errol Hill, Roderick Walcott and Derek Walcott began to write plays based on the lives of the Caribbean people. They consciously turned away from the longstanding tradition of producing British and American plays. These artists explored Afro-Jamaican folk forms on stage as a means of presenting a realistic portrayal of Caribbean life. Much of this work took place at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica in the mid-1950s, and later at Derek Walcott's Trinidad Theatre Workshop in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. For the first time, the Caribbean began to develop

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<sup>226</sup> Rex Nettleford, "Fifty Years of Pantomime," *Jamaica Journal* 24, no. 3 (February 1993): 2-9.

its own canon of dramatic literature. Hill collected these early plays and published them modestly as small booklets in 1955.<sup>227</sup>

Chevannes was one of the few women who participated in this artistic movement by creating and directing new work.<sup>228</sup> She played an integral role in the establishment of the Adult Drama Festival (ADF, later known as Festival) that began in 1955. Her presence and participation in Festival represents an important feminist voice in a male-dominated artistic political movement. She is a unique example of how women artists used the Jamaican stage to articulate their vision of the nation. She is representative of her middle-class audiences and yet is a minority among Caribbean theatre artists of this period. While her use of Afro-Jamaican folk forms is evident, she never fully embraces the beliefs and lifestyles of her lower class characters. Her plays typically end with her main characters retreating to the safety of the status quo and affirming middle class values.

In her plays *Root of Evil* (1956) and *Turned Tables* (1957), Chevannes demonstrates her overriding concern with class and gender. Lower-class women appear to possess commonsense knowledge, or “folk wisdom,” rooted in a strong sense of self and an Afro-Jamaican sensibility that enables them to correct the missteps and critique the attitudes of the Westernized middle class. While these two plays do not specifically explore Afro-Jamaican religion, the folk wisdom of her lower-class characters is derived from the African tradition in Jamaica. This Afro-Jamaican sensibility is also found in the oral tradition of Jamaican folk songs, riddles, proverbs, games, and poetry.<sup>229</sup> Chevannes utilizes this Afro-Jamaican sensibility to comment on middle-

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<sup>227</sup> Errol Hill, *Plays for Today* (Kingston, Jamaica: Longman Caribbean Writers, 1985), 15.

<sup>228</sup> Other women include Cicely Howland-Smith, Louise Bennett, and choreographer Ivy Baxter.

<sup>229</sup> See Olive Lewin’s *Rock it Come Over* and the extensive literary criticism of Louise Bennett, a pioneer in documenting Jamaican oral tradition and writing poetry in this tradition.

class values. As a member of the middle-class herself, however, Chevannes treads carefully as she critiques colonialist attitudes about gender without suggesting radical shifts in Jamaican understandings of gender roles, marriage, and class. She brings an Afro-Jamaican worldview to issues of class and gender, while creating an arena for her female characters to explore Jamaican womanhood and the new nation.

In *Superstition* (1961) and *The Vision* (1963), Chevannes presents a complex view of Afro-Jamaican spirituality. She exposes the ambiguity of the middle class regarding this newly celebrated aspect of national identity. Chevannes sets the limits of this national embrace by demonstrating how far the middle class is willing to go in its valorization of the poor through the performance of ritual. In these two plays, she articulates an acceptance of the misunderstood African presence in Jamaica: the death ritual nine night and the occurrences of visions. She expresses the reluctance of the middle class to fully recognize these Afro-Jamaican religious forms and yet, by restaging them in her plays, she advocates that they be acknowledged as part of Jamaica's national culture. This emerging nation, while reviving remnants of its African past, is fearful of its own preoccupation with these elements. *Superstition*, for example, categorically rejects popular belief in obeah. The middle class regards this spiritual tradition as a silly distraction of the poor. *The Vision* also speaks to this ambivalence, the embrace of some Afro-Jamaican religious forms and a rejection of others. The play serves as a cautionary tale for a society that she feels must be wise about how these ritual practices will function as tools for progress.

Like Una Marson, Chevannes explores the arenas in which women, Afro-Jamaican spirituality, madness, and social status intersect. In Chevannes' plays madness sometimes stands

in for belief in spiritual phenomenon; in others madness is set aside and belief in the power of ancestors is upheld.

This analysis of Chevannes' plays demonstrates how Chevannes continues the process of myalisation that Marson began with her play *Pocomania* in 1938. Chevannes' treatment of gender is as complex as her ambiguous stance on Afro-Jamaican belief systems. In *Superstition*, she upholds popular assumptions of gender roles that dictate that women take full responsibility for illegitimate children, and supports the notion that women are easily manipulated by rumors of obeah. In *The Vision*, she is subversive, rewriting the well-known legend of Mamby Park by making a woman the central character instead of the male figure Mamby. In the end, however, the male character gets most of the credit for achieving the happy ending and Chevannes retreats from her seemingly feminist agenda. Her moderate positions on gender issues, lower-class attitudes and Afro-Jamaican beliefs stem from her middle class and Christian background as well as her personal desire to maintain a middle class respectability that discouraged women from engaging in political forms of expression.

This chapter sheds light on the development of Jamaican theatre by analyzing four plays written, directed, and produced by Enid Chevannes: *Root of Evil*, *Turned Tables*, *Superstition*, and *The Vision*. Because so little is known about her life and her contribution to Jamaican theatre, it also includes a biography of Enid Chevannes' life as a mother, teacher, dramatist, social activist, and community organizer.

#### ENID CHEVANNES: UNSUNG ARTIST, TEACHER, AND ACTIVIST

Chevannes held the titles of founder, producer, director, playwright and president of her theatre company, *The Ivory Club*, from the 1950s through the 1970s. She was a schoolteacher

who was not politically outspoken but directed a company that contributed to the development of a Jamaican cultural identity.

She was born in 1914 as Enid Josephine Hope Duncanson in Kingston, Jamaica and was the last of four children. Her friends and family knew her as “Chevy.” She was a woman with a solid Christian background who “spent her life helping people.”<sup>230</sup> She was baptized and worshipped her whole life at the Coke Methodist church in downtown Kingston.

Chevannes was a teacher whose formal education ended with primary school. She did not attend high school or a teacher’s college as a young woman though later in life she attended high school and took the CXC exams. She taught at the Wesley School, a Methodist primary school, and directed several theatrical performances with her students. As a teacher, she created speech anthologies for her students to help them work on their enunciation.<sup>231</sup> Her dedication to training her students in “proper” speech is indicative of her role and the value her social class placed on a certain type of education. It reflects how Jamaican society aligned speech with education and the ability to accumulate wealth. “The Queen’s English” was necessary in securing a position in middle class Jamaican society. While Chevannes was committed to the task of training her students to maintain a certain class status, in *Root of Evil* and *Turned Tables* she critiques the nexus between wealth, education, and speech. In addition to her work as a teacher and her passion for theatre, Chevannes also taught domestic science evening classes at

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<sup>230</sup> Easton Lee, “Eulogy of Enid Chevannes,” Barbara Chevannes’ private collection, Kingston, Jamaica. Used with her permission.

<sup>231</sup> Barbara Chevannes, interview by Karima Robinson, Chevannes’ home in Kingston, Jamaica.

the Kingston Technical School in the 1950s. She was the president of the Teachers' Cooperative Co-op Credit Union Ltd. for twenty-one years.<sup>232</sup>

She was briefly married to Kenneth Chevannes, who worked for the Jamaica Railway. Shortly after their marriage, she gave birth to their daughter Barbara. Her husband forbade her to work once their daughter was born. They ended their marriage because of "a lack of affection between them" and because Kenneth wanted to move to England and Chevannes did not.<sup>233</sup> He elected to go to Liverpool, England, during the war, when many Jamaicans were migrating for better employment opportunities. Once he left, Chevannes resumed her career as a teacher. She taught at Alpha Primary, Holy Rosary Primary, and finally Wesley Primary until her retirement. Her daughter Barbara grew up to be Chevannes' lifelong companion, as Enid never remarried and Barbara never married or had children. Barbara worked as a librarian and was a participant in the Ivory Club. They lived in the same house together in St. Andrew for the remainder of Enid Chevannes' life.

Chevannes' work in the theatre began in 1951 when she founded The Ivory Club, also known as The Ivory Players. The group was comprised of young civil servants whose mission was to develop music, art, and literature in support of a Jamaican national identity. The Club's various cultural activities were planned for Thursday evenings at Chevannes' house in St. Andrew, where the backyard was utilized for drama rehearsals. The Club entered all of their productions in the Jamaica Adult Drama Festival.<sup>234</sup> In addition to Chevannes' own plays, the

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<sup>232</sup> Enid Chevannes' Curriculum Vitae at National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>233</sup> Easton Lee, "Eulogy of Enid Chevannes," Barbara Chevannes' private collection, Kingston, Jamaica. Used with her permission.

<sup>234</sup> Barbara Chevannes, interview by Karima Robinson, Chevannes' home in Kingston, Jamaica.

club performed popular American and British plays including *Crime in Reverse* by Evan Mathews and *The Bishop's Candlesticks* by Norman McKinnell.<sup>235</sup>

Among early dramatic productions were *The Queen's Ring*, *Room in the Tower* and *Of Thee I Sing*.

In addition to entering Howard Agg's *All On a Summer's Day* in the first Adult Drama Festival during Jamaica 300 [an event celebrating 300 years as a British colony], the group assisted in the national production of *The Tempest*, which was one of the finale events in the first Jamaica National Festival of Arts.<sup>236</sup>

The group as a whole had great comedic timing and looked for light material to perform for their audiences. Chevannes was a self-taught dramatist and director. She also acted in many of the club's performances. The group produced plays through the early 1970s.

Chevannes' dramatic writing included four plays, a Jamaican pantomime, and numerous contributions to a popular radio drama. Her Jamaican pantomime, *Camilla of the Great House*, was never performed. The series *Life in Hopeful Village*, was voted most popular radio program in 1966. She wrote several scripts for the program and she starred in it as Ms. Rita. Her daughter Barbara played Ms. Rita's daughter in the serial.<sup>237</sup> Chevannes prided herself on the fact that each one of her plays and radio dramas had at least one Jamaican folk scene, like the Market Scene in *Turned Tables*.<sup>238</sup> Theatre critics would later take issue with the inclusion of an obligatory folk scene in each of her plays. Indeed, her steadfast affirmation of middle-class values seems at cross purposes with the forced inclusion of folk material.

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<sup>235</sup> Enid Chevannes Scrapbook, Chevannes Manuscript Collection, Jamaican National Library.

<sup>236</sup> "Adult Drama Festival: Ivory Club Returns," *The Daily Gleaner*, August 6, 1960 in Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>237</sup> Chevannes, Interview.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

Chevannes received many awards in Jamaica for her creative work in drama, including the prestigious Musgrave Medal in 1966. *Root of Evil* and *Superstition* won awards for Best Comedy in the Adult Drama Festival, while *Turned Tables* was a runner-up in the 1957 festival. Chevannes was awarded a government travel grant in 1962. She traveled to New York and California in 1963 and attended the New York University Summer Drama Course.<sup>239</sup> Her play *The Vision* produced by The Ivory Club won the prestigious Bronze Musgrave Medal of Honor and the Centenary Medal from the Institute of Jamaica. Many of the actors in the play also won awards for their performances.<sup>240</sup> *The Vision* was produced during the independence celebrations in 1964. In 1980 Chevannes received The Centenary Medal in recognition of her contribution to cultural development in Jamaica in the field of drama and speech. She received the Prime Minister's Award of Appreciation for activities in the field of communication and culture in December 1983. In spite of these awards and the popularity of her plays, theatre critics did not value her contribution to Jamaican theatre and gave her plays mixed reviews at best. This may be why she has been omitted from Jamaican theatre history up to this point. Her gender and lack of formal training in theatre are other possible reasons why her work has not been adequately documented.

Chevannes was an active member of a number of theatre organizations in Jamaica, including the Jamaican Drama League, for which she served as secretary. In 1962 Chevannes became the Jamaica Festival Drama and Speech Coordinator, a position previously held by celebrated actress and poet Louise Bennett and later by poet and actor Easton Lee. She joined the Jamaican Festival office in 1968 and served there for ten years. Her responsibilities included

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<sup>239</sup> Curriculum Vitae of Enid Chevannes at National library of Jamaica

<sup>240</sup> Chevannes Manuscript Collection, the National Library of Jamaica.

conducting theatre training for teachers and drama groups and coordinating drama competitions in Festival. She contributed to the establishment of The Little Theatre and The School of Drama (now part of the Edna Manley School of the Performing Arts) in Kingston. Chevannes was largely responsible for the establishment of the Primary Schools Drama Festival in 1968.

After working at the Festival, she worked for Jamaican Movement for the Advancement of Literacy (JAMAL) at the East Street Day Center and served there for ten years.<sup>241</sup> The problem of adult illiteracy in Jamaica was enormous, with approximately 500,000 people, or between 40-50% of the population over the age of fifteen, functionally illiterate. In the early 1970s, Chief Minister Michael Manley addressed the problem of adult illiteracy by restructuring the National Literacy Program and establishing the JAMAL Foundation.<sup>242</sup> Chevannes used her skills as a seasoned teacher to teach adults to read and write.

In addition to her career as a teacher and theatre artist, beginning in 1955 Chevannes found time to collect clippings, photographs, articles, programs and other material related to drama and carefully preserved them in two large scrapbooks. This documentation has become a valuable source of the theatre of the period. “In a country which pays little attention to preserving our heritage, they will be invaluable indeed.”<sup>243</sup> These scrapbooks are currently housed at the National Library of Jamaica as part of the Chevannes Manuscript collection. They function as valuable source material for theatre historians. It was through this collection that I first became aware of Chevannes’ work as a theatre artist. A newspaper article buried in a large pile of articles marked “Theatre” at the University of the West Indies, Mona, in the West Indian

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<sup>241</sup> Chevannes Interview.

<sup>242</sup> *JAMAL*. A JAMAL Foundation Publication. Produced in collaboration with Media Skills, Ltd. Kingston, Jamaica. National Library of Jamaica. 29.

<sup>243</sup> Easton Lee, “Eulogy of Enid Chevannes,” 7.

Collection announced: “National Library of J’ca gets historic collection.”<sup>244</sup> The photo below the headline showed Barbara Chevannes handing her mother’s manuscript collection to John Aaron of the National Library of Jamaica.

The collection traces the development of theatrical institutions like the Little Theatre and the Creative Arts Center. Theatre historians Errol Hill and Wycliffe Bennett have used the collection for their own research and scholarship on Jamaican theatre. John Aarons, deputy director of the National Library said: “Enid Chevannes is one of Jamaica’s unsung heroes, and although she never sought recognition for her work, she will now, hopefully, get the recognition she deserves as her collection becomes available to more people.”<sup>245</sup> Indeed, her collection provided much of the primary material for this dissertation.

Later in life, Chevannes began to retire from many of her commitments. Close friend and fellow dramatist Easton Lee talked with her about her views on retirement. In his eulogy of Chevannes, he said:

Always she knew when it was time to retire. When we discussed retirement and future projects, she said ‘The old Chevy is running out of gas and is being replaced by Hondas and Izuzus.’ She said in her interview, ‘I am the most retired person. I retired from Alpha, from Wesley, from Festival.’<sup>246</sup>

One institution from which she never retired was the church where she grew up.

She was a lifelong member of the Coke Methodist Church on East Parade, located in downtown Kingston. She never abandoned the church despite the deterioration of the area that

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<sup>244</sup> “National Library of J’ca gets historic collection,” *The Daily Gleaner*, December 2, 1991, 16.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.* Aarons also said that the National Library would greatly benefit from other historic collections that many Jamaicans have in their possession. I agree with this sentiment, particularly with regard to the potential value of retrieving personal collections in order to reconstruct the history of women’s cultural production in the Caribbean.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

was eventually taken over by poverty and violent crime. The elderly knew her in her neighborhood and many came to her home for assistance of all kinds. She was a leader in the church for many years and was honored by the church when she retired from service. “Her final act was the writing of a script *The Making of a People* for a pageant to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Methodist Church in Jamaica.”<sup>247</sup> She completed this script in June of 1988, the year of her death.

She died at her home in Kingston while being treated for a heart condition. She was 74.<sup>248</sup> Funeral services were held at the Coke Methodist Church.<sup>249</sup> Easton Lee commented extensively on how she fulfilled her duty and commitment to nation building. His comments were drawn in part from an extensive interview with Chevannes on May 19, 1988, shortly before she died. He felt strongly that her life and work are significant to the history of Jamaica and that future generations would benefit from her words and thoughts. “She was a private person who shunned popularity and publicity.”<sup>250</sup> He made an agreement with her to publish the interview and send the tape to the national archives.<sup>251</sup> He concluded his eulogy with this:

We give thanks too for her contribution to Education and Theatre, and as performers recognize applause as their ultimate reward, I ask you to rise and give the grand lady of the Theatre and of Life, a standing ovation for a brilliant performance. And to borrow and adapt a quotation from that other great theatre personality ‘Good night dear lady and flights of angels sing thee to thy Rest. Amen.’<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Barbara Chevannes, interview by Karima Robinson at her home in Kingston, Jamaica, July 2001.

<sup>249</sup> “Mrs. Enid Chevannes dies at 74,” *The Weekend Star*, September 2, 1988.

<sup>250</sup> Easton Lee, Interview by Karima Robinson.

<sup>251</sup> Chevannes’ interview by Easton Lee had not yet been processed by the National Library of Jamaica at the time of my visit in 2003.

<sup>252</sup> Easton Lee, “Eulogy of Enid Chevannes,” Barbara Chevannes’ Private Manuscript Collection of Enid Chevannes, 10.

Easton Lee and Barbara Chevannes played a vital role in preserving her memory and assuring that future generations would acknowledge her contribution to the cultural development of Jamaica, for they worked together to ensure that Enid's collection of material on Jamaican theatre was carefully preserved at the National Library of Jamaica.

My analysis of her plays in the following sections is the first time her dramatic work has received serious consideration by a theatre historian. I demonstrate why her voice is an important one in the history of women's cultural production in Jamaica and in Jamaican theatre in particular. Enid Chevannes utilized the medium of theatre to articulate the significance of Jamaican women in the establishment of the new nation. Her early plays *Root of Evil* and *Turned Tables* address issues of class and gender and encourage her middle class audiences to question longstanding assumptions.

#### WOMEN, LADIES, AND CLASS IN *ROOT OF EVIL* AND *TURNED TABLES*

Chevannes' first two plays are a response to the newly endorsed Jamaican feminism promoted by the Jamaican Federation of Women. Her first play, *Root of Evil*, explores how sudden wealth corrupts a lower-class black couple as they navigate their way into middle class circles. The folk wisdom of their newly hired domestic servant saves the couple from divorce. I examine the relationship between the housewife, the domestic servant, and the husband and how women of two different classes negotiate the domestic sphere. Chevannes complicates the gendered role of the husband as the 'official' head of the household. Her second play, *Turned Tables*, raises questions about the role of women within marriage and demonstrates that to be a housewife is to have a legitimate occupation. I argue that Chevannes uses language and representations of rural Jamaican women to critique middle-class Jamaican constructions of

womanhood. These plays both support and challenge key assumptions about marriage and the imposition of Victorian notions of the housewife onto Jamaica women. I briefly examine the history of feminism in Jamaica in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to support my analysis of Chevannes' early plays.

Black women's participation in Marcus Garvey's UNIA in Jamaica (1927-1935), the Women's Liberal Club, and the Jamaica Federation of Women represent three eras of women's activism in Jamaica, the philosophy of each of which helps demonstrate how, at various times, black women viewed their social position. In the previous chapter on Una Marson, I discussed the significance of Garvey's movement for black women in Jamaica. Black middle class women like Amy Bailey and Una Marson, who had worked alongside Marcus Garvey's UNIA for the improvement of the black poor, later formed the Women's Liberal Club.<sup>253</sup>

Armed with the radical ideology of Marcus Garvey, many participated in the decolonization movement from the 1920s forward. As Linnette Vassel has shown, middle-class women used their pens to voice their opinions on a variety of issues that affected colonial Jamaica. Working-class women sought to empower themselves and gain independence from agricultural labor through land acquisition. They sent their children to school so that they could use education to achieve upward social mobility and enter the professions.<sup>254</sup>

In 1939, The Women's Liberal Club, comprised of working and middle class black women, aligned with the nationalist movement to lobby, with moderate success, to end discrimination against black women in the civil service and gain access to vocational education.

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<sup>253</sup> Una Marson was not a member of the Women's Liberal Club, but she did work with them on occasion and supported their efforts. She later formed The Jamaica Save the Children Organization with Amy Bailey.

<sup>254</sup> Verene A. Shepherd, "Image and Representation: Black Women in Historical Accounts of Colonial Jamaica" in *Stepping Forward: Black Women in Africa and the Americas*, ed. Catherine Higgs, Barbara A. Moss, and Earline Rae Ferguson (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002), 55. Linnette S. Vassel has written an extensive history of women's organizations in Jamaica and the Jamaica Federation of Women entitled *Voluntary Women's Associations in Jamaica: The Jamaica Federation of Women, 1944-1962*. (Jamaica: MA Thesis, University of the West Indies, February 1993).

In 1944, the Jamaica Federation of Women, largely composed of upper and middle-class white women, defined itself as apolitical and integrated the feminists of the Women's Liberal club into their organization. This was an important shift in the activism of black Jamaican women, who were viewed by the colonial regime as troublesome due to their involvement in large numbers in resistance movements and incidents of social unrest, particularly the rebellion of 1938.

The Jamaica Federation of Women, mostly comprised of the wives of top colonial officials, sought to redefine the goals of black women by focusing their attention on femininity instead of such political issues as the harsh labor conditions for women and the poor quality of life for black Jamaicans, as black women inspired by Garvey's movement had done. While the Women's Liberal Club had focused on improving working conditions for black women and increasing economic opportunities for them, the Jamaica Federation of Women encouraged black women to leave the workforce and depend on men for their livelihood.

The merger of these organizations succeeded in dampening the spirit of activism among black middle-class Jamaican feminists. In her essay, "Caribbean Women and Social Change," Honor Ford-Smith outlines the ways in which an indigenous feminism in Jamaica evolved from emancipation in 1838 to independence in 1962. This essay is useful in understanding how the European concept of the nuclear family became the dominant ideology in the Caribbean by the mid-twentieth century. Looking askance at the high numbers of black women in the labor force and large number of common-law marriages, the Moyne Commission after the 1938 rebellions had set about to encourage Jamaican women to become housewives and depend economically on

their husbands.<sup>255</sup> The Jamaican Federation of Women obliged by conducting mass marriages for black women, demanding child support from fathers as husbands, and discouraging political activism. By 1950, the Jamaica Federation of Women had succeeded in making the concept of the Jamaican housewife a reality.<sup>256</sup> With the feminist opinions of black middle class women in Jamaica harshly criticized, performance became one vehicle for women to address their issues, under the rubric of artistic expression without directly challenging the status quo.

Despite the efforts of conservative organizations like the Jamaica Federation of Women, many working-class women remained politically active and fought for their equality as black workers, but not as women, within leftist organizations. For middle-class women, however, activism was not the norm and was looked down upon. Chevannes, like Ivy Baxter, falls into the category of middle-class women who were not vocal about their political views but made their opinions known through a body of creative work.

Feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques the position of the “third world woman” within Western feminist scholarship as a monolithic subject born of colonial representations of “the Other,” who in this case is the “same but different.” Mohanty examines the subject of power and argues that the political nature of feminist scholarship must deal with the implications of situating third world women at the bottom of a power structure from which they are unable to extricate themselves. All too often these women are portrayed as “politically

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<sup>255</sup> Honor Ford-Smith, “Caribbean Women and Social Change Some Aspects of Our History,” in *A Caribbean Reader on Development*, ed. Judith Wadderburn and Hon. Don Mills (Kingston, Jamaica: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1986), 152-176.

<sup>256</sup> Ford-Smith, “Caribbean Women and Social Change,” 170-1.

immature women who need to be schooled in the ethos of Western feminism.”<sup>257</sup> I apply Mohanty’s critique of Western feminists to the feminist movement in Jamaica, where black Jamaican women were empowered by their participation in the anti-colonial movement. These women were later disempowered when they left those organizations to join the Jamaica Federation of Women, a group that presented women as a universal category. The Jamaica Federation of Women aimed to have white women lead black women out of their oppressive circumstances by removing them from the labor force and making them dependent on men.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the efforts of the Jamaica Federation of Women to make men financially responsible for their children by conducting mass marriages and imposing the western ideal of the nuclear family was viewed by women—white and black—as a positive step for Jamaican women.<sup>258</sup> In the 1970s however, when Caribbean women observed the feminist movement in America, they harshly critiqued the work of the Jamaica Federation of Women for imposing the Victorian construction of housewife onto Jamaican women, removing them in large numbers from the workforce, and making them dependent on men.<sup>259</sup> In my examination of Enid Chevannes’ plays, I reveal how she used the theatre to critique a Jamaican feminism born of colonial policy. My analysis of theatrical performance will reveal how Chevannes resisted Western models of womanhood that were being imposed on black Jamaican women.

Chevannes’ first play, *The Root of Evil*, a comedy written in 1956, is the story of a lower class couple, Nathaniel and Elizabeth Poordom, who suddenly strike it rich when they win \$100,000 from the lottery. Their newly found wealth provides Elizabeth with the capital she

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<sup>257</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 51-58.

<sup>258</sup> Clark, xxiii.

<sup>259</sup> Honor Ford Smith, interview by Karima Robinson, at her home in Kingston, Jamaica, July 2001.

needs to finally propel her husband and herself into middle class Jamaican society. Nathaniel, a hard working and devoted husband, allows his incredibly controlling wife to manage their finances and make all of the major decisions in the household. At a celebration party for the couple's new fortune, male co-workers encourage Nathaniel to attend night school in order to learn to "talk properly."

Joe: You know well that Nat can't manage him wife. It's the worse thing when a man mek him wife feel that she better than him.

Nat: That's not it but you see, Lizzie is well educated. She pass exam and I didn't pass anything so more or less a take advice from her. [...]

Jim: Nat take my advice and go to night school. [...]

Joe: [...] Now you have money you can go to a private teacher and make him teach you how to talk properly. That's all you want. You have commonsense[,] you only want learn to talk properly.

Nat: You know how long a wanted to do that thing but I always feel like a too big.<sup>260</sup>

The assumption here is that gaining a higher level of education would allow him to regain control of the household and become the proper 'head of the house.' These working-class men view education as a tool, not for gaining knowledge, but for speech and power in the home.

The use of Jamaican speech on stage was still a contested theatrical device in this period. It was only in the late 1940s that Ranny Williams and Louise Bennett began to appear in Jamaican pantomimes and popularize the use of Jamaican speech on the proscenium stage in Kingston. Theatre historian Wycliff Bennett writes about speech in Jamaican theatre:

As in England, 'received pronunciation' had become more than a badge of social distinction: it was often regarded as the unmistakable sign of a good education.... Insofar as the theatre was concerned, you could not expect to be cast in a play that

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<sup>260</sup> Enid Chevannes, *The Root of Evil*, 5. Unpublished script cited with permission of the author's daughter, Barbara Chevannes.

required ‘good’ or ‘standard’ speech, as some organizers then incorrectly called it, if the director felt that your utterance did not belong. ‘Good’ speech became one of the hallmarks of privilege.<sup>261</sup>

Chevannes’ contrasting use of Jamaican speech and Standard English in her plays enabled her to critique the ways in which society attributed knowledge to one’s level of education or accumulation of wealth.

In the next scene in *The Root of Evil*, Nathaniel has enrolled in school, but throughout the rest of the play Elizabeth rudely corrects his speech and finds fault with all of his former habits. She insists that they must ‘put on airs’ if they are to truly find a place for themselves among middle-class Jamaicans. Elizabeth insists on several changes to their lifestyle, most notably that Nathaniel quit his job as a shop worker, that they hire a domestic servant and purchase new clothes and other expensive household items in order to demonstrate their wealth to the neighbors. These new changes are also necessary in order for the community to distinguish them from their new maid, who is of their former class.

Their domestic servant Maizie, recommended to them by the Labor Office, is more than Elizabeth bargained for. Upon entry into the home, Maizie mistakes Elizabeth for a market woman from her parish. This and other comments by Maizie frustrate Elizabeth terribly as she struggles to separate herself from the image of the downtown Jamaican “woman” and remake herself into an “uptown lady.”

Anthropologist Gina Ulysse discusses this dichotomy in her article, “Uptown Ladies and Downtown Women.” She explains that this duality is a Victorian product reinforced by the

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<sup>261</sup> Wycliff Bennett, “Theatre and the English We Speak,” *Jamaica Journal* 22, no.3 (Aug.-Oct. 1989): 24.

British to facilitate hegemonic rule. “Though distinctions between the Creole and the British were especially recognized by travelers, all the white females were ladies and black females were women or girls.”<sup>262</sup> As Jamaica moved closer to independence, upper class ‘brown’ Jamaican women were included in the term ‘lady,’ while lower class black women maintained the status of ‘woman.’ In *The Root of Evil*, Elizabeth attempts to remake herself in the image of the lady with the following criteria, as outlined by Ulysse.

A lady is, by definition, educated and refined. She should always be a wife. Her status derives from matrimony and the extent to which she is devoted to her husband and family. Other characteristics ascribed to her include the femininity that she exudes: diminutive size and unobtrusive manner, high heels and exquisite grooming, soft voice and careful diction.<sup>263</sup>

Maizie, instead of obeying Elizabeth’s commands, is entirely too casual with the couple. She does not take orders from Elizabeth, but Maizie dictates what types of work she will and will not do. She also informs the couple of what types of food she will and will not cook and exactly how much vacation and sick time she has the right to according to the Labor Office. By the end of this scene it is clear, as Nathaniel comments, that Elizabeth has finally met her match.

In scene four, six months later, the couple’s fortune is running out. Elizabeth is having an affair with Alex Smart, the son of Nathaniel’s old boss, whom she met at the celebration six months earlier. Elizabeth has been giving Alex money to start a business that she hopes to benefit from as his soon-to-be-wife, once her plans to divorce Nathaniel are realized. Their newly found financial difficulties force Nathaniel to abandon his educational goals and fire the maid. Elizabeth insists that Nathaniel join the country club and network there to find a

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<sup>262</sup> Gina Ulysse, “Uptown Ladies and Downtown Women: Female Representations of Class and Color in Jamaica” in *Representations of Blackness and the Performance of Identities*, ed. Jean Muteba Rahier (Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin and Garvey, 1999) 149.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

respectable job. He retorts that he does not have anything in common with “those people” and that he was comfortable with his old job.

In an exchange between Maize and Nathaniel, Maize tells him that he must stand up to Elizabeth because as a man he should rule the household. Later Elizabeth enters and announces that she is leaving Nathaniel, not to marry Alex, but out of shame. Elizabeth has stolen all of the couple’s money and been dumped by Alex for a wealthier woman. She is so ashamed that she feels that she must abandon her marriage to Nathaniel out of fear that he will never be able to forgive her.

Throughout the play Nathaniel is repeatedly encouraged to “wear the pants” in the house, which he never does, for even at his most angry and in his final bit of dialogue, he is irritated at best.

Nat: You know Elizabeth this money has opened my eyes to a lot of things. I knew you have always wanted to hob nob with your betters but I never thought you would stoop so low as to buy such *friendship*. [...] Do you think Alex Smart or ‘Smart Alex’ as we call him at the shop would have looked at you twice if you did not have money?

Eliz: Oh Nat I know that now—but I was such a fool—a fool.

Nat: Not only a fool Elizabeth but a disappointment. Excuse me. (He moves angrily pausing at the door).<sup>264</sup>

Elizabeth planned to divorce Nathaniel because he could not fit into her new lifestyle. Alex plays a similar trick on her by using marriage to gain status and not love. After Nathaniel leaves, Maize attempts to console Elizabeth and help her save her marriage. Maize suggests that she offer Nathaniel a sincere apology and remind him of their vow to remain together for better or worse. In an abrupt and conveniently happy ending, Nathaniel forgives Elizabeth off stage and

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<sup>264</sup> Enid Chevannes, *The Root of Evil*, 18. Emphasis mine.

Maize is able to remain their domestic servant in spite of the couple's impoverished state. Maizie's reward for helping to save the marriage, through prayer and advice, is also a more casual relationship with the couple and an extra Sunday off. Maizie praises Nathaniel as a blessed man and the ideal husband. In a final commentary by Maize, she states that in spite of the fact that money is the root of evil, and appears to be the cause of the couple's problems, she still prays to have it one day.

This conclusion raises the question: what is the ideal Jamaican husband? Nathaniel's final dialogue can be read in two ways. The first is that he never really wears the pants, but instead opts to abandon the marriage until he is convinced to do otherwise by Elizabeth. The other is that Nathaniel has finally spoken to Elizabeth in proper English without being prodded to do so. At this moment, he finally gains the upper hand over Elizabeth and his months of night school pay off. This second reading would justify Maizie's praise of Nathaniel as the ideal husband because he has finally demonstrated a type of power over his wife through education. In the end he makes the final decision on the future of their marriage.

One other problem with the swift conclusion of the play is that the troubles of the marriage are glossed over, or ignored all together. Elizabeth's betrayal of Nathaniel happens on three levels. The acknowledged betrayal of the loss of the couple's wealth to Alex Smart is financial and likely sexual. It is clear that if Alex had not rejected Elizabeth, she would not have regretted her betrayal because it would have benefited her. It is because she "invested" the money in Alex and the hope of "marrying up," that she is forced to return to Nathaniel and admit her guilt. Her tears of shame are because at that moment she has neither money nor status, and may lose her marriage to Nathaniel. Her sexual and emotional betrayals of Nathaniel in order to

move up in society are overlooked or forgiven. Nathaniel, not having witnessed the earlier, passionate on-stage kiss between Elizabeth and Alex, presumptively misnames Elizabeth's affair as "friendship." Maizie, who admires his ability to be sympathetic to Elizabeth's plight, later praises Nathaniel's apparent blindness and his willingness to forgive. Elizabeth stands to lose all social status by forfeiting her position as wife. Based on what we know about Elizabeth, this loss would be a fate worse than death and one from which Nathaniel rescues her. In *Root of Evil*, Elizabeth fails, despite being married and even obtaining a nest egg, to become a middle class housewife.

Critics enjoyed Chevannes' first play and encouraged her to write more for the theatre. "*The Root of Evil* is a good comedy, light, with good dialogue sensibly written by Enid Chevannes. The play was carefully produced with some amount of attention to detail. But, occasionally, the pace was allowed to slacken."<sup>265</sup> In all reviews of her plays, critics comment on technical aspects of her writing and directing that need improvement. In Chevannes' second play, the middle-class housewife abandons her post to make a point to her husband.

In *Turned Tables* (1957), Madge, a frustrated housewife and mother, struggles to teach her spoiled teenaged children, Philip and Elsie, discipline, hard work, and responsibility. Madge's husband Henry undermines her efforts as a mother and devalues her contribution to the home as a housewife by repeatedly remarking that Madge's "job" is simply to "relax." In the first scene of the play, wife and husband have a bitter exchange about the children's behavior. Instead of punishing the children as Madge suggests, Henry insists that he and the children celebrate their carefree attitude by going to the beach for the day, while Madge remains at home

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<sup>265</sup> "Archie Lindo Reviews St. Andrew Drama Finals: Some Good Acting," August 1964, Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, from National Library of Jamaica.

to prepare their lunch. Madge decides to teach her family a lesson once and for all. At the end of the scene, she packs a suitcase and leaves to visit her mother for a month. She suggests that Henry take a vacation from work to relax with the children. Henry takes Madge's note in stride and takes up the challenge of managing the household. Henry believes that the housewife lives a life of leisure. The Jamaican Federation of Women (JFW) supported women's move out of the workforce and into the home, where they were financially dependent on men and lost all decision-making power. Chevannes' narrative supports the Jamaica Federation of Women's mission of legitimizing the role of the housewife in Jamaica.

In scene three, sixteen year old Elise asks her eighteen year old brother Philip for his male opinion of her adolescent figure. Elise suggests that her measurements are perfect according to a local magazine, with her bust 20-in., waist 18-in., and hips 20-in. She compares her figure to women in a recent Miss Jamaica contest. Young Philip retorts:

Well, all I can say is, I prefer the imperfect ones. Because some scrawny, underfed, frustrated spinster can't make a living any other way, she measures herself and puts down the result as being ideal and you poor little nitwits starve yourselves into becoming like her and more often than not you end up like her—a miserable old maid.<sup>266</sup>

One could argue that young Philip is wise beyond his years. Through him, Chevannes comments that the constructed nature of the image of beauty to which Elise aspires reflects the changing attitudes regarding the inclusion of black women in the recent Miss Jamaica beauty contests.

Black beauty in Jamaica had been a contested issue for a number of years leading up to the 1955 "Ten Types: One People" beauty contest.

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<sup>266</sup> Enid Chevannes, *Turned Tables*, 6. Unpublished script cited with the permission of the author's daughter. Chevannes Manuscript Collection at the National Library of Jamaica.

The fact that Jamaica's earliest black feminists rallied against the exclusion of women of color from the contest—rather than the patriarchal structure of the pageant itself—reminds us that the struggle for black women everywhere to be recognized as women, as feminine subjects, is not, as Nancy Caraway puts it, simply “derived from vanity...but is a crucial component of a larger collective effort at self definition.”<sup>267</sup>

In 1955, the first of five “ten types” competitions took place in Jamaica. The contest identified ten distinct racial types on the island and allowed women of all shades to compete for the various titles like that of Miss Ebony, Miss Sandalwood (for women of Indian descent), Miss Lotus (for women of Chinese descent) and every shade in between. This commentary by Chevannes in 1956 in the guise of young Philip in *Turned Tables* is an affirmation of this opportunity for the inclusion of women of color in beauty contests that had previously been exclusively the domain of white women in Jamaica. While black women were included in the contest, they still had to adhere to European standards of beauty and they were judged by their tall and slender frames. Historian Verene A. Shepherd discusses the image of black women in colonial writing in Jamaica in relation to the problem of skin bleaching in the late 1990s in Jamaica. Shepherd cites Lifestyle Editor for *The Jamaica Gleaner*, Barbara Ellington.

In another article, Barbara Ellington, pointing to the tendency in Jamaica to select Caucasian-featured women to represent the island at international beauty pageants, commented that “for too long we [black Jamaicans] have allowed standards of beauty to be dictated by white society.” She added that “the brainwashing that short hair, dark skin, thick lips and flat noses are ugly, has taken root and many people do not like what they see in the mirror,” using creams and other strategies to attain a more white European look.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Natasha B. Barnes, “Face of the Nation: Race, Nationalisms and Identities in Jamaican Beauty Pageants,” *Massachusetts Review* (Autumn-Winter 1994): 476.

<sup>268</sup> Verene A. Shepherd, “Image and Representation: Black Women in Historical Accounts of Colonial Jamaica,” in *Stepping Forward: Black Women in Africa and the Americas* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002), 44-56.

Chevannes' character of young Philip in the 1950s criticizes his sister's gullibility and insists that European standards must be revised to fit the body types of Jamaican women, as would Ellington four decades later. In this scene, Chevannes attacks the reluctance of middle class Jamaicans to embrace their blackness.

In the next scene, Chevannes' critique of the constructions of Jamaican womanhood shift from the terrain of beauty pageants to the very definitions of womanhood and class in Jamaica. In the market scene, Henry and daughter Elsie attempt to do the grocery shopping. Upon arrival, they find that the market women have mistaken them for a romantic couple, instead of father and daughter. Elsie is immediately considered a loose woman and accused of "playing house" with an older man who has not married her. Here the market women contest Jamaican constructions of women and ladies in Jamaican society. After Elsie attempts to ask about how peas are sold, the women comment that this is common knowledge. When Henry attempts to rephrase the question on Elsie's behalf, he refers to her as a lady. The women mock his use of the term lady in reference to an unmarried woman.

1<sup>st</sup> Hig., Lize: Lady? Eh He (She laughs) Lady? Si ya massa, Lady enna drawing room ya sah.

Henry: (With dignity) All right madam. She is a lady as far as I'm concerned.

1<sup>st</sup> Hig., Lize: Mi a lady to. In fack mi more lady dan she for mi marid. She no even 'av the decency fi wear a ring an pose se she marid to you. Meck you no buy one ring a Wulworte so put it on pon per finga. It woulda look betta.<sup>269</sup>

Henry and Elsie are dumbfounded by the higgler's assumption of them as an unmarried couple, and that the higgler is more of a lady than Elsie. In their discussion of the class qualifications of ladies as opposed to women, the market women comment:

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<sup>269</sup> Enid Chevannes, *Turned Tables*, 8.

1<sup>st</sup> Hig. Lize: Missis you see me trial? De ooman come look pan me like washa ooman a look pan dutty bungle. Den come ask me say ‘ow peas sell. Me tell ‘er sey every bady know sey peas sell by de quart. Das all me say. De ‘ol mampala man a come de tell me say me talk to the lady so. [...] De man ‘ol like Metuselah dem ‘av dis lily gal a walk roun’ and tell people say she a lady.<sup>270</sup>

In addition to the belittling the “couple” receives from the higglers, their shopping is further complicated by the fact that certain foodstuffs are “married” to each other, meaning that two items must be sold as a pair. This is a new concept to Henry and Elsie and the market women refuse to sell the potatoes without the bananas. The couple leaves the market in despair, without the necessary items to prepare their next meal. From then on, the term “marriage” becomes one to be avoided by all members of the family, who all end up accidentally raising it in conversation.

Aside from a few cooking disasters, the family really learns their lesson from the market women and their inability to negotiate this woman-centered sphere. The market women turn the tables on the middle-class husband and daughter by altering definitions of womanhood that have been handed down to them. The absent wife, Madge, forces Henry and young Elsie out of the private realm of the home and into a public arena controlled by lower-class women. The higglers break down the divisions between notions of public and private spheres (with lower class women belonging to the public realm and upper class women being of the private) by publicly declaring that sixteen year old Elsie is not a lady by their standards because she is not married and because she is not familiar with the most basic of domestic matters. In this setting, Henry understands Madge’s role as a proper lady who has the ability to negotiate this space in a way that he and Elsie cannot. Arguably, Chevannes’ portrayal of a lady here is flawed. In *The*

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 9.

*Root of Evil*, Elizabeth must hire a maid in order to establish herself as a housewife, while Madge in *Turned Tables* is a housewife who does not have a maid to do her shopping and housework for her. I believe that Chevannes makes this choice in order to force her upper class characters into direct contact with lower-class women.

While Madge is away, Cora Green, a noisy neighbor, pays the family an unexpected visit. Cora, known as the neighborhood gossip, makes a sexual advance toward Henry and offers to help with the housework in Madge's absence. She becomes a threat to the marriage, as she is ready to fill Madge's shoes as lover to Henry, housewife, and mother. Cora makes this "offer" to Henry at the moment when he is finally fed up with trying to maintain the household and discipline his disobedient children. Madge returns in time to witness Cora's advance on Henry. Madge swiftly regains control of her household by throwing Cora out and demanding an explanation from Henry. He manages to explain away the incident and follow it with a clear appreciation of Madge's role in the family as a housewife and mother.

Ironically, Madge teaches Henry a lesson by leaving him to the ridicule of the market women. His profound inability to negotiate that space makes him appreciate his wife as a true lady. Henry recognizes that Madge can communicate and earn the respect of the downtown women, in part because of her status as a wife. In this play it is the housewife and the market women who turn the tables on this middle-class family by reversing gendered roles in the family and by challenging societal definitions of womanhood.

Critics responded to *Turned Tables* with mixed reviews.

"Turned Tables" is a domestic comedy with nothing very new in idea or approach....

It provides, too, the occasional comic line and laughter and there is a bright market scene. Other than that, its best aspects, both from acting and character-writing, hinge on the village gossip, Cora Green, very well played by Joyce Logan, who finds herself at the other end of the scale in the final scene.<sup>271</sup>

One reviewer compares the 1963 production with an earlier production in 1957.

“Turned Tables” has been premiered some years ago and still retained a number of good easy jokes in the script, no matter that they lay along well worn lines. ...

Unfortunately, on this particular occasion, Chevannes as director left the cast to fend for itself unduly and collected in return a conspicuous lack of vitality in the playing. The dialogue really isn’t important enough to have every word given equal weight—that is when it could be heard--; the fun lies in the situations. No subtle piece, the players needed to find the key punches and belt them home.<sup>272</sup>

As with *Root of Evil*, reviewers find Chevannes’ work funny, but not sophisticated and lacking in its technical execution. While her comedic timing cannot be denied, critics will become even harsher with Chevannes in response to her later plays, *Superstition* and *The Vision*.

In *Root of Evil* and *Turned Tables*, Chevannes addresses the issues of class, gender and domesticity at a critical moment in Jamaica’s feminist movement. In her last plays *Superstition* and *The Vision*, she addresses the relationship between gender and Afro-Jamaican belief in Jamaica at the moment just before and after independence. In all of her plays women stand center stage and speak with authority to men, upper-class women and middle-class audiences about their vision of the new nation.

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<sup>271</sup> Archie Lindo, “Ivory Club’s plays: Domestic Affair and A Look Into The Past,” written in the fall of 1963. Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, in National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>272</sup> Norman Rae, “Ivory Club Plays Double Bill,” *The Daily Gleaner*, September 10, 1963. Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, in National Library of Jamaica.

‘IS WHY OONOO SO DARK AND SUPERSTITIOUS’:

QUESTIONING AFRO-JAMAICAN BELIEF<sup>273</sup>

play *Superstition* (1961) questions Jamaicans who believe in Obeah and, by necessity, its spiritual antithesis, Myal. Chevannes’ representation reflects her religious views as a Methodist and the ambivalence with which she dramatizes this marker of Jamaican culture on stage. She upholds the standard black middle-class perception that Obeah is foolishness. She instructs her middle-class audiences that, while they look down on some Afro-Jamaican religious forms like obeah, others like nine night, should be honored. Chevannes participates in the myalisation of Jamaican theatre by performing these forms on stage within the context of a community struggling with fears of spinsterhood. *Superstition* is, therefore, an example of myal-theatre because the context for Obeah and nine night are performed in addition to the nine night ritual itself. Chevannes’ abrupt and surprising ending reveals her uncertainty about removing the taboo surrounding Obeah.

*Superstition* examines the danger posed to women in a small middle-class rural community because of their belief in obeah. The initial cause for the suspicion of obeah is Imogene Jennings’s desire to see her grown daughter Wilhemina married before the community labels her an old maid. The play opens with Imogene coming to discuss an important matter with her long-time friend Jane Avrite, played by Chevannes.<sup>274</sup> Imogene claims that her daughter Wilhemina is pregnant and that Jane’s son Altiman (Alty) is the baby’s father.

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<sup>273</sup> Quote from Alty in Chevannes’ *Superstition* in *West Indian Plays For Schools*, Vol. II, (Kingston, Jamaica: Publishing House, 1979), 6. Chevannes’ glossary following her published version of *The Vision* indicates the meaning of UNOO as “you: for Ibo unu, you (plural). Various spellings: ono, onoo, oonoo, onnoo, oona, uno, unoo, unno, uni, una, with consequent infinitesimal changes in pronunciation from person to person,” 83.

<sup>274</sup> Enid Chevannes played Jane Avrite in *Superstition*, Theatre Programmes Collection, National Library of Jamaica.

Imogene's accusation and Alty's subsequent denial ignites a firestorm of counter-accusations and fears about Imogene seeking revenge by using Obeah against Alty. The seemingly promiscuous bachelor Alty is already engaged to Mr. Wilkin's daughter, Tiny, but news of Wilhemina's pregnancy destroys the possibility of marriage. Interestingly, his mother and his sisters, Sarah and May, do not believe Alty's denial of the accusation. They fear that harm will come to him from Obeah set in motion by Imogene, the pregnant Wilhemina, or Tiny's family who had been planning the wedding. In any case, Jane does not have the financial resources to consult a myal-man (or myal-woman) and pay to have her son "protected" from the evil force(s) of Obeah that will likely descend upon her son. She even considers the possibility of selling the plot of land left to her by her deceased husband to send Alty to England to protect him from Obeah.

Imogene's pregnancy is a surprise to his family, who was unaware that she and Alty were dating. They cite his secretive nature as the reason that they did not know. They never consider that Imogene or Wilhemina might not be telling the truth about the pregnancy or the identity of the baby's father.

All of the women's reactions to this news betray the high status enjoyed by men and the low evaluation of women who engage in sex before marriage. His two sisters in their late teens or early twenties,<sup>275</sup> along with their mother Jane, discuss Alty's behavior as consistently irresponsible, lazy, and spoiled because of his gender. The sisters bicker with each other, often generating comic relief, as May blurts out inappropriate comments and Sarah scolds her. May is highly critical of her brother, who gets away with doing no housework and little fieldwork.

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<sup>275</sup> The text and program booklet do not specify their ages.

Sarah, the oldest child, maintains some sense of order and peace in the household between the turbulent personalities of Alty and May. The sisters immediately understand that Alty will not marry Imogene or make any financial contribution to her household, yet they have no sympathy for her as a soon-to-be-single mother. Alty's mother, however, believes that Sarah and May should care for the child, since Alty is unwilling to do so. The accused Alty is absent for most of this scene.

Later, Alty's fiancé, Tiny, pays a visit. The sisters comfort her and assure her that Alty is not the father of Wilhemina's child. They all vow to make an effort to prevent the accusation from getting to Tiny's father, Mr. Wilkin. Jane and the sisters consider the consequences of Alty's actions, negotiate visits from Imogene and Tiny, discuss how to protect him from Obeah, and manage rumors in the community during his absence.

The sisters' lack of sympathy for Imogene stems from the fact that there are many single mothers in the area who struggle financially without help from their fathers. The sisters quickly accept the assumption that Alty's role in the child's life is entirely up to his discretion.

Anthropologist Edith Clark, in her famous 1957 study *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, explains how Jamaican children were trained in the home about their kinship responsibilities. This is what she says about male children.

...he receives no education as to his duty as a father. He accepts from his elders the dictum that children are a woman's concern and that there need be no avoidance of procreation until such a time as he is in a position to fulfill the natural obligations of husband and father. Nothing in his own experience has enabled him to learn the meaning of the paternal relationship, nor has the society helped by example or precept.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Edith Clark, *My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Families in Three Selected Communities of Jamaica*, (Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago: The Press University of the West Indies, 1957), 124.

Alty lives up to many of the assumptions about male children in the Caribbean, in that they are not taught to feel a sense of obligation to other family members with the possible exception of their mother.

It is established early in the play that Jane has a heart condition and that the stress of these latest developments is not good for her health. The family anticipates the effects of Obeah from Imogene, Wilhemina's mother. Later that evening, Jane is heard offstage screaming and then falling to the ground unconscious. The children bring her in from outside and rub her head with bay rum. She awakens briefly and speaks.

Jane: Just what I expect. A was coming out of de kitchen. A feel somebody sprinkle water pan me. A call out, den a feel de heat an see light come straight fi me an pop pan me foot. A done fa now! Imo you win, you win! De lick come fi Alty but me get it. Never min, better me dan him. Sarah tek the baby, tek Wilhel baby. (She whispers something to Sarah and falls back in the bed).<sup>277</sup>

The scene ends after Jane collapses. In the next scene we learn that she died believing that she was attacked by a duppy (evil spirit) sent to harm Alty. The "attack" consisted of liquid sprinkled on her body, followed by the sensation of heat and light.

Jane's account is affirmed the next day when Miss Addie, their neighbor, visits and says that she witnessed the attack. Addie states that she saw a man lingering outside of Jane's home the previous night. She testifies about her own spirit possession and the sound of Jane's screams.

Addie: Him tall, tall and him had on a black suit. A couldn't see him face for him back was turn to me, but a say to meself, is which man so tall a go look fe Aunt Jane, an right away I feel a heat come down pan me and me head grow. A say, "Yes bwoy, dis is it" A bawl out too soon, too soon, three time; then I cut the unknown tongue pan him. Same time a turn inside. A wasn't in there five minutes when a hear Aunt Jane bawl out and scream, and I say is not a soul but that man frighten Aunt Jane.

Sarah: Him ever only frighten her but him box her, for when I go outside she was

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<sup>277</sup> Enid Chevannes, *Superstition*, 5. Personal collection of Barbara Chevannes.

holding her jaw.<sup>278</sup>

In Addie's account she saw the figure of a man she did not recognize and felt the sensation of heat followed by the feeling of her "head growing."<sup>279</sup> Addie spoke in an unknown tongue as an unconscious response to the stranger.

Both Addie and Jane's testimonies suggest a spiritual experience in which they were both overcome by a duppy. The fact that Jane seems to have suffered a blow suggests that this incident was not just a figment of her and Addie's imagination. Alty dismisses both of their accounts. He blames his mother's death on heart problems and faults his sisters for their silly superstitious beliefs. The audience knows that something happened outside of the house that night that affected both women, and likely resulted in Jane's death, but her pre-existing heart condition gives the skeptics like Alty an alternative explanation.

The various explanations of death—heart attack, a blow, or a duppy—are hard to evaluate without an understanding of Afro-Jamaican spirituality. Zora Neale Hurston in her 1938 ethnographic study of Jamaica and Haiti, *Tell My Horse*, documents the Jamaican understanding of a duppy and explains why Jamaicans believe the nine-night ritual must be performed to placate it. Hurston recounts the words of her informant:

...That is the duppy, and that is the most powerful part of any man. Everybody has evil in them, and when a man is alive, the heart and the brain controls him and he will not abandon himself to many evil things. But when the duppy leaves the body, it no longer has anything to restrain it and it will do things more terrible than any man ever dreamed of. It is not good for a duppy to stay among living folk. The duppy is much too powerful and is apt to hurt people all the time. So we make nine night to force the duppy to stay in his grave.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>279</sup> In 2003, I heard accounts in Jamaica of the preliminary stages of spirit possession. People speak of feeling as though their head were growing.

<sup>280</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (New York: Harper and Row, 1938), 59.

Hurston's informant explains that the duppy is the spirit of a dead person who has not been properly put to rest and/or adequately appeased by a nine night ritual. Duppies will wander aimlessly, causing havoc in people's lives and can be used by Obeah practitioners to carry out evil. When describing Jane's attacker, both Jane and her neighbor Addie believed that the strange man was a duppy who had been mobilized by Obeah and sent to harm Alty.

As the sisters plan the nine night for their mother Jane, Alty denounces the ritual as an event fueled by the community's desire for gossip about the deceased. The sisters insist that the nine night will actually prevent further gossip and speculation. In the following exchange, May acknowledges the role of gossip as partial motivation for the ritual and blames Alty for their mother's death.

Alty: But what oonoo bothering wid any nine night fa? Mamie dead and gone.

Sarah: You think we could have somebody so near and dear to us and don' have a nine night. So mek people chat us and laugh after us.

Alty: Then is Imogene and Wilhel you trying to please?...

May: Yes! (Alty kisses teeth) You can suck you teeth as you like. You should be the last one to suck you teeth for is you cause it.

Alty: Me cause what!

May: You cause Mamie fi dead. Is you Imogene send the duppy for and mamie get the lick.

Alty: (Surprised) Is so oonoo have it a talk. Is what do oonoo eh? Don't the doctor say Mamie heard did bad and as the wild pine shake down on her head and the peeny wally fly past her she got frighten and her heart fail her. Is why oonoo so dark and superstitious. Is a pity oonoo too old to get into Government education plan.<sup>281</sup>

Alty's rhetorical question to his sisters is one that Chevannes poses to the nation. She asks: Why do we believe in Obeah and what purpose does this belief serve? Linguist and cultural historian

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<sup>281</sup> Enid Chevannes, *Superstition*, 6. *Unoo* means you (plural).

Mervyn Alleyne explains the delicate negotiation of Jamaicans caught in between Euro-centric and Afro-centric world views.

The cultural history of Jamaica is one in which people's lives may be said to be in a constant struggle to maintain the deep heritage in the face of the onslaught of disorder and disarray in the Jamaican society brought about by slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism under the guise of modernization.<sup>282</sup>

Chevannes also faces this same struggle as she advocates for celebration of these beliefs. Yet at the same time, her strong Christian and colonial upbringing encourages her to shun them. Her middle-class audiences are engaged in the same struggle to acknowledge the role of Obeah and nine night in Jamaican society and their African origins, while responding to Western influences, which suggest that these practices have no value.

Alty rejects his sister's belief in an Afro-Jamaican worldview and opts for a Eurocentric explanation. Because the sisters have chosen not to believe the medical explanation and blame Alty and Obeah instead, he responds with: "Is why oonoo so dark and superstitious." Alty's use of the term dark in reference to Obeah suggests that Obeah is the darker side of Myal and that it is part of a primitive African belief system that is inherently inferior to the symbolic whiteness and purity of Christianity. Alty's constant refusal to consider that Obeah is a possibility in the death of his mother allows him to reject any personal responsibility, because if it was Obeah, it was certainly meant for him. His rejection also implies that he aspires to escape poverty and ascend to the Jamaican middle class by taking on their economic and social attitudes.

Alty's rejection of traditional Afro-Jamaican beliefs enables him to miss his mother's nine night. Later, in the final scene of the play after the nine night is over, Alty explains why he did not attend.

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<sup>282</sup> Mervyn Alleyne, "The World View of Jamaicans," *Jamaica Journal* (1978): 3.

May: ...Imagine you keep away from you own mother nine night.

Alty: A tell oonoo long time say a don' eena any nine nite bizness. Dem tings use to happen in the dark days. People come a people place, mek whole heap a noise, drink off dem coffee and white rum an sing till dem hourse; when I dead oonoo don' bother wid it at all. Try member dat.

May: I will member for is a shame- everybody was wondering what happen to you an you the only man in de house. Weh you was?

Alty: Dats my bizness.<sup>283</sup>

Alty does not accept pressure from his sisters or the community to fulfill the expectation that he attend his own mother's nine night (regardless of the cause of death). He also rejects any responsibility in raising Wilhemina's child that is presumably his. Jane's dying wish is that Sarah raises this child. Unlike Sarah, Alty has complete autonomy over his comings and goings and over the role that he will play or not play in the family. The autonomy comes to him from his constant denial of others' expectations of him. By denying belief in Obeah and nine night, he shirks all personal and social responsibility—something that he seems especially good at as the only male child of the family. Edith Clark's psychoanalysis of the Jamaican mother-son bond perhaps explains why it is so easy for Alty to remain focused on himself at a time when the family should be united in grief and support.

One of the features of the exclusive, and often obsessive, mother-son relationship is the persistence of the son's dependence upon her into adolescence and beyond. A result of this is often a failure to develop satisfactory relationships with other people or achieve personal independence.<sup>284</sup>

Alty remains dependent on the family, and yet emotionally detached from it in that he is unable to take any personal responsibility here. Despite the dependent mother-son relationship, we do not see Alty grieve for this mother. It is possible that his understanding of Jamaican manhood

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<sup>283</sup> Enid Chevannes, *Superstition*, 11.

<sup>284</sup> Edith Clark, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, 124.

prohibits him from expressing his emotional loss in front of his sisters. His expression of grief would make him a more sympathetic character. Instead, Chevannes chooses to make him the shiftless enemy of all of the women in the play. She makes the business of Obeah and the nine night women's business. As an irresponsible man, Alty is voluntarily excluded.

In addition to staging Jane's death as a result of Obeah, Chevannes stages a nine night ritual in the play to demonstrate how Afro-Jamaican belief operates in the community. In the nine night scene, Jane's best friend, Mrs. Eldermina Brown, leads the ceremony. Mrs. Brown provides bits of humor to the play by frequently bursting into tears whenever she remembers the loss of her dear friend. A hymn or joke is the remedy offered by the assembly to lift the spirits of Mrs. Brown and the other loved ones who are overcome with grief.

Caribbean historian Elizabeth Pigou describes the Christian influence on this primarily African religious form. "The nine nights are an interesting blend of Christian and African forms. In one integrated rite are hymns, sermons, references to the soul in Heaven and the role of Christ in helping the soul to this place, along with African derived rites for placating the duppy of the deceased."<sup>285</sup> The Christian influence on this rite is evident in the way that Chevannes stages the ritual. Her script references two hymns, *Lead Kindly Light* and *Blessed Be The Tides That Bind*, in the script, but lyrics are not included in the text. This absence possibly suggests that these are so familiar to the actors and the audience that they know the words or that they could quickly find them in any Baptist Hymnal. In addition to their Christian references, the songs can also be read in relationship to the political moment in which the play was produced in 1961, as

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<sup>285</sup> Elizabeth Pigou, "A Note on Afro-Jamaican Beliefs and Rituals," *Jamaica Journal* 20, no.2 (May-July 1987): 23-26.

Jamaicans questioned their role in the West Indian Federation and reconsidered the meaning of independence.

The first song *Lead, Kindly Light*, suggests an anxiety about the post-colonial condition and the responsibility of self-rule. It is a prayer for spiritual guidance for the community of mourners. Chevannes includes it here as a prayer for the new nation that a higher power will lead them into the future.

Lead, kindly Light! A-mid th'en-cir-cling gloom, Lead Thou me on;  
The night is dark, and I am far from home, Lead Thou me on;  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The dis-tant scene; one step e-nough for me.

I was not ev-er thus, nor prayed that Thou Shouldst lead me on;  
I loved to choose and see my path, but now, Lead Thou me on;  
I loved the gar-ish day, and spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will; re-mem-ber not past years.

So long Thy pow'r has blessed me, sure it still Will lead me on  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and tor-rent, till The night is gone;  
And with the morn those an-gel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost a-while! A-men.<sup>286</sup>

The line “The night is dark, and I am far from home, Lead Thou me on” suggests the unfamiliar territory of the soon-to-be-acquired independence. It can also be read as a commentary on the African experience in the New World, and the lasting dislocation as a result of the middle passage. Both readings are accurate, as Jamaicans have been separated from their African homeland and more recently from their political dependence on Britain. They now must forge ahead in the darkness of the unknown.

The song *Blest Be the Tie That Binds* is about a community united by a common belief. Their goals are the same as well as their past experiences that are both positive and negative.

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<sup>286</sup> John H. Newman and John B. Dykes, “Lead, Kindly Light,” *The New National Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1977), 233.

Blest be the tie that binds  
 Our hearts in Christian love!  
 The fellowship of kindred minds  
 Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne  
 We pour our ardent prayers;  
 Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,  
 Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,  
 Our mutual burdens bear;  
 And often for each other flows  
 The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part  
 It gives us inward pain;  
 But we shall still be joined in heart,  
 And hope to meet again.<sup>287</sup>

Here Chevannes speaks about an imagined national community based on a common history, experience, understanding, and belief. Christianity is a unifying force for all Jamaicans regardless of their individual practices. Also, they are joined together by their prayers before “Our Father’s Throne.” This can be read as their common colonial servitude to Britain.

There is no evidence of drumming or dancing in Chevannes’ representation of ritual, but an element of Afro-Jamaican folk tradition is seen in the character of Mrs. Brown. Her storytelling ability indicates the significance of the ritual in the community. She recounts the story of when Jane was first married to her husband who has since died. Recounting this story at this time reaffirms Jane’s respectability as a woman in the community who had a church wedding as opposed to a common-law arrangement. Edith Clark concurs the widespread “...belief that marriage endows a union with attributes of respectability and carries with it a

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<sup>287</sup> John Fawcett and Hans G. Naegeli, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” *The New National Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1977), 359.

higher class status.”<sup>288</sup> By including this story in the nine night, Mrs. Brown (referred to in the script as Mrs. B.) solidifies Jane’s class status in the memory of her community. Mrs. B. met her husband at her grandmother’s nine night, demonstrating the importance of marriage, common law or otherwise, and the significance of nine night as a community building event.

Mrs. B. notices Alty’s absence from the nine night ceremony and makes it part of the communal remembrance of Jane.

Mrs. B: ...By the way, where is Alty?

Sarah: Him just gone out a road. Him soon come.

May: Gone out a which road? Him say him don’t like nine night.

Mrs. B. Anybody can don’ like nine night?

Caleb: ...A agree wid you Miss. B. Only a idiot don’ like nine night.<sup>289</sup>

Here Chevannes unquestionably sanctions nine night and the community who respects its importance. May shames Alty by revealing to the mourners that he does not respect the significance of the ritual. The community and Chevannes embrace the necessity and desire to continue the tradition of nine night. By poking fun at he who is absent, and by demonstrating the necessity of night nine for this community to honor the dead and prevent the creation of new duppies, Chevannes inscribes this ritual into the national consciousness. This tradition brought to Jamaica by enslaved Africans remains essential and serves multiple functions in society. She demonstrates to her middle class audience the value of this tradition and reappropriates it as “progressive” rather than “backward” as previously thought.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Clark, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, 49.

<sup>289</sup> Chevannes, *Superstition*, 9.

<sup>290</sup> Jamaican intellectuals did in fact begin to hold nine nights for their deceased colleagues instead of standard church wakes and at the same time made these ceremonies more “African” with an emphasis on drumming that is not always included in nine nights.

An exchange between Jane's neighbors, Caleb and Addie, where Caleb does not want to go home and tend to her headache, reveals that the nine night is also a social opportunity for staying out late and drinking. In this ritual, the spiritual and the social are collapsed.

After a brief nap during the all night ceremony Mrs. B. wakes up and announces that it's time to go, and "the rum is nearly finished."<sup>291</sup> She instructs the mourners how to leave the ritual.

Mrs. B.: So one and all tek up you body and leave quietly without saying "Goodbye" for if you sey Goodbye the spirit will follow you home. (They all nod in agreement and file out in two and threes, touching Sarah and May as they go.)

Mrs. B.: Turn your roll friends, tun yu roll.<sup>292</sup>

In terms of the actual performance of ritual in this play, Chevannes does not mention ritual dance at all, nor is there sermonizing, drumming, or references to the Bible. She includes just two traditional Baptist hymns. Aside from the singing, it is framed like a party that one hates to miss. It is a social gathering and feast as well as an opportunity to talk about the deceased in a positive light. They all observe the Afro-Jamaican practice of "turning their roll" before they leave so the spirit will not follow them home.

Wilhelmina remains after the nine night is over to help Sarah and May clean up. As they discuss the events of the past few days, Alty enters. Wilhemina explains that the accusation of pregnancy was a lie created by her mother, Imogene, who recently went mad. She is not pregnant and has never had a relationship with Alty, only a crush on him.

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<sup>291</sup> Chevannes, *Superstition*, 10.

<sup>292</sup> Chevannes, *Superstition*, 10. "Turn you roll" means to spin around three times so that the spirit/duddy will be confused and will not be able to follow you home. The reason for not saying goodbye is the same. This information was gathered in an interview with Joyce Campbell who related a story about a duppy who followed her from an NDTC performance in the 1970s. Joyce Campbell interview at the Jamaica Festival Office, Kingston, Jamaica.]

Wilhel: Mek a tell you – Momma an me did have a fuss dis morning because she say it look like me a pick an choose and she want no old maid inna her house. A tell her who I like don' like me- an she say: 'she will no weh fi do. Before a coulda wink me eye she put on her clothes and go out.'<sup>293</sup>

Imogene did not want an old maid in her house for two main reasons: the shame of this label in the community and the financial burden of helping to support her grown daughter. According to Wilhemina's explanation, these fears contributed to her madness. Here Imogene, who set off a series of events in order to get Alty to marry her daughter Wilhemina, is mad. In Una Marson's *Pocomania*, Stella was not mad, but madness became the only reasonable explanation that church officials could imagine regarding her participation in Revival. In Chevannes' play, Imogene is actually mad, but her madness does not negate the fact that she may have used Obeah in an attempt to secure a husband for her daughter. Obeah still has power in spite of Imogene's madness and is the likely cause of Addie's spirit possession and Jane's death.

When referring to how Jane took the false news, they have the following exchange.

Sarah: But you see, Mamie didn' know sey Aunt Imo did a go off her head....

Wihel: Well, look how worries can come eeh?

May: Den Wihel, is not true?

Wihel: Nothing no go so mi dear. Poor Mamma.<sup>294</sup>

Wilhemina's "Poor Mamma" refers to her own mother's madness and suffering. There is no mention of Jane's death, how she misinterpreted the situation, and may have died needlessly.

All of the misunderstandings of the play are set right. Wilhel is not pregnant, and, therefore, Alty is not as promiscuous and irresponsible as previously thought. The bickering between May and Alty ends with an apology from May for believing that he impregnated

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<sup>293</sup> Chevannes, *Superstition*, 11.

<sup>294</sup> Chevannes, *Superstition*, 12.

Wilhemina and caused Jane's death. The confusion between Alty and Tiny is cleared up and the wedding is no longer in jeopardy. Everything appears to be happily resolved without a discussion of Jane, who died from Obeah.

In the end, Imogene's insanity and her frustration at Wilhel's single status set off a series of events, superstition, false allegations, confusion, Obeah, and death in order to attempt to force a marriage between Alty and her daughter Wilhemina. Chevannes uses madness to discredit Imogene and her belief in Obeah. This enables all of the previous charges against Alty and Imogene to be dismissed and allows for the reconciliation between Alty and Tiny. Chevannes does this to provide the necessary happy ending to her one-act comedy. Because of Imogene's madness, Chevannes' middle class audiences can read Jane's death as a heart attack and not as a result of the power of Obeah. But what of Addie's account of spirit possession and the strange man who attacked Jane? Audience members uncomfortable with this account can dismiss it as a woman's superstition. Chevannes gives the audience a way out, a way around viewing Jane's death as the result of the power of Obeah. In the end, Alty is commended as a rational and level-headed man in the face of female superstition and gossip.

For most of the play, Chevannes appears invested in demonstrating the power of Obeah and critiquing the reckless philandering of men. In the last moments of this scene, Chevannes rescinds her critique by condemning Imogene as mad and praising Alty in spite of his lack of familial obligation. The play ends with the community returning to harmony (with the exception of the deceased Jane and the insane Imogene).

Nine night, however, is an important and obligatory sign of respect for the community of mourners. Yet the ceremony itself was comical with drinking and little attention given to the

spiritual content of the ceremony. Chevannes' depiction of nine night emphasizes the social rather than the religious. The ritual comes off as a slightly backward ceremony geared toward appeasing the curiosity of the community. The forward thinking, yet spoiled, Alty does not attend even though the nine night is for his own mother.

Madness is used in both Marson's *Pocomania* and Chevannes' *Superstition* as a strategy to devalue the beliefs and actions of women in both plays. But Chevannes, unlike Marson, does not pit Obeah and nine night in opposition to the virtues of Christianity.

Jane and Addie are both possessed by the spirit of a duppy. They are overcome by Obeah. Addie is transported, to refer back to my discussion of myalisation. Jane is transformed by the experience, since she dies almost instantly. This play can be considered myal-theatre because it places Obeah and nine night in the context of a small rural community. Women in the play mobilize around a fear of Obeah and later, the need to organize a nine night. Although Alty is the presumed target, his role in the play is relatively small. He functions as a non-participant in discussions of Obeah and nine night, which are constructed as women-centered occurrences in this play. Alty can, and does, avoid participation. *Superstition* questions the credibility of Obeah that while may not be believed by some, does have real consequences. Imogene may have been "out of her head" to create such a story and seek out an Obeah-man. At the same time the story could easily have been true and is easily believed by the community. Chevannes does not succeed in using madness to discredit the power of Obeah here. She does not introduce a medical doctor who can present counter-evidence and cite an alternative cause of death. We only have the words of Alty, who has plenty of reason to avoid responsibility for these events and never convincingly proclaims his innocence. Chevannes creates a world of belief that the

foreign-minded Alty does not want to participate in and, because he is a man, he does not have to.

The audience can choose to identify with Alty, a firm non-believer and non-participant. However, he has a questionable moral character and reputation in the community. Alternately, the audience can identify with the deceased Jane who protected her only son at the cost of her own life. Chevannes places middle class audiences in an ambiguous position regarding their own beliefs. She participates in the process of myalisation by placing them in this awkward position where they cannot openly admit to the power and reality of Obeah, and yet cannot deny its presence on stage given the evidence presented by Jane and corroborated by Addie. This is also myal-theatre because it reveals the destructive power of Obeah and yet provides a very human motive for this action. Imogene did not want to see her daughter become an old maid. Her middle class audience members can relate to that perspective and that social pressure.

In *Superstition*, Chevannes explores the difficult terrain of Afro-Jamaican belief and questions how deeply the middle class is willing to invest in this belief system for the sake of the nation. In this play, she celebrates the African ancestry of Jamaican slaves as a source of strength as well as the strength of women, white and black, as the backbone of Jamaican society.

Chevannes' *Superstition* did not fully win over her critics who enjoyed the humor of her characters, but still complained about her playwriting and directing skills.

Their lines were neatly rounded off for laughs and keen observation went into the Nine-Night scene. Her actors in these roles served her well.

However, the line of progression of the play and the prevailing tone were somewhat uncertain[.] The difficult business of inserting the death of a leading and sympathetic character into the midst of uproarious goings-on unfortunately did not quite come off, nor the breaking up of the play into a series of short

scenes. A little re-shaping might have saved the interruption of the flow and, again some cutting might have helped sustain a continuous forward movement.<sup>295</sup>

Regarding the nine night scene, there is a difference of opinion in that some appreciated the attention to detail that Chevannes used in constructing the ritual, while others were bored by the possible overuse of folk material in plays in this period.

Enid Chevannes has written far better plays than this. However, her gift for the good comic line was evident throughout, and one or two of her characters were very well delineated.

“Superstition” showed great promise in its first bright opening scene, after that it disappointed. Instead of following the interest created[,] it digressed into a Ninth Night [sic] scene from which it could not be rescued, even by a clearing up scene which followed.

In the Ninth Night scene, since we had to have a Ninth Night, the singing of each hymn could have been shortened, and a tauter job of production effected to make the play keep moving.<sup>296</sup>

For those who were weary of the representation of the folk in her plays, they would show great disappointment regarding her last play, *The Vision*. Their harsh criticisms of *The Vision* may be the reason that this was her last play for the stage.

#### *THE VISION*: REWRITING JAMAICA’S PAST

*The Vision* is a play about a Jamaican plantation on the verge of destitution during the era of slavery. It is based on a true story about a slave named Mamby Park that Chevannes heard from her pastor of Coke Methodist church. The story explains that a region of upper St. Andrew was suffering from drought. Livestock and crops were dying off daily. The owner of the estate hired an engineer from England to build a tunnel that would irrigate the area and save several plantations. But the engineer had great difficulty finding an adequate source of water. The

<sup>295</sup> Norman Rae, “Adult Drama Festival: Dialect Originals,” *The Daily Gleaner*, August 18, 1960. From Enid Chevannes Collection, scrapbook, The National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>296</sup> Archie Lindo, “Adult Drama Festival—Second session: Country Style,” written in August 1960. In Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, National Library of Jamaica.

elderly slave, Mamby, was born on the plantation and was loyal to his master. One day while resting under the divi-divi tree, Mamby received a vision from his great-great-grandmother from Africa. His great-great-grandmother told him that there was a passageway in Ram's Horn and water that could be used for irrigation. Mamby eventually found the courage to tell his master about his vision. The engineer from England investigated Ram's Horn. He discovered water and a path that could be extended as an irrigation tunnel. The plantation and the surrounding areas were saved as a result of Mamby's vision. Chevannes was so impressed by this Jamaican legend that she decided to bring the story to life in the form of a full-length play.<sup>297</sup> Chevannes creates an important female character in this Jamaican legend and uses the legend about slavery and ancestors to comment on Jamaica's recent independence.

Chevannes presents an ahistorical portrait of slavery to counter other plays and literary works of the time that brought attention to the cruelty of the institution. Instead of historical accuracy in her account, Chevannes finds a way to shift the focus away from the primary character Mamby, to a woman, Mamby's wife, Jama. *The Vision* participates in a myalisation of Jamaican theatre by erasing the taboo about connection and communication with African ancestors. Chevannes uses the medium of the vision as a form of communication, where spirit possession and ritual performance are not required. While the play was popular with audiences, critics did not appreciate her ahistorical approach and lack of imagination with the legend.

Chevannes' *The Vision* is set in Cherry Gardens.<sup>298</sup> In the production notes of the play, published in *West Indian Plays For Schools* Vol. II, she wavers about the specific time period of

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<sup>297</sup> Barbara Chevannes interview by Karima Robinson. *The Vision* was first performed in 1963. Jamaica Drama League revived it in 1967 as its showpiece.

<sup>298</sup> Easton Lee, Eulogy of Enid Chevannes, 9.

the play, but seems to prefer 1795-1820. She refers to this historical moment in part to account for lack of discussion of emancipation in the play, which did not become a reality until 1838.<sup>299</sup>

Chevannes takes great care to outline the historical period of the play, in terms of the setting, character descriptions, costumes, production concept, lighting, sound effects, and stage properties. It is clear that the play has been performed several times since its initial production in 1963 and has won numerous awards. This is the only one of Chevannes' four plays that is published and her only full-length play. She includes detailed instructions how the play should be staged. Below is an example of her notes on costumes.

As has been stated elsewhere in this volume, European fashions took some time to percolate to the West Indies, and if the producer decides to set the play in about 1790, then a style of at least five years earlier should be followed. This is the late Georgian period: the dress cut with a round neck, high at the back, low in front, worn with a fichu or wide frill of lace or lawn.<sup>300</sup>

The setting of the play includes four locations: a Great House living room, a slave cottage, and two exterior settings that could be indicated simply with logs or tree limbs. At the very least, three different areas should be created. Like her descriptions of costumes and characters, Chevannes carefully outlines the look and feel of each of these locations.

The play opens in the Great House with the master and mistress, Henry and Mary Farquharson, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Smith, the engineer from England. Henry and Mary are both in their 50s. They are either from England or first generation white Jamaicans.<sup>301</sup> Chevannes describes the couple as having a great deal of humanity, particularly toward their slaves. Mary has taught many of the slave children, born on the plantation, to read and write.

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<sup>299</sup> Enid Chevannes, *The Vision*, in *West Indian Plays for Schools*, Vol. II, ed. Jeanne Wilson (Jamaica: Jamaica Publishing House, 1979), 52.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> The indecision here is Chevannes', not mine. Chevannes, *The Vision*, 50.

Henry considers Mamby, one of his oldest slaves, a trusted friend, “—although this seems to be a rather one-sided friendship.”<sup>302</sup> The engineer, Smith, finally arrives and the problem on the plantation is presented to him. Henry includes the slaves in a long list of those in the area who will benefit from the new irrigation system. Throughout the play, Chevannes suggests their humanity by downplaying their value on the plantation as property and the inhumane reality of slavery. This is in opposition to the British view of their slaves as property and not human beings.<sup>303</sup> Mamby’s son John, in his twenties, is described to the engineer as an intelligent slave who is so helpful around the plantation that he could one day replace the white overseer Dixon. This is said in jest of course, given the strict hierarchy on the plantation. Henry and Mary mention on a few occasions that John has a rebellious streak.

This scene sets up an interesting dynamic whereby the slaves are seen as loyal subjects and human beings worthy of respect as opposed to chattel and property. While John’s rebellious nature is acknowledged, he is not viewed as a threat to the plantation. If John is as rebellious as they indicate, why would he want a position where he would have to use violence to maintain the level of production of the plantation? Would he not use this position to lead a revolt? While Henry and Mary cultivate a sense of humanity with the slaves by teaching them to read and write, there is never any discussion of the abolition of slavery or of the literate slaves running away or planning a revolt. Instead, slavery is framed as a happy institution, if kind masters occupy the Great House. Chevannes’ conception of the institution of slavery is problematic and historically inaccurate.

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>303</sup> Dale A. Bisnauth, *History of Religions in the Caribbean* (Jamaica: Kingston Publishers Ltd., 1989), 114.

Her stage directions, however, gesture toward slavery as an inhumane existence for the slaves Chevannes' critique of slavery is absent in the script, but could be evident in production. Her note below is of interest as it sets the tone for the production and indicates her feelings about how the characters relate to each other.

The aim should be to point the contrasts: the luxury of the Great-house as opposed to the simplicity of the cottage; the elegant clothes and leisured manner of Mary as opposed to the plain cotton dress and long working hours of Jama; the self-confidence of Henry in contrast to the diffidence and cringing attitudes of Mamby; the blustering arrogance of Dixon against the quiet inner strength of John.<sup>304</sup>

This is good instruction for the actors and designers as they prepare the play for production, but the divergent realities of the slaves and their owners is not spoken. Chevannes makes this choice possibly because of the recent independence celebrations in 1962 and the feelings of optimism regarding Jamaica's future. It is possible that Chevannes felt that this was not the moment to dwell on the painful truth about this dark period of their past. Instead, she focuses on the kindness of these masters who eventually grant freedom to their loyal and docile slaves. Theatre critic Harry Milner reveals why he thinks Chevannes presents a romanticized view of slavery.

Judging by Keith Parkin's glamorized version of "The Runaway," Rex Nettleford's delightful ballet "Plantation Revelry" and now Enid Chevannes' "The Vision", there has been a reaction from [missing word?] regarding Jamaica's past through the bitter, angry and often melodramatic eye of earlier novelists and playwrights. There is a suggestion that all masters of all plantations were not all monsters of cruelty and iniquity, and that all slaves were not at least in the later period living in a constant state of cowed and brutal subjection. Perhaps, in "The Vision" the reaction has gone rather too far. Mrs. Chevannes' plantation in upper St. Andrew, presumably in the 1820s, where the dream of a comic "Uncle Tom" brings water and relief to the lands of the kind Mr. and Mrs. Farquharson, would bring a smile to the mouth of Mr. Pickwick and a gentle tear

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<sup>304</sup> Enid Chevannes, *The Vision*, 54.

to the eye of Mr. Cheerybibble. Here, surely is the Jamaican past seen through the temperament of a Jamaica Barrie.<sup>305</sup>

Milner, like other critics of this play, refers to the fairy tale-like quality of this play by referencing Peter Pan's author Sir James M. Barrie. In addition to the productions that Milner names, Chevannes is overcompensating perhaps unnecessarily because of the recent independence of the island and a reluctance to view the past in a negative light.

Scene two takes place in front of the cottage of Mamby and his wife Jama. They sit on the front stoop, while their meager belongings inside are visible to the audience. Mamby tells Jama about his "vijan" (vision) from his great-great-grandmother about water in Ram's Horn. Mamby's fearful posture toward the white planter class delays him from communicating the meaning of his vision to the master. Jama demands that he go to the Great House and tell the master immediately. She even supplies Mamby with a bit of cane liquor to give him courage. Chevannes makes Mamby fearful of a kind and humane master in order to demonstrate the inferiority complex that was part of slavery regardless of the disposition of the master. She also does this in order to introduce a stronger character to the legend—Jama.

Chevannes creates the strong and vital character of Jama, Mamby's wife, who in the end gets much of the credit for saving the plantation. But in order to make Jama strong and significant, she makes Mamby's character weak. She comments on his weakness in opposition to Jama's strength throughout the play. "Chevannes endowed the leading female character Jama with many of her own characteristics: loyal, strong, matriarchal and the power behind her

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<sup>305</sup> Harry Milner, *The Sunday Gleaner*, September 22, 1963. In Enid Chevannes Collection, scrapbook, in National Library of Jamaica.

man.”<sup>306</sup> Jama relates that she and their son John have a stronger spirit than Mamby, who has always been fearful of whites. Mamby is criticized and even mocked throughout the play for this trait. The harsh realities of slave life and the violence inflicted upon courageous or rebellious slaves are never mentioned as the likely reason for Mamby’s fear and docile behavior.

Slaves at every level of the hierarchy could be not only demoted but flogged. The use of the whip was regarded as necessary to secure production as well as maintain discipline. It was used by the slave drivers in charge of every plantation gang and by their supervisors, the bookkeepers, to keep slaves working in the fields and to punish all forms of misbehavior: work badly done, damage to estate property, or fighting and stealing among themselves.... Indiscriminate corporal punishment was used, as one missionary remarked, to deprive every slave of character and make him, however intelligent, a man of degraded condition.<sup>307</sup>

Mamby’s adult son, John, in particular is frustrated and embarrassed by his father’s scraping attitude. In one scene he shares his frustration with his girlfriend Cherry.

JOHN: Same old story. He afraid of his shadow, Cherry. You no idea how afraid he is. He jus’ bow and scrape to the white people, and he can’t understand why a can’t worship them so...

JOHN: He would be a nice person if he would act like a man...stead of a fraidy mouse.<sup>308</sup>

John seems to be unaware of the harsh reality of slavery that his father is fearful of. His tone reflects the recent post-colonial condition of the early 1960s in Jamaica and not the late 1700s. Chevannes is writing the present onto the past, at a moment when Jamaicans felt free after centuries of colonial oppression. Because Chevannes has created a world of benign slavery, inconsistent with the historical record, the rebellious John cannot understand the behavior of his father. Chevannes indicates some of the complexity of Mamby’s character and social condition

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<sup>306</sup> Easton Lee, “Eulogy of Enid Chevannes,” 10.

<sup>307</sup> Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 42-3.

<sup>308</sup> Chevannes, *The Vision*, 67-8.

in the staging and production notes, but not in the script. She demands historical accuracy for the sets and costumes but not in her own representation of slavery as an institution. Instead of slavery, audiences received a masked commentary on 1963 and not the 1790s.

Mamby: a senior field slave, has also been with the Farquharsons all his life. Unlike Jama, his wife, he is subservient and fawning towards his ‘master’ and ‘mistress.’ The actor portraying this character should avoid making him a figure of fun: pity and resentment should be the emotions stirred in the audience—resentment that a man has been so degraded by his environment that he bows and scrapes and practically apologizes for being alive. A very sensitive actor is needed to project this character.<sup>309</sup>

Chevannes is relying on acting to communicate the injustices of slavery. This production note recognizes disconnection between the world she has created on stage and the historical reality of slavery. Based solely on the dialogue, Mamby’s bowing and scraping could have very easily been played for a laugh.

Chevannes, as director, having given herself pasteboard characters to deal with does very little to assist the actors to suggest at least some individuality in the roles. It is really the personal warmth of Shirley Logan, for example, that brings to life, Jama, Mamby’s wife, a comfortable ‘Jamaican mammy.’ Edward Collymore provided amusement as Mamby but one was never quite sure whether, in this context, such a central matter as this visioning was deliberately intended to be funny.<sup>310</sup>

Because Chevannes does not allow Mamby to explain his position on the plantation, but only a set of behaviors that others mock in the play, audiences laughed at this character, even if they were uncertain if this was the desired reaction.

Jama hopes that the master will listen to Mamby and that their family will be rewarded for saving the plantation. Jama believes that she and her son John get their courage from *her*

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<sup>309</sup> Chevannes, *The Vision*, 53.

<sup>310</sup> Norman Rae, “‘The Vision’ Celebration in the Drama,” in Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, in the National Library of Jamaica.

great-great-grandfather who was a chief of an Ashanti tribe. Here, along with the vijan itself, Chevannes celebrates another ancestral connection to Africa as the source of strength, courage, and visions for this family.

Jama: Well, jus' look pan dat. Anybody ever see me dying trial: man sit down ya and get a vijan... and not a wud, not a wud! A wa mek 'im coward so? T'enk God John have little guts. T'enk God 'im tek affa me ... me tell Mamby over and over say fe me Grampa was chief a de Shanti tribe... as if dem didn't bring me madda come ya...<sup>311</sup>

Jama's African heritage is celebrated and her strength as a woman to push Mamby to speak to the master is revered. Although the legend centers on Mamby and his vision, Chevannes gives Jama equal credit for saving the plantation. The strength of women is essential to the story that Chevannes is telling. By recentering the legend of Mamby Park on Jama, Chevannes makes the role of women essential to the retelling of Jamaica's past.

In addition to the legend of Mamby, Chevannes takes this opportunity to perform other aspects of slave life and draws attention to the institution of marriage and slave literacy, even if her representation is skewed. John enters later in this scene. He tells his mother that he is in love with Cherry. Jama decides to ask the mistress to allow them to marry.

Marriage, therefore, was not encouraged. There was a widespread opinion in Jamaica, elevated into law by the 1826 slave code that the slaves could marry only with their masters' permission. Marriage was a privilege that most slave managers were prepared to withhold. Marriage for the slaves, like civil rights for the free colored and black populations, implied a humanity the whites were unwilling to concede as a right and preferred to retain as a privilege to confer.<sup>312</sup>

John does not want permission to marry, but freedom and children who are born free. Because he can read, he has been exposed to other possibilities. He is determined to seek freedom in

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<sup>311</sup> Chevannes, *The Vision*, 60.

<sup>312</sup> Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 44.

England through the church that provided opportunities for ex-slaves to hold offices and become parsons. John's quest for freedom is seemingly one of the most compelling parts of the play, but Chevannes fails to take full advantage of the potential of this character. I will return to the development, or lack thereof, of John's character in a moment.

In scene three, slave literacy is addressed alongside John's vision of his future. This scene provides acting opportunities for other members of The Ivory Club or accommodates a larger cast. Chevannes states in her introduction that scene three can be omitted without harm to the plot. This scene takes place outside with a group of girls, and later boys, who are waiting for Cherry to arrive and teach them a lesson. Cherry, like John, teaches reading and writing to children from the neighboring plantations. This scene is carefree and fun as most of the children enjoy the time away from their plantations and work. There is no sense of fear of being caught or fear that their masters may be angry if it is discovered that they can read.

The free churches laid the foundation for the education of Africans during slavery. Africans had learnt to read and write if they had become exposed to the Christian church.... All education, however, whether available to the coloured middle-class, white creoles or the black working class, was linked to the church. Thus from its beginnings education in the Caribbean was orientated in a framework of religious indoctrination.<sup>313</sup>

Here Chevannes' representation of slave literacy that is not only unchallenged by the slave owners, but encouraged, is skewed. Henry and Mary Farquharson possess the attitudes of missionaries of the time and not slave owners. Their ability to view their slaves as humans and not mere property is uncharacteristic of slave owners of the time. Chevannes' own Christian devotion may be coloring her view of the institution as a whole. Here is another example of how

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<sup>313</sup> Amon Saba Saakana, *The Colonial Legacy in Caribbean Literature* (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, Inc., 1987), 25.

her attempt to soften the representation of slavery on stage makes her retelling of the legend a true work of fiction.

Chevannes also shies away from reality when portraying the sexual experiences of adolescent slave girls. The banter with the girls is about who has a crush on whom. Most of this scene is silly bickering among teenaged girls. There is a great deal of innocence operating in terms of sexuality. One girl even has a crush on the visiting engineer, Smith. The scene is virginal, as if young slave girls would not be exposed to sexual contact with their masters and other slaves early in their adolescence. In some cases this sexual contact was forced, in others, slave women were able to manipulate sexual relationships with white men on the plantation in exchange for money, food, clothing, or other favors.

Whereas the male slave was valued solely for the economic contribution he made to the plantation, the woman was expected to perform both sexual as well as economic duties. Childbearing fell into the former area, but also sexual duties performed for white masters. In the West Indies, sexual relationships between black and coloured women and white men were widespread, commonplace and generally accepted by the plutocracy to be an integral part of the social structure of the islands.<sup>314</sup>

Again, Chevannes' representation of slavery has erased the sexual vulnerability and exploitation of black women. The innocence with which the girls discuss the men on the plantation, white and black, betrays the lived reality. Instead, Chevannes chooses to "sugarcoat" the institution for her audiences. She presents a wholesome image of good Christian girls with middle class values, much like the membership of her Ivory Club. She deliberately ignores how black women were put into a position where they had to use their sexuality to secure benefits for themselves and their children on plantations. She overlooks the inherent promiscuity of the slave system

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<sup>314</sup> Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society: 1650-1838* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 11.

because she is mindful of the work of the Jamaican Federation of Women who sought to stamp out the perceived promiscuity of the lower class and the high numbers of female-headed households. Chevannes portrayed good female role models in her play and focused on the marriage of John and Cherry instead of the lived reality of black women slaves.

It is important to Chevannes that the women in the *The Vision* are respectable by 20<sup>th</sup> century standards, regardless of their enslaved status, in order for Jama to be included in the legend of Mamby Park. “Indigenous women were characterized as open to sex, a stigma that persisted through the slavery and postslavery periods, with the historical literature (particularly that of the slavery period) presenting black women as ugly, lacking in intelligence, and promiscuous.”<sup>315</sup> Historian Verene Shepherd discusses the journals of Thomas Thistlewood who migrated to Jamaica in 1751.

He learned very soon after his arrival that living openly with enslaved or free-colored women brought no social condemnation and indeed was accepted behavior. Thistlewood, like most white men in the colonies during this time, seems to have believed that one advantage of coming to the island was the chance to sexually exploit many black and colored women.<sup>316</sup>

Chevannes counters this reality with clean-cut middle class girls of whom the Jamaica Federation of Women would have approved. They seem to exist in a world where premarital sex did not exist, not to mention rape or sexual exploitation.

In *The Vision*, the girls suggest that they have seen the foreign engineer Smith and that he is cute. Chevannes describes the girls and boys in her production notes.

THE OTHER GIRLS: all very gay and light-hearted. Care should be taken in this scene that the dialect is clearly enunciated, especially when they are bickering and quarrelling: it should always be borne in mind that stage dialect should be

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<sup>315</sup> Verene A. Shepherd, “Image and Representation: Black Women in Historical Accounts of Colonial Jamaica” in *Stepping Forward: Black Women in Africa and the Americas*, 46.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

treated as an art form. Their clothing: similar in style to Jama's. If bright contrasting colours are used, they should look like a flock of butterflies on stage.

THE THREE YOUNG MEN: fun-loving and gay-hearted. Dressed similarly to John.<sup>317</sup>

Chevannes' description of "a flock of butterflies" and "fun-loving and gay-hearted" enslaved youth is troubling. Obviously, Chevannes is going out of her way to ignore the harsh realities of slavery. The joy of this scene could be relief from the harsh work conditions and pleasure in spending time away from the fields.

By the time John's girlfriend Cherry finally enters, it's too late to begin the lesson. The suggestion is made that they take homework instead. Homework assumes adequate supplies like paper, pens, and books. Some of the material conditions of slavery are referenced briefly as the children say that some of them do not have light in their cottages and none of them have time, given their heavy workload in the field.

The demands of estate labour were heaviest on the sugar estates. Throughout the crop, or harvest, season, which ran from December to June on the south side of the island and variously from February through November on the north side, the slaves did shift work, resting for only five- or six-hour spells so as to feed the sugar mill continuously with freshly cut cane.<sup>318</sup>

Chevannes partially acknowledges some of the lived reality, but even Cherry's suggestion implies ignorance of their condition. Instead, Chevannes tells a story that she feels will uplift her audiences. The misrepresentation of Christian harmony, opportunities for literacy, and virginal slave girls goes against the scholarship on slavery in Jamaica. I speculate this is because this play was written just after independence. In this moment of optimism the nation was in the midst of celebrating its birth and a great political accomplishment. Chevannes' representation of

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<sup>317</sup> Chevannes, *The Vision*, 54.

<sup>318</sup> Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries*, 40.

slavery here offers an opportunity for reconciliation with past oppressors by glossing over or erasing the violence of the institution.

At the end of this scene, John enters and discusses marriage with his girlfriend Cherry. He explains that he might finally have his long awaited opportunity to travel abroad and study. He has been befriending the engineer Smith who will help him get into missionary school in England. This has been John's dream and he will seize this opportunity. He asks for Cherry's support and will marry her upon his return. He does not think of himself as a slave, but as a man and will one day have his freedom. John plans to buy Cherry's freedom in the future. Cherry is saddened to think about John's departure and his extended stay in England.

JOHN: Well, don't you ever forget that I going away to improve myself, and nothing or no-one going to stop me... I must help my people. I must.  
[consciously speaking well now] Just think what it would mean to educate them so that they can do away with their evil practices and cults, and look to someone higher for help!

CHERRY: [following his example] I agree with you, John... that is why I am doing all I can to help the girls.

JOHN: The Bible says, If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you can move mountains...and I have faith.<sup>319</sup>

This is one of the few moments in this play where Chevannes directly contrasts myal-based practices with Christianity. In this play, slavery is represented through the rose-colored glasses of Christianity in the twentieth century, whereby masters and slaves all work toward the common goal of spreading the gospel, while issues like emancipation, slave revolt, and sugar production are not discussed by either the slaves or masters. Here Myal and Christianity are pitted against each other in a similar way as in Marson's *Pocomania*. Chevannes' ambivalence about these

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<sup>319</sup> Chevannes, *The Vision*, 67.

forms is betrayed in the character John. In Chevannes' representation of slavery, the slave-owning Farquharsons encourage slave literacy as part of their Christian charity because education and slave conversion were closely aligned in this period. As a literate slave, John has been fully indoctrinated and sees Christianity as the means to attaining his goal of freedom. Because of his indoctrination, he views myal-based practices as evil cults.

Critics questioned Chevannes' portrayal of the rebellious John.

Performances were again generally neutral including a puzzling interpretation of a slave boy (who at one time looked as if he might develop into a runaway), eager to lift the educational standards of his people, and doing so in the finest cultured manner right down to the flashing gold signet-ring.<sup>320</sup>

Another critic remarked: "John the slave-boy, echoes the tones of the earnest young Jamaican idealist of, say, the 1950s about to trot off to university, the London School of Economics, or, perhaps, the Mico Training College."<sup>321</sup> While the Legend of Mamby Park is set during slavery, Chevannes' portrayal has more to do with the late colonial period than the distant past of slavery.

By scene four, Mamby has made it to the Great House to tell the master about his vision. He smells of cane liquor. Henry and Mary are extremely frustrated by Smith's inability to find a solution. The future of the estate is uncertain. Mamby enters and has great difficulty explaining the reason for his visit so late at night. Henry dismisses his rambling about a vijan as drunkenness, while Mary probes further. Mamby defines the difference between a dream and a vision. Then he carefully communicates his vision with accuracy in spite of Henry's mocking comments.

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<sup>320</sup> Norman Rae, "Ivory Club Plays Double Bill," *The Daily Gleaner*, September 10, 1963. Also in Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, in National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>321</sup> Norman Rae, "'The Vision' Celebration in the Drama," in Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, in the National Library of Jamaica.

MAMBY: [gaining a little confidence] Dream, Missis, is wen yu sleepin' and de spirit wander whey an' come back wen yu wake...but vijan different. Vijan is wen yu shet yu yeye an' yu ol' generation come to yu an' tell yu t'ing...<sup>322</sup>

Mamby explains his vision of his great-great-grandmother talking to him.

MAMBY: Is not be ol' Granpappy, please Massa, is me great Mammy, that dead inna land whey me come from...

HENRY: Good, she had to travel quite some distance to come and give you the news, so it must have been important. Now what did she say?

MAMBY: ...As a was siddung underneath de big divi-divi tree...a see me Great Gramma wit' her long white robe, an' she ses to me, 'Mamby, whey yu look so serious like?' ...dem was her word, her very word... 'Serious like'.

HENRY: [impatient] All right, go on.

MAMBY: So I ses to her, 'Yu don' see how de drout a kill all a Massa beast' dem?' She sey, 'A see.' Jus' like that, 'A see.' So a ses to her even we... meanin' Massa slave de...cyan' get water fe drink a wash. She says, 'A see that to.' A ses to her, 'If yu see all dat how yu askin' me so?,'<sup>323</sup>

Mamby describes his vision as a transformative spiritual experience. He is adamant that this was not simply a dream, but a moment of clear communication with a distant ancestor who appeared to him wearing a white robe. The color white symbolizes the purity of the spirit and it is the color worn by Revival and by other myal-based practitioners. Two images are presented here, one of a man sleeping under a sacred tree and the other of a woman in ritual attire.

Mamby frames the problem as one that is facing the master and not himself. His self-effacing attitude is consistent with his timid personality. His great-great-grandmother reveals that Ram's Horn is where they can get water. Mary convinces Henry to believe Mamby's vision. Henry agrees to send Smith out in the morning to investigate Ram's Horn.

HENRY: [*sits in rocker*] Oh, nonsense! Let the man go home and sleep off the stuff he's been drinking. You know, Mary, I'm beginning to agree with Dixon

<sup>322</sup> Chevannes, *The Vision*, 70.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

that you honour these people too much. Before long you'll be going to one of their revival meetings and jumping up with them when they get the spirit.

MARY: Don't be ridiculous, Henry. This man evidently had some kind of a dream, and I do believe in dreams... don't you remember?<sup>324</sup>

Chevannes hints at the possibility of Mary as a participant in Revival, and taps into some of the anxiety of the period that I discussed in chapter one. Mary is spiritually attuned to having prophetic dreams. Chevannes follows Una Marson and Ivy Baxter with the suggestion that women are more vulnerable to spirit possession and participation in myal-based ritual practices. Overall, Chevannes gives women much of the credit for the success of this story.

HENRY: I see. No wonder you insisted that Jama did it! I agree with you. It takes a woman to help push some of us over the hill, doesn't it?<sup>325</sup>

In this play it is the women, Jama and Mary, who guide the decisions of their husbands, thus enabling the story to have a happy ending and become a legend.

The experience of the vision transports Mamby, but it does not transform him. In the end he is still the cowardly and docile slave. The information communicated by his great-great-grandmother, however, is transformative in that it drastically changes the outcome of the plantation. Henry reluctantly becomes a believer in order to benefit from the vision. Out of desperation Henry asks Smith to investigate Ram's Horn. In the end he accepts the power of this truth, and it is his wife Mary who convinces him to do so.

In the final scene of the play John rushes in with good news. Water has been found at Ram's Horn and Henry falls to his knees in gratitude. Celebratory drumming is heard in the background. All are grateful to Mamby and John for the exact location of the water. With gratitude Henry grants Mamby and Jama freedom. Mamby quickly gives this up, and asks

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 71.

instead for John's freedom. Mamby explains that they are too old to really enjoy freedom and they would not know how to survive outside of the institution of slavery. John, on the other hand, already has a plan of action for his freedom and is eager to move off the plantation.

Mamby and Jama are praised for being big hearted and unselfish.

But the play itself is marred by a very bad and scrappy ending, by the neglect of the author to tie up the loose ends successfully, and leaving the most important character—the young slave John, with stirrings of freedom and a silent rebellion against his lot, unfinished; as also his romance with the young Cherry left hanging in thin air, so to speak.<sup>326</sup>

John's quest for freedom at any cost is undercut when he is granted the freedom for which he was willing to fight. We do not witness John's excitement or his new plans for his life with Cherry.

Henry and Mary invite the slaves inside for dancing. Errol Hill explains these types of celebrations in *The Jamaican Stage*.

One of the occasions for jubilation by the whole estate was the day of Crop-over when, the last canes having been cut, the grinding stopped, and the boiler house fires doused, flags would be displayed in the fields, rum shared among the slaves, and general rejoicing begun. In the evening, there would be a large assembly in the hall of the master's or manager's house, where, with fiddle and tambourine, dancing would commence. As Barclay observed: "Here all authority and all distinction of colour ceases; black and white, overseer and bookkeeper, mingle together in the dance."<sup>327</sup>

In this scene slaves and masters dance together. Smith is so impressed by Jamaican culture that he wants to move to Jamaica. The curtain comes down on this joyful scene.

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<sup>326</sup> Archie Lindo, "Ivory Club's plays: Domestic Affair and A Look Into The Past," written in the fall of 1963. In Enid Chevannes Collection, scrapbook, in National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>327</sup> Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage*, 224. Alexander Barclay, *A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies; or, an Examination of Mr. Stephen's "Slavery of the British West India Colonies": containing more particularly an account of the actual condition of the negroes in Jamaica: with observations on the decrease of slaves since the abolition of the slave trade, and on the probable effects of legislative emancipation: also, strictures on the Edinburgh review, and on the pamphlets of Mr. Cooper and Mr. Bickell*. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1826), 10.

In spite of the popularity of the play and the numerous awards that it received, theatre critics were harsh in their reviews of *The Vision*. “The trouble with ‘Vision,’ apart from its dully pious homilies, could lie in the basic absence of onward moving dramatic material. Hence, the characters just talked till time for the blackout.”<sup>328</sup> Another critic speculated on Chevannes’ dramatic technique:

Chevannes’ dramatic method is merely to dress out this slender story-line with a few comic sketches and chatterings returning regularly to sometime telling us what next has happened in the water quest. The whole thing really suggests more some kind of a Welfare-centre pageant written on a tract level than a play; or perhaps, particularly with the last scene and its slaves sidling into the great house drawing-room to do a half-hearted celebratory dance as the finale, a scenario for a pantomime-musical.<sup>329</sup>

Probably disturbed by the number of negative reviews about her work, on this occasion Chevannes felt the need to respond to their attacks in writing.

THE EDITOR, Sir:--Let me begin by saying how flattered I am that the critics thought “The Vision” worthy of such a lot of time and space. Indeed plays that won awards in the Festival were squeezed into obscure spots in the *Gleaner*—not so this ‘backwoods’ play. It got all the prominence and publicity a worthwhile play could need and far more than this *worthless* one deserved.

I think most people who make an effort to contribute their bit to theatre in Jamaica have grown quite accustomed to being treated as if they have committed a crime against society so I will not go into the manner in which my play was reviewed. I will however point out that one critic who last year wrote of “The Vision.” “I found this quite the best of the longer “patois style” plays yet produced in Jamaica. Its dialogue though repetitive flowed, its comedy was easy, the plot was reasonably well developed and it was on the whole competently acted,” this year wrote of the same play, “The play in fact is not really a play at all but a decorative and mildly entertaining charade that hardly bears a second seeing.”

I hope the critics will think twice next time before taking a second look at a play which they adjudge a waste of time at an earlier performance. Strangely

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<sup>328</sup> Norman Rae, “Ivory Club Plays Double Bill” *The Daily Gleaner*, September 10, 1963. Also in Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, in National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>329</sup> Norman Rae, “‘The Vision’ Celebration in the Drama,” in Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, in the National Library of Jamaica.

enough, quite a few people seemed to have enjoyed the show, but perhaps they are not sufficiently intelligent to know what plays they ought to enjoy.<sup>330</sup>

Here Chevannes is responding to an article by theatre critic Harry Milner. She accurately notes that her reviews in 1963, the year that she received the Bronze Musgrave Medal of Honor and the Centenary Medal from the Institute of Jamaica for *The Vision*, were on the whole more positive. In subsequent years, however, when the play was revived critics were unapologetically harsh.<sup>331</sup> Fine directing or acting could not save a troubled script that attempted to rewrite contemporary politics onto the historical reality of slavery.

Some may question *the Vision's* validity as an example of Jamaican theatre, but her work does contribute to the process of myalisation of Jamaican theatre. Chevannes' play performs communication with African ancestors and performs the context of that communication for audiences. Jama and John's strength of character is attributed to their Ashanti heritage. Africa is celebrated in this troubled dramatic work and Chevannes does succeed in making an attempt to shift the focus of Jamaican theatre from the Euro-creole to Afro-creole with her original work. Mamby's vision did save the plantation and bring his son freedom, although Chevannes' message to audiences could have been more effective if Mamby did not inspire laughter as he stumbled through the story of his encounter with his great-great-grandmother. Chevannes adhered to middle class respectability to the detriment of her play and its reception.

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<sup>330</sup> Enid Chevannes, "Letter to the Editor: 'The Vision'" *The Daily Gleaner*, September 1, 1964. Enid Chevannes Collection, Scrapbook, in The National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>331</sup> This is a partial list of the reviews of Chevannes' *The Vision*, taken from her manuscript collection and scrapbook in the National Library of Jamaica: Norman Rae, "Ivory Club Plays Double Bill" *The Daily Gleaner*, September 10, 1963; Archie Lindo, "Ivory Club's plays: Domestic Affair and A Look Into The Past" 1963; Harry Milner, *The Sunday Gleaner*, September 22, 1963; Norman Rae, "'The Vision' Celebration in the Drama;" Norman Rae, "'The Vision' Celebration in the Drama"; Harry Milner, "Why 'The Vision'?" Enid Chevannes, "Letter to the Editor, 'The Vision'" in *The Daily Gleaner*, September 1, 1964; Harry Milner, "Letter to the Editor, 'The Vision'" in *The Daily Gleaner*, September 14, 1964.

## CONCLUSION

In her plays *Root of Evil* and *Turned Tables*, Chevannes is interested in the figure of the lower class woman. In *Root of Evil* the domestic servant is praised for her insight into a troubled marriage and in *Turned Tables*, Chevannes celebrates the Jamaican housewife. In both plays these women have a specific bit of folk wisdom to pass on to those of the middle class.

Chevannes inserts the archetypal figures of the higgler and the domestic helper into middle class households to disrupt the very notion of womanhood in Jamaica and allow these women to redefine womanhood on their terms.

In her play *Superstition*, Chevannes reveals the problems that members of a poor rural community face when negotiating the ramifications of Obeah. Chevannes half-heartedly discredits Obeah, while acknowledging the spiritual and communal value of nine night. Her commentary here is less about the power of Obeah, that she attempts to mask behind the thin veil of madness, and is more about gender roles, marriage, and parenting in rural Jamaican communities.

In *The Vision*, Chevannes examines a little discussed spiritual phenomenon of visions, which would normally be dismissed by the middle class who rely on analytical and scientific evidence of the truth. Here Chevannes validates the knowledge of ancestors who protect their descendents from destruction. This validation comes in the form of the acceptance of the masters who benefit from Mamby's vision. Chevannes' vision of slavery, however, is troubling as she presents a benign system of labor that contradicts the historical record. This distorted view of the slave experience, presented to the masses at the moment of political independence from Britain, suggests a call for reconciliation regarding the wrongs of the past instead of a bitter

attack on this former colonial power. At the same time, she presents a problematic representation of slavery, which gestures towards erasure of the past as a method of forgiveness and reconciliation. She adds to the legend of Mamby Park by creating a strong women character that steals the show.

In *The Vision*, the docile slave Mamby receives a vision from his great-great-grandmother from Africa that ultimately saves the plantation. Chevannes looks at slave society and denigrates the docile slaves and celebrates those who are rebellious. Given the history of slave rebellion and myal-based practices, at first glance it appears ironic that it is the more rebellious slave who shuns revival and dreams of being a parson. Here myal-based ritual practices are framed as a distraction from the redemption offered by Christianity as practiced by the white planter society and aspiring free blacks. But nine night and visions of ancestors are held up as essential to the Afro-Jamaican belief system, an important means of community building, and at times, the key to its very survival.

Enid Chevannes' body of work as a whole reveals the thought process of an artist acutely aware of the position of black women in Jamaica and their exclusion in the realm of feminist discourse and nationalist politics. Through the theatre she attempts to right this wrong and creates distinct worlds on stage where women are given the space to speak directly to these issues and are heard.

In my next chapter, I discuss how Ivy Baxter transforms Jamaican dance-theatre through her inclusion of Jamaican folk dance vocabulary in her dance technique and shifts the aesthetic of dance-theatre in Jamaica. Her works *Elation* and *Pocomania*, which perform ritual and spirit

possession on stage, raised a number of issues for Jamaican audiences and her company, The Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## IVY BAXTER'S JAMAICAN FOLK

Ivy Baxter revolutionized Jamaican dance-theatre by creating a dance technique and aesthetic that valorized the lifestyles of a cross section of ordinary Jamaicans at a critical period of the colony's self-definition, namely, at the height of the nationalist movement. During her dance career from 1950 to 1962, she used the successful Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group to train urban and rural Jamaican audiences to appreciate little known aspects of their culture. She did this by dramatizing Jamaican subject matter, altering the standard image of the trained dancer, and "re-disciplining" the Jamaican dancer's body with her own technique that combined folk, ballet, modern, and mime. Her company embodied components of political leader Norman Manley's ideology on race and color. Her middle class upbringing made her a likely supporter of the more moderate and sophisticated Manley over his cousin and future political rival Alexander Bustamante, who championed the causes of the lower classes. Her research on Jamaican folk culture, including her position as the Dance Officer of the Social Welfare Commission, provided her with source material from across the island. With this folk material and her formal dance training, she mobilized her Creative Dance Group to disseminate a Jamaican consciousness that expanded upon popular ideas of nationalism and gender.

The creation of a technique and aesthetic through a set of bodily practices that was identifiably Jamaican provided the people with a set of images that visually communicated Norman Manley's abstract notions of a "new" Jamaica and an "independent" nation. In addition to developing a formal dance technique, Baxter also documented Jamaican folk dances and taught a range of non-dancers (teachers, school children, housewives, civil servants, manual

laborers, and farmers) how to teach these dances to others. Her Roadside Concerts and Folk Dance Workshops in major cities beyond Kingston and rural areas are examples of how Baxter made Jamaican dance accessible to non-traditional theatre-going audiences. She redefined dance and dance-theatre as art forms with which Jamaicans of all classes and ethnic backgrounds could identify as the colony made strides toward independence. In the mid-1950s, representation of Jamaican folk culture on stage was a relatively new phenomenon. Baxter's work throughout this period was a major force in the eventual acceptance of these forms on stage. Her use of Jamaican folk dance constructed a collective imagined past, while her use of modern dance for the first time in Jamaica signaled an innovative and promising future. The use of European modern dance vocabulary and technique provided Jamaican audiences with a cosmopolitan knowledge of current trends in art. For middle class audiences, Baxter's fusion of dance styles symbolized a level of cultural sophistication from an island worthy of independence.

In this chapter, I will provide a brief history of the early years of Jamaican dance-theatre and the representation of the Caribbean internationally in the early twentieth century. I frame Baxter's work in the context of the careers of Hazel Johnston, Beryl McBurnie, Katherine Dunham, Berto Pasuka, and Lavinia Williams Yarrow, who were performing Caribbean dance on stages around the world while Ivy Baxter was performing in Jamaica. In newspaper reviews of Baxter's work, she is often compared with these performers. The eventual acceptance of her aesthetic in Jamaica by middle class audiences is due, in part, to the international success of these choreographers.

The year 1962 marked the realization by Jamaica of political independence, as well as the beginning of the end of the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group. Rex Nettleford and Eddy

Thomas's National Dance Theatre Company (NDTC) of Jamaica was founded in the same year, and continued Baxter's work of defining the nation on stage through dance. The overwhelming success of the NDTC, founded by a core of Baxter dancers, and the subsequent rift between Baxter and founding Artistic Director of the NDTC, Rex Nettleford, created a great strain on Ivy Baxter's career after 1962. She struggled to continue as a choreographer by attempting to recreate the Creative Dance Group with her beginning level dancers and a small number of loyal friends. By the end of a few years of struggling to bring the group up to standard and continue performing, funding and the morale of the group had declined and opportunities to perform were few and far between. The group ceased performing and Baxter resigned herself to administrative work and teaching dance to children. The sheer longevity of the NDTC, which has produced an annual season for the past 40 years, and of the Jamaican School of Dance, founded in 1970, overshadows the memory and significance of Ivy Baxter's career even among current students of dance in Jamaica.

Baxter's death in 1993 at the age of 70 sparked a number of newspaper articles and memorial services acknowledging her many contributions to Jamaica. While upon her death Rex Nettleford and other former members of the Ivy Baxter Dance Group praised her as the "Mother of Jamaican Dance," during her lifetime she felt that she did not receive recognition and respect. Despite her tremendous contribution to Jamaican culture and dance, only one essay has documented Ivy Baxter's career.<sup>332</sup> This examination of her work is the first critical study of her choreography. My sources for this study are Baxter's book *The Arts of An Island*, Alma Mock Yen's essay on Baxter in *Caribbean Quarterly*, newspaper reviews, memorial articles,

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<sup>332</sup>Alma Mock Yen, "Remembering Ivy Baxter: Her Life and Legacy," *Caribbean Quarterly* 47, no.1 (March 2001) 7-29.

photographs from private collections, and numerous oral histories gathered from former members of her company. Because so little has been written about her, in the second section of this chapter, I will provide an overview of her life and dance career while pointing to key performances that demonstrate her participation in the development of a Jamaican consciousness.

In the third section of this chapter, “Embodying Nationalism,” I demonstrate how performances of *Polychrome* and discussions of Baxter’s technique reflect aspects of the nationalist discourse articulated by Norman Manley. Her performances of *Athletic Dance* and *Village Scene* articulate her ideology on gender: she demands respect for the male dancer on stage with hyper-masculine dances and adherence to hetero-normative coupling of dance partners. Yet she creates a unique space for women by revealing their social concerns through dance.

The last section of this chapter, “Dancing Pocomania: Embodying Spirit,” examines her productions of *Elation* (1952) and *Pocomania* (1961). In these performances Baxter restages rituals and initiates the process of myalisation of Jamaican dance-theatre. When some of her dancers, including Baxter herself, became possessed on stage, she struggled to “contain” possession while performing the ritual dances for audiences. I explore the implications of these productions for my theory of myalisation.

#### CARIBBEAN DANCE ON STAGE

In this section, I examine the history of dance-theatre in Jamaica in light of Baxter’s teacher Hazel Johnston, who trained Baxter in ballet. I will also provide brief overviews of the careers of Beryl McBurnie, Katherine Dunham, Berto Paskua, and Lavinia Williams Yarborough. These choreographers each conducted fieldwork in the Caribbean, adapted

Caribbean dances to the stage, and earned international reputations. Their careers all intersected with Baxter's at some point and influenced the opinions of her audiences and critics in Jamaica.

The origins of contemporary Jamaican dance-theatre lay in the early twentieth century with a small number of Kingston ballet teachers. Mrs. Keith Alexander was the first ballet teacher. Her shows, consisting entirely of white dancers, were performed exclusively for white audiences. (These performances took place within prominent downtown hotels to which only white patrons had access.)<sup>333</sup> The succession of ballet teachers after Mrs. Alexander includes Mrs. Squire, who taught Herma Dias. Dias later trained Hazel Johnston and Gloria Stone. Stone went on to become the first Jamaican dancer on Broadway in the 1940s, appearing in *The Song of Norway*. In this genealogy, Hazel Johnston, who taught in the late 1930s and 1940s, plays the most significant role in the evolution of Jamaican dance theatre as the first colored ballet teacher.

Although Hazel Johnston came from a very wealthy Jamaican family of fruit exporters, as a "brown lady," she faced racial discrimination that initially threatened her ballet career. Ivy Baxter in *The Arts of an Island* points to the issue of race when discussing Johnston's ballet performances. After studying music and dance in England at the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing in London and the Euphran McLaren School in South Kensington, Johnston returned to Jamaica to face the racism of the Anglo-Jamaican elite who viewed ballet as a strictly European form that should be preserved as such in the colonies.

It was hard going at first, for nowhere could she rent a hall in which to hold classes, even though other teachers had held classes [there] before. At that time it was very difficult for a colored person to enter preserves formerly held by a white world.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 285.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

Her career on the island began in her friend Anna Maria Hendriks' drawing room. Hendriks was a member of Jamaica's black middle class. Eventually, Johnston's classes and performances were to become so popular that she became the first dance teacher in Jamaica to construct her own studio. Between her return from England in 1937 until her death in 1944, she taught ballet, Greek, tap and acrobatic dancing.<sup>335</sup> Johnston advocated for change by inspiring all her students—white, Chinese, and brown alike—to achieve their personal best.

In 1946, Johnston choreographed a version of *Sleeping Beauty* in three acts and introduced a male ballet dancer, Neville Alexander, on stage for the first time. Rex Nettleford in *Dance Jamaica* discusses the tension around the use of the male body in dance-theatre due to fears of effeminacy and homosexuality. Beginning in the 1940s, when dance-theatre became accessible to some middle class black audiences, suspicion of the male ballet dancer emerged among black men based “on concerns about sexual prowess and the emasculation of their manhood under slavery.”<sup>336</sup> Ivy Baxter, Johnston's most famous student, would follow Johnston in showing male dancers. While Johnston began to break down barriers of race and gender in her performances, Baxter would push these social boundaries even further by including dancers of every complexion, ethnic origin, and body type in her company. She succeeded in making the male dancer socially acceptable by actively recruiting male dancers into her company who could project from the stage her choreographic vision of heightened masculinity.

While Johnston had an interest in creating a Jamaican dance aesthetic inspired from the movement of the black lower classes, she was daunted by the task of ethnography.

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Rex Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica*, 25.

If there were in existence any recognized folk dances, the task would be very much simplified, but Jamaican native dances consist of improvisations which, however, bear similarity to each other. This is in itself proof of the spontaneity and natural aptitude of our people, but it presents almost insurmountable difficulties to the choreographer.<sup>337</sup>

Johnston immediately identified the problem of improvisation within social dances and rituals in particular. She recognized the necessity of ethnography that would document and differentiate Jamaican folk dances and that could account for the element of improvisation that operated within a set of movement vocabularies. Baxter admits that she did not realize the magnitude of the task of ethnography when she formed her company. She began by making observations of aspects of Jamaican urban and rural life, and used mime and folk movement as well as her training in ballet and modern dance to adapt what she saw to the stage.<sup>338</sup>

Baxter's dance training included Laban notation. Her position at the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission allowed her to travel throughout the country and document Jamaican folk dances. Her in-depth ethnography and training in a range of forms allowed her to create a new form of dance in Jamaica. Her work was inspired in part by the careers of other choreographers who performed Caribbean dance in the region and beyond.

In 1987, the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary by honoring Beryl McBurnie of Trinidad, Ivy Baxter of Jamaica, and Lavinia Williams Yarborough of Haiti (via New York). The NDTC dedicated their Silver Jubilee season to the "Three High Priestesses" of Caribbean dance and presented them with plaques and flowers at the annual gala event. They also co-sponsored a symposium, "The Aesthetics of Negritude," with the Jamaica School of Dance, with the three choreographers as the featured speakers for the

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>338</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of An Island*.

event. This moment in Caribbean dance history demonstrates the impact that all three women have had on dance in the region. The event was a rare moment for Ivy Baxter, to be recognized in Jamaica after feeling slighted by the success of the NDTC in its early years and the demise of her own company. Examination of the state of Jamaican dance theatre before Ivy Baxter's career and the role she played at a crucial moment in the nation's history reveals that her contribution to Jamaican dance is immeasurable.

Beryl McBurnie was one of the first Trinidadian choreographers to perform Caribbean folk forms on stage and faced similar criticisms to those faced by Baxter for her radical departure from ballet. Like Baxter, McBurnie had a somewhat successful career beginning in 1940 in Trinidad where she later became known as the "Mother of Caribbean Dance." Her company performed for nineteen years. By 1959, under financial pressure, it ceased performing. She received numerous awards, including a special tribute from Alvin Ailey in 1978, but in the later years of her life she, too, felt that she had not received the level of recognition she deserved. While this is probably true—like Baxter's, her works are no longer performed—McBurnie has to date nonetheless received more recognition than Baxter. A biography of her life, *The Cradle of Caribbean Dance*, was written by one of her students, Molly Ahye, and her famous Little Carib Theatre still stands in Port-of-Spain. But like Baxter, her works are no longer performed.

Beryl McBurnie was a teacher who researched folk dance with Trinidadian folklorist Andrew Carr in her spare time. In 1938, she traveled to New York to study medicine. Upon her arrival, she rebelled against her parents and instead enrolled in dance classes with Martha Graham at Columbia University and with Charles Weidman at the Academy of Allied Arts.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Judy Raymond, "Beryl McBurnie: 1914-2000," *The Sunday Guardian* (April 2, 2000): 15.

She danced professionally in New York for a brief period in the 1940s under the stage name of “La Belle Rosette.” According to reviews, she showed great promise, but gave up the possibility of becoming a huge star in order to return to Trinidad in 1942.

In Trinidad, McBurnie worked for the government and introduced folk dances into the schools. Her fieldwork expanded to research in the Guianas, Suriname, Brazil, Venezuela, the Grenadines, and Cayenne, where she saw an intimate theatre which she sketched as a model for her Little Carib Theatre.<sup>340</sup>

The ground-breaking ceremony for the theatre was a national event in 1948, attended by such dignitaries as actor and activist Paul Robeson and Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams. From the beginning, funding was very limited, and the first Little Carib theatre was “a shed made of galvanized iron and palm leaves. The Little Carib wasn’t so much a building as an idea—a Big Idea.”<sup>341</sup> The Little Carib was the scene of nightly jam sessions of drumming and dancing, plays, and poetry readings. “McBurnie was the first person to put a steelband on stage... In those days steelbands were considered disreputable good-for-nothings, not real musicians, but McBurnie, herself a natural rebel, was undeterred.”<sup>342</sup> McBurnie was considered more rebellious than Baxter because of her somewhat confrontational personality and open defiance of the expectations of middle-class audiences.

In 1957, McBurnie taught dance at the Extra-mural Summer School Program at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. There she met a young poet and dramatist, Derek Walcott from St. Lucia, who was teaching a course in drama. McBurnie’s use of folk material inspired him to consider using folk forms to create West Indian plays. Shortly after the summer

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

school experience, he wrote his classic folk play, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, which incorporated folk songs and dances into the production. Walcott eventually moved to Trinidad. In 1959 he founded the Little Carib Theatre Workshop. But McBurnie and Walcott were both strong-willed personalities. They soon clashed, and it became impossible for them to share the same space. McBurnie eventually locked the actors out of the Little Carib, and in the mid-60s Walcott was forced to create the Trinidad Theatre Workshop on his own.

Early in her career, Beryl McBurnie inspired another dancer during her brief time in New York, where she taught Caribbean music and dance at the New Dance Group Studio and at Henry Street Settlement Playhouse. In 1938, Katherine Dunham was one of McBurnie's students. Upon her arrival in New York from Chicago, Dunham took private lessons in Caribbean folk dance from McBurnie. In an effort to correct a mistake published in a 1966 issue of *Dance Magazine* giving Dunham credit for bringing Caribbean dance to American stages, Lavinia Williams writes:

Also, the first person to promote primitive and Caribbean dancing was not Katherine Dunham but Beryl McBurnie, who was originally from Trinidad. I am told that Dunham took lessons from her when she came to N.Y.C. from Chicago. Beryl McBurnie left New York after many people began to copy her dances and is now heading the 'Little Carib.'<sup>343</sup>

Dunham had visited Trinidad briefly in 1936, but had not studied or learned the island's dances during her visit. Years later, Dunham performed a show set in Trinidad, *Carib Song*, as a tribute to all that she had learned from Trinidad and Beryl McBurnie.<sup>344</sup> Dunham danced professionally for over twenty-five years from 1938-1963. She marks the beginning of her

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<sup>343</sup> Molly Ahye, *The Cradle of Caribbean Dance: Beryl McBurnie and the Little Carib Theatre* (Trinidad and Tobago: Heritage Culture Ltd., 1983), 4. Ahye citing *Dance Magazine*, "In the Mailbox" December 1966, p. 35.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

career as the classes she took with McBurnie upon moving to New York, which inspired her first major success, *Caribbean Rhapsody*.<sup>345</sup>

Raised in Joliet, Illinois, Katherine Dunham began her dance training in her late teens. She earned a B.A. in Social Anthropology from the University of Chicago in 1936. Anthropologist Melville Herskovits of Northwestern University was one of her mentors when she was awarded the Rosenwald Travel Fellowship that enabled her to study dance, utilizing the techniques of anthropology, in Jamaica, Trinidad, Cuba, Haiti, and Martinique. This year of travel and study changed the course of Dunham's life. The Caribbean became the source of much of her choreography, including her seminal work *L'Ag'Ya*, and Haiti became her second home. Her fieldwork in Jamaica is documented in *Journey to Accompong*. Her master's thesis at Northwestern University in 1947 was published in the same year as *The Dances of Haiti*. Dunham also wrote *Island Possessed*, discussing the evolution of African religions and rituals in the New World.

After her fieldwork for the master's thesis, in 1937 Katherine Dunham returned to Chicago and began incorporating Caribbean dances into her choreography. In 1939, Dunham moved her dance company, The Negro Dance Group, dedicated to producing work on African American and African Caribbean dance, from Chicago to New York City. Inspired by her dance classes with McBurnie, she staged her famous *Tropics and Le Jazz Hot: From Haiti to Harlem*, which catapulted her into national and international fame. The success of the extended ten-week run of *Tropics* opened the doors of Broadway and Hollywood for Dunham. She and her company appeared in the Broadway musical *Cabin in the Sky* choreographed by George

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

Balanchine, and in her 1946 revue *Bal Negre*. She appeared in nine Hollywood movies, including *Carnival of Rhythm*, *Stormy Weather*, and *Mambo*.

Like Dunham, Jamaican-born Berto Pasuka studied dance with the maroons of Jamaica, and he performed songs and dances for tourists. In 1931, Pasuka and Jamaican dancer Richie Riley met while rehearsing for a performance spectacle organized for the opening of Marcus Garvey's amusement park in Kingston. "The show was short-lived but Riley and Pasuka had caught the dancing bug."<sup>346</sup> In 1939, Berto Pasuka left Jamaica for Britain to pursue his dream of becoming a professional dancer. He and Riley met again in Britain and formed the first Black British dance company, Les Ballet Nègres in 1946.

The classically trained Riley, who attended the Astafieva school, of Ashton and Fonteyn fame, linked up with Pasuka, who had finished work as a dancer on a film called *Men of Two Worlds*, a rather dodgy study of paternalistic British officials and African natives that also goes under the title *Witch Doctor*. Enlisting the Nigerian drummers and ethnically mixed co-dancers on the movie, Pasuka decided it was time to strike up a company of his own.<sup>347</sup>

The dancers with whom he performed came from a wide range of countries. They included British-born black dancers, Canadians, Nigerians, Trinidadians, Germans, Guyanese, Ghanaians, and Jamaicans. Receiving high praise from dance critics, the company toured Europe and beyond. Pasuka based his choreography on Caribbean themes. *Market Day*, one of Pasuka and Riley's most famous performances, featured four of Pasuka's choreographic works. The company performed for six years until 1952, when it closed due to cuts in government

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<sup>346</sup> Keith Watson, *The Guardian*, "They [Les Ballet Negres] were Britain's first black dance company. How come no one's ever heard of them?" Thursday August 5, 1999. [www.guardian.co.uk/arts/story/0,3604,282185.00.htm](http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/story/0,3604,282185.00.htm) (accessed January 11, 2004).

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

funding.<sup>348</sup> In August of 1999, Black British choreographer Leon Robinson and his company Positive Steps restaged *Market Day* as a tribute to Les Ballet Nègres.

While Pasuka's career as a professional dancer (1946-52) was short-lived, newspaper accounts of the critical acclaim his work received in Britain helped legitimize the choreography of Jamaicans at home who were incorporating Jamaican folk dance forms. When Ivy Baxter's group emerged in 1950, comparisons between her work and the careers of Beryl McBurnie, Katherine Dunham, and Berto Pasuka were immediate. Even when middle class Jamaican audiences had not yet embraced Baxter's folk-based approach to dance, they were fully aware of the fame of the other performers and knew that international audiences appreciated performances of Caribbean folk forms on stage.

In the early 1950s, a student of Katherine Dunham's, Lavinia Williams Yarborough, emerged as a major force in the development of a national dance aesthetic in Haiti. American-born, Lavinia Williams Yarborough studied ballet as a child in Virginia and moved to New York in 1935 upon receiving a scholarship to the Art Students' League. She enjoyed a successful career in New York, dancing with Eugene Von Grona's American Negro Ballet for three years and with Agnes de Mille's American Ballet Theatre for one season, before joining Katherine Dunham's company as a dancer and instructor. There she learned about Caribbean dance, especially Haitian traditions. She performed several solos for the company and appeared in the Broadway musical *Cabin in the Sky* and the film *Stormy Weather*. She toured Europe in Noble

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<sup>348</sup> PeoplePlay UK, "Black British Dance, Ballet Nègres," [www.peopleplayuk.org/guided\\_tours/dance\\_tour/black\\_dance/british\\_intro.php](http://www.peopleplayuk.org/guided_tours/dance_tour/black_dance/british_intro.php) (accessed January 11, 2004).

Sissle's revival of *Shuffle Along*, a revival of *Showboat*, and a production of *Finian's Rainbow* and *My Darlin' Aida*.<sup>349</sup>

In 1953, she was hired by the Haitian Education Bureau and the Bureau of Tourism to develop Haiti's national school of dance, the National Folklore Group. In 1954, she founded the Haitian Institute for Folklore and Classical Dance and became the director of Haiti's Theatre de Verdure. She remained in Haiti for 26 years during which time she traveled to other Caribbean countries to help develop dance in the region. She regularly taught dance in Jamaica's Extra-mural Summer Program at the University of the West Indies in the late 1950s and in the Dance Institute organized by Ivy Baxter in the 60s. In the 1970s she developed national schools of dance in Guyana and the Bahamas. She returned to New York in the 1980s to teach dance at Alvin Ailey's American Dance Center School and New York University.<sup>350</sup>

Baxter transformed the tradition of dance theatre performances in Jamaica, with their focus on ballet by white, brown, and Chinese girls. She introduced not just folk dances, but also modern dance and mime onto Jamaican stages. Although she had studied ballet with Hazel Johnston, Baxter's career was similar to that of Beryl McBurnie, Katherine Dunham, Berto Pasuka, and Lavinia Williams Yarborough in her engagement with the ethnography of Caribbean folk dances and fusion of these forms with modern dance and ballet. Baxter's contribution to Jamaica includes the introduction to the art stage of folk dances and a wider range of dancing bodies. She was also sensitive to the changing political climate in the 1950s and early 1960s, and her work addressed issues of poverty, gender, race, color, and the new nation.

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<sup>349</sup> *Encyclopedia Of African-American Culture And History*, s.v. "Williams, Lavinia." Great Performances: Free To Dance-Biographies-Lavinia Williams. [www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/biographies/lwilliams.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/freetodance/biographies/lwilliams.html) (accessed January 11, 2004).

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

One enthusiastic Jamaican audience member compares Baxter to Beryl McBurnie and Katherine Dunham, and sees her as a major force capable of representing Jamaica on the international stage.

Jamaican native dance forms are crying out for someone with the training and the art to formalize them and give them choreographic meaning and pattern. In Trinidad, Beryl McBurnie has been very successful in crystallizing both dance and song forms into recognized and intelligible routines much after the fashion—but not quite as elaborate—as Katherine Dunham’s work on stage and in films. There are many talented male and female dancers here doing the rounds of concerts and night clubs, but they need the touch of the trained artist to enable their skill to be seen to advantage.<sup>351</sup>

Baxter’s first performances gave this writer hope that Baxter would fulfill this role in Jamaica.

The “native” dances of Jamaica became known through the work of choreographers and dance historians beginning with Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, and Ivy Baxter, who documented Jamaican folk dance and folk movement. The signature movement styles of Jamaica that have been recorded and adapted are: Kumina, Pocomania/Revival movement, Mento, and Quadrille. Each of these has its own movement style, footwork, composition, music, and progression. Ivy Baxter made these dances recognizable as *Jamaican*. Today they are performed most often at national or regional cultural festivals on the island. I briefly describe the movement of these dances before turning an analysis of the career of Baxter.

The Jamaican dance Kumina is derived from the parish of St. Thomas where the Free Africans first settled and began practicing a religion of the same name. Through my own field work in Jamaica, I have seen this dance performed on several occasions by Kumina practitioners and professional dancers. What follows is my description as a lay person.

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<sup>351</sup> Newspaper article, “Dance to Form,” Unknown author, date, or publication, from 1950 scrapbook, Ivy Baxter collection.

The action is centered around two drums and drummers. The drums are laid on their sides and face each other. Each man sits on his drum and uses one heel pressed against the skin of the drum and his hands to play it. The men complement each other in their playing and sing while playing. The dancers, usually female, circle around the drummers in a series of wheels and turns and rocking hip movements. The element that always stands out to me is the intricate footwork. With each step, the dancer's right foot must land almost on the arch of the foot and roll toward the opposite outer edge of the foot. The rolling motion is also seen from the ball of the foot to the heel. This repetitive "tramping" is a complex movement and only a true Kumina dancer can master this and keep time with her swiveling hips and arm movements. Over time the rhythm and intensity of the drumming builds. The dancers quicken their turns and their circles around the drummers until possession occurs.

Revival dance is marked by the above-described tramping movement, during which guttural breathing is heard, and through which wide turns are executed. The tramping movement requires a torso bent roughly 90° at the waist. One arm is extended and swings up, usually in a fist, with the torso and the head following. At the same time one foot steps forward and the guttural breath is released. The repetition of the tramping movement and wide turns triggers possession, which is sometimes expressed by quick spins. If traditional costume is worn, the wide skirts of the women flare out and the space is filled with oscillating fabric and color, usually white. If the dance takes place in a sacred setting, a long table dominates the space and all of the dancing happens around the table. The table is "set" with symbolic objects that identify what the community wants to communicate to the ancestors. In theatrical presentations of Revival (or Pocomania) the table is usually absent.

I have not observed Mento or Quadrille often enough to comment on the key characteristics of these dances. Together these dances (Kumina, Revival, Mento and Quadrille) came to represent a specific Jamaican national identity.<sup>352</sup> In the following section I chart the trajectory of the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group and Baxter's life after 1962.

#### THE IVY BAXTER CREATIVE DANCE GROUP

Born in 1923 in Spanish Town, Jamaica, Ivy Baxter was the sixth daughter of Aubrey William Allen Baxter and Fanny Beatrice Wright. Ivy's father was a civil servant for the railway and later, the Public Works department.<sup>353</sup> Fanny Beatrice died early in Ivy's life.<sup>354</sup> Ivy, along with her five sisters, grew up in a middle class Jamaican society. The Baxters were a religious family and attended Anglican services regularly. Ivy converted to Catholicism in the late 1940s, while her sisters remained Anglican.<sup>355</sup>

The sisters were expected to achieve much for themselves, uphold the family name, and make a contribution to Jamaican society. Aubrey Baxter ensured that his daughters were well educated. They all attended the prestigious Wolmer's Girl's school, and three of Ivy's sisters were awarded the Jamaica Scholarship for Girls.<sup>356</sup> Their father, beloved by his daughters, encouraged the sisters not to marry because he felt that marriage would deter them from being truly independent and successful career women. Aubrey Baxter's request that his daughters

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<sup>352</sup> See Hilary S. Carty's *Folk Dances of Jamaica: An Insight* (Hampshire: Dance Books Ltd, 1988) for extensive descriptions of Jamaican folk dances and their histories.

<sup>353</sup> Marguerite Curtain, "The Life and Leadership of Ivy Baxter, Memorial Lecture" (Partners of the Americas, March 2, 1994) 9.

<sup>354</sup> Ivy Baxter's mother, Fanny Beatrice Wright, died young. I have been unable to find information on her life or the year of her death.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

remain single suggests the presence of feminist ideology in the Baxter household instilled in his daughters from a tender age.

Aubrey Baxter's request was both personal and political, as middle class women were expected to be housewives, mothers, and volunteer church social workers. Instead, the sisters were expected to deny their romantic desires and to give up a life of leisure typical of their class in order to make a greater contribution to Jamaican society through their careers.

The Baxter sisters each fulfilled their father's wishes, becoming pioneers in their separate fields. Arabel became one of the first black female barristers in the country, while Edith was one of the first black female doctors. Daisy was the only one of the sisters to marry, but she had no children. Olive became one of the first female headmistresses of a prestigious secondary school in Kingston.<sup>357</sup> While none of the sisters were particularly vocal about Jamaican politics, I argue in this chapter that Baxter's work was politically charged because it constructed a multi-ethnic identity for the emerging nation and in some cases explicitly addressed issues of nationalism and feminism.

After secondary school, Ivy won a YWCA scholarship to Toronto University in Canada for a degree in Physical Education.<sup>358</sup> Upon her return to Jamaica, from 1947 to 1950, she established herself as a "physical culture" teacher at the Excelsior School, as a volunteer Physical Instructor and Secretary for the YWCA, and as a choreographer for a number of local theatrical productions including several Little Theatre Movement (LTM) Pantomimes.<sup>359</sup> Baxter began to train a small group of close friends in what she called "creative" dance. By 1950, at the

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<sup>357</sup> I have not been able to obtain information on the careers of Joyce and Edith.

<sup>358</sup> Marguerite Curtain, "The Life and Leadership of Ivy Baxter," 12.

<sup>359</sup> *The Sunday Gleaner*, July 2, 1950. "Farewell and Bon Voyage" and "Through the Looking Glass" by Duchess "Portrait Gallery" *West Indian Review*, August 5, 1950. Ivy Baxter Scrapbook, 1950.

age of 27, with the encouragement of friend and dramatist Noel Vaz, she founded the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group (IBCDG). Over the course of the next twelve years she worked tirelessly to redefine Jamaican dance-theatre.

Upon founding the group, Baxter wrote a formal constitution including a “Policy and Aims” section that outlined her vision and defined the group’s purpose.

THE IVY BAXTER CREATIVE DANCE GROUP, under the direction of Ivy Baxter, exists as a cultural group to widen its own knowledge and experience of dance and to develop a dance expression in keeping with life and culture in the Caribbean. THE GROUP also aims to do research in folklore of the Islands, with a view to recording and presenting this wealth of indigenous background material to the World. The activities of the GROUP shall include—1) Regular classes to attain and maintain the necessary technique; 2) Research, study and demonstration of authentic folk-dance, music and art; 3) Theatrical Productions.<sup>360</sup>

Here Baxter articulates the desire for a formal dance-theatre tradition that is unique to the Caribbean. Her mission, as she defines it, is to present the Caribbean “to the World” through the medium of dance. She speaks in regional as opposed to nationalist terms, revealing the political fervor around a West Indies Federation of the early 1950s that was achieved in 1958, but quickly dissipated by 1962.

The members of the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group were drawn from a pool of amateur actors and dancers who participated in the Little Theatre Movement’s annual Pantomime and other theatrical productions. Some attended classes regularly at the local ballet studios, took recreational dance and physical classes at the YWCA, and were students of a drama course taught at the Extra Mural Department of the University.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Ivy Baxter, “Policy and Aims of the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group,” 1953 in Ivy Baxter Manuscript Collection at the Jamaica National Library.

<sup>361</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 298.

Ethnic and racial diversity among the group's members was important to Baxter. Evidence of this is found in the group's first recital, which took place at the Open-Air Anderson House Theatre on Brentford Road in Cross Roads for three performances in late July, 1950.<sup>362</sup> A newspaper article announcing it describes the group's performances in the following manner. "The mixed group of dance enthusiasts will perform a ballet dance with a Jamaican theme."<sup>363</sup> The reference to the membership as a "mixed group" suggests the mixed genders in the group, the mixed level of ability, as well as the ethnic and racial diversity of the group that Baxter insisted on from its inception. Her close relationship with her mentor Hazel Johnston, the range of her abilities as a dancer, and her own experiences as a young "brown" dancer in Jamaica, made her well aware of those who had been excluded from the proscenium stage in Jamaica because of their gender, color, body type, and lack of training. She prided herself on the diversity within her Creative Dance Group. Every ethnic group of Jamaica was represented among her dancers. This was a radical departure from the standard image of the ballet dancer in Jamaica as a young and thin woman who was either Anglo-Jamaican or of Chinese descent. "Our group is entirely amateur, and we are varied in our occupations—clerical workers, artists, housewives, artisans, teachers, students."<sup>364</sup> While her members represented an ethnic cross section of Jamaica, they were all from middle class backgrounds.

Baxter actively recruited Jamaicans of Indian and Chinese descent. After the emancipation of slaves in 1834 in the British Caribbean, large numbers of indentured servants from India and China were imported to the region in boats that were very similar to the slave

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<sup>362</sup> Cross Roads is an urban retail area of Upper St. Andrew/Kingston, Jamaica.

<sup>363</sup> "Farewell and Bon Voyage," *The Sunday Gleaner*, July 2, 1950.

<sup>364</sup> Programme for the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group Studio Concerts, July 1957, Dance Programs Collection, Jamaica National Library.

ships that formerly carried slaves from Africa.<sup>365</sup> The indentured servants were promised a life of prosperity and land after only ten years of moderate labor. The Indians and Chinese arrived to find themselves in slave conditions on Caribbean plantations, and most of them had to work their entire adult lives to pay off their debts and receive small plots of land, if any. In spite of their slave-like condition, they were viewed by the planter class as higher in status than people of African descent. Subsequent generations of Indians and Chinese had an easier time rising to the middle class, especially the Chinese because of their light complexion. Their upward mobility caused rivalries with the Africa-descended population in places like Trinidad, where Indians are 50% of the population. In Jamaica, however, the Indians and Chinese were always a small minority who kept to themselves, often retaining their languages and cultural practices and intermarrying.<sup>366</sup> Chinese ballet dancers were common in Jamaica, especially given Madame May Soohih's company in Kinston, and their light complexion gave them access to other companies as well.<sup>367</sup> For Baxter, it was important to include both Chinese and Indian dancers in her company in order to represent the diversity of Jamaica.

Baxter was the first choreographer to introduce the concept of adult dancing to Jamaica; previously dancing consisted of ballet recitals by girls or young women. Baxter had over twenty-five adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty in her group. She created three skill

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<sup>365</sup> Walton Look Lai, *The Chinese in the West Indies 1806-1995: A Documentary History* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 1998), 4-5.

<sup>366</sup> For more information see Verene Shepherd, *Transients to Settlers: The Experience of Indians in Jamaica, 1845-1950*, (England: Peepal Tree, University of Warwick, 1994); Laxmi Mansingh, *Home Away From Home: 150 Years of Indian Presence in Jamaica, 1845-1995*, (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999); and Walton Look Lai, *The Chinese in the West Indies, 1806-1995: A Documentary History*, (Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 1998).

<sup>367</sup> Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica*, 31.

levels: beginning, intermediate, and advanced dancers. She introduced dance as a legitimate hobby for adults but did not have the funds to pay them to be full-time professional dancers.<sup>368</sup>

The stage that her Creative Dance Group used for their first recital was built for the University Drama Workshop.<sup>369</sup> In preparation for Baxter's show the stage underwent a transformation to make it suitable for a dance performance. Baxter brought in new, makeshift lighting equipment, set design, and other fixtures to make the space more inviting.<sup>370</sup>

The program booklet notes that their first ballet had a Jamaican theme. Baxter's recital was the first to attempt to represent Jamaican movement. Ivy Baxter performed two solos in the production, *The Swan of Tuonella*, which utilized music of the same name by Jan Sibelius, and *Polychrome*, named after a poem she wrote for the piece read by Dickie Morris at one side of the stage to drumming by Norman Rae. The piece *Daylight* was also performed to spoken word. One reviewer commented on the impact of this theatrical device on the audience. "Both dances to verse, 'Polychrome' and 'Daylight,' were greatly heightened by the emotional appeal of the spoken word. Or, if you will, the other way around."<sup>371</sup> Drumming and poetry read off stage as accompaniment to dance pieces was an innovation in Jamaican dance and became a common feature of Baxter's performances.

The featured full-length piece of the evening was entitled *Passing Parade: A Dance Drama of Jamaica*, based on a Kingston street scene. The dance attempts to capture a day in the life of a policeman, stationed at a busy urban corner of Kingston, observing the people who pass

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<sup>368</sup> Enid Douglass, Interview by Karima Robinson. This is still the case for most dancers today in Jamaica with the exception of those who work for the School of Dance as teachers or individuals who accessed their private funds to support their artistic endeavors.

<sup>369</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 299.

<sup>370</sup> "Ivy Baxter's Dance Recital 'Captivates,'" *The Daily Gleaner*, July 26, 1950. Ivy Baxter Scrapbook, 1950.

<sup>371</sup> "Dance Recital By Ivy Baxter And Her Group" *Public Opinion*, Saturday, August, 5, 1950. (Author—S.) Ivy Baxter Scrapbook, 1950.

him. A second scene follows wherein he meets these characters again in his dreams.<sup>372</sup>

Reviewers were impressed with Baxter's ability to portray daily life in Jamaica with accuracy and humor. Her use of modern dance and mime is clear. A large cast played the roles of street-sweepers, policemen, women selling apples and candy, sailors, and tourists.<sup>373</sup> The other element that made specific reference to Jamaica was the arranged folk music composed by Hazel Lawson Street and orchestrated by Mapletoft Poulle, who composed and arranged classical and folk music for Baxter throughout her career.

For the most part, reviewers applauded the show and recognized its importance for Jamaican dance.

The significance of this dance recital lies in the emergence of a creative group which seeks to express through the medium of the dance the variety and vitality of our age. This development of creative group work, the bold experiment with rhythms and movement patterns, the expression of our rich West Indian resources, all mark the coming of maturity to the dance in Jamaica.<sup>374</sup>

In spite of the overwhelming success of the production and the positive reviews, some critics pointed to areas in need of improvement by the young creative dance group. Of *Passing Parade*, one reviewer remarked, "It could not properly be called 'A Dance Drama of Jamaica,' since there was very little real dancing, but rather more pantomime and miming. As such, it was a clever little sketch, well conceived and amusingly portrayed...."<sup>375</sup> The patronizing attitude of this reviewer toward the group's performances was typical of Baxter's reviews, which fluctuated between high praise and harsh criticism about form, ability, and an over-reliance on Jamaican

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<sup>372</sup> 1950 Program of Ivy Baxter Dance Recital, 5 in Dance Programmes Collection, Jamaica National Library.

<sup>373</sup> "Baxter's Dance Recital Pleases First Nighters" Tuesday, July 25, 1950. Ivy Baxter Scrapbook, 1950.

<sup>374</sup> "Baxter Group Gives Final Dance Recital Tomorrow," *The Daily Gleaner*, July 28, 1950. Ivy Baxter Scrapbook, 1950.

<sup>375</sup> "Ivy Baxter's Dance Recital 'Captivates'" *The Daily Gleaner*, July 26, 1950. Ivy Baxter Scrapbook, 1950. Emphasis mine.

folk dances. But *Passing Parade* was more than a sketch; its use of mime and its attempt to capture aspects of everyday Jamaican life became one of Baxter's hallmarks.

While some reviews critiqued Baxter's choreography, others commented on her need to develop as a dancer. Early in her career Baxter made the decision to remain an offstage presence for the group as often as possible. In her *The Arts of an Island*, she writes: "I have danced little in group performances, having decided very early that I was more interested in teaching than in performing."<sup>376</sup> It is not entirely clear why she made this decision, but some clues lie in the reviews of this first performance in 1950, when the spotlight was focused on Baxter as the lead dancer of the group. One reviewer critiqued her ability. "Miss Baxter has noticeable ability for expressing a theme through dance, and when she acquires more balance and finesse, she will assuredly be in the class of Katya Delakova, a noted character dancer who has just completed a most successful season in New York."<sup>377</sup> Delakova migrated to New York after fleeing Nazi Germany in 1939. She soon founded the Jewish Dance Repertory Group and taught classes on Jewish folk dance. The comparison here with Baxter is a way of acknowledging the content of Baxter's work as based in Jamaican folk dance and suggesting that she has the same potential for international recognition as Delakova. This is another cue to theatre-goers that the folk from a range of cultures is being embraced abroad and an argument for why middle class Jamaicans should celebrate one of their own.

Former dancer and friend Alma Mock Yen suggests that Baxter's decision to step down as a dancer occurred because Baxter felt the need to represent the group to the press, dignitaries, and local organizations in Jamaica. She became the spokesperson for the group and enjoyed

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<sup>376</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 298-99.

<sup>377</sup> "Ivy Baxter's Dance Recital 'Captivates,'" *The Daily Gleaner*, July 26, 1950. Ivy Baxter Scrapbook, 1950.

viewing the entire performance from the vantage point of the audience.<sup>378</sup> Norman Rae, former Baxter dancer and later theatre critic and director, speculates that Baxter was concerned about her own body image on stage as a very tall, yet stout woman. While she encouraged dancers of all body types on stage, which broke the perceived norm of the ballet dancer, she herself was unwilling to face the possible negative criticism from conservative reviewers.<sup>379</sup> It is possible that a combination of these concerns about how the group was represented to the public influenced her decision to remain off stage as a dancer.

After the group's first performance in July of 1950, Baxter left Jamaica in August to attend the School of European Ballet under the direction of Sigurd Leeder, who had studied with Kurt Joos in Germany. She remained in London for a year and a half at the Leeder School. Baxter defines the type of dance taught by the school as "...a school whose purpose is to eliminate the strict and inflexible movements of the classical ballet and to introduce more freedom of expression into the ballet."<sup>380</sup> At Leeder she studied "music, dance notation, choreutics, the study of the use of space; eukinetics, the study of the quality of movement; and dance composition."<sup>381</sup> In her essay on research of Caribbean folk dances, Baxter articulates the philosophy of Rudolf Von Laban and advocates the use of his system of movement notation by Caribbean researchers. Her training at Leeder taught her to regard dance ethnology as a field that reveals the psychological state of the mover, as well as the physiological and social purposes of the dance to the community or individuals who practice it. She advocates the use of Laban notation and film as tools to document Caribbean folk dance forms and identifies three purposes

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<sup>378</sup> Alma Mock Yen, Interview by Karima Robinson, at her home, Kingston, Jamaica.

<sup>379</sup> Norman Rae, Interview by Karima Robinson, at restaurant in Kingston, Jamaica.

<sup>380</sup> R.C., "Jamaica will greet its dance group," *The Daily Gleaner*, September 8, 1952, 12.

<sup>381</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 299.

for these dances: their preservation as a part of Caribbean culture, their use in theatrical productions, and their power as educational tools in the Caribbean.<sup>382</sup> Indeed, Jamaican folk dances would become part of elementary school curricula in Jamaica, thanks to Baxter's work on stage and off. The dancers she trained fulfilled her legacy by forming their own successful companies, most notably Garth Fagan's in New York and the National Dance Theatre Company, and by becoming teachers in the Jamaica School of Dance.

Baxter's training at Leeder in dance ethnography and Laban notation provided her with advanced techniques in the field, which she used to study and document Jamaican folk dances. Her rigorous training, when applied to a formerly ignored and denigrated folk culture, elevated the folk to an object worthy of study. Her subsequent performances then valorized the folk and Jamaica as a colony fighting for political independence. Her study of the psychological and social purposes of the dances is consistent with my definition of myal-theatre, to be analyzed in relationship to *Elation* and *Pocomania* in the last section of this chapter.

Ivy Baxter returned to Jamaica in 1951 after her studies of dance in Britain. The Creative Dance Group's first major performance was at the Caribbean Folk Arts Festival at the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan in 1952. The festival was organized by Americans to celebrate Puerto Rico's new status as a U.S. commonwealth, meaning that it would be a U.S. territory but would govern itself under its own constitution. Baxter was able to convince the Jamaican government of the importance of the event and Jamaica's participation in it with the help of Phillip Sherlock, who succeeded Norman Manley as chairman of Jamaica Welfare, Ltd. Sherlock also served as the director of Extra-Mural Studies of the University of the West Indies

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<sup>382</sup> Ivy Baxter, Untitled Essay on Research into the Folk, Ivy Baxter Manuscript Collection, Jamaica National Library.

and later the Vice Chancellor of the University. Norman Manley's wife, Edna Manley, a visual artist and political activist, also aided Baxter.<sup>383</sup> The government granted the group £1,500 to perform at the festival.<sup>384</sup> Nineteen Caribbean countries participated in the week-long event, and the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group was voted one of the best shows of the festival.<sup>385</sup> When the group returned to Jamaica, they performed their festival show at the Ward Theatre in Kingston. The Governor, Sir Hugh Foot and Lady Foot, and their party attended the opening performance.<sup>386</sup>

Ivy Baxter choreographed three new pieces for the 1952 festival, *Fabrication*, *Village Scene*, and *Elation*. The group also performed *Passing Parade*. In between the dances, the Frats Quintet sang folk songs accompanied by Mapletoft Poulle's orchestra. *Fabrication*, like *Passing Parade*, represents a slice of life in Jamaica. It depicts the manual labor involved in building roads in the rural areas. Men and women performed the task of breaking stones under the watch of an overseer and gang leader who were responsible for making sure the gang completed its task. The gang leader encouraged the group to sing folk songs and perform dances to help pass the time while continuing with the difficult task of breaking stones. This type of work was very common in this period of Jamaica's development. Baxter transformed the back-breaking and tedious work of breaking stones all day in the Jamaican sun and humidity into a celebration of the sturdiness of Jamaican people.

*Elation* was the final performance of the group at the Caribbean Folk Arts Festival. It depicts a pocomania ritual. The Shepherd and each follower become possessed one by one, until

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<sup>383</sup> Phillip Sherlock, *Norman Manley*, 22.

<sup>384</sup> "Ivy Baxter Dance Troupe For Caribbean Festival," *The Daily Gleaner*, July 10, 1952, 10.

<sup>385</sup> "Dance Group Back From Caribbean Folklore Festival," *The Daily Gleaner*, August 12, 1952, 10.

<sup>386</sup> "Governor to attend Ivy Baxter Show," *The Daily Gleaner*, September 10, 1952, 10.

finally the entire group is in a state of possession. I will discuss this particular piece and the complexities of staging spirit possession at length in the last section of this chapter.

The Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group's participation in the festival was a milestone for the group of Jamaicans, who had little exposure to the culture of other Caribbean nations. Witnessing a wide range of folk traditions assured Baxter of her calling and solidified her belief in the value of Caribbean folk traditions. The troupe represented Jamaica, while Beryl McBurnie's more polished dancers of the Little Carib Theatre represented Trinidad. Baxter and her group returned to Jamaica with newfound energy and drive to create a Jamaican aesthetic in dance that would support the construction of national identity.

Baxter choreographed dance scenes for the annual Jamaican Pantomimes in the 1950s and 60s and used her folk/modern dance technique as well as many of the dancers from her group on stage. The pantomimes of this period strove toward the creation of a truly "Jamaican" theatrical form that could be clearly distinguished from its British predecessor, imported to the island in 1941. Ranny Williams and Louise Bennett led this movement of transformation in the Pantomime by bringing in folk songs and folk characters like Anancy and by placing Jamaican speech onto center stage.

The group's next major show, *Creations in Dance* (1954), won rave reviews from critics. This production included one of the group's most famous dance-dramas, *Rat Passage*, which depicted the experiences of a male Jamaican stowaway on a ship bound for England. Upon arrival, he faces poverty and racism in Britain. He unexpectedly falls in love with a young white woman, but in the end, dies before the two are able to marry. Audiences celebrated Baxter's style and the storyline of *Rat Passage*, which reflected a moment in history when large numbers

of Jamaicans were arriving in Britain after 1945 in search of work and better economic conditions.

During World War I, British subjects from India and the Caribbean were recruited as seamen, and some settled in seaport towns following the war. Despite legislation and incentives designed to facilitate their return to their countries of origin, many remained in Britain. In the period between the World Wars, dark skinned seamen were perceived as a source of social decay in seaport towns and were forced to comply with the Restriction Act of 1919 and the Aliens Order of 1920. These laws subjected immigrants to regular inspection by police and to the ever-present threat of deportation. The government feared the increase of a black population in Britain and an increase of violence in seaport towns initiated by unemployed whites who competed with them for jobs. During this period, the image of the black community as a source of social problems and a threat to the British way of life began to gain currency. After the Second World War, new groups of black immigrant workers arrived and added to the black populations in seaport towns. In spite of a long history of immigrants from European countries, the issue of immigration became synonymous with discussions of racial difference.<sup>387</sup> The negative image of blacks in Britain, which intensified after 1945, was the backdrop of Baxter's *Rat Passage* of 1954.

In *Rat Passage* Baxter successfully combined European theatrical conventions and Afro-Jamaican movement vocabulary. Dance historian Susan Manning has documented the work of West African choreographer Asadata Dafora and his popular *Kykunkor* in the 1930s in New York. "Whereas the proscenium frame and three-act structure recalled European opera and

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<sup>387</sup> John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 47-64.

ballet, the movement style and musical accompaniment recalled West African precedents.”<sup>388</sup>

Like Dafora, Baxter found success by combining European and African performance modes.

With this performance, Baxter had momentarily won over even her harshest critics. The strength of her depiction of Jamaicans abroad was powerful because the psychological desire to reach the metropolis was felt by all Jamaicans regardless of class. In addition, by 1954, Baxter’s so-called “weaker” dancers had matured, and the reviews suggest that Baxter had at last found the right mix of story line and form.

In 1956, Ivy Baxter became the All-Island Dance and Creative officer for the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission (formerly the Jamaica Welfare Ltd.), one of several organizations designed to help realize Norman Manley’s mission to improve the quality of life for peasant communities through outreach and education. This position allowed Baxter to travel to every corner of Jamaica and observe the culture of her people. During this time she documented the folk music and dances of Jamaica. “She wanted to understand how, figuratively speaking, Jamaica ‘danced’ in the dance of the universe.”<sup>389</sup>

Baxter was known as a very supportive teacher and mentor to members of the group and students in her studio. From the years 1957-59 she held annual Studio Concerts where senior members of the Ivy Baxter Group showcased works they choreographed alongside her own. In addition to major shows and Studio Concerts in Kingston, Jamaica’s capital, the group performed Roadside Concerts in the countryside. They danced in non-traditional venues like teacher training colleges. Thus, her stylized constructions of Jamaican life traveled throughout the island and reached a wide and varied audience.

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<sup>388</sup> Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 48.

<sup>389</sup> Marguerite Curtain, “The Life and Leadership of Ivy Baxter,” 16.

The establishment of the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Jamaica in 1948 grew out of the Moyne Commission, formed by the British to investigate the reasons for the Rebellion of 1938. Education was seen as the key to cultivating a larger black middle class who could support the colony's movement toward self-rule. The creation of an Extra-mural Drama Department at UWI had a direct impact on the subsequent cultural production of the region. Later, two additional University of the West Indies campuses would be established in Trinidad (1961) and in Barbados (1963). But from the late 1940s and through the 1950s, the University brought students and staff from across the Caribbean to Jamaica, which became the setting for the examination of a range of Caribbean experiences as the region moved toward Federation in 1958. The University funded travel for drama tutors throughout the country and the region to collect folklore and train teachers to become dramatists. UWI also provided space for the creation and development of plays and access to materials for the creation of props and other technical equipment for productions. It attracted scholarships from the British Council for students to attend the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London and funding from the United States Information Service (UIS) to bring theatre practitioners to Jamaica to hold workshops. UWI became a site for the exploration and documentation of Caribbean culture as well as the development of technical expertise from abroad with workshops by guest artists. The department offered evening and summer courses that eventually inspired the founding of The Federal Theatre by Errol Hill.<sup>390</sup> The University of the West Indies in Jamaica in this period was a nexus between Caribbean intellectuals and artists eager to create a new identity for the region. Ivy Baxter participated in campus activities by holding summer dance workshops in the late

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<sup>390</sup> See Chapter Nine of Ivy Baxter's *The Arts of an Island* on Jamaican Theatre.

1950s along with Lavinia Williams who taught Haitian dance and Beryl McBurnie who taught Trinidadian and other Caribbean dances.

In 1960, Baxter's next major production was the highly acclaimed work *Once Upon A Seaweed* to celebrate the group's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This full-length folk-ballet was written by one of her lead dancers, Alma Mock Yen, while musician and senior dancer, Eddy Thomas, wrote the lyrics. Baxter then choreographed sections of the dance around the script and music created by Mock Yen and Thomas. The innovation of *Seaweed* lies in the incorporation of other ballet studios' dancers in the piece. The entire dance community came together in this performance, a feat that no one had attempted to date. The story of *Once Upon A Seaweed* is a magical tale of a young shoe-shine boy looking for his long-lost older brother who had migrated to Britain and returned to Jamaica years later. During the boy's journey, he travels to the underworld of the sea and encounters all of its spectacular creatures. The scenery, costumes, and set design for this piece were extremely beautiful and elaborate. Audiences loved the element of fantasy and magic Baxter brought to the stage.

The last major work of the Ivy Baxter Dance Group was their participation in the collaborative production *Sun Over the West Indies* in 1961, which was performed in Washington D.C. and in Jamaica as part of a cultural exchange program with Howard University. Sponsored by the Howard University Faculty Women's Club, the eclectic group of performers called themselves The Jamaica Company of Dancers and Singers. The Frats Quintet and poet, storyteller, and comedian Louise Bennett performed in between dance performances choreographed by Baxter or group members. By this point Rex Nettleford had secured a leadership position in the group as an administrative organizer of the trip, and he artistically

coordinated the overall look of the show. *Sun Over the West Indies* featured choreography by Baxter and a few pieces by her students Eyrick Darby, Eddy Thomas, and Rex Nettleford, all of which were accompanied by music by the Mapletoft Poulle Orchestra. Ivy Baxter's group performed *Village Scene*, *Cane Cutters Dance*, *Pocomania*, *Rat Passage*, and *Martiniquan Coquette*.

Following this production in 1961, Baxter traveled to the United States to gain a Masters of Arts degree in Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance Teaching from Columbia University Teacher's College. She asked her close friend Rex Nettleford to continue her work in the studio with the group during her absence.

Rex Nettleford and Eddy Thomas decided to forge a new national company that would integrate Jamaican folk dance vocabulary with the techniques of American choreographers, particularly Martha Graham. This artistic move meant a break away from Baxter's style of modern dance based on her European training. Nettleford and Thomas had hoped that all of the members of the Baxter group, including Baxter, would join the new company that claimed the term "national" and sought to take a further step away from Europe, at least artistically and symbolically. Because these decisions were made in her absence, Baxter felt slighted when nearly all of her senior and intermediate dancers became part of the National Dance Theatre Company.<sup>391</sup>

After a few years of trying to rebuild her Creative Dance Group, Baxter left Jamaica in 1966 to accept a Research Fellowship in order to earn her Ph.D. from the University of Florida. During this time she wrote her book, *The Arts of an Island: The Development of the Culture and*

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<sup>391</sup> Alma Mock Yen, Interview by Karima Robinson; Buddy Puyatt, Interview by Karima Robinson; Ronan Critchlow, Interview by Karima Robinson; and Enid Douglass, Interview by Karima Robinson.

*the Folk and Creative Arts in Jamaica, 1492-1962 (Independence)*, which was published in 1970. Her book meticulously chronicles the development of Jamaican history and culture beginning with the Arawak Indians and continuing with the Spanish colonial period, the folk forms of the African slaves, British land owners, and the development of twentieth century theatre, music, and dance. It remains an invaluable source book on much of Jamaica's cultural history, which remains undocumented elsewhere. For three decades, her chapter on dance was the only published record of the history of her company.

In 1971, she became the coordinator of several educational programs at Excelsior High School. She quickly moved up in the ranks, becoming first the Head of the Community College, then Acting Director, and later Director of the Excelsior Education Centre until she retired in 1982. During this period, she committed her spare time to a number of local organizations including the National Council for the Aged, the Council for the Institute of Jamaica, the Jamaica Library Service, and the Partners of the Americas. Her work with these organizations demonstrates her long-standing belief in community development.<sup>392</sup>

#### EMBODYING NATIONALISM

We have in Jamaica our own type of beauty, a wonderful mixture of African and European, and it is for our artists and writers to discover and set the standards for the national loveliness in the national gift of thought and expression.

We can take everything that English education has to offer us, but ultimately we must reject the domination of her influence, because we are not English and nor should we ever want to be.

--Norman Washington Manley<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Marguerite Curtain, "The Life and Leadership of Ivy Baxter," 19.

<sup>393</sup> Rex Nettleford, ed., *Norman Washington Manley and the New Jamaica: Selected Speeches and Writings, 1938-1968* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1971), 67.

Norman Manley's vision of Jamaican beauty, one created by the mixture of African and European heritage, reflects his belief in a pluralistic society and the process of creolization. At the same time, he acknowledges a need to reject European culture in order to break away from Britain's political domination. This duality of embracing both the African and the European, while rejecting the saturation of British culture in Jamaica for the sake of political change, can also be found in the ideology of Ivy Baxter's Creative Dance Group.

In this section I discuss how Baxter used her group to embody aspects of nationalism in Jamaica. I review the tensions between regionalism and nationalism in the Caribbean, particularly around the West Indies Federation of 1958 to 1961. Political leaders, including Norman Manley and Dr. Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago, had to grapple with the inherent racial diversity of their societies and present a clear image of a heterogeneous political community to their constituencies. Baxter embodied this diversity in her company. She also had an intriguing approach to gender issues where she created a space for male dancers to perform on stage as seen in her *Athletic Dance*. She symbolically created spaces for women to participate in constructions of the nation in her solo performance of *Polychrome* and the ensemble piece *Village Scene*. Baxter's career as a dancer was supported in part by her position with the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission. The mission of this organization was to improve the lives of impoverished Jamaicans. Culture played a critical role in achieving its agenda, in part by creating opportunities for rural Jamaicans to perform at regional and national folk festivals for cash prizes.

Benedict Anderson's theory of the nation as an imagined community applies to Baxter's choreography during a critical period of Jamaica's decolonization. In *Imagined Communities*,

Anderson asserts Gellner's claim that "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist. .... Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."<sup>394</sup>

Manley's approach to inventing Jamaica centered on institutional infrastructure and the arts. Baxter's position as the Artistic Director of the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group and later Dance and Creative Officer of the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission provided her with a unique opportunity to view the folk, while her dance training at home and abroad gave her the skills necessary to invent a national tradition. Her stylization of Jamaican folk dances embodied the colony's political aspiration for independence and identified a set of cultural sources from which political figures could draw on in order to make a case for a rich Afro-Jamaican heritage, racial harmony, and a modern society ready to bear the responsibility of political independence.

Norman Manley believed that a rational, civilized, and modern nation could only be achieved through organization. For Manley, this meant the creation of institutions that could meet the needs of the people: trade unions for workers, a constitution to govern the country, political parties within a bi-party system, financial institutions, and others. He did not see himself so much as a leader but as a mediator of a "congress-type" system, like that of India, where he would reconcile differences by finding democratic solutions. This type of leadership stood in sharp contrast to his cousin and rival Alexander Bustamante who autocratically led the Jamaican Labour Party.

Norman's wife, Edna Manley, was a leading sculptor who had inspired an artistic movement among visual artists in Jamaica beginning in the 1930s. As a visual artist, she was

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<sup>394</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

known for her kinetic sculptures of the black body in stances of defiance or tender embrace, as well as for her interpretations of Jamaican landscapes. The marriage of Norman and Edna Manley demonstrated the close relationship between art and politics in Jamaica. Norman's political involvement informed Edna's artistic career, just as he was ever mindful of the importance of the arts in forming and solidifying a national consciousness that would unify the people. While Ivy Baxter was not a close personal friend of the Manleys, the couple deeply appreciated her work and faithfully attended her performances. Between Edna Manley and Ivy Baxter there grew a mutual respect for one another's artistic contribution and understanding of the political work that their art performed for the nation.<sup>395</sup>

In 1955, Norman Manley and the People's National Party (PNP) won the election and the road to Federation was clearly laid out. Manley insisted that a federal constitution was necessary to unite the British Caribbean islands, particularly the smaller and more isolated islands. The West Indies Federation was established in 1958.<sup>396</sup> At the same time, the larger islands, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados gained universal suffrage. Jamaica's and Trinidad's economies were booming at the time due to the production of bauxite, used to make aluminum, and oil, respectively. These economic successes undermined the political consensus on Federation. The Federation Day celebrations signified unity of the region and also marked the beginning of the political rivalry between Jamaica and Trinidad, with the seat of the federal capital in Chaguaramas, Trinidad. Jamaica constantly defended its own economic interests while

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<sup>395</sup> Eddy Thomas, Interview by Karima Robinson, Montego Bay, Jamaica.

<sup>396</sup> Marcel Bayer, *Jamaica: A Guide to the People, Politics, and Culture*, (London: American Bureau, 1993), 19-20. Islands and regions of the West Indies Federation: Jamaica, the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts-Nevis, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, the Cayman Islands, the Bahamas, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Belize (then British Honduras), and Guyana.

competing with the industries of the other islands. In 1960, Bustamante spoke out publicly against the West Indies Federation, and Chief Minister Norman Manley issued a referendum in 1961 that ended Jamaica's participation in the Federation and therefore the Federation itself.<sup>397</sup> Each of the former British colonies had to fend for itself, with most becoming independent. In August of 1962, both Jamaica and Trinidad celebrated their political independence. Nationalism in the former British West Indies is marked by this initial attempt at Federation that is still lamented by the smaller islands, who firmly believed in the unity of the islands and the strength of their numbers and resources. For the larger islands like Jamaica and Trinidad, with strong industries in addition to tourism, the concept of nation was quickly reconfigured.<sup>398</sup>

Caribbean intellectual Edouard Glissant identifies the failure of the Federation as a lack of understanding of the intellectual discourse on this issue by the people. Although the former colonies share similar historical experiences, the people were unable to relate to each other.

We know that the first attempt at a federation, in the Anglophone islands, was quickly abandoned. The conflict of interest between Jamaica and Trinidad, their refusal to "bear the weight" of the small islands caused this idealistic project to fail. What has been left behind is a serious aversion on the part of the Anglophone Caribbean to any such idea. This federation had been agreed to by the political establishment and not felt in a vital way, not dictated, by the people.

It would be silly to try to unite under some kind of legislation states whose political regimes, social structures, economic potential are today so varied if not opposed to each other.

...The region's intellectuals know each other and, more and more, meet each other. But the Caribbean people are not able to really understand the work created in this area by their sons who have escaped the net. The passion of intellectuals can become a potential for transformation when it is carried forward by the will of the people.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>398</sup> Clinton V. Black, *The History of Jamaica*, 164-166.

<sup>399</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 222-223.

This might have occurred had there been a regional Anglophone newspaper equally representing and reporting news of all of the islands.<sup>400</sup>

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson discusses the relationship between fraternity, power, and time as essential to nation building. He points to the important role of print-capitalism, “which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”<sup>401</sup> Without the vehicle of a weekly paper, it was difficult for the people of Jamaica, for example, to understand the social and economic issues of people from smaller islands like Antigua. “It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”<sup>402</sup> Glissant argues that while there were many economic, social, and political benefits of Federation, the comradeship among the islands lacked depth. Instead, each colony had its own set of newspapers that its residents read faithfully and that enabled the people of that island to identify with each other.

Baxter’s development of a Jamaican dance technique coincided with a nationalist movement that was popular among the middle class and gaining strength among the lower class. She understood that her expertise in the area of dance could be utilized to create a set of images that could help redefine the political future of the island and the consciousness of its people.

The early history of dance in Jamaica reveals the social divisions of race and class at work in the society. On one side of this divide were the Jamaican white upper classes and light-skinned middle classes following the cultural trends of England. On the other were the black

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<sup>400</sup> In 1958, activist Claudia Jones of Trinidad began *The West Indian Gazette* in Britain. The paper discussed the process of decolonization in the Caribbean but circulated mainly in Britain.

<sup>401</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

lower classes, whose social dances reconfigured a range of West African movement influences and adapted some British social dances. Theorist Frantz Fanon discusses the role of the colonized intellectual in creating a national culture.

The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening up the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope. But to ensure that hope and give it form, he must take part in action and throw himself body and soul into the national struggle.<sup>403</sup>

Baxter's use for the folk in her choreography mobilizes the remnants of an African past in Jamaica. Her integration of Jamaican folk dances with other Western forms of dance demonstrates her forward-thinking approach to an independent future. Ivy Baxter brought these two disparate cultural discourses into conversation with each other after a long history of segregation and mobilized them during the height of the nationalist moment.

Baxter's technique, diversity of members, and content of dance pieces enabled her Creative Dance Group to embody the process of creolization in Jamaica. Her construction of national identity represented a shift from a "Euro-Creole" consumption of dance-theatre to a celebration of the "Afro-Creole," to use the terms of Edward Kamau Brathwaite's definition of creolization. Cultural historian Richard Burton's *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* adds to Brathwaite's definition of the term creolization.

...starting from the very formation of slave colonies in the Caribbean, African and European cultural elements were merged, married, blended, or combined into a new and quintessentially Caribbean synthesis, a *tertium quid* to which the appropriately composite term "creole" is widely given.<sup>404</sup>

Baxter's use of a range of dance vocabularies symbolized the very process of creolization to which Burton and Brathwaite allude. While she blended a range of dance styles in each piece

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<sup>403</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 232.

<sup>404</sup> Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 2.

that she choreographed, her goal was to create a product that resembled the “Afro-Creole” aspects of Jamaican culture.

...the cultures of West Africa from which the vast majority of Jamaican slaves were seized constituted a common matrix. Furthermore, the underlying Africanness of Afro-Jamaican culture was reinforced by the arrival of substantial numbers of African indentured laborers after emancipation. Whatever cultural superstrata may have been formed through interaction with Whites, the substratum of the Jamaican masses remains durably African to this day, and it is this cultural substratum that informs all its most characteristic expressions: language, music, dance, and perhaps above all, religion.<sup>405</sup>

By shifting the style and technique represented in Jamaican dance-theatre, Baxter brought dance-theatre more in line with other forms of cultural expression in Jamaica.

Baxter trained her dancers in a range of vocabularies that included ballet, folk movement, mime, and modern dance. She considered ballet basic to the understanding of human movement and insisted that her dancers were well trained in it before they learned any other vocabulary. Because classical ballet was the norm in Jamaican dance-theatre at the time, and because she sought to make a specific political statement through dance, Baxter trained her dancers in ballet but did not emphasize this technique on stage. In many of her dances, there was a deliberate attempt to mask the ballet training of her dancers by emphasizing and drawing attention to the Jamaican folk elements of the performance, including dance vocabulary, music, costumes, and props. While Baxter acknowledged that the dance training she instilled in her dancers “lived” in their bodies, mime, modern, and folk movement were the center of her choreography.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>406</sup> Enid Douglass, Interview by Karima Robinson, August 2003. The use of mime helped make the meaning of the dances transparent.

Baxter's audiences often recognized the folk vocabulary. The mime helped to knit together a story line between these various folk dances.<sup>407</sup>

Her task in the studio was to "re-discipline" the body of dancers who came into her company from one of the local ballet studios with years of training. She had to change the physical orientation of the dancer from habitually extending and elongating the body as often as possible, to an orientation that was more "grounded." Her dancers were re-taught how to move from a flat-footed stance via a bent knee, an arched back, and gracefully swiveling hips. Baxter was clear that this folk vocabulary was just as demanding on the body and had to be executed in as precise a manner as ballet. In the studio, each vocabulary was given an equal amount of respect, while on stage; ballet became a "second-class" citizen.<sup>408</sup>

The program for Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group's first recital in 1950 contains an essay that addresses the cultural importance of the event and the emergence of the Creative Dance Group. In Fyfield's essay "A National Dance Drama for Jamaica," he explains that culture is multifaceted and suggests that ballet and its European roots are only one aspect of Jamaica's rich heritage. He claims that ballet should be "embedded firmly in a national soil but with roots which link it and draw substance from men and minds of many nations." He also explains that the "free" or modern dance of Europe is a helpful means of expression for those who find the angular lines of ballet too rigid. Finally, the author identifies Katherine Dunham and Bert Pasuka of Ballet Nègres of Europe as two choreographers who used both ballet and modern dance to explore Caribbean themes. He predicts that with continued training and

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

performance, Baxter will soon join the ranks of these choreographers.<sup>409</sup> The references here to nation, culture, and the rigid lines of ballet helped to prepare audiences to see a different type of dance-theatre and to define its difference as essential to the new politics of the region. His citing of Katherine Dunham and Bert Pasuka situates Baxter and Jamaica within a regional and international context of a growing artistic movement. The essay is intended to instruct middle class theatre-goers to appreciate the new dance forms performed that evening, and to place the performance as a whole in the context of the shifting local and international political and cultural trends. He encourages Jamaican audiences to be cosmopolitan by embracing one of their own who aspires to join the likes of Dunham and Pasuka.

The Baxter technique, then, was a hybridized or creolized form of dance. It was composed of all of the elements that Baxter herself had been trained in. The actions and gestures that she chose to mime were the everyday moments of a cross-section of Jamaican society. Mimed movements included running, planting, working, flirting and holding a baby.<sup>410</sup> Her use of modern dance served to distinguish her company from the local ballet companies and forwarded her political agenda by stepping away from what ballet symbolized: a Jamaican upper class affinity for European high art. Her technique was appropriately creolized, indicating, through choreography, the range of cultural influences within the island. The company itself was also creolized because of the diversity that she insisted upon from the group's inception and the ways that she highlighted difference in her choreography.

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<sup>409</sup> Fyfield, "A National Dance Drama for Jamaica" in the Program for the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group, 1950 Dance Recital, 1-2. Dance Programmes Collection, Jamaica National Library.

<sup>410</sup> Roy Thomas, Interview by Karima Robinson. Thomas is a former Baxter Dancer and a film archivist at the National Library of Jamaica.

Baxter's insistence on diversity within the group and the content of her work itself stands in opposition to efforts to create a false image of a homogenous black Jamaica. Caribbean literary critic Patrick Taylor, in the introduction of his edited volume *Nation Dance: Religion, Identity, and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*, signals the diversity of Caribbean nations as a complex factor when attempting to construct one image to adequately represent the whole.

National politics as creole politics remained heterogeneous. The myth of the singular national identity was expressed at the ideological level: Haitians defined themselves as blacks, Cubans as mestizos, some Anglo-Caribbean nations as creole. However, Caribbean nations never resolved the social and cultural tensions dividing different ethnic, racial, and social groups: not in Revolutionary Haiti or Cuba; not in the liberal Anglophone Caribbean countries; not in heterogeneous Guyana, Trinidad, or Suriname.<sup>411</sup>

The tensions that Taylor speaks of, however, can be seen in the criticism of Baxter's work, and likely in the audience, who must have found it difficult at first to accept Jamaican folk dance and the presence of dark-skinned, Afro-Indo and Afro-Chinese and male dancers on stage. Baxter portrayed a harmonious, multiracial Jamaican society. The deep racial, color, and class divides are all but erased in the majority of her pieces. She practiced a form of "color-blind casting," where her dancers were chosen for their roles based on ability and not color or ethnicity.

Dance historian Susan Manning carefully documents the interplay between "Negro" dance and modern dance in America in the mid-twentieth century and notes the racial diversity within African American dance companies.

Although African-American dancers predominated in Negro dance, the practice also involved African, West Indian, Asian-American, Latino, and even Euro-American performers. Moving together, performers of Negro dance articulated culturally marked bodies, bodies that often, though not always, bespoke the collective experiences of African peoples in the New World.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Patrick Taylor, *Nation Dance: Religion, Identity, and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>412</sup> Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*, xv.

While these companies were inclusive, they nonetheless articulated a specifically black experience. Baxter's company was similar in that she choreographed from a clearly defined black Jamaican middle class position, even though dances of all ethnic backgrounds and body types participated. Further, Manning adds that racial diversity helped define African American dance companies as black, and simultaneously modern.

During the heyday of the Black Arts movement, peers often criticized Ailey for casting dancers from diverse ethnic backgrounds in *Revelations*. In his posthumous memoir Ailey justified his casting decisions: "the presence [of non-black dancers] universalizes the material," for "the tune and texture of the spirituals speak to everybody." Strikingly, Ailey's rationale assumed the generalizing power of non-black bodies in motion and thus paralleled a fundamental strategy of modern dance.<sup>413</sup>

Like Alvin Ailey, Baxter performs modern dance not just through her technique, but also, by including Jamaicans of a range of ethnic backgrounds. The inclusiveness of Baxter's company in part enabled comparisons between her work and other internationally recognized black choreographers. Her strategy also supported her political affiliation in Jamaica. Many practical decisions regarding her company were inspired by the nationalist rhetoric of the People's National Party.

Norman Manley welcomed the followers of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) into the People's National Party. In spite of the rhetoric of Black Nationalism of the Garvey movement, Manley remained committed to a plural democratic nationalism and did not make race the primary motivation for the end of colonialism in Jamaica. He was committed to the unity of all Jamaicans and not just prosperity for the black majority. He recognized the dangers of ethnocentricity, racial prejudice, and discrimination against

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 213.

anyone, white or black, as a source for future problems. For Manley, independence meant, not the reversal of racial prejudice, but a new equality and acceptance of difference.<sup>414</sup> He proudly coined the national motto, “Out of Many, One People” that Ivy Baxter’s company embodied.<sup>415</sup>

Dr. Eric Williams, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, articulated his vision of the nation and the possible tensions between the various racial and ethnic groups.

There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India... There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin, and the Trinidad and Tobago society is living a lie and heading for trouble if it seeks to create the impression or to allow others to act under the delusion that Trinidad and Tobago is an African society. There can be no Mother England and no dual loyalties; no person can be allowed to get the best of both worlds, and to enjoy the privileges of citizenship in Trinidad and Tobago whilst expecting to retain United Kingdom citizenship. ... A nation, like an individual, can have only one mother. The only Mother we recognize is Trinidad and Tobago, and a Mother cannot discriminate between her children.<sup>416</sup>

Literary theorist Shalini Puri notes that Williams’ sentiment is representative of other Anglo-Caribbean nations precisely because of a need to separate and simultaneously unify people.

“Racial and nationalist discourses in the Caribbean frequently offer contradictory instances of tearing apart and stitching together ‘the people,’ and discourses of hybridity offer a crucial means of managing those contradictory tendencies.”<sup>417</sup> Williams evokes the trope of family to contain the disparate racial groups or “children” and establish solidarity and exclusivity among its members. Baxter echoed this understanding of nationhood in her company and her choreography.

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<sup>414</sup> Rex Nettleford, *Manley and the New Jamaica: Selected Speeches and Writings, 1938-1968*, lxvii.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx-xxxii.

<sup>416</sup> Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Post-Colonial*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 47-8. Citing Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, (Port of Spain, Trinidad: PNM Publishing Co., 1962), 281.

<sup>417</sup> Puri, *The Caribbean Post-Colonial*, 48.

The dance pieces presented at her first recital were an eclectic mix demonstrating experimentation with form and content. Baxter's solo *Polychrome* is noteworthy in this regard because of the sentiments communicated in the poem read off-stage during her performance. Each of the four stanzas speak of human struggle for survival in difficult conditions including man's pre-historic days, the age of discovery, the oppression of slavery, and the legacy of several forced and difficult migrations. This is the fourth and last stanza of the poem.

Who there! Who come through wreckage dim,  
Crawling on beach of bloody sand with blinding,  
deafening light,  
With faith and courage for their liberty to fight?  
Whiteman, Yellowman, Redman, Blackman.<sup>418</sup>

The last two lines echo the political climate of nationalism in Jamaica that constantly referred back to the rebellion of 1938, the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 and numerous slave rebellions. The order in which she listed the different races is not accidental. It is not the order in which people came to the island, but a commentary on the color and social hierarchies in Jamaica, with white men at the highest point on the social ladder, and black men at the lowest.

When Baxter danced this solo, she explored different spatial levels and used posture and attitude to communicate the social position in society, level of self-confidence, and hope for the futures of different social groups. Baxter's white man walked tall, deliberately, with his head held high, surveying all around him, and made gestures as if wearing a suit. The yellow man crouched down a bit, darted around from side to side with his arms extended at the elbow,

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<sup>418</sup> Baxter, *Polychrome*, in 1950 program of first dance recital. Dance Programmes Collection, Jamaica National Library.

looking over both shoulders. The black man walked slowly, bent far over in despair, and mimed carrying a large heavy sack over his shoulder.<sup>419</sup>

Baxter's multicultural perspective toward human history is echoed in this solo piece. With the same last line concluding each stanza, "Whiteman, Yellowman, Redman, Blackman," her emphasis on the multi-racial historical experiences of Jamaicans is articulated, as is her need to place Jamaica's history within the context of a much broader history of humankind. *Polychrome* is a case where the racial and social differences are acknowledged as a way of life in contemporary Jamaica. Baxter does not call for change explicitly by performing the downtrodden Blackman. She does not attempt to remake him, for example, by allowing him to wear the suit of the white man.

Baxter probably danced the solo in *Polychrome* for the practical reasons that the company was still young, and she had not yet recruited and trained male dancers. But her dominant physical presence in the piece begs the question: What are the implications of Baxter's "brown" female body playing a male-dominated historical narrative of Jamaica? For one, her body demands the inclusion of women in this narrative. All of the male figures are written on and performed through her body. Without her, this story of Jamaica could not be told. Secondly, she claims a pivotal space for women in the history of Jamaica and implies that women are central to the future of this narrative. Her light skinned, brown, female body plays the whiteman, yellowman, redman, and the blackman.

The Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group helped inform nationhood within and outside of Jamaica. In the early 1950s, as the Anglophone Caribbean looked forward to the prospect of

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<sup>419</sup> Roy Thomas interview by Karima Robinson, National Library of Jamaica, August, 2003.

Federation, it became increasingly important for the region to define itself. Penelope Harvey's work on nationalism and universal exhibitions states that: "Nationalist movements appeal simultaneously to the weight of tradition and the active construction of a new social consciousness. ...Museums and international exhibitions were crucial venues for the display of the empirical evidence of progressive modernizing national cultures."<sup>420</sup> Over the course of her career, Ivy Baxter's group performed at numerous national and regional events where the group represented Jamaica. The Caribbean Folk Arts Festival of 1952 in Puerto Rico became a critical moment of definition for the young group and for Jamaica. On the level of the symbolic and the imagined, the festival allowed those who attended to witness stagings of nationhood and a simultaneous staging of regionalism.

This spirit [of the imagined community] was expressed in a nation's particular genius, in its language and cultural production, in what were understood as the external manifestations of essential racial characteristics. The legitimacy of the new nation states depended to a great extent on the possibilities of demonstrating cultural continuities with the past, of naturalizing the links between territorial, political, and cultural units.<sup>421</sup>

The very title of the festival, the "Caribbean Folk Arts Festival," signaled that folk forms and African survivals of the region were made to symbolize continuity with an African past that was finally being celebrated after centuries of repression. Nineteen Caribbean islands were represented in the festival. "Miss Baxter said that the steel band from Antigua, dance groups from Trinidad and the Haitian Men's Chorus were very impressive and were all well received."<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Penelope Harvey, *Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 57.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-7.

<sup>422</sup> "Dance Group back from Caribbean Folklore Festival," *The Daily Gleaner*, Aug. 12, 1952, 10.

In the Anglophone Caribbean, people negotiated British colonialism in an effort to prepare themselves for independence. At the same time the hegemonic presence of the United States, which had military and cultural interests in the region, could not be ignored. The Caribbean Folk Arts Festival in Puerto Rico, in which Baxter's group performed, was funded by the U.S. government. I briefly explore the U. S. presence in the Caribbean in the mid-twentieth century before retuning to my discussion of Baxter's Creative Dance Group.

Political historian Penny M. Von Eschen analyzes the operation of U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean and Africa. Her book, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, helps to uncover why the U.S. might have sponsored the Caribbean Folk Festival in Puerto Rico in 1952. As part of its participation in WWII, the United States established military bases in Trinidad and Jamaica in 1940-41.<sup>423</sup> She notes how the U.S. military presence in the Caribbean was soon followed by economic penetration and cultural exploitation. Black American newspapers monitored United States investments in the Caribbean during the war. In Jamaica, the U.S. air base bolstered American interest in the United Fruit Company, which exported bananas, while the United States controlled the Jamaican Bauxite Company that produced aluminum.<sup>424</sup> Cane sugar was a major interest for Americans in the region, especially in Puerto Rico and Cuba. "Not only had American-controlled sugar interests built a one-crop economy, but U.S. tariff laws further contributed to exploitation by rewarding

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<sup>423</sup> The U.S. also established bases in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; Soto Cano, Honduras; three different bases in Puerto Rico; Manta, Ecuador; Aruba; Curacao; Antigua; and Bermuda. See J. Lindsay-Poland's "U.S. Military Bases in Latin America and the Caribbean" in *Foreign Policy in Focus* 6 (35) 2001; Rachel Woodward, *Military Geographies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); and Fitzroy A. Baptiste's "U.S. Caribbean Relations from WWII to the Present: The Social Nexus" in *U.S.-Caribbean Relations: Their Impact on Peoples and Cultures*, ed. Ransford W. Palmer, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998).

<sup>424</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 37-39.

the cultivation of unsuitable land for that one crop and discouraging diversified farming.”<sup>425</sup>

Von Eschen describes the U.S. political stranglehold on Puerto Rico as due primarily to its economic interests in sugar that reduced Puerto Rico to a “one money-crop plantation system” and resulted in poverty and disease for its people.<sup>426</sup>

One example of cultural exploitation by Americans in the Caribbean was the misuse of calypsonian Lord Invader’s famous calypso “Rum and Coca-Cola,” which critiqued the U.S. soldiers in the Trinidad for turning the island’s women into prostitutes. Ironically, the song was later recorded without permission, or payment of royalties, by the Andrew sisters and became a hit in the United States.<sup>427</sup>

The U.S. State Department understood the power of culture in its diplomatic efforts abroad. The international tours of black American athletes, ex-Olympic high-jumper Gilbert Cutler and the Harlem Globetrotters, as well as the tours of jazz musicians Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong went a long way to improve America’s image overseas during the Cold War.

Initially proposed by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, the jazz tours were part of a State Department strategy of not denying that discrimination existed in the United States but showing “progress” and emphasizing what a talented and motivated individual could achieve. Widely celebrated in the African American press, the Goodwill Ambassadors symbolized the legitimacy of U.S. claims as leader of the “free world.” “American jazz—hot, blues, Dixieland, bebop or rock’n’roll—has at last been publicly acknowledged as the principal asset of American foreign policy,” declared the *Afro-American*.<sup>428</sup>

Through the success of these tours, the U.S. State Department learned a valuable lesson about the power of culture. The U.S. sponsorship of the 1952 Caribbean Folk Festival supported its interests in the region in a number of ways. On the surface it appeared to be a gesture of

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<sup>425</sup> Von Eschen, 38.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 177.

appreciation of Caribbean culture and a backhanded acknowledgement of its military presence and economic interests in the region. The festival served a second function for America in that it placed the Caribbean in line with its own perception of Africa in the 1950s as a site of the primitive and “backward.”

...[T]he 1950s tendency to portray Africa as a place outside of history was an especially pernicious reinscription of ideas of the primitive....With discussions of history, political economy, and political dissent out of bounds in the Cold War, “Africa’s problems” were explained as timeless, not something created by and potentially capable of eradication by the actions of human beings.<sup>429</sup>

While the U.S. government saw the Caribbean as an ideological extension of Africa and sought to promote the region as such, Caribbean performers saw the festival as an opportunity to travel, perform, and establish ties with artists from other islands. For them the festival was an opportunity to elevate the folk from the lowly status of common social forms practiced by the lower classes to high art practiced and appreciated by the middle class. For Caribbean performers, the alignment with the African continent, also working toward independence, was not necessarily a negative attribute.

Anthropologist Kate Ramsey describes how the U.S. military occupation on Haiti in the early twentieth century fueled the rise of Haitian ethnography in the 1930s and the subsequent state sanctioned performances of national culture.

Born into and of a crisis in sovereignty, Haitian folklore studies were immediately infused with nationalist content, the destiny of the republic linked to the study and careful custodianship of popular cultures. ... Alongside literary/ “print culture” productions, the performance of folklore came to occupy an increasingly privileged status in ethnographic and official representations of national culture,

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 160.

emerging as a primary site in which Haitian particularity was scientifically and creatively “imagined” into existence during the post-occupation years.<sup>430</sup>

While the U.S. military presence in Jamaica was far less invasive, Jamaican intellectuals engaged in a similar process of recovering, performing and “imagining” a unique Jamaican culture as they built an independent nation.

The Caribbean Folk Festival in Puerto Rico fulfilled the U.S. agenda of offering a conciliatory token of appreciation for their extensive military presence. By celebrating the primitive of the Caribbean, the United States did not have to be accountable for the economic problems of the region. For Baxter, the festival affirmed her self-appointed mission that her work as a dancer and choreographer would contribute to the national identity of Jamaica.

Baxter articulated her mission as an apolitical artistic endeavor; however her focus on Jamaican folk forms in this era betrays this sentiment. Her former dancers remember that she did not offer an explicit critique of the social conditions of Jamaica at the time but instead sought to present to Jamaicans “a picture of how we are”<sup>431</sup> by creating “mirror” images of the society demonstrating the beauty of Jamaican culture.<sup>432</sup> While her former dancers remember her with nostalgic longing, I argue that the portraits she created were not mirror images but romanticized and stylized portrayals of what middle class Jamaicans wished that the country could be. The stinging issues of poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, illiteracy, gender and color discrimination rarely were addressed directly, and when they were, they were quickly glossed over with a happy ending, as in Baxter’s *Village Scene*.

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<sup>430</sup> Kate Ramsey, “Vodou, Nationalism, and Performance: The Staging of Folklore in Mid-Twentieth-Century Haiti” in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. Jane C. Desmond, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 350.

<sup>431</sup> Enid Douglass, Interview by Karima Robinson at her home in Kingston, Jamaica.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

While understanding the influence of British culture on Jamaica through her performances of the folk, Baxter's portrayals of gender were radical in their presentation but maintained contemporary gender hierarchies. Baxter's *Village Scene* and *Athletic Dance* demonstrate her willingness to challenge the boundaries of Jamaican theatre and simultaneously her desire to maintain societal norms.

*Village Scene* begins as a charming scene that depicts different aspects of rural life, including children at play and the elderly working or telling Anancy stories. The Anancy character of the story is represented in the form of a spider up to his usual tricks. The children performing folk dances for their parents follow the storytelling. In the midst of this delightful scene, a mother holding a baby takes center stage. The tone of the piece changes as the mother dances out the frustration of trying to raise several children by herself.

She fans the baby to sleep, and dreams of her ambitions and fears for her eldest child. In her terror she attempts to drown the baby in the pool, but is restrained by the old women, who comfort her, and the young men and women who dance with her. Finally she is reconciled to the wishes of the people and gives consent to the young people, amid general rejoicing.<sup>433</sup>

This moment of the piece is significant because it is one of the rare moments when Baxter tackles a tough gender and economic issue on stage. A single mother attempting to drown her baby because of crushing poverty and a bleak future highlighted the need for organizations like the Social Welfare Commission and the Jamaica Federation of Women. Baxter danced the powerful solo role of the mother. The weight of this moment is deflected when three women elders prevent the mother from destroying her baby. A sub-plot of the dance was a budding romance between the mother's eldest teenage daughter and a boy from the village. Initially the

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<sup>433</sup> "Programme to be presented by the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group at the Caribbean Folk Dance Festival, San Juan, Puerto Rico" in Dance Programmes Collection, Jamaica National Library.

mother opposes the relationship and fears that her daughter will end up a single mother like herself. After the attempted drowning, the boy comes to the mother and expresses a desire to marry her daughter. The final scene is a celebration of marriage with joyful folk dancing.

Here Baxter is tapping into one of the primary concerns of the Jamaica Federation of Women, which saw the large number of female-headed households as a societal problem that had to be solved by conducting mass marriages and legally demanding child support from fathers. The JFW felt that marriage would solve the economic problem of women who struggled alone to provide for their families. Her stinging critique, followed by the happy ending of marriage, signaled her position as a middle class woman, for whom speaking out directly about social ills would have tainted the refinement associated with middle class femininity.

It is interesting to note that Baxter, who remained single and childless, advocated marriage for lower class women in *Village Scene*. In another piece entitled *Birth*, she played a mother giving birth to a child and symbolically giving birth to a nation. Baxter performed these mothering roles on stage and among her company members but not in her personal life. Despite the efforts of organizations like the Jamaica Federation of Women, many working class women of the 1940s and 1950s remained politically active and fought for their equality as black workers, not as women, within leftist organizations mostly aligned with Norman Manley's People's National Party. For middle class women, however, activism was not the norm and was looked down upon. Ivy Baxter, like Enid Chevannes, falls into this category of middle class women who were not vocal about their political views but made their opinions known through their body of creative work. She was a light-skinned middle class Jamaican woman who never married. Due to her commitment to what was then called "barefoot dancing," she is often referred to as a

“restrained rebel” who found a voice for her political views in the dances that she choreographed.<sup>434</sup> As a middle class, brown, and educated woman, Baxter fit into the demographic of a People’s National Party (PNP) supporter. Baxter’s revolutionary approach signaled a move away from European dance traditions, while her performances mirrored the broader context of the colony’s move away from European domination and toward self-governance.

Another of Baxter’s dances that confronts societal concerns about gender is *Athletic Dance*, which was likely renamed *Stone Guard*. This dance features the men of the group who executed movements based on men’s team sports, namely football, cricket, tennis, swimming, and hurdling.<sup>435</sup> *Athletic Dance* was the first dance piece performed in Baxter’s first recital in 1950. Like her mentor Hazel Johnston, Baxter made a bold statement about the inclusion of men in her company. She also defined the type of dance that the men would perform. Baxter was very conscious of the homophobia of Jamaicans, and some would argue that she held this view herself. Baxter’s male dancers would not ignite rumors of effeminacy or homosexuality because they would not attempt to display the refinement of ballet on stage. While recruiting men into the group, she let all of the current members know that she did not want any gay men in the group.<sup>436</sup> In her choreography, she projected the image of a strong and athletic black man. Even off-stage, the men in the group were instructed by Baxter to play the role of “protecting” the women of the group when they were on tour in Jamaica or abroad.

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<sup>434</sup> Rex Nettleford, “Ivy Baxter—Restrained Rebel,” *Jamaica Gleaner*, Jan. 17, 1993.

<sup>435</sup> “Baxter’s dance recital pleases first nighters,” Tuesday, July 25, 1950. (Author and Newspaper Unknown) Ivy Baxter Scrapbook, 1950.

<sup>436</sup> Buddy Pouyatt, Ronan Critchlow, and Enid Douglass elucidated on the issue of male dancers and the fear of homosexuality.

There was, as well, the often carefree but always gallant support by the men of the company in terms of group transport and marshalling. This kind of performance of dance in the beginning was new to them; however, they had gained assurance in the fact that it was the masculinity of the Jamaican male dancer and the femininity of the Jamaican female dancer which were the image projected by this company.<sup>437</sup>

In the cases of *Village Scene* and *Athletic Dance*, Baxter made radical choices in the way that she addressed these issues on stage, but her overall messages about societal norms were in keeping with her conservative middle-class upbringing.

Over the course of her career, Baxter's representations of the folk culture on stage performed a significant social function for middle class theatre-going audiences because she elevated these forms in the minds of the middle and upper classes. Her work in the rural areas encouraged people to revive traditional dances and form local performance groups. These groups were eventually called upon to compete against each other in parish and island-wide contests for small amounts of prize money and recognition. The cultural wing of the Social Welfare Commission became known as Jamaica Festival Commission or Festival for short and held its largest event each year, the annual week-long Independence Day Celebrations in August. Jamaican songs, dances, poetry, crafts, and culinary arts from across the island are proudly displayed in Kingston and broadcast on national television. Each year, children and adult groups from across the island perform a repertoire of Jamaican folk dances.

It has stimulated renewed interest among the rural and urban populations in traditional culture and contemporary creative artistic expression. More than any single official cultural institution the Festival Commission has been able to mobilize more Jamaicans from all over the country and from all classes and age-groups, around to a lively awareness of the country's indigenous artistic/cultural

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<sup>437</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 310.

potential whether it be culinary arts, fashion design, drama, music, dance, arts, and crafts, or grand spectacle.<sup>438</sup>

Baxter's work with the Commission began in 1956 as the All-Island Dance and Creative officer for the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission. She traveled throughout Jamaica to document forms and teach folk dances. St. Thomas was a frequent destination for Baxter. This is the culturally rich area where the Free Africans from the Congo region first arrived in the 1840s. It has remained a site of African survivals. She documented the Kumina and Yanga dances, taught them, and planned to adapt them to the stage.<sup>439</sup> Judith Bettelheim, in her study of the Christmas folk tradition of Jonkonnu in Jamaica, notes the moment when these formerly illegal and banished traditions came back into the public eye. "In 1951 and 1952 the Daily Gleaner, a Kingston newspaper sponsored an all-island "John Canoe" Contest."<sup>440</sup> This island-wide contest is an acknowledgement of the value of the folk to the development of a national consciousness. While these "new" cultural celebrations helped support the tourism industry, they also served a greater purpose for the Jamaican people. Baxter's company, founded in 1950 with its emphasis on folk dance, operated in a similar way as it captured national attention by performing the folk in national venues in the major cities of the country.

The survival and proliferation of Jamaican folk dances are due to Ivy Baxter and the subsequent work of members in the National Dance Theatre Company, the Jamaica School of Dance and Baxter's successor in the Social Welfare Commission and former student Joyce Campbell. Students of Ivy Baxter, Rex Nettleford and others have gone on to create new dance

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<sup>438</sup> Rex Nettleford, *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica, 1978), 123.

<sup>439</sup> "Jamaica will greet its dance group," *The Daily Gleaner*, Sept. 8, 1952, 12.

<sup>440</sup> Judith Bettelheim, "The Jonkonnu Festival: Its relation to Caribbean and African Masquerades," *Jamaica Journal* 10, nos. 2, 3, and 4 (1976): 21.

companies in Jamaica including L'Acadco, Movements, and The Company. Former students Clive Thompson and Eddy Thomas went on to North America to work with Martha Graham and Alvin Ailey. Her student Garth Fagan, who formed the Bucket Dance Company in his early years in New York, went on to win a Tony for his choreography of *The Lion King* in 1998.

#### DANCING POCOMANIA: EMBODYING SPIRIT

When I began, I asked many people and was told that there were no Jamaican dances, no, not one, just a little “shay shay” and “bram” on a Saturday night. At that time, in the mid 1940s, I had not seen Pocomania, which is now the most viewed of all of the branches of religious dance.

--Ivy Baxter<sup>441</sup>

Ivy Baxter's productions of *Elation* (1952) and *Pocomania* (1961) reveal interplay between the desire to forge a national identity through performances of Afro-Jamaican religious ritual and the pervasive taboo surrounding ritual in this period. For Baxter's company, performances of religious ritual and spirit possession within the framework of a theatrical event raised questions about the overlap between ritual and theatre. My interviews with her former dancers reveal that the perceived distance between the audience and the ritual did not exist for the performers themselves. Eventually, the dancers realized that they shared the common experience of spirit possession while rehearsing or performing these dances. They hid these occurrences from each other until they were confronted by Baxter herself. My study of Ivy Baxter's choreography implements my theory of myalisation with a critical difference. Baxter does not perform a social context for the ritual dances, a critical part of my definition of myal-theatre, but these performances do participate in the process of myalisation already underway in Jamaica. While her dances did not provide a context explaining why the ritual was being

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<sup>441</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 297.

performed, she and her dancers had an intimate and unexpected experience with the ritual that does relate to myalisation. These middle class performers had now experienced a critical part of these rituals, spirit possession, which brought them in touch with the Afro-Jamaican belief system that they were portraying on stage.

As part of my fieldwork, a total of six months in Jamaica between 2001-2003, I interviewed several former members of the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group who gave their accounts of Baxter's style, artistic intention, and descriptions of some of her major works. My archival work included the collection of newspaper reviews of her performances, ethnographies of Pocomania and Revival ceremonies from the early twentieth century, and photographs of Pocomania the ritual and staged performances of the ritual. I attended a Revival meeting in Spanish Town in August of 2003 and will use some of my observations to discuss aspects of the ritual. With extensive interviews with Enid Douglass and Ronan Critchlow and detailed accounts of Pocomania ceremonies by William J. Makin, Earl Leaf, Martha Beckwith and Edward Seaga, I describe Baxter's process of fieldwork, adaptation, and performances of these dances. This is an attempt to understand the type of ceremony Ivy Baxter might have attended in the late 1940s and early 1950s in Jamaica. In addition, I seek to understand what she attempted to capture and recreate on stage with the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group in her 1952 piece *Elation* and 1961 *Pocomania*. Finally, I will address the secrecy around this ritual and spirit possession and Baxter's attempt to remedy this problem for her company.

In her book *The Arts of an Island*, Baxter relates her first experience of conducting fieldwork on Jamaican folk forms with anthropologist Thomas Moore.

How well do I remember coming upon the Cumina Music, for the first time.  
[Thomas] Moore was doing research on African survivals in the parish of St.

Thomas and as he and his colleague and I listened to the playback of tapes, I could not believe that this was Jamaican music. I was sure that he was playing material gathered in Africa....When I was actually taken to watch the Cumina memorial ceremony from eight o'clock one night to six the next morning, then my real Jamaican eyes were opened. During the evening the drums became deeper and deeper and more intense as the more exciting part of the ritual took place, about midnight, and I removed myself for a while to sit in the car and relax before going back to watch.<sup>442</sup>

Baxter's need to sit in the car may have been a tactic to avoid spirit possession caused by continuous exposure to the drumming. This experience reshaped her view of Jamaica and informed the level of detail needed to research the dances that she would adapt to the stage.

Enid Douglass, one of Ivy Baxter's closest friends, told the story of how Baxter had to sneak out of her home, where she lived with her five sisters, to go to a Pocomania ceremony at night in August Town, a ghetto community of Upper St. Andrew. The story is reminiscent of an adolescent school girl climbing out of her window to meet up with her high school sweetheart. But Baxter at the time was in her late twenties, and it was not her parents that she was afraid would catch her, but her very conservative and accomplished middle class sisters. Likewise, it was not a lover that she was going to meet, but a few close friends and dancers in her company who took her to her first POCO-meeting. The shame of attending such a meeting was shared by middle and upper middle class communities because it was considered mixing with the uneducated lower classes. The ritual itself was considered backward and heathen by the devout Christian society.<sup>443</sup> The need to sneak out and the fear of being reprimanded by her sisters, in spite of her reason for attending, exemplifies the intense bias and taboo against these practices by the Jamaican middle class, who found these practices unacceptable under any circumstance.

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 297-8.

<sup>443</sup> Enid Douglass, Interview by Karima Robinson.

Enid Douglass, who went with Baxter to observe the POCO-meeting, remembers that the practitioners dressed in white robes and wore head wraps, and that the Shepherd sometimes whipped the practitioners. Baxter's fieldwork for Pocomania consisted of attending POCO-meetings for three nights in order to fully understand movement sequences and the relationship between sequences.<sup>444</sup>

Spirit possession is a key element of Afro-Jamaican religious ritual and myalisation, and was discussed by former members of Baxter's company. Ronan Critchlow danced as the Shepherd in *Elation* and as a practitioner in *Pocomania*. He was also a master drummer for the Ivy Baxter Company and later the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica (NDTC). In preparation for his performances in *Elation* and *Pocomania*, he did not need to travel or do research. He had already been exposed to Pocomania meetings through "the culture" and felt that it was not foreign to him. At one POCO-meeting he once saw a man standing still and leaning backward at a 45° angle for at least five minutes. He went on to explain that there are different manifestations of spirit possession. "Some fall on the ground, and flail about, roll around on the ground. Some speak in tongues, some sit or stand perfectly still while their skin trembles violently. Some shout prophetic words in English."<sup>445</sup> Ethnographer Edward Seaga similarly outlines various manifestations of spirit possession:

In Pukkumina it is said that the onset [of possession] is usually experienced by a paralytic shock in one leg followed by a recession of consciousness. The individual stamps the other foot at the moment of seizure and falls forward. He is held motionless by bearers for about half a minute until he stirs, signifying that he is conscious enough to stand.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

<sup>445</sup> Ronan Critchlow, Interview by Karima Robinson.

<sup>446</sup> Seaga, 7.

Several dancers from the Ivy Baxter group explained this idea of labouring to me in different ways and that they performed this type of movement and breathing on stage.

In *Black Roadways: A Study of Jamaican Folklife*, Martha Warren Beckwith conducted two interviews with Pukkumina Shepherds and their female assistants, called Shepherdesses. During her interview with Shepherd Sam Thompson, she describes an impromptu performance of the ritual given by Thompson and his assistant.

Thompson and the girl were perfectly ready to entertain me with an imitation of the Pukkumerian dance, one singing and beating a tambourine while the other performed, and they laughed heartily over the comical figure that each cut in the dance when pretending to stagger under the possession of a spirit.<sup>447</sup>

Beckwith includes a photograph at the end of this section of a female Pukkumerian in possession, which she labels “a rehearsal.” The laughter and amusement described here was discussed again in my interview with Ronan Critchlow about audience reactions to Ivy Baxter’s stagings of Pocomania ritual and the choreographed spirit possession in particular.

In the image that Beckwith provides there are no violent convulsions or clothing being discarded, but someone falling into a trance-like state. As Ronan Critchlow had suggested, possession takes many forms, some more subtle than others. It is unknown what Ivy Baxter witnessed when she attended Poco meetings in the early 1950s or how she would have described the events. The various accounts provide readers with some visual images of the movement of Pocomania. For Baxter and her company, spirit possession became a problem that had to be addressed by dancers who performed an adapted form of this ritual on stage.

Baxter discusses the class divide that she attempted to bridge through dance, particularly performances of folk forms.

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<sup>447</sup> Martha Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, 181.

Psychological distances were great, not only between country and town, but in their traditions. Middle-class Jamaica and the functional folk-oriented systems of Afro-Jamaica were far apart. The conscious understanding of both these systems and of the creative art inspiration to be derived from them has been part of my work in the field of dance. It was not the rural folk who saw the compositions in creative dance at first, but town-oriented audiences and middle class townpeople, who had forgotten or had never known, or had refused to look upon the folklore of rural Jamaica, except in ridicule, distaste, and sometimes fear.<sup>448</sup>

Baxter's secret defiance and determination to observe the ritual was paralleled later by the middle class dancers who performed Baxter's choreographed version of *Pocomania*.

Baxter's description of *Elation* is included in the program booklet for the 1952 production in Puerto Rico.

The Shepherd is found alone in front of the table, waiting for his followers to enter. They move around. The inner group moves forward. Candles are lit to herald the descent of the Spirit—into the Shepherd first, then to each of the Officers and then to a few chosen members of the flock. They are “dipped”, and finally become totally “possessed”, to the rejoicing and satisfaction of the Shepherd and all of the flock.<sup>449</sup>

Here Baxter indicates that the spirits are called and that nearly all of the members respond by becoming possessed during this performance. This choreographed possession performed by several members of her group demonstrates why it was so difficult for them to prevent actual possession on stage.

Founding member of the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group, Ronan Critchlow remembers Baxter shouting in the studio that the dancers had to concentrate on what they were doing. He remembers her saying: “You must concentrate, don't get absorbed by it.”<sup>450</sup> He went on to explain that for a performance like *Pocomania*, the dancers had to resist the spirit. They had to

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<sup>448</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 298.

<sup>449</sup> “Programme to be presented by the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group at The Caribbean Folk Festival, San Juan, Puerto Rico. August 1952,” in Dance Programs Collection, National Library of Jamaica.

<sup>450</sup> Ronan Critchlow, Interview by Karima Robinson.

actively deny the spirit access to their body. Critchlow gave the example of a rehearsal for NDTC's *Kumina* in the early 1970s that was stopped "to bring the person back."<sup>451</sup> He believes that this type of ritual performance possesses too much risk. "It demands concentration. It's better to have a pretend possession or a choreographed possession."<sup>452</sup> Dancers in Baxter's *Pocomania* each attempted to do as Baxter instructed, but each one with whom I spoke failed. Actively resisting full possession during shows required an extraordinary amount of concentration in order to execute the right movements at the right times and remember the next sequence of movements.<sup>453</sup>

Critchlow, as a master drummer, blames it on the music. He explains, "Possession is caused by singing and rhythm, incessant and monotonous rhythms."<sup>454</sup> In the first performance of *Elation* in 1952, the phrases of the dance all followed the music and the lyrics of the spiritual songs, which all blended together. "Fire Fall on Me" was one of the songs used in the performance, sung by The Frats Quintet. William Makin in his description of the ritual also notes the music: "It possessed an irresistible syncopation which made all feet in the vicinity shuffle."<sup>455</sup> At another moment he notes: "Feet, some bare, some in cracked boots, were shuffling in the dust. I found some of the worshippers at my side shuffling and swaying quietly. The rhythm was almost impossible to resist.... Occasionally the hymn was changed, but rarely the rhythm."<sup>456</sup> During ritual performance it is the job of the drummer to "call down the spirit."

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Enid Douglass, Interview by Karima Robinson.

<sup>454</sup> Ronan Critchlow, Interview by Karima Robinson.

<sup>455</sup> Makin, 99.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 102.

Those who could not do so were “called off” the drum and were replaced with a more experienced drummer.<sup>457</sup>

In the early seventies with the creation of the experimental Caribbean Lab at the Jamaica School of Drama, theatre practitioners and master drummers tested the effects of particular drum rhythms on students who were not exposed to the actual rituals and had little knowledge of religious ideology of the various practices represented. Within the secular context of the classroom, students and teachers discovered which rhythms played at which tempos for a particular length of time triggered spirit possession in the average person.<sup>458</sup> This knowledge of the effects of music, which Baxter most likely did not have in the 1950s and early 1960s, points to a dichotomy within Baxter’s instructions to the performers. On one hand the dancers were to resist the spirit. But her insistence on the presence of live drumming and use of the same rhythms and songs used in actual ritual performances made it impossible for her dancers to obey her orders.

Anthropologist and dance scholar Yvonne Daniel discusses the possibility of spirit possession by non-initiated people within the context of Haitian Vodou.

It is possible for anyone to feel or display *lwa* energy—that is, to manifest spiritual entity. Haitian Vodou is really a “democratic” religion in this regard, since it allows any person—male or female, adult or child, initiated or even uninitiated—to receive spiritual energies and display manifestation. I should emphasize, however, that uninitiated persons are not encouraged to display or give themselves fully to divine manifestation. Requisite training that prepares the body for the powerful unfolding of spiritual energy is considered crucial. Deliberate and incremental stages of learning are preferred to the *bozal* or “wild” access of spiritual energy, although this type of “mounting” or altered state of consciousness occurs sometimes nevertheless. The deliberate, apprenticed

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<sup>457</sup> Ronan Critchlow, Interview by Karima Robinson.

<sup>458</sup> Earl Warner, Interview by Karima Robinson in 1993; and Jean Small, Interview by Karima Robinson on the Caribbean Lab which she created in 1970s at the Jamaican school of Drama.

initiation permits the *lwas* to dance and commune comfortably with the living community.<sup>459</sup>

The concept of bozal is particularly relevant here as Baxter's dancers were unprepared to receive any spirit, and their reaction of silence likely stemmed from a lack of understanding and an inability to articulate what they experienced.

Enid Douglass, as a young dancer in the company, did not realize that she had been possessed at all until it was over. She recalls dancing on stage and the precise moment when she lost and regained consciousness during a performance. She was Down Stage Right (DSR) and was supposed to repeat a particular short sequence of gestures (most likely a laboring movement) as she moved left across the stage in the shape of a semi-circle to the opposite location Down Stage Left (DSL). When she arrived DSL, she realized that she was not conscious of having made the semi-circle. In other words, she completed the choreography, repeated the stamp-like movements, making an arch across the stage, and found herself on the other side of the stage without being aware of the various steps that she had taken to get there. After the performance was over, she realized that she had not been conscious during that portion of the dance, and she could not remember how she got from one side of the stage to the other. After the show, no one complained about her having made a mistake, even when she asked about it. She assumed that she had completed the movements as they were choreographed and did not tell anyone about her experience.<sup>460</sup>

Douglass was with the group in Puerto Rico in 1952 when *Elation* was first performed. The dance was performed several times during this ten year period, and each time at least one of

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<sup>459</sup> Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom*, 151.

<sup>460</sup> Enid Douglass, Interview by Karima Robinson.

the dancers kept secret his or her experience of possession. It was not until 1961 when Baxter performed in the piece, with the new title of *Pocomania*, that she experienced spirit possession on stage. At this point she began to ask the other dancers about their experiences of spirit possession during rehearsals and performances. Baxter gives her own account of *Pocomania* and the spirit possession experienced by the dancers.

In this dance, it was originally planned to have drums stop just before the time of “possession,” which took place in silence, just as it had taken place in the meeting which I had watched. I had never danced in this number in its entirety. However, I discovered that the same effect was produced in the dancers as took place in the real worshippers. This was not revealed until a year or so later. Many of the dancers said, “I felt light. I felt as if my head was growing, but I was ashamed to tell you.” Since then, this dance has never been performed as it was in Puerto Rico. The ending was changed to prevent this happening; and, thereafter, *Pocomania* was never rehearsed “full out.” At Howard University in Washington, when one of the dancers became ill, I substituted, and then understood fully what they were saying.<sup>461</sup>

Baxter ends her description here. She does not elaborate or describe what it felt like to experience spirit possession during a performance. Daniel however gives an account of an uninitiated girl in Cuba having a bozal experience and the community’s reaction.

In a Cuban transformation that I witnessed, a girl about fourteen years old was being brushed with leaves as everyone had been brushed in a closing ritual. Suddenly she started to tremble violently and uncontrollably. She registered fear and started to scream and cry profusely while holding onto her grandmother. Abruptly she lifted her legs and, in an exaggerated march, tore loose from her grandmother, stomped across the room, and then began to dance and spin furiously. This occurred at the close of a spiritual mass or *misa*, where mediums relate communications from spirits of the dead and where *orichas* rarely appear. After an hour or more of her vacillations between a frightened, humble, young girl and an audacious and fiery dancing *oricha*, those who were officiating concluded that she had received her first transformation. She had received suprahuman, spiritual energy without preparation, called a *bozal*, or un-baptized, “African” manifestation.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Baxter, *The Arts of an Island*, 301-2.

<sup>462</sup> Daniel, 62.

In Daniel's description the girl struggled against the spirit before being overtaken by it. Baxter's dancers also tried to resist and to some extent succeeded, because the Baxter dancers with whom I spoke were possessed briefly and soon regained consciousness. Up until Baxter's own possession, she insisted that the ritual be performed "full out," meaning with maximum physical energy by the dancers with intense drumming, in rehearsals and on stage.<sup>463</sup> Once Baxter realized that the dancers were becoming possessed, she insisted that it should never be danced this way again.

I asked former company members about how the audience responded to *Elation* and *Pocomania* and spirit possession on stage. Overall they suggested that the audience could see that it was choreographed possession. When I asked about the danger of actual possession for an audience member, Critchlow gave me his theory. He claimed that someone would have to be "susceptible to it." By this he meant that only those audience members for whom the experience happens in other settings or those who have already opened themselves up to this type of experience would be vulnerable to possession during a performance. Eddy Thomas, former company member and former co-artistic director of National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, felt that the audience was amused by the contortions of possession on stage. They recognize that it is choreographed and enjoy its representation. "Sometime they cheered and clapped."<sup>464</sup>

Reviews of Baxter's *Elation* performed in Jamaica in 1952 just before and after their performance in Puerto Rico reveal that most critics were pleased with the overall performance.

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<sup>463</sup> Enid Douglass, Interview by Karima Robinson.

<sup>464</sup> Eddy Thomas, Interview by Karima Robinson.

Some critics mention *Elation* by name and respond with mixed reviews of the dance.

“Critchlow, as Chief Shepherd, commands the centre of the stage with authority.”<sup>465</sup> This positive review by Cynthia Wilmot, a member of the company, is contrasted with negative response from theatre critic Harry Milner.

The final number, “Elation,” based on Pocomania was, save for the singing of the Fraternity Quintette ... was the least successful. Also in the Shepherd’s dancing there was more than a hint of Indian, which must have been picked up from the Trinidadians at the festival. The drums were not strong enough moreover.<sup>466</sup>

Being unfamiliar with the ritual dance, the reviewer believes that aspects of the dance appear “Indian.” He credits the Indian presence in Trinidad for this occurrence and regards this slippage as a fault of the company.

Cultural historian Patricia Mordecai also documents the spinning motion of Pocomania dancing.

It is the wheeling and the form of the ritual—dancers surrounding the central figure of the ‘cymballing’ leader—that suggests a connection to the whirling dervishes of Turkey. The turbans are also a possible further East Indian influence. Although it is known that there were Muslim slaves in Jamaica who knew and recited the Koran, any more certain connection to the dervishes remains to be established.<sup>467</sup>

While I have witnessed this wheeling motion in ritual performances and on stage, I have not come across any evidence to support Mordecai’s speculation concerning Turkish or East Indian influences on the ritual.

Further examination of the reviews shed some light onto the specifics regarding the performances and the apprehension by some to embrace this new form of dance.

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<sup>465</sup> Cynthia Wilmot, “On Eve of Puerto Rican Festival: Baxter Group Gives Exciting Preview,” *Public Opinion* (1952): 5.

<sup>466</sup> Harry Milner, “Jamaican Dancing at the Ward: ‘It Was Colourful, Pleasing,’” *The Daily Gleaner*, September 12, 1952, 12.

<sup>467</sup> Mordecai, 161.

In the famous Pocomania number, for instance, Ronnie Nasralla, who is an excellent ballet dancer by local standards, was quite unable to lose himself in the movements of the dance. He has learned to discipline legs, arms and back in the ballet tradition, but has not discovered control of his torso, an aspect of training emphasized in Miss Baxter's technique.<sup>468</sup>

This comment on technique by fellow dancer Cynthia Wilmot reveals one of the pitfalls of Baxter's early dancers, whose training in ballet was more extensive than Baxter's instruction in Jamaican folk dance. Over the years these kinds of comments about technique were less frequent, as Baxter's work on teaching folk dance in Jamaica became more extensive and dancers gained experience in this area. In another article, critic Harry Milner celebrated Baxter while expressing fears that she may have taken her exploration of Jamaica folk forms too far.

I hope with all my heart that Miss Baxter takes the same road [as Katherine Dunham] and does not lose herself here in a maze of intellectual "primitivism," and artistic chauvinism: traps, which have swallowed up so much potentially progressive work in both this country and others.<sup>469</sup>

This comment expresses the concern of many of Baxter's middle class audience members, who were generally uncomfortable with this emerging direction in Jamaican performance in which the folk were valorized to the exclusion of formerly popular forms of British culture in the colony. Dunham's international success provided Baxter with some room for exploration in this regard.

The secrecy around the possession experience that extended for almost ten years among the dancers reveals Jamaican middle class attitudes regarding Afro-Jamaican religious practices and practitioners. William Makin in *Caribbean Nights* described his frustration at the refusals by members of the Jamaican middle class to take him to a Pocomania ceremony in the late 1930s.

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<sup>468</sup> Cynthia Wilmot, "Ivy Baxter" September 13, 1952 in scrapbook at UWI Drama Department.

<sup>469</sup> Harry Milner, "The Theatrical Year," *Pepperpot* (1952): 20.

One person he approached described it as “debasing,” and defined it as a “mixture of inflamed Methodist revivalism and African voodoo worship.”<sup>470</sup> He soon realized that this class of educated Jamaicans was utterly ashamed of these practices and would never display them to a white man. Finally, he convinced his garden boy to take him to a meeting. I faced similar difficulties in attempting to locate a contemporary Pocomo-meeting to observe. My middle class associates insisted that it was too dangerous and that I should spend my time reading about Pocomania rather than observing it. Some promised to check on the possibility of my attending a ceremony, but never followed through. Finally, a former member of NDTC took me to a Revival meeting in Spanish Town in 2003.

Edward Seaga discusses some of the reasons why middle class Jamaicans do not accept the ideology or practices of Pocomania. “The orthodox or accepted Christian Churches in Jamaica have rarely, if ever, been able to come to terms with revivalist cults.”<sup>471</sup> One reason is the difference in religious thinking between Christian monotheism and African polytheism. In addition to this ideological difference, the acceptance of spirit possession as a form of worship is a defining element of Afro-Jamaican religious ceremonies. “The Christian Church in its orthodox and accepted form frowns upon the more emotional manifestations of the spirit.”<sup>472</sup> The third reason for the middle class rejection of these cults is socio-economic and cultural, as Seaga explains.

Revivalists are mostly outside the socio-economic framework of the middle-class; membership is drawn primarily from the working class. The Christian middle-class widely holds particular views of Revivalists: pagan, superstitious, comical in ritual behavior, tolerant of dishonesty. The suspicion of the practice of Obeah (use of spirit for destructive purposes) adds further to the middle-class disrepute

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<sup>470</sup> Makin, 94.

<sup>471</sup> Seaga, 4.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

of cultists. The ambivalent attitude of the middle-class groups towards their African heritage contributes to the contempt.<sup>473</sup>

This analysis of middle class intolerance of this practice explains why dancers in Ivy Baxter's company, while acknowledging Pocomania's cultural validity, also wanted to maintain distance between themselves and this ritual practiced by the lower classes. Part of the shame of their spirit possession may have been related to their inability to prevent themselves from succumbing to the effects of a stigmatized ritual. To suddenly and unexpectedly become possessed by a spirit meant that the dancer was no longer an outsider merely intellectually appreciating the ritual. In the moment of possession, the dancer became an "initiated" ritual practitioner. Baxter's middle class group of civil servants, who were likely also devout church-going Christians, suddenly found themselves under the control of an unknown spirit. In addition to that, each member of the group had a personal experience of spirit possession and a bodily memory of that contact. The Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group now had something in common with the lower class, uneducated, and "backward masses" they sought to represent on stage.

In addition to attending a Revival service, I had the opportunity to interview Revival Pastor Michael Reid. I wanted to understand how Revival practitioners felt about use of their religious practice as "raw material" for artistic productions by non-practitioners, who sometimes profited from their creations. He stated that he accepts the adaptation of Revival and feels that the artists should be paid for the art that they produce. He explained that this type of cultural production in Jamaica is very useful to him, because it presents his practices to middle class audiences who would otherwise not be exposed to them. He believes that such performances actually help erase the stigma of Revival that he and his practitioners face on a daily basis. He

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<sup>473</sup> Seaga, 5.

insisted that these performances are educational tools by which the larger society can learn about this aspect of Jamaican culture.<sup>474</sup> In one sense he is correct that the stigma against Revival has lessened since Baxter's time because Revival is now upheld as an important part of the national culture.

But I probed further. I questioned how effective these "educational tools" are. What is really learned by Jamaican audiences who watch dance-theatre performances of Revival, like Baxter's *Pocomania*, that do not provide the audience the social context for the ritual? Baxter's approach to the documentation of Jamaican folk dances was formalistic. Her concern was with movement and composition. She did not attempt to gain a deep knowledge of the spiritual or social significance of the ritual. It took her a decade to realize that her dance group, composed of non-believers who were not attempting actually to call down any spirit, was nonetheless doing so through the form of the ritual itself. When she did realize that her choreographed sequences along with the drumming held the power to possess her dancers, she altered the dance to avoid this effect. Rex Nettleford's 1971 production of *Kumina* is an example of how a dance company attempted to avoid spirit possession by not choreographing it into the performance. But in spite of this effort to respect the power of these representations, spirit possession still occurred among NDTC dancers in rehearsal, according to Ronan Critchlow.<sup>475</sup> Reid's suggestion that these performances help bridge the distance created by the class divide is not entirely accurate. While Baxter's performances of *Pocomania* made the ritual more respectable to local audiences because middle class dancers were performing it, the need for distance between the ritual and the performers remained.

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<sup>474</sup> Michael Reid, Interview by Karima Robinson.

<sup>475</sup> Joyce Campbell, interview by Karima Robinson, Jamaica Festival Office, Kingston, Jamaica. Campbell is a former member of Baxter's company and the NDTC and discussed spirit possession occurring on and off stage.

Baxter's representations of Pocomania rituals in *Elation* (1952) and *Pocomania* (1961) begin the process of myalisation in the field of Jamaican dance-theatre. She made a clear shift in what was acceptable on stage by performing her adaptations of Revival. In one sense, she destabilized the colonial taboo surrounding it, but the taboo itself was an obstacle for her, as it nearly prohibited her fieldwork and silenced her dancers when they experienced spirit possession for themselves. Her decision to alter the performance of this dance by changing the choreography and decreasing the intensity of the dancing and drumming demonstrates her own concerns about spirit possession on stage and in rehearsal. Her Anglican beliefs and practices prevented her from understanding and embracing this element of performance. Once Jamaican folk forms had been carefully documented and artistically represented by the Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group, middle and upper class Jamaicans could set themselves apart from it and begin to imagine and realize the modern nation.

## CONCLUSION

Years later, members of the National Dance Theater Company, many of whom were former Baxter dancers, would study Afro-Jamaican religious rituals in depth and give the spirits their proper respect by blessing the stage before performances. They would also learn the proper techniques for bringing the dancers back after possession.<sup>476</sup> Baxter, who did not have a deep understanding of the ritual, found ways to regain the necessary distance between the actual ritual and her adaptation of the ritual on stage. Her career laid the foundation for the type of investigation that members of NDTC conducted on Jamaican folk forms and ritual in particular.

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<sup>476</sup> Marjorie Whyllie, Interview by Karima Robinson, at the University of the West Indies, Mona campus, Music Administrative office.

Her introduction of Jamaican folk forms, including ritual dances and mime, brought the everyday lives of poor Jamaicans onto center stage. Her inclusion of modern dance also supported her complete break with the preceding ballet tradition of Jamaican dance-theatre. She diversified the field of dance by including dancers of both genders and all racial and ethnic groups in her company. Baxter's performance of Jamaican folk enabled the British colony to begin to think of itself as a modern and independent nation.

In the next chapter, my conclusion, I bring together all of the arguments made in the individual chapters and discuss how the three case studies that I have examined thus far provide evidence of the process of myalisation at work in Jamaica.

## CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

This dissertation demonstrates how playwrights Una Marson and Enid Chevannes and choreographer Ivy Baxter used theatre and dance-theatre to perform the social reality of the island's black majority. These women artists highlighted myal-based practices and women in their performances in order to articulate a new perspective on Jamaican society.

In chapter one, I explained my theory of myalisation which explores the social, political and spiritual significance of myal-based practices on stage. I have argued that the dramatization of Jamaican rituals for the stage has transformed or myalised Jamaican theatre by establishing a new theatre aesthetic. The staging of myal-based rituals and performances of spirit possession transformed the secular space of the theatre into sacred ground. Middle class non-believers (among the performers and audience members) reluctantly acknowledged the presence of ancestors in the theatre and thus embraced an Afro-Jamaican worldview in a previously Eurocentric setting.

The history of these religious rituals is intertwined with narratives of slave resistance and women's history in Jamaica. Slave owners documented the correlation between the frequency of ritual practices and incidents of resistance. This relationship continued into the post-emancipation era. Descriptions of myal-based religious rituals were filled with images of women's bodies in a state of spirit possession. The discourse of resistance associated with these rituals then was written onto black women's bodies. This can be seen in colonial writings on these rituals, where the male gaze of colonial officials is fixated on black women's bodies. The image of women in a state of spirit possession is translated to the stage when artists like Marson, Chevannes and Baxter represented these rituals as part of the nation's identity. Women

protagonists play a central role in the plays and dance-theatre productions by these women artists. Marson's Stella, Chevannes' Jamma, and the women of Baxter's *Pocomania* have all contributed to the rhetoric of resistance to colonialism and the establishment of a national discourse.

The colonial discourse on these ritual practices accused participants of deviant sexuality and psychological instability. Marson, Chevannes and Baxter re-appropriate the image of the woman possessed. In their creative work, the black woman's body is de-sexualized. Spirit possession is reframed as a religious experience and as one to be proud of, while the legacy of sexual shame and the colonial taboo around this image is erased on stage. Intelligent and insightful protagonists, who show no signs of mental instability, debunk the stereotype of mental illness. The potent image of spirit possession that evokes ideas of revolution, deviant sexuality and mental illness is discussed as a feminine revolution against the limitations of constructions of Jamaican womanhood. The reframing of these religious rituals is part of the process of the myalisation of Jamaican theatre.

In the opening chapter I explain that Myal-theatre presents, dramatizes, or explains how the ritual fulfills a social and spiritual function in the community. Myal-theatre reenacts the ritual, acknowledges the vexed history of the ritual, and performs a Jamaican collective consciousness. It provides a context for the ritual. Myal-theatre shifts what is acceptable on stage in terms of subject matter and style, destabilizes the colonial taboo of myal, and appears to maintain a necessary distance between the audience and performers. Spirit possession plays a pivotal role, as it is the key element that shifts the performance aesthetic from a Eurocentric approach to theatre to an Afro-Jamaican mode of performance. Further exploration of the terms

myalisation and myal-theatre have the potential to create a liberating discourse to analyze the cultural production within nationalist movements of the African Diaspora. Myal-theatre allows the middle class to engage in an African derived spirituality while participating in a ritual designed to refute the oppressive forces of colonialism.

Una Marson's *Pocomania* (1938) introduced Jamaican ritual to theatre. Her play sets the standard for the myalisation of Jamaican theatre and helps define the parameters of myal-theatre. Revival practices are part of the dramatic structure of the play. Marson unapologetically revealed the impoverished state of the Jamaican lower class that struggled to survive while seeking strength from their religious practices. The material conditions of the lower class demonstrate the poverty that is one of the results of colonialism for the majority of Jamaicans.

Marson's protagonist Stella participates in Revival and represents a psychological longing for Africa. Her defiance of her father, who symbolizes the ideology of the Baptist church, is consistent with the spirit of revolt that is historically linked to these practices. Stella's rejection of Victorian values and the embrace of an African-derived ritual suggest a new Afro-centric ideology in operation. Once the 1938 rebellion came to a climax in May of that year, a nationalist ideology emerged as a practical solution to the many economic and social problems of the island. Her play offered a stinging critique of the middle class, that diagnosed women who questioned societal norms as insane. Marson defies popular Victorian constructions of womanhood by compelling Stella to break all of the dictates of society and participate in Revival anyway. The label of insanity is used as a method of control and is meant to alter her behavior. In the end it seems as though the threat of spinsterhood is the only thing that *might* deter her. Stella's marriage to David saves her from becoming a complete social outcast.

Marson's play *Pocomania* was a huge success with Jamaican highbrow audiences. Her play represents the first transportation of the Jamaican theatre from a European aesthetic to an Afro-creole perspective. Over the next thirty years Jamaican theatre would be transformed by such performances, and a new Afro-creole performance aesthetic would dominate Jamaican performance.

Enid Chevannes was acutely aware of the feminist movement of the 1940s and 1950s and the efforts of the Jamaican Federation of Women. Black lower class and middle class women were being assigned a new set of feminist values that were aligned with Victorian constructions of womanhood. All of her plays portrayed strong black women protagonists of the lower class. Chevannes used comic wit to empower these women to speak to middle class values and express themselves in a way that was normally not acceptable. Her female characters reframed feminist and nationalist debates on their own terms, thereby contributing to the emerging national consciousness.

In Chevannes' plays *Root of Evil* and *Turned Tables*, the market women and a domestic helper redefine the terms lady and woman according to their own values in order to correct the misguided middle class. Her plays *Superstition* and *The Vision* expose the ambiguity of the middle class regarding the valorization of the poor. At the same time, the folk and their forms are essential to a national identity, yet there is a limited acceptance of them and their ways by the middle class. Chevannes reveals this ambiguity in her work by celebrating the nine night ritual and visions from African ancestors, while questioning the validity of Obeah. In *The Vision*, the ambitious John rejects Revival in favor of Christianity. In *Superstition*, the nine night ritual is celebrated, while the practice of Obeah is presented as a symptom of madness. This ambiguity is

symptomatic of Jamaican nationalism, which engages in the simultaneous celebration and denigration of folk practices and beliefs.

Enid Chevannes' play *The Vision*, first produced in 1963, celebrates African ancestors while sugar-coating the harsh reality of slavery. Her misrepresentation is a unique call for forgiveness that requires black Jamaicans to forget the stories that had been handed down to them as well as the written historical record of slavery. Chevannes adds to the legend of Mamby Park (a slave) by creating the character Jamma, a strong woman who is not afraid to speak her mind.

Chevannes continues the process of myalisation that Marson began in 1938. Chevannes' plays reveal the material conditions of the lower class as a symptom of colonial oppression. Her plays perform rituals on stage within their social context and demonstrate the purpose of these rituals. Mamby's vision of his great-great-grandmother from Africa is an acknowledgement and validation of the importance of Jamaica's African heritage to contemporary survival. Her female protagonists defy the colonial authority of the Jamaican Federation of Women by undermining the prescribed ideology about women and asserting an alternate view of Jamaican womanhood.

Choreographer Ivy Baxter was inspired by the lifestyles of lower class Jamaicans. She pooled her training in ballet and modern dance with her study of folk dances and mime to create a new dance technique. Her Creative Dance Group was comprised of dancers of all ethnic backgrounds and of both genders. The inclusive nature of the group was innovative for the time. The content of her work revolved around new images of Jamaica. Baxter presented skilled workers, sportsmen, women, tourists, and struggling single mothers. She found ways to communicate abstract notions of nationhood in her performances of *Birth* and *Polychrome*.

Baxter represented ritual on stage by focusing on its sacred elements and omitting movement that could be misread as sexual. Her performances throughout the island disseminated a new understanding of Jamaica to the people. She captured a broad audience including middle class urban theatergoers, teachers, rural farm workers, and children. From 1950-1962, her company made the representation of the folk an acceptable dance-theatre aesthetic.

She created unique opportunities for the opinions and concerns of women to be revealed. While men were included in a dance company for the first time in Jamaica, women played crucial roles in defining the nation on stage. Her productions of *Elation* and *Pocomania* both presented Revival ritual. While Baxter did not provide the context for the ritual for audiences, she contributed to the reversal of the taboo surrounding these rituals. The actual possession of her dancers during performances of these dances and her need to correct this problem reveals the anxiety that the middle class still held regarding these practices. Her middle class dancers, like her middle class audiences, felt the need for distance between themselves and the possibility of spirit possession.

My vision for an expansion of this dissertation is to extend its scope into the post-colonial period and examine the work of male playwrights Errol Hill and Dennis Scott, and choreographer Rex Nettleford. While Errol Hill is a native of Trinidad and this project focuses on the theatre history of Jamaica, I include him in part because of his long residency in Jamaica and his impact on Jamaican theatre. Hill also represents the fact that the process of myalisation was a regional phenomenon. Playwrights and choreographers from Trinidad, Barbados, St. Lucia, and Guyana and beyond were all creating new works utilizing ritual and spirit possession as part of the process of nation building. Many began this process at the University of the West

Indies at the Jamaica campus where Hill was a Drama Lecturer for many years. In the larger project I plan to provide a cohesive history of the myalisation of Jamaican theatre and dance-theatre history in the twentieth century.

In one additional chapter, I will analyze Hill's writings on the role of ritual in Caribbean theatre and nation building. As a theatre practitioner and theorist, Hill places ritual at the center of understanding and interpreting African Diasporic performance. I will use his theory of the role of the mask in performance to analyze his play *Dance Bongo*. In this chapter on Hill, I will compare this play about ritual dance to Rex Nettleford's *Kumina*. Both pieces place the male dancing body at the center of ritual performance. This marks a clear shift from the work of Marson, Chevannes, or Baxter, where the image of the female body in the state of spirit possession was center stage.

Dennis Scott's 1974 production of *An Echo in the Bone* in Jamaica signifies a critical moment in the process of myalisation that takes place in the post-colonial period. The Black Power movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Jamaica also marks a shift in how spirit possession as an icon of national identity is portrayed. Errol Hill's *Dance Bongo* and Dennis Scott's *An Echo in the Bone* both place the male body in a state of spirit possession at the center of their plays. This was due to the hyper-masculinity of this movement and the need to dramatize this on stage. By the 1980s in the Caribbean, the disillusionment of independence and the harsh economic realities of neo-colonialism were starting to become clear. Government funding to support many of the experimental theatres, which Scott as well as artists like Trevor Rhone and Rawle Gibbons, had inspired, dried up. While the most exciting moments of myal-based ritual on stage were behind them, myal-theatre was the accepted and expected norm,

although some would argue that its application and execution had become stale by the 1990s. My extended study of myalisation and Jamaican theatre and dance history contributes to a number of fields, namely Caribbean Studies, Dance Studies, Theatre Studies, and Gender Studies. It is my hope that the resulting book will provide a new methodological and theoretical model for scholars in these fields who are seeking examples of interdisciplinary scholarship. One of the most salient aspects of my work is the role of religious history and the use of colonial records to create a theory of contemporary theatre practice that blurs the line between theatre and ritual. My theory of myalisation, while specific to Jamaica, could be adapted and applied to other cultures that share a similar history of slavery, colonialism, and the use of folk forms to form national identities.

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