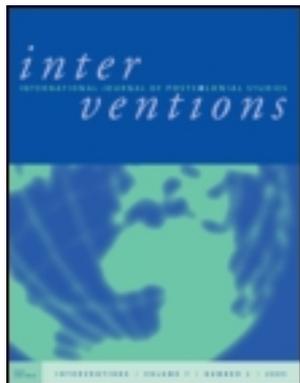


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Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/riij20>

Unruly virtues of the spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica

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Available online: 04 Jun 2010

To cite this article: Honor Ford-Smith (2004): Unruly virtues of the spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 6:1, 18-44

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369801042000185642>

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articles

UNRULY VIRTUES OF THE SPECTACULAR

Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica

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Garveyism

gender

Jamaica

nationalism

performance

race

This paper complicates notions of anticolonial nationalist resistance by discussing images emerging within the performances of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Approaching the Garvey movement as a practice taken up by active subjects who engaged with and used its ideas, the paper contends that anticolonial resistance cannot be reduced to a single narrative, easily appropriated or overturned by dominant groups. An examination of anticolonial performance in the Garvey movement allows us to move beyond the binary of resistance versus accommodation because performances were productive in multiple ways. UNIA performances were marked by excesses, strategic collusions, contradictions and absences. It was precisely this instability that allowed subjects from diverse social locations to grasp alternative social possibilities and elaborate these in terms of the particular marginalization or exploitation that they faced. The multiplicity of narratives generated point to the difficulty of reducing Garveyite resistance to a set of fundamental fixed ideas.

Two examples bear out this argument. The first focuses on performances of gender in the movement. Spectacular parades taught the official position of the movement, privileging a militant, modernist image of black masculinity, ready to rule but reliant on subordinate, if active and organized, femininity. Women resisted these images of subordination, drawing on their

training in the movement to advance a black feminist critique outside of the movement. Their struggles were simultaneously reformist and radical, for while they improved middle-class women's lives, they overlooked the needs of working-class women. The second example focuses on challenges to middle-class respectability and sexual rigidity through variety concerts at Edelweiss Park. The result is that, through its performances, the UNIA facilitated multiple unruly forms of resistance and advanced different claims for change over time and space.

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As far as their society is concerned, if you want to hear about titles, just cross the channel. White folks like titles so much that they pile up millions of dollars for a lifetime so that they can buy a title on the other side of the channel . . . Why therefore should some folks want to be spectacular and do not want Negroes to be spectacular? We say therefore, that since they have found some virtue in being spectacular we will try out the virtues there are in being spectacular.

(Garvey; cited in Hill 1994: 199–200)

[T]o organize Negroes we have got to demonstrate; you cannot tell them anything; you have got to show them; and that is why we have got to spend seven years making noise; we had to beat the drum; we had to do all we did; otherwise there would have been no organization.

(*ibid.*: 189)

Introduction

Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was, unquestionably, the most influential anticolonial organization in Jamaica prior to 1938. Garvey's legacy cannot be fully understood without attentiveness to his brilliance as an organizer who deployed heterogeneous performance languages – spectacular parades, elocution competitions, variety concerts, pageants, ceremonial rites, music, choirs, dance, plays, public debates and speeches – to teach, mobilize and transform his followers. UNIA performances were as crucial to the making of Jamaican identity as they were to anticolonial resistance.

Richard Burton, in a discussion of Caribbean cultural resistance, draws on de Certeau to argue that there are two kinds of resistance – that which contests power 'from outside of a system using weapons and concepts from a source or sources other than the system in question' and that which contests from within the system itself (1997: 7). Noting that in the Caribbean contestation often takes place playfully through entertainments and performative enactments, Burton observes:

I see cultural opposition in the Caribbean as double edged to the extent that an (Afro-) Creole culture cannot, by dint of its very creoleness, get entirely outside the dominant system in order to resist it (in de Certeau's sense of the word) and so tends unconsciously to reproduce its underlying structures even as its consciously challenges its visible dominance. (ibid.: 8)

While it is unrealistic to imagine that resistance can result in a complete *tabula rasa*, I propose that not all Caribbean cultural resistance can be completely reincorporated into the world view of the privileged – even where it appears to rely on a critique of dominance and even where, as in the case of Garvey, the project of revolutionary nationalism may seem to fail. While resistance always contains elements of accommodation, there is often something left over, a remainder or an excess which cannot be reincorporated into the dominant hegemony and which pops up in unexpected ways, sometimes after the original critique of domination seems to have been subdued. This remainder or excess derives from the multiple ways in which human subjects engage with organized resistance movements, transforming their teachings over time to address everyday experiences of exclusion and exploitation.

Garvey's work in performance reveals that he was a master of excess, exploiting the subversive potential of multiple sites of cultural production. While the UNIA was patriarchal, it also subverted conventional gender roles. It was proletarian, but also pursued respectability. It is precisely these unstable combinations and the contradictions within them that enabled active subjects to grasp alternative meanings which addressed their specific problems in diverse ways.

It is not surprising, then, that, in everyday discussions, Garveyism as national narrative is increasingly contested terrain. While most Jamaicans would agree that it is a crucial aspect of Jamaican nationalism, there is disagreement over what this crucial element actually is. Despite the scholarly efforts of Horace Campbell (1987), Winston James (1998), Robert Hill (1994), Rupert Lewis (1987) and Ula Taylor (2002), Garveyism is popularly imagined, certainly by many of my students, as a mode of nationalism based on essentialist racial and patriarchal narratives. This is so despite evidence that in practice Garveyism was, at particular moments, more racially inclusive and productive of gender equality than is usually recognized.

In discussions of Garveyism, a number of positions usually emerge. Some critical scholarly works engage the limitations of various forms of African nationalisms for theorizing race, gender, class and sexuality, and propose an emphasis on the social construction of race in articulation with other social categories and networks of power (see, for example, Alexander 1994; Carby 1998; Gaines 1996; Hall 1990; Collins 1991). This group of debates coexists alongside emotional dismissals of African nationalist politics *per se*, which often come from those who fear the implications of naming their own race

privilege. In the classroom, problems arise when these opposing viewpoints are conflated and taken up as a dismissal of all Garveyite achievements and credibility.

In Jamaican popular music and popular religion, Garvey himself is seen as an iconic figure who attempted to trouble the amnesia and alienation which often characterizes the lives of survivors of racial trauma in the Americas, and who suffered rejection as a result ('No one remembers old Marcus Garvey', Burning Spear tells us). On the other hand, he is seen as a prophet who articulated a vision of black redemption and challenged white supremacy in the interests of establishing Africa as a political and economic power. For students, the enormity of his achievement as the organizer of millions transnationally, coupled with the persistence of anti-black racism in the present, leads them to place him above critical engagement and mythologize him as a transcendent figure rather than a Legba-like embracer of contradictions.

In the tradition of West African religion even gods can have weaknesses. The desire to make Garvey into a perfect hero, at once the innocent victim of traitors and patriarch of the nation, is a narrative which invites interrogation. The desire for a perfect male hero probably reveals more about those of us that need it than it does about Garvey himself. It suppresses the diverse narratives of resistance which coexisted within anticolonial movements like the UNIA, and it silences the many ways people took up and transformed Garveyism to address the particular forms of exclusion and exploitation which they faced. In spite of the achievements of the UNIA, the problems with which anticolonial activists engaged – racialized global hegemonic capitalism, gender subordination, class privilege, anti-black and other forms of racism – remain stubbornly in place in the present, albeit in new configurations. Critical study of the UNIA enables an expansion of contemporary strategies for dismantling structures of domination. Analyzing the ways in which ordinary people took up ideas of resistance within social movements like Garvey's, and acted on them from diverse locations, expands theories of resistance and strengthens strategies for social justice in the present.

In what follows, I approach the Garvey movement not as a construct controlled by one man or as a series of utterances made by one great person, but as a practice taken up by active subjects who drew on it to challenge different but interlinked forms of exploitation and marginalization in diverse ways. I seek to complicate notions of anticolonial nationalism by uncovering the plethora of narratives, identities and images of resistance within the UNIA, as these emerged in movement performances in Jamaica. A focus on anticolonial performance in the Garvey movement as a site of analysis moves us beyond the pure binary of resistance versus accommodation because performances are productive in multiple ways, often simultaneously resisting and accommodating the social structure. Performance is productive precisely because its immediacy and symbolism, as well as the varied ways in which

people read narrative, make it a highly unstable site of meaning-making. Studying UNIA performance, we come up against the cracks, contradictions and absences through which participants grasped alternative meanings and enacted them, sometimes in sites beyond the movement itself.

The official narratives and images of Garveyite performances were transformed by participants who occupied multiple social locations. On the one hand, the movement parades privileged an image of black masculinity which is militarized, modernist, professional, efficient and ready to rule, and yet reliant on subordinate, if active and organized, femininity. On the other hand, the images that emerged in the variety concerts were subversive of middle-class respectability, gender and sexual rigidity. As I discuss later, performers like Ranny Williams dramatized the rough everyday reality of working-class men, alongside singers like the male soprano Johnny Lyons who sang light classics and opera in falsetto. Mock courts satirized the workings of the colonial legal system, while the legendary Cupidon transgressed gender rigidity by performing in drag as a working-class woman. Choirs singing sacred songs performed alongside rumba and tap dancers, the latter costumed in glamorous outfits. In the performances, then, class, gender and sexuality existed as boundaries which were made, challenged and satirized within the space created by the resistant narratives of the movement, the common thread being that these challenges were always interlinked with struggles against colonialism and racism. The result is that through performances, participants in the movement addressed several kinds of cultural marginalization and deployed shifting strategies of resistance conditioned by the social locations they occupied.

Understanding performance as a pedagogy of nation

The term ‘performance’ usually refers to a public display of technical skill and to activities carried out within a culturally coded framework that gives them consciousness of themselves (Carlson 1996: 3). But the notion of performance is very slippery – because the line between what is considered performance and other areas of existence, such as social role-playing, ritual behavior and play, is fuzzy and highly contested. For the purposes of this discussion, I draw loosely on Richard Schechner’s definition of performance as ‘restored behavior’; that is, behavior which is based on some pre-existing model of action and which separates role from person. I also draw on Bauman’s work on oral tradition (1993), in which he argues that performance is never a stable or fixed category; rather, the dynamics of performance shift in negotiation between performer and public and in relation to a remembered ideal of performance. A performer may assume a responsibility to an audience and a tradition as they understand it, but s/he may also try to undermine a tradition by providing a site for exploration of alternative structures and

patterns of behavior, blurring the boundaries between audience and performer or performer and role. Bauman's concept of performance as a shifting terrain defined in negotiation with an audience allows an examination of how groups differently positioned in the racialized hierarchy of colonial societies renegotiated inherited symbolic languages within the complex web of imperial power relations and extended these negotiations into everyday life.

Performance played a principal role in developing narratives of community and identity in Caribbean anticolonial settings, but it is writing that is more often recognized as having a formative role in nationalist movements. Though performance was often combined with writing, as in the work of poet Louise Bennett, performance was nevertheless the form that the majority of people could enjoy. As Anne McClintock has argued (1995), performance offered a visible language of power, displaying the aspirations of the imagined anticolonial nation. For communities in which literacy is the property of the elite, performances are a practical way to tap into knowledge that is unauthorized by formal and dominant systems of knowledge. Performances can create communities of resistance by releasing memory and unofficial ways of knowing encoded in body, dress and voice. They are a practical way to mobilize committed volunteers because, unlike print, they do not necessarily require a large outlay of capital and can be immediately consumed by audiences.

Performance in the UNIA was a formidable pedagogy of nation. Ceremonials fashioned and built belief in the possibility of achieving and, indeed, reproducing emancipatory ideas through the body and its interaction with symbols. Performance was a means of teaching ideas about black nationhood, black masculinity, femininity and community. It was subjunctive; in other words, it brought into being, in material and visible ways, ideas which did not yet exist in the everyday but which could, should or might be.

The range of performative strategies deployed in the UNIA meant that one never knew in any one moment exactly what combination of parody, critique, accommodation or conformity would operate. It is this that unsettles and makes the familiar strange. It is this that produces an overabundance or excess which continually marks the movement, producing practices and ideas which can be reworked, remade and used by active subjects to further plural projects of transformation across a range of sites. In what follows I trace this process describing Garveyite parades, plays and variety shows in Jamaica. I then analyze in context the implicit pedagogy within them, drawing out examples of heterogeneity, contradiction, instability and excess.

Parades and the Garveyite pedagogy of nation

The spectacular parades staged by Garvey were an exemplary teaching technique and reached thousands of people. The numbers reached by them eclipsed those reached by his history plays, which, as Hamilton shows (1987), recreated narratives of colonial history as the basis for contemporary militancy. Garvey's plays, such as 'Slavery from Hut to Mansion', commemorated past griefs as the instigation for activism. But it was the parades that played a leading role in teaching UNIA ideas of nation to large numbers of people, both in Harlem and in Jamaica. If ideological consensus is often contested at the level of style (Hebdige 1979), the UNIA certainly achieved this. At the level of dress, it fashioned the nation. Members could be identified by their African liberation colors – red for our blood, black for the race and green for our promise (Talley; cited in Hill 1994: 190) – and, at ceremonials, by their stylish military uniforms. They incorporated banners and flags, symbolic images drawn from Egyptian history, swords and other regalia into a complete *mise en scène*.

Large numbers of black people took over public space, conveying the message of the UNIA through the parades. These lessons were deepened, for members, through regulatory exercises in disciplined public-speaking and elocution, as well as through rituals and regal displays elsewhere in organizational practice. The most impressive UNIA parades were those of August 1920 and August 1922 in New York, which launched the Third International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World. The photos of these parades show hundreds of people marching through the streets of New York in full regalia. According to Truman Hughes Talley, Garvey's great parade of 1920 included more than 50,000 black people, with twelve bands all wearing the Garvey colors (*ibid.*: 190). Garvey was photographed in one of these Harlem parades dressed in the uniform of an imperial leader or field marshal of the First World War. This photograph has become a quintessential image of the movement, even though Garvey did not always attire himself in military regalia. He often wore 'flowing scarlet robes and academic cap with golden tassel that were the insignia of his UNIA president general's office' (Hill 1994: 188), or a three-piece suit. As well as being a copy of a First World War field marshal's uniform, Garvey's outfit is also a replica of that worn by the governors of Jamaica until about twenty years ago. The image of Marcus Garvey in the outfit of a colonial governor, with plumed pith helmet and gold tasseled epaulets, seated in an open car, is one of the most famous images of the man and the movement.

Parades were staged on the streets of Kingston when Garvey returned to Jamaica. On 12 December 1927, Marcus Garvey arrived in Kingston on the SS *Santa Marta* and was met by uniformed UNIA members, the black cross nurses, girl guides, the UNIA legion and the leadership of the UNIA (*Daily*

Gleaner, 12 December 1927: 3). As the banners and flags blew in the sea breeze, Garvey made a brief speech to his followers. The centrality of ceremony evident on this occasion became more obvious at later meetings, concerts and performances at Edelweiss Park and Liberty Hall. In 1929, for example, the UNIA convention opened on 1 August (Emancipation Day) with a religious service followed by a huge procession through the streets of Kingston, 'the like of which had never been seen before', according to the report in the *Daily Gleaner*. Attracting 20,000 spectators, the procession advanced from Kingston Racecourse to Liberty Hall and then to Edelweiss Park. Garvey, in his governor's apparel, drove in an open car accompanied by ordered marching groups. Crowds of people streamed into the street, beside and behind the procession.

The parades displayed the entire hierarchy of the UNIA led by Garvey and his lieutenants. Segmented uniformed marching groups included women attired in the white dresses and white veils of the black cross nurses, the female motor corps and the girl guides. Madame M. L. T. di Mena Aitken became a legendary image when she rode a 'gray charger with a drawn sword' (Hill 1990: vol. vii, p. 317). Men made up the militia and the Royal African Guards, uniformed as soldiers in a modern army. Everyone marched in formation carrying banners and flags. Sometimes political demands were displayed on huge placards (such as those calling for the release of Mohandas Gandhi from jail).

UNIA parades, as descriptions attest, enacted subjunctive desires for a new nation, publicly and visibly tackling the symbolic racial dichotomies which underlie white colonial power. The parades projected the specter of men ready to fight, women ready to nurse them if they were wounded and a race ready to rule. The parades issued a call to action to those watching, even as they metaphorically proposed armed struggle as the ultimate goal of such action. In the words of Garvey:

No race is free until it has a strong nation of its own; its own system of government and its own order of society. Let no one persuade you against it. It is the only protection for your generation and your race. Hold on to the idea of an independent government and nation as long as other men have them. (Martin 1986: 34)

Militant nationalist desires emerged in the parades both as a futuristic celebration of progress and a commemoration of history. The parades in Harlem usually took place on 1 August, which for anglophone Caribbean people is Emancipation Day and marks the end of slavery. All the parades privileged masculine militancy within the desired nation, demonstrating a highly specific critique of colonial discourses on black masculinity alongside an official movement position on women.

As his governor's costume illustrates, Garvey's parades reversed the

iconography of colonial discourses on racial othering. White men, like essayist Thomas Carlyle in his famous ‘Discourse on the Negro question’, written after the Morant Bay Uprising in 1865, had characterized the Afro-Caribbean male as greedy, lazy and dependent. Quashee, as Carlyle liked to call all Afro-Caribbean men, was unmanly, emotional, dependent and prone to outbursts of rage. For him, black men were not properly men. While Africans were seen in imperial iconography as savages, West Indians were, according to Carlyle, a little removed in many respects from absolute savages and encouraged to think of themselves as more ‘advanced’ than Africans, even though, as Lynne Segal reminds us, ‘Westernized Black subjects evoked the fiercest scorn and contempt. “The more they copied the white man the more funny it was”, Graham Greene wrote in the 1950s’ (1990: 174).

Fanon (1970), Said (1978) and Hall (1992), among others, have since shown that such stereotyping was crucially concerned with transferring onto the colonized characteristics which the colonizers feared in themselves, in an effort to fix white masculinity as the identity of rational, efficient and superior leaders. In imperial discourses after 1865, Jamaican men appear as particularly threatening, violent foils to English manhood (Hall 1992). The violent Jamaican of the contemporary media is not a new stereotype but an old colonial image. For those who lived with the consequences of these racial images in daily life, the UNIA parades staged a militant political desire to confront and reverse imperial regimes of representation of black masculinity while condoning notions of ‘civilizing backward tribes of Africa’ (Hill and Bair 1987: 207).

The close engagement of Garveyism with British thought resulted in ‘reverse discourse’ – the tendency of anticolonial nationalists to be constrained by attempts to engage with Victorian notions of masculinity (Edmondson 1999). Colonial languages and institutions deeply affected how colonized people knew themselves. Garvey and others of his generation, formed by the regulated, institutionalized aspects of imperial discourses, could not voluntarily invent another language to negotiate with dominant groups. The dichotomous structure of colonial discourse had to be appropriated and turned on its head by those it dominated.

At the same time, the parade can also be read in another way – as a satire of hierarchies of all kinds. Garvey understood the power of performative parody and satire, as the following speech shows:

They laugh and say that I am spectacular. Who is more spectacular than the Pope? The critic asks why Garvey wears a red robe. Marcus Garvey flings back the retort, ‘Why does the Pope wear a red robe?’ ‘Why does the King of England wear purple robes?’ . . . They say Mr. Garvey is spectacular. Now what does that mean, anyway? There is no such word in the African dictionary as spectacular. Therefore, if Mr. Garvey is spectacular he has copied it from them. Then why should they be offended

at Mr. Garvey's being spectacular? That will show you how unreasonable and unjust some men are. Some white people in Europe and America say Mr. Garvey likes colors and robes and titles. Can you tell me where you can find more titles and robes than in Europe? If you would just take up the 'Pictorial Review' you will find that the English people when they are about to open their Houses of Parliament you will see the King and Queen with more robes of more colors than you have seen in the rainbow [laughter] They talk about wearing robes. If you watch the picture from Buckingham Palace to the House of Commons in Westminster you will see hundreds of men with all kinds of uniform, all kinds of turbans, all kinds of breeches [laughter], all kinds of uniform – the whole thing looking like one big human show and everybody going to the circus to see [laughter].

As far as their society is concerned, if you want to hear about titles, just cross the channel. White folks like titles so much that they pile up millions of dollars for a lifetime so that they can buy a title on the other side of the channel . . . Why therefore should some folks want to be spectacular and do not want Negroes to be spectacular? We say therefore, that since they have found some virtue in being spectacular we will try out the virtues there are in being spectacular. (Garvey; cited in Hill 1994: 199–200)

Garvey's speech demonstrates that he clearly understood himself to be parodying white ceremonials and masculinity, while turning notions of white military power against themselves. His parades assert black male militancy, readiness and right to rule, and, at the same time, ridicule white patriarchal dominance, thereby combining the threat of militancy with carnivalesque satire. They are not typically carnivalesque because of the emphasis on military marching, the carrying of political banners and the realistic quality of the costumes, and because they do not stress moral misrule through dancing, singing and sensuous celebration. Yet since the parade is subjunctive – that is, Garvey did not in reality rule a state – we cannot avoid the theatricality of the display. The parade stages a desire and cannot be incorporated into the ruling hegemony because it is at once a fiction and a threat. It is unstable and is not a transparent political demand. This performative space/opening allowed for multiple maneuvers among the movement's subjects.

Women, nation and the pedagogy of performance

Women took up this instability in various ways. They appear in the parades in the subordinate role of members of the motor corps or the auxiliary role of nurses in white uniforms, their heads covered with white veils like the British women in the senior ranks of the colonial nursing service. Outside of the parade, in other movement ceremonials, black women appear as

Madonnas, and as queens enacting rituals of court in royal regalia. Garveyite visions of gender and nation in performance were critical responses to dominant constructions of infantilized, irrational, oversexed, animalized black men and masculinized, promiscuous, amoral black women. Black women, whose wombs and labor had been appropriated and exploited by white capitalism and patriarchy, were challenged to think of themselves less as exploited workers or as mothers forced to ‘father’, than as living symbols of a future black civilization which was to produce a disciplined elite with sexual mores that conformed to those of nineteenth-century respectability. Women bore the symbolic weight of royalty and were exhorted to assume moral leadership of the racial future: to be chaste, not to give in to the sexual advances of men prior to marriage – especially not white men – and to avoid miscegenation. In his lessons from the school of African philosophy, Garvey taught:

The idea of the UNIA is to unite into one race all the grades of color and build up a standard race. You should discourage intermarriage between white and black and black and other races. You should tell people that it is an honor to be black and that nothing is wrong with the black skin but bad conditions. That a well kept black woman or black man is as good as a well kept white man or white woman. Never allow your followers to have their children play with white doll babies, because they will grow up to like white children and they will have them. (Hill and Bair 1987: 202)

Black women’s wombs were to be the basis of racial progress and purity. Elsewhere I have argued that the Garvey movement appropriated the Victorian idealization of the white middle-class woman as the embodiment of chastity, purity and superior civilizing forces, and extended this idealization to black women (Ford-Smith 1988). The uniform of the black cross nurses and the regal ceremonials symbolized this. Intended to counter the degrading ideologies which had historically shaped black women’s lives, these performances also produced women as men’s other, stressing a hierarchical division of labor, skewed sexual responsibility and problematically reproduced notions of racial purity. Militarized black masculinity depended on the reproductive labor and sexuality of women and reproduced patriarchal hierarchy within the movement. The official images also produced an implicit class hierarchy among women, suggesting that idealized class identification outranked ability or hard work. Middle-class women would have an enormous advantage in the attainment of the ideal. The gendered images of the parade were the end product of the socialization process within the organization.

The UNIA depended on women to carry out the practicalities of organization. Women were always represented on the executive, and even local

branches always had a woman vice-president (Reddock 1994: 107). But women were absent from the public reviewing platform of the parade in 1922 (Hill 1994). Only Garvey himself, in his military uniform and accompanied by his deputies, reviewed the parades, though his second wife Amy Jacques Garvey and Henrietta Vinton Davies, president general, had considerable power. Amy Jacques appeared on the reviewing stand only in 1924 when she had become *de facto* chief of staff, symbolically placed behind Garvey himself.

As in other anticolonial nationalist movements of the period, the placement of women in the parades represented the fact that they were part of the fight for equality – but only on certain terms. Women were not encouraged to challenge male leadership, the male-headed nuclear family, the skewed sexual division of labor or sexual double standards, or to fight for sexual autonomy. This was not something women passively accepted. Behind the parades and coronations, a lively public debate (itself another form of performance) raged around the question of the role of women. As early as 1914, for example, the organization held a public debate on the question ‘Is the intellect of a woman as highly developed as that of a man?’ (French and Ford-Smith 1986: 216). Amy Ashwood, Garvey’s first wife, who co-founded the UNIA with him, was unwilling to accept the rules of morality and propriety imposed on her. She left the UNIA after her marriage with Garvey ended, but continued throughout her life to work for women’s rights within African nationalist movements, joining with English socialist feminist Sylvia Pankhurst to oppose intervention in Ethiopia. At the famous Fifth Pan-Africanist Conference of 1945, where Nkrumah replaced Dubois as leader of the movement, she organized a panel on women’s equality and fought for resolutions urging an end to discrimination against women (Reddock 1994: 248). Amy Jacques, Garvey’s second wife, also constantly struggled to be accepted as the leader she was (Taylor 2002: 82).

Women used the opportunities afforded by displays of elocutionary and rhetorical skill in the movement to challenge the men. Satira Earle, who was critical of the cautiousness of male leadership in the Permanent Jamaica Development Convention (PJDC), the organization Garvey had left behind, publicly stated at an inaugural meeting: ‘Wake up men, if you are afraid to carry on, I will organize a committee of women and launch out against capitalists in this island and leave you drowsy men behind’ (Post 1978: 241). The performative exhortations of women like Earle, which were frequent, enabled them, through speech and practice, to challenge the limitations of the official position on gender – and ultimately to propose a feminism in which gender and race (though not necessarily class) were interlinked struggles.

One result of women’s organizing in the UNIA was that black Jamaican women were empowered to fight for their own political rights, for access to professions and clerical work, and for representation in government. Indeed,

1 The Women's Liberal Club organized the 'First Jamaica Women's Conference', held from 22 to 23 February 1939, a landmark meeting for Jamaican women, especially middle-class women. The conference, to which no men were admitted, marked the anniversary of thirty years of women's suffrage in England and culminated in a series of resolutions which were presented to the governor by a delegation of women: Madame di Mena Aitken (a stalwart of the UNIA), Amy Bailey, Ina Bailey (Amy's sister), May Farquharson, Mary Morris Knibb and Mrs Howe Martin. The resolutions demanded that women be included in positions of power in the civil service, judiciary and other professions, and insisted on the extension of full political rights to women. In 1939, the club endorsed the candidacy of Morris Knibb in the Kingston and St Andrew parochial elections and won the first feminist campaign in Jamaican electoral politics.

the contradiction between official performances and women's actual work for the movement, articulated in Earle's and Ashwood's stubborn feminism and in Jacques' fight to be taken seriously as a leader in her own right, found expression in Jamaican feminism after Garvey's departure from the island. This was one productive result of the subordinate images of women in movement ceremonials. Black feminists took the opportunities offered them and addressed the contradictions between UNIA rhetoric and their own experience. They transformed the space they occupied within and outside the UNIA, exploiting the contradiction between their participation and the subordinate experience of women with their lack of formal power in the movement and the wider society. The slippage between the two produced a problem that would not go away. The contradiction between the stress given to black masculinity at the formal level of the movement and women's work in building the organization and their training as critical political subjects contributed to the emergence of black feminist activism in Jamaica in the 1930s.

Two leading Jamaican feminists of the 1930s, Una Marson and Amy Bailey, were profoundly influenced by Garveyism in different ways, and both developed their own anti-racist feminist practice. In 1937, Amy Bailey and a group of schoolteachers, including Mary Morris Knibb, founded the Women's Liberal Club, a black feminist organization. By her own admission, Garvey's activities in Jamaica influenced Bailey's work (interview with Amy Bailey, conducted by Honor Ford-Smith and Joan French, 1985). Garvey's influence is evident in the stress on the study of Negro history, stated in the early objectives of the Women's Liberal Club, and in Bailey's advocacy for black women as a social group. She made a point of visiting Garvey on a trip to England in 1938 to fundraise for the Save the Children Fund. The two discussed the work of the UNIA, but Bailey was distressed by his diminished importance and the rejection he faced.

Returning home, her activism intensified. She wrote about discrimination against black women in clerical work and as partners of men, advocated skills training for the working class, promoted family planning and the professionalization of domestic service. Ultimately she led and won a feminist political campaign for gender reform in Jamaica which culminated in the Women's Conference of 1939 to which Garveyites like Madame di Mena Aitken lent their support (French and Ford-Smith 1986).¹ The outcome of this was the election of Mary Morris Knibb as the first female member of the Kingston and St Andrew parish council on a platform stressing childcare and improved social services.

Una Marson (1905–65), the Jamaican playwright, poet and journalist, dramatized the dilemma of middle-class black women's identity in her plays. She became a leading feminist, working toward a position which linked African nationalism and feminism (Jarrett-Macauley 1998; Smilowitz 1984).

Based in England and Jamaica, Marson's contribution to debates on gender, race and imperialism was her description of contradictions facing black women. A participant in the elocution contests of the UNIA, as a young reporter she was also assigned to cover Garvey's activities. She later became a singular playwright and poet, exploring the lives of black Jamaican women.

In 1937, she wrote *Pocomania*, widely thought of as a breakthrough in Caribbean drama because it was an early attempt to represent Afro-Caribbean popular religion and to use the Jamaican language as a serious vehicle for formal drama. A struggle between the colonial Baptist church and the Pukkumina religion in the play struck at the heart of the contradiction facing middle-class black Jamaican women of Marson's time. The play explores the desire of the heroine Stella to reconnect with African spirituality and the knowledge traditions of the working class, and simultaneously to find acceptance in a society gripped by rigid Victorian colonial convention. While nationalist men struggled to act on behalf of women, Stella fights for her own subjectivity, albeit unsuccessfully, for at the end of the play she is forced to give up her desire to join the *Pocomania* band that has so compelled her.

Marson made visible the cultural contradictions facing middle-class educated black women for the first time in *Pocomania*. It was the working-class black woman who tended to obsess both white writers and the first generation of nationalist men (Cobham-Sander 1982). Working-class black women were idealized as symbols of cultural authenticity, while middle-class women were portrayed as anti-progressive, petty bourgeois and materialist – except, of course, in the Garvey movement. The problem Marson faced was how to speak as who she was, the black product of an elite colonial high school, when there was no discursive place from which educated black women could speak beyond the regimes of representation mapped by western languages and institutions. Marson questioned what it meant to become separated by formal educational privilege from the culture created by the black working class. Though she did not solve the conflict in *Pocomania*, which by the final act becomes a predictable romance, she nonetheless named the conflict.

Angry, unladylike middle-class black women searching out the secret knowledges of Afro-Christian religions were officially denigrated in the 1930s, seen as slightly ridiculous or out of control. Black female anger and cross-class solidarity were as taboo in women's organizations as they were in the wider world. Black feminist organizations of the time relied on the image of woman as caregiver as the basis of negotiation for power with the colonial establishment – a position that limited their struggles and made them simultaneously agents of resistance and agents of conservatism.

Feminists like Bailey and Mary Morris Knibb based their demands for reform on a careful pattern of identification and difference between themselves and lower-class women. Their education, morality, Anglophile tastes

2 The Women's Social Service Club (WSSC) won a limited vote for elite women in 1919 on a platform which stressed their ability to contribute to imperial social services through their voluntary labor, to moralize working-class women and to contain male sexuality (French and Ford-Smith 1986).

and professional teaching skills differentiated them from the same working-class black women they identified with in terms of color. As professional social workers, they fought to displace the grip of white and near-white Creole upper-class women, who made up the Women's Social Service Club (WSSC), the dominant Jamaican women's organization until the 1938 uprising. Their statements before the Royal (Moyne) Commission of Inquiry into the uprisings in the West Indies in the 1930s speak to their fight against racial exclusion from this organization. As in the WSSC earlier, they later won reforms that increased women's voting rights, participation in government and representation in the professions.² Marson's struggle was different. With very little support, she questioned how knowledge was linked to power and identity, and began the work of creating a language that could address discursive absences.

The UNIA was the training ground for these early feminists. Without the performance work of the UNIA, Marson would not have experienced the galvanizing effect of elocution competitions, nor would she have had an audience prepared to engage with the dilemmas of middle-class black women. Without the preparatory work of the UNIA, Bailey could not have built an organization of black women or gone on to create a broad alliance between African nationalists like Madame di Mena Aitken, English feminists, and white Creoles like May Farquharson to agitate for and win feminist reforms. The Garvey movement provided a performative space; it rehearsed changes at the level of the subjunctive which were then enacted in everyday life in a different time and space. Like the marchers in Garvey's parades, black feminists were able to take the public space. They used the presences and absences configured in the UNIA to demand and win new conditions for middle-class black women. These changes combined elements of resistance and accommodation in that they affected the conditions of life for middle-class black women while deferring the needs of working-class women. But they nonetheless made an important contribution to the conditions of possibility defining Jamaican women's lives.

Garveyite variety and the destabilizing of gender, class and sexual rigidities

I now turn to another site of contestation, the Garveyite variety, arguing that performers brought aspects of what might be called the vulgar popular into the entertainment associated with the movement, radically destabilizing rigid notions of class, gender and sexuality. The popular variety shows staged at the UNIA's Edelweiss Park were strikingly different from the official parades, at times conflicting with the movement's position on sexuality and class and challenging Victorian colonial culture. Developing new forms of cultural

capital in black-controlled cultural space, they controversially staged images of gendered sexuality and class difference, reappropriating caricatured images of blackness and ironically providing alternatives to images of militarized masculinity. In a Jamaica that is often constructed as homophobic in popular media and entertainment, the UNIA variety was marked by playful approaches to performances of sexuality, and included openly gay men among its performers. With a strong cadre of professional actors, dancers and singers from the middle and working classes, the actors covertly dramatized issues that were not openly discussed in the movement or the society, complicating the ways in which we understand anticolonial resistance.

Edelweiss Park, where much of the cultural work took place, was situated in one and a half acres of land, below Cross Roads in Kingston. It had an old two-story house, outbuildings and a spacious yard. A large outdoor amphitheater, which had been refurbished in time for the 1929 UNIA convention, held about 8,000 people. Cultural activities, such as the quattie (penny ha'penny) dances, also took place at Liberty Hall, headquarters of the Kingston division of the UNIA, at 76 King Street, but Edelweiss Park was the larger, more active, of the two centers. In 1931, Garvey established the Edelweiss Park Amusement Company at 57 Slipe Road in Kingston, no doubt influenced by the expansion of black entertainment taking place in Harlem. The name of the nightclub Dreamland, for example, as well as the style of the variety, was borrowed from Harlem nightlife.

The mission of the Amusement Company was to manage the facilities and cultural units of the UNIA, present productions and seek out local talent (Hamilton 1988: 92). The concept was complex, combining amusement park with variety shows – including comic duos, recitations, dances (jazz, classical and acrobatic), specialty acts, musical revues, minstrel shows, carnivals, plays, garden parties, choral concerts of spirituals, religious services, classical recitations and orchestral concerts. Singing and elocution competitions attracted many competitors. Two companies of UNIA Follies performed regularly. There were amplified 'radio broadcasts' – amplification of a speaker at a microphone on the compound. Even Mr Garvey himself on occasion would act in a play, direct a pageant, give a speech or even recite 'Chatham's' famous oration on the American war', which had won him a special mention in an elocution competition at the Ward Theatre in 1913 (*New Jamaican*, 3 September 1932: 1). Garvey also planned to build a movie house and a small amusement park at Edelweiss, but he left Jamaica in 1933 after criticism of the colonial judicial system resulted in his imprisonment and bankruptcy.

The variety program was hybrid. Light classical music mingled with jazz and mento; glamorous song and dance routines dazzled audiences. The charleston, the black bottom, the rumba, tap and mento were all danced. Granville Campbell, popularly referred to as 'Jamaica's Caruso', the male soprano Johnny Lyon, Blanche Savage and popular mento street singers Slim

and Sam displayed their talents. Topical comic sketches, which have had an abiding influence on the Jamaican theatre, competed with full-length plays, including Garvey's history plays and others, like *Old Black Joe* (also the title of a minstrel number), billed as 'A Gigantic Drama' by Ranny Williams. The UNIA Follies were modeled on the Ziegfield Follies and were jokingly referred to in the *New Jamaican* (a Garveyite newspaper) as the Follies with the Palm Beach tan (*New Jamaican*, 1 September 1932: 1). Under the direction of Geraldo Leon (Johnny Lyon's brother), both the dancing girls and the men wore elaborate and expensive costumes. They performed with an orchestra conducted by Frank Benjamin. The musical revue *Snapshots of 1931* had a company of 200, featuring the Glorious Glorias and Tropical Swans. Interspersed with the dance numbers were items like 'The Girl from Linstead', which starred Eudora Myrie. This was probably the saga of a young girl migrating from the country to Kingston, and may have involved a match-maker as there was a character called Miss Matchette. There were vaudevillian numbers like 'Sleepy Time down South'. Professor Geraldo Leon rendered a popular item called 'I have got it', in which he played the piano while doing a female impersonation.

A favorite offering was the mock court. Court dramas, satirical versions of the rituals of the colonial courtroom, poked fun at the police force and at the excessive ('extra') behavior on the part of victims and witnesses, and traversed the entire Jamaican language spectrum. Developed in community concerts, the mock court could be a play or a monologue. The story usually dealt with a trickster figure brought before a bewigged judge by a cruel policeman who had arrested him/her for causing conflict in the community. The trickster could be male or female or, as we shall see, both male and female. The core roles were the judge, the accused, the policeman and the clerk of the courts, though additional roles could be added, including multiple witnesses, lawyers and specialists who often represented particular vices and virtues, as in the British morality plays taught in church and school. The names of people – i.e., Uriah Moutamassi (Uriah Big Mouth) – signaled their characters in the Jamaican language. Typical conflicts included issues like the working of obeah, inadequate child support, rivalry in love or petty theft.

The form was passed from performer to performer, each of whom learned by listening and watching and then put their stamp on it. Louise Bennett described a version which she performed in the 1940s. According to her, it was a routine she learned from fellow performer Lee Gordon, who played all the roles as she does in the following:

Corporal: [*patwah, male voice*] Call Matilda Slackness.

Matilda: [*patwah, female voice*] Comin Carpie.

Judge: [*English accent, male voice*] Matilda Slackness, are you guilty or not guilty?

Matilda: [*patwah, female voice*] Guilty wid explanation, your honour. Please, your

honour, sar . . . I have a bwaifren and I go a him wukplace fi get mi lickle dividens. An when I reach I see one nex woman reach before me sar, an she a claim fi her dividens from him and I go fi lick her, sar. But, sar, she lick me first. And me drop and roll. And when me roll, sar, me roll right inna Sergeant Mawga Lion hand and same so, sar, di black maria come. Me beg yuh pardon sar!

Judge: Guilty.

Matilda: [*weeps*] Beggin yuh pardon sar.

Corporal: Come on . . . Hush up!

Matilda: [*weeping loudly*] . . .

Corporal: Hush up and come on.

(Interview with Louise Bennett, conducted by Honor Ford-Smith, 2002)

Bennett's rendering of the form illustrates the narrative power of the storyteller. This power undermines that of the judge, since the narrator determines the outcome of the story. The storyteller dramatizes the entire colonial social hierarchy and justice system to demonstrate his or her power over the outcome of a situation usually determined by colonial authority.

Other sketches satirized figures of authority: among them, politicians, judges, parsons and preachers, upper-class women, social climbers, gossips (Mother Long Tongue/Mada Lang Tung) and landlords. Sketches dramatized conflicts between husbands and wives, girlfriends and baby fathers. Transportation problems produced social commentaries; the slowness, the crowdedness and the tensions between social types allowed plenty of room for comedy. Religious hypocrisy, obeah and encounters with duppies (spirits) were popular themes – poking fun at the over-zealous, criticizing those who exploited ignorance, and demonstrating human limitations in dealing with the spirit world.

The UNIA was the first organization to offer consistent professional engagements to black Jamaican performers. Before the advent of Edelweiss Park, variety performers were confined to community and seasonal concerts, opening acts for touring troupes and front-of-curtain acts at movie houses (Baxter 1970; Hamilton 1987; Hill 1992). The significance of this goes beyond opportunity. The UNIA's entertainment projects were implicitly, if not explicitly, linked to the political movement and to the development of black Jamaican cultural capital as an underlying guarantee of political power. Garvey recognized that a first step to changing representations of colonized people was to create a space in which performers and audiences could have access to the means of cultural production, and could control the mode of production, the images and narratives produced and the distribution of cultural products. This, combined with cultural critique and audience education, would make up the components of a total ecology of cultural production in the context of the new nationalist thrust.

In my opinion, two key issues emerge from the cultural ecology fostered at Edelweiss, and these bring out the heterogeneity of interests facilitated by the movement beyond the gender struggle already identified. The first of these issues concerns class and the way working-class Jamaicans became visible in the UNIA variety as opposed to other sites in the movement. The second issue concerns the treatment of gender, class and sexuality in the variety concert, and the question of whether this challenged ideas about what was seen as acceptable and what was not.

The figure of the ‘rough’ working-class black man achieved popularity in community skits, medicine shows and front-of-curtain acts at movie houses, but moved into sustained professional entertainments at Edelweiss. At the center of this was Ranny Williams, who later succeeded Ernest Cupidon as the leading national comedian in the 1950s and 1960s. Mas Ran, as he was popularly known, began his professional career at Edelweiss. There were other important working-class male comedians, such as Lee Gordon, but Ranny managed, through craft and longevity, to make the working-class character a staple of local theatre for several decades. Initially he did so in ways that linked the figure to the nationalist cultural struggle. Ranny’s ‘ginal’ or trickster replaced Cupidon’s stock impersonations of working-class women. Early in his career, Ranny appeared as a Jamaican-speaking working-class black man at Edelweiss. His satirical social commentaries were a hit. Unlike both Cupidon and Sandy (of the duo *Racca and Sandy*), he did not depend on female impersonation, but satirized authority figures like the governor, the UNIA overseas delegates, the police, and other figures of authority. His persona disturbed at least one UNIA reviewer, who commented:

Don’t appear like a tramp when you are acting the part of a clown . . . don’t roll your pants up unless you must . . . on Saturday night you were better than ever, but you spoilt the act by your costume; believe me Ranny no LEGION would allow a man looking as you did in the park much [less] so near the delegates or the convention room. (*The Blackman*, 12 August 1929: 8)

Williams’ performance obviously jarred the writer’s sense of propriety and his ideas about the image the UNIA should project. Williams embodied lower-class black masculinity – an image that did not conform to notions of the properly progressive movement man. Throughout his career, Ranny remained the working-class trickster-griot, in contrast to the overt militant of the parade. He developed a subtle sophistication as the formidable shape-shifter Anancy in the Little Theatre Movement’s pantomime *Anancy and Busha Bluebeard* in 1949 (after the Edelweiss period). Under the direction of Noel Vaz, *Bluebeard* transformed British pantomime into Jamaican musical, using traditional music, characters and myths. While its narrative was a

conventional allegorical national romance, featuring a struggle between the degenerate white male patriarch and the mixed-race middle class who are robbed of their legacy, Mas Ran's Anancy, like the narrator of the mock court, controlled the entire story – playing multiple roles from coachman to hair-dresser, counseling the protagonist and ultimately turning the evil *busha* (overseer) into a rolling calf (a spirit in the form of a monstrous animal who haunts dark roads). Mas Ran's Anancy made the plantation struggle into a parable invented by a godlike trickster as an exercise in survival skills, a rite of passage that the mixed-race male hero must undergo to attain manhood and overcome challenges to his land ownership and sexual prowess. The power of the trickster in this rendering transcends the binary of respectability/disreputability to establish a new field of power because he controls the terms on which the rite of passage is accomplished.

Initial responses to Mas Ran's working-class hero may have been qualified, but other aspects of his work and that of all the performers (including Kid Harold, Racca and Sandy, and Cupidon) were affirmed, advertised and discussed in UNIA newspapers. Access to newspaper reports was something that working-class black performers did not have until the UNIA. Performances by working-class actors were simply not reported, let alone reviewed.

Publicity and criticism in the UNIA papers alongside the actual performances cultivated new 'downtown' cultural tastes that competed with those of the colonial elite. Journalists endorsed characters and situations that had been under-represented in a formal theatre which privileged English touring companies and light British dramas. The advertisements for shows at Edelweiss drew in crowds with wonderfully salacious wording, which was far removed from the conventional sexual relations that the movement officially encouraged. One advertisement for a play, for example, featured a sensational taboo-breaking sexual liaison, exhorting its audience to 'Come and see West Indians arrested in New York for Drinking a Bottle of J. Wray and Nephew's Rum! Come and see a Gardener Boy from Jamaica making love to his former Mistress in America' (Hamilton 1987: 24).

What finally differentiated the variety from the formal theatre, and explained the transformation in performance, was the strong influence of American popular cultural industries. Relying on glamour and spectacle on the one hand, and social satire, comedy, exaggeration, and repetition on the other, variety performers drew in and transformed multiple influences from both 'high' and 'low' culture. Yard theatre traditions (tea meetings, queen parties, pleasant Sunday afternoons), British colonial speech and drama, Jonkonnu (the traditional Christmas masked performance), church and school concert were all combined in the UNIA variety, but it was the adaptation of the American popular show which made the difference in the tone of the entertainment at Edelweiss. Black-face minstrel shows which had developed in the northern US in the antebellum years, vaudeville routines,

and glittering chorus lines of ladies and gentlemen reminiscent of those who danced in the black musical cabaret of Harlem nightspots like the Cotton Club and the Black and Tan clubs – all were present at Edelweiss.

Local performers copied and altered these influences. Ranny Williams, Racca and Sandy, and others all blacked up early in their careers, as was the convention in the US. The legendary Ernest Cupidon cross-dressed as a market woman or domestic servant, mixing the tropes of Jonkonnu with the wench routines of the minstrel shows. Indeed, in his remembrance at Ranny Williams' funeral, Rex Nettleford drew attention to Ranny's identification with the minstrel show, describing him as '[c]ourt jester, funny man with the suggestive shuffle, minstrel, man pon spot, copasetic fren o mine, vaudeville clown' (*Daily Gleaner*, 24 August 1980: 3).

In spite of the use of black-face, the work of the performers cannot be reduced to racist minstrelsy, for they used their own ideas and power to transform inherited stereotypes, bringing the world of the Jamaican working class to the stage. They cleverly used the cultural capital and style of the mainly white American popular culture industry to underwrite their developing cultural capital, which they marked as black. They borrowed from popular cultural influences outside of Jamaica, mixed these with yard traditions, altered the language, context and characters and developed a repertoire which mounted a challenge to white 'high' cultural authority and institutional control, as well as to the orthodoxies around propriety in the African nationalist movement.

Cupidon exemplifies this tradition of challenging cultural orthodoxies through combinations of borrowing and innovation. He predated Ranny Williams as Jamaica's leading actor, appeared regularly for the UNIA, and also had an independent variety career. Cupidon was a storyteller and a straight actor, but his reputation was mainly based on female impersonations which he consolidated in skits and adaptations of H. G. de Lisser's novels *Jane's Career* and *Susan Proudleigh*. One of his stock-in-trade performances was the mock trial. Garvey himself appeared in Cupidon's *Uncle Fixam's Trial* – the trial of an obeah man, played by Cupidon. Garvey played a high court judge, while Ken Hill, later a prominent and controversial politician, appeared as a lawyer. The script of *Uncle Fixam's Trial* is not available, so to analyze Cupidon's approach I have had to rely on descriptions of *Mattie Ragg*, a full-length version of a mock trial, featuring Cupidon, which was performed in 1940, the year of his death. Though it was presented some time after the heyday of Edelweiss, *Mattie Ragg* was a sequel to an earlier version that also starred Cupidon. Its expanded format synthesized the tropes for which the mock trial was famous. According to a newspaper description:

The case was a sequel to a triangle love affair involving Mattie, Scandal and Gossip, played by E. M. Cupidon, Racca and Iscema Cupidon respectively. Did Scandal love Mattie Ragg or Susan Gossip? That was a question the audience was asked to

ask itself. Love letters which passed between the parties were amplified by learned Counsel L. H. U. Robinson for Mattie Ragg and were enthusiastically challenged by learned Counsel Kenneth Hill for Zephania Scandal who evidently also held a watching brief for Susan Gossip.

Dr. E. C. DaCosta, as learned Judge, tried to balance the weight of conflicting issues, raised by Counsel and parties . . . Sandy as Court Sergeant was the usual storehouse of fun and did not let slip a single opportunity for getting in his punches . . . The jury, after carefully not considering the issues at stake – no one seemed to have been entitled to get a firm grip on them – found for the plaintiff (Cupes as Mattie Ragg) by five to two. Upon this declaration being made, and before they could go on to name the amount of the award, Mattie and Susan Gossip positioned themselves on either side of Scandal and the curtain went down on a riotous display of grab and hold. (*Daily Gleaner*, 4 July 1940: 14)

Mattie Ragg satirized gendered social relations and hierarchies by creating characters who refuse to accept the disciplines and boundaries of the courtroom and its values, and continually create chaos by upsetting its norms. It borrows from the comedy of manners and slapstick routines, and combines these with the exaggeration, braggadocio, agonistic display and wordplay that characterize black oral tradition (Smitherman 1977).

Less obvious than this upset of social and gendered convention is the reason for the emphasis on cross-dressing in the variety. Ernest Cupidon, like a number of other entertainers of the time, such as Geraldo Leon and Sandy of Racca and Sandy, almost always played a woman. Unlike Leon, Cupidon always played a working-class black woman. Why? In a context in which women could and did take major roles on stage, what explains the popular presence of cross-dressed males in the variety?

Cross-dressing on stage, particularly by men, is often dismissed by feminists as misogynist rather than seen as subversive of conventional gender and sexual roles. It can be seen as an expression of men's power to play with women's bodies so as to reinforce the conventional gender order. I contend that each case has to be evaluated in context and on the basis of the identity of the performer, the content of the material presented and audience reception, in order to evaluate its meaning. Intention is after all not the same as impact. I want to use the example of Cupidon's work to suggest that theatrical cross-dressing in the context of a nationalist movement emphasizing militarized masculinity is in this instance simultaneously transgressive and accommodating, raising questions through the performative excesses which the audience is left to deal with. Cupidon's female impersonations seem to me to be excursions into the liminal where unruly subjects playfully disrupt the social regulation imposed on the human body, and covertly point to alternatives to militarized masculinity and colonial social authority without offering closure. This is accomplished in several ways.

First, Cupidon's symbolic female persona allowed him, under cover of comic parentheses, to bring commentaries on local social hypocrisy onto the stage, a place where they had not been consistently visible before. His comic portrayals can be read as appropriating the officially 'marginal and apolitical status of women in the patriarchic order' (Scott 1990: 149) in order to upset the conventions of respectability around class, gender and sexuality without the consequences which might accrue to men who criticize dominant men, such as judges, directly (as was the case with Garvey). The obsession of the colonial establishment with the subordinate black woman as a figure that was hard-working but vulgar and promiscuous meant that, in Victorian patriarchal terms, black women symbolized social instability. By appropriating the symbolic instability personified by working-class black women, Cupidon pointed to the potential instability inherent in constructions of gender and class.

This performance of instability calls attention to social anxieties around sexuality and gender which were/are prohibited from open discussion. When discussing his cross-dressing, those who saw Cupidon perform feel immediately obliged to point out that he was 'very masculine offstage' (interview with Noel Vaz, conducted by Honor Ford-Smith, 2003). In other words, his cross-dressing willy-nilly raises the question of his sexual orientation, even where this results in a denial of homosexual identity. The effect of these denials is to prevent discussion of the question of gay masculinity while simultaneously lengthening the ever-returning shadow of repressed sexualities across public discussions. In fact we know from interviews that some male performers in the variety were gay and accepted as such. Nervous responses to questions about cross-dressing in the context of a nationalist movement privileging military masculinity, combined with the accepted presence of performers like Johnny Lyon who sang in falsetto and were acknowledged as gay, point to contradictions in attitudes to sexuality.

While gay sexuality was certainly not publicly accepted in the movement, indications are that homosexuals were confined to the liminal spaces of entertainment (that of the variety) rather than censured with the threat of violence or seen as absolutely threatening to others. Within liminal spaces, these performers had agency and could negotiate how they represented sexuality and gendered identity to the public. Performance space allowed them to present for public consideration states of being which were not fully acceptable in conventional life.

The effects of these performances depended finally on the reading practices of audience members. For some, performances no doubt raised questions about the 'naturalness' of class, race, sexuality and gender in middle-class colonial society and about the official patriarchal position of the Garvey movement on marriage and sexuality. For others, they may have offered reassuring confirmation of their own 'normalcy'. In either case, audiences

could not avoid the fact that Cupidon's playful cross-dressing revealed class, gender and sexual behavior as artifice. This had particular ramifications in the context of a social movement in which gender and sexuality were themselves being re-examined and redefined. If gender attributes are reiterated in repeated acts and brought into being performatively through these acts, as Judith Butler famously proposes, then a male Mattie Ragg reveals rigid constructs of sexuality, gender and class identity as a new kind of trick. Cupidon's performance might therefore be read as disconnecting the body from the classed, gendered act and from fixed sexuality, and as raising new conditions of sexual possibility. He challenges social convention, making clear that gender identity is 'a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe' (Butler; cited in Mangan 2003: 22).

Performances such as Cupidon's do not change social exclusions on their own. They merely raise questions by making the familiar strange. When the curtain descends over the washerwoman (a man in drag) fighting with her female rival (a 'real' woman) the laughing audience must come to terms with the meanings of this parody of gender relations and consider the social performances possible for them in the everyday, in order to have a sense of control returned to them. Cupidon's female impersonations then become excursions into the liminal. Against the imagery of the militarized parades which offer a properly disciplined, hierarchically ordered people marked by gendered difference, the gender benders covertly gesture to alternatives to militarized masculinity by disrupting the social regulation imposed on the human body at the level of the subjunctive. The performance has troubled the familiar and the normative. It is finally the audience that must draw conclusions – use what is left over from this excessive rehearsal for change when they return to their 'real lives' offstage.

Conclusion

Performance within the UNIA is constantly marked by elements of instability and excess. Garvey himself was able to exploit the instability of performance, and members of his movement were able to find and develop in diverse ways the subversive potential of cultural production. The multiplicity of performances in the UNIA shows that one never knew in any moment exactly what combination of parody, critique, accommodation or conformity was operative. It is this unsettling combination that produces remainders and excess, as well as absences, contradictions and cracks, which can be reworked, remade and used by active subjects to advance plural projects of resistance across a range of sites and subject positions.

While the UNIA was sometimes patriarchal – as in its official position on

gender roles, epitomized in its parades – critical subjects subverted these narratives, using the contradictions that inhered in images to grasp and enact new possibilities. They used the contradiction between official images of women as subordinates and women’s leadership and organizational participation to develop critiques of the gender hierarchy and identities that prevailed. Black feminists influenced by the movement made use of their training as activists, and of the contradictions between their desires and needs and the idealized images in the parades and ceremonials. They acted to change the women’s social script in ways that went beyond those considered by the UNIA or by Garvey’s political party. They did this both by organizing across space and time for greater power for themselves and, in the case of Marson, by writing accounts of the conflicts which faced black middle-class women and the anger they were forced to suppress in order to do their conventional best.

While the UNIA was proletarian in its anticolonial goals and in its support for the majority black Jamaicans, it was also, like the liberal black feminists, in pursuit of the notions of respectability endorsed in images of Victorian gentility. Working-class performers took hold of images of respectability and playfully challenged conventional emphases on class, gender, sexual propriety and sexual identity. They raised questions related to class, gender and sexuality in their performances, and destabilized notions of propriety in both colonial culture and the nationalist movement.

The UNIA offered performers a mode of production and distribution, an audience and a tradition of journalistic exposure linked to anticolonial struggle, and the performers took this space and used it to undermine colonial cultural tastes and to build others. Through a complicated and often contradictory process of borrowing and transforming influences from the rural festival tradition and American popular culture, black and black-identified performers created a multitude of popular narratives and new spectatorial desires outside the control of white colonial elite institutions and the orthodoxies of the movement. Those performers and participants who took up Garvey’s ideas and ran with them created heterogeneous narratives of resistance linked to a critique of racism. They brought subordinate voices into a public forum which gave them public visibility and critical engagement with their work. This led to the development of multiple narratives of anticolonial resistance. It also led to new forms of Jamaican cultural capital which have, in the long term, shaped those of us who inherited the legacies of anticolonial struggle. This legacy of resistance is itself not reducible to a single orthodoxy. We constantly engage with it and transform it to make it relevant to our needs today. We make and remake it in the present. Indeed, the narratives of women like Una Marson and performers like Ernest Cupidon and Ranny Williams leave us with lingering questions about class, gender and sexuality – about excess, with which contemporary social movements and all cultural

producers must contend in order to broaden that vision of liberation for which Garvey's UNIA so valiantly fought.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the following people who discussed and supported my work on this essay: Rhonda Cobham, Carolyn Cooper, Alison Donnell, Bernardo Garcia, Robert Hill, Melanie Newton, Sherene Razack and Rhoda Reddock. Dalea Bean and Keisha Weise worked on the newspaper search and located much of the material on which the discussion of the variety is based.

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