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More than Producers and Reproducers: Jamaican Slave Women's Dance and Song in the 1770s-1830s

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Abstract

Thus far studies of Caribbean slave women have concentrated upon slave women as producers and reproducers. This paper argues that a description of the lives of Caribbean slave women is not complete without an analysis of their performing capacity. It is based on the assumption that interpretations of slave women's dance and song are important approaches to understanding the slave woman's sense of life's worth, for dance and song were nearly inseparable from her identity.

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Introduction

This paper examines discussions about Jamaican slave women's dance and song in the period 1770s-1830s. It consists of two projects. The first is an examination of 'images' of singing and dancing Jamaican slave women in diaries, novels, natural histories, travel accounts, and pamphlets written by proslavery writers (colonialists). It not only describes these images but also tries to point out the purposes they served. The second is a detailed analysis of some dances and songs that were performed by slave women. It attempts to show that dance and song fabricated slave women's identities in various ways.

The second project is a rather difficult undertaking considering the fact that we only have incidental impressions of slave women's dance and song. This stems first of all from the fact that dance and song were primarily performed within the slave community and were thus not easily accessible to colonialists. The dances and songs mentioned in their accounts are those performed in front of them during the major slave festivals, such as Christmas. The presence of the colonialists limited of course slave women's mode of expression. For instance, it restricted the range of topics they could address in their songs. Another reason for the lack of descriptions of dance and song in white contemporary accounts is of course the fact that they did not consider this aspect of slaves' lives worthwhile recording. They were far more interested in aspects such as the slaves' work regime. Contrary to their American sisters, Jamaican slave women have not left autobiographies, memoirs and letters, nor have they or their descendants been interviewed.¹ This and the fact that we see and hear the dances and song through the eyes and ears of white male commentators means that I cannot say anything conclusive about what the dances and songs meant for

Jamaican slave women. I hope to show in this paper, however, that the commentators' observations provide some clues about the link between slave women's performance and their identity.

This paper adds to the existing historiography on Jamaican slavery in general and Jamaican slave women in particular. Thus far only a few studies have been published on Jamaican slave music and dance. The main aim of these studies is to show the development of a distinct creole culture in Jamaica.² They therefore focus in particular on the African roots of the dances and songs and their structure. Little or no attention, however, is paid to the actual content, meaning and effectiveness of the performances. They are also preoccupied with white commentators' descriptions of slave music and dance, especially their remarks that it was completely at odds with European music and dance, but have not examined the descriptions of slaves in these accounts of dance and song. Finally, these studies exclude an analysis of the role of slave women in dance and song and do not indicate how important these forms of creative expression were for slave women.³ Studies of Jamaican slave women, such as Barbara Bush's *Slave Women in Caribbean Society* (1990) have equally ignored these issues. This is because they have concentrated upon slave women's experiences as 'producers' and 'reproducers'.⁴ This paper adds to the descriptions of slave women's lives in these works by pointing out that slave women were more than producers and reproducers: they were also performers.

Dance

Slave dances were both recreational and functional. They not only provided slaves with relief from the daily toil and the degrading, coercive regime but also served as an outlet for pent up aggressions and hostilities.⁵ They furthermore instilled in slaves a sense of community spirit. Finally, they were used to socialize the slave community. They expressed, for example, ideas about sexuality and gender roles.

The slaves' choreographic traditions differed from those of white contemporaries. As in Africa, dances usually took place in the centre of a ring of spectators-participants, with activists entering the ring singly or in twos or threes.⁶ This contrasted sharply with the European open or closed couple dances.⁷ The flexibility of the dancers in the ring, their improvisation and concentration upon movements from the pelvic region, was completely at odds with the erect position of European dancers. Finally, whereas slave dances were a serious activity involving the whole slave community, -young and old, men and women, field workers and domestics-, European dances were primarily a middle-class pastime and were not regarded as a serious activity.⁸

There were a variety of slave dances. First of all, the Saturday night dance which usually started at eight and lasted till midnight.⁹ This dance was organised by the slaves themselves and took place in one of the slave houses. The guests, either invited or paid, were provided with live music, food and drink. To hold a dance, slaves had to ask permission from their master, who rarely seems to have refused. Evidence suggests that women not only took part in them as dancers and waitresses but also organised them. In December 1823, for example, Mary Ann Reid a slave woman from Unity Hall gave a dance. The guests had to pay a small entrance fee in return for which they were able to dance till day-break to music provided by fiddlers and were served pork, yams, plantains, and rum.¹⁰ Much larger in scale were the dances at the major slave festivals, such as harvest, Easter, and Christmas. In the daytime slaves formed a procession. They firstly paid tribute to their owner or his representative on the estate by dancing and singing in front of the big house. Thereafter, they proceeded dancing and singing to neighbouring estates. At night in their own quarters, they held dances similar to the Saturday night dance with the difference that the owner usually provided some food and drinks.

Colonialists only wrote about dances performed at Christmas. The slave Christmas lasted for three days. It consisted of singing in front of the big house on Christmas Day, the so-called John Canoe procession, a parade in which male dancers wore masks and danced like harlequins, on Boxing Day, and various dances held at night in the slave quarters.¹¹ Those who wrote about the slaves' Christmas observed the dancing of set-girls in the John Canoe procession. About 40 to 50 slave girls from occasionally two neighbouring estates led by a so-called 'queen of set' and accompanied by two masked men, travelled dancing and singing over the estate and then went to neighbouring estates. The sets were each dressed in

a particular uniform and carried flags and fantastical figures.¹²

Some of the writers attended and wrote about the dances held at night during the Christmas festival.¹³ They described these dances as 'courtship or marriage' dances of which there were two variants. The first in which slave men formed a ring and in which a 'beau-man', singled out one woman who danced with him in the ring. He followed her with active movements, fanned her and sometimes wiped the perspiration of her face and subsequently left her. She moved lightly, wriggled her hips while keeping the upper part of her body still, and responded to his invitation by wiping his face.¹⁴ The second variant consisted of several men and women in the ring, performing at the same time this ritual of invitation and defence, thrust and counter-thrust, immanent submission and detachment.¹⁵ In both variants, slave men displayed male virility, moving their whole body, while women displayed female seductiveness, moving only the lower parts of their body in more modest way. Or in the words of Jamaican historian and planter Edward Long: 'The female dancer is all languishing and easy in her motions, the man, all action, firm and gesture.'¹⁶ Feelings and ideas about gender roles took shape in the courtship dance. The male's activeness and female's passiveness displayed, seems to me to convey the idea of male domination and female subordination in the slave community. The fact that the 'beau man' could not simply take the slave woman but had to 'woo' her, seems to suggest that the subordination of women in the slave community was slightly modified.

The courtship dance also expressed feelings and ideas about sexuality. The woman's hip wriggling clearly simulated love-making. This combined with the male domination displayed in the dance suggests that the courtship dance conveyed the message that the appropriate way to perpetuate the slave society was to subject slave women's reproductive capacity to slave men's command.¹⁷

Before examining the remarks of colonialists in more detail, it needs to be stressed that dance was very important in slave women's lives. They were instructed in dance from an early age onwards.¹⁸ It seems that the best female dancers on an estate were held in high esteem by the rest of the slave community.¹⁹ When planter Monk Lewis wanted to see some slave girls dance, the slave community brought forward by 'general acclamation', a woman called Psyche. According to Lewis she was the best dancer because her performance was 'light, graceful, easy and spirited'.²⁰ According to J. B. Moreton, a former book-keeper, the criteria for best female dancer on an estate was the wriggling of the hips.²¹ It is difficult to say what criteria the slaves themselves applied. Monk Lewis' remark that 'there is a regular figure and that the least mistake or a single false step is immediately noticed by the rest'²² seems to suggest that 'skill' was their distinguishing criteria. Colour, however, was definitely not a criterium used by the slaves. Moreton mentions, for example, that 'flat-nosed damsels', by which he meant black women as opposed to coloured women, were also appointed as best female dancer.²³

Being the best dancer not only raised the status of the slave woman in the slave community, it could also materially benefit her. Psyche, for example, received a handful of silver from Monk Lewis for her performance.²⁴ It was also customary that the slaves themselves gave the best female dancer a present.²⁵ It is likely that the status of the best female dancer was related to the elevation of female fertility in Jamaican slave society. Slaves were of the opinion that the reproductive power of women guaranteed the continuity of the community. The best female dancer symbolized this reproductive power by means of her skill at hip wriggling.

Through dance, a slave woman could thus improve her material situation as well as her status in the slave community. Another reason why slave women valued dance, is that it that if offered them a chance to bond with other slave women. Descriptions of courtship dances suggest that there was close cooperation between slave women. They would, for instance, reproach those who did not keep in tune. The slave women's preparations for the John Canoe procession as well as their dancing in the procession can also be seen as a means for slave women to bond. It, furthermore, seems that dance broke down the divisions between slave women in terms of age, colour, occupation and ethnicity. Field women and domestic women, coloured and black slave women, creole and African born women of all ages danced side by side and every slave woman seems to have had the chance of being chosen 'best female dancer'.²⁶

How did the colonialists perceive the performance of slave women in the courtship dance? They all liked it. Edward Long, for example, remarked that it had 'a very pleasing effect'.²⁷ They liked it first of all because of the 'difficulty' of the women's movements, especially their hip movements. Moreton mentioned for example: 'It is very amazing to think with what agility they twist and move their joints; I sometimes imagined they were on springs or hinges, from the hips downwards'²⁸ Secondly, they were impressed by the fact that the women kept their movements in tune with the music or that they were even able to dance without instrumental music.²⁹ Their fascination with slave women's performance in the courtship dance stemmed primarily from the fact that it differed enormously from the way women danced in their own society. White women's dance at the time was one of studied and measured steps. Slave women, on the other hand, showed joyful and intensified movements.

Although the descriptions of the courtship dance stressed the hip wriggling, none of the authors actually stated that the dance simulated sex.³⁰ They merely pointed out that the dance represented 'courtship' or 'mating'. The anonymous author of *A Short Journey in the West Indies* (1800) remarked about the dancers that 'they make you understand, as perfectly as any ballet dancer in Europe what they mean'.³¹ Monk Lewis, on the other hand, was less positive about the slaves' ability to imitate courtship and mating in dance:

I could indeed sometimes fancy, that one story represented an old duenna guarding a girl from a lover; and another, the pursuit of a young woman by two suitors, the one young and the other old; but this might be only fancy.³²

The last verse of Moreton's poem about slave dances suggests, however, that white male bystanders were well aware of the fact that courtship dances mimicked sex and thereby indirectly encouraged sexual activity amongst slaves:

When wanton Jingo with side-long looks of love,
to mutual rapture do each other move;
with kind compliance and with warm desire
in melting pairs they privately retire
to lonely shades, to fences or old walls,
to dance more pleasing jigs than at their balls.³³

Colonialists also did not reflect much upon the other message in the dance, ideas about gender roles in slave society. This was probably due to the fact that the gender roles performed in the dance, that of male domination and female submission, were similar to those in their own society. It is also likely that the composition and delivery of the dance, -its fiercefull movements and the use of props etc.-, obscured this particular message for white observers. Some, however, seem to have understood that ideas about gender roles were conveyed in the dance. Edward Long, for example, remarked that 'The lady keeps her face towards him and puts on a modest demure look, which she counterfeits with great difficulty'.³⁴ The word 'counterfeits' suggests that according to Long this slave woman mimicked what she was not, that is she was far more domineering than the dance suggested. Thus for Long, the gender roles performed in the courtship dance differed from those exercised by slaves in their daily lives.

What we thus see is that colonialists provided picturesque images of dancing slave women, praising them for their grace, form and discipline. Some colonialists, however, combined an admiration for dancing slave women with their debasement. Edward Long expressed his admiration for the skill slave women displayed in their dance, while at the same time he argued that they began to practise the 'wriggle' from such an early age onwards that 'few are without it in their ordinary walking'.³⁵ This combination of admiration and debasement, one could argue, stems from a desire for slave women which had to be resisted as white society did not accept a white man's desire for black women. The desire could only be suppressed by means of negative images of slave women. The negative images of dancing women clearly emphasized the difference between slave women and white women. It should be noted, however, that also the more positive images of dancing women also articulated notions of difference. For example, the

skill slave women displayed at dancing was seen as 'different' from that displayed by white women in their dances. This 'difference' was presented as natural and self-evident, i.e. the women were born with it and it was plain for all to see.

Song

Slaves' songs differed in several respects from songs in white society. Firstly, the songs differed in terms of tonal scale. Secondly, most of the slave songs had a call-and-response structure; one slave sang a verse followed by several slaves singing the chorus.³⁶ Thirdly, the lyrics were the result of a process of improvisation. The singers took a bit here and bit there, some of it was even absurd and without meaning, and pasted it together. European lyrics, on the other, were bound by the processes of linear thought.³⁷ Fourthly, the songs were much more than European songs an expression of a sense of community. Various segments of the slave community took part in a song and the solo singer never lost touch with the whole. Finally, slave songs were customarily the province of women.³⁸ In general, slave men only took the lead in work songs and funeral songs. They did, however, never take part in the chorus.

Sometimes slave women accompanied their songs with rattles made of calabashes.³⁹ More often, and especially at the major festivals and funerals, their songs were accompanied by instrumental music played by men.⁴⁰ Sources suggest that song was nearly inseparable from slave women's identity: all their rites of passage were accompanied by song as well as their daily work and their leisure time. The songs related to every aspect of their lives and articulated often their deepest feelings and certainties.

As pointed out, only a small number slave women's songs have been recorded by white commentators. They only recorded those that were performed in their presence, usually at Christmas and at work, and which suited their ideas of slave women. Michael Scott, for example, recorded a song in his novel *Tom Cringle's Log* which emphasized as I shall demonstrate later on, the opinion held by many white commentators that slave women were promiscuous.⁴¹ Left unrecorded are the songs slave women sung in the absence of whites. The majority of these were very likely African in structure and sung in the women's native language.⁴² Through these songs slave women could express a yearning for their homeland. They also allowed them to uphold traditional values and beliefs. I now want to look at some of the recorded songs in more detail and indicate the purpose they served for slave women.⁴³

In many of the recorded songs, slave women indicated features of slavery that troubled them most, such as the whippings, enforced separations, and sexual abuse. A slave woman could receive a maximum of 39 lashes for offenses ranging from shirking work to shamming illness. The following song clearly described the nature of their flogging. The women were usually stripped naked and held down by fellow slaves while their owner or overseer ordered a black male driver to flog them

O massa! o massa! One Monday morning
they lay me down,
and give me thirty-nine of my bare rump,
o massa, of mass!⁴⁴

The European style ballad '*Me know no law, me know no sin*' criticises in particular the sexual and physical abuse of slave women and the lack of recognition of slave motherhood ⁴⁵:

(Air: What care I for mam or dad)
Alth'o a slave me is born and bred,
My skin is black, not yellow:
I often sold my maidenhead
To many handsome fellow

My massa keep me once, for true,
And gave me clothes, wid busses (kisses, HA):
Fine muslin coats, wid bitty too,
To gain my sweet embraces.

When pickinniny him come black,
My massa starve and fum (flog, HA) me;
He tear the coat from off my back,
And naked him did strip me.

Him turn me out into the field,
Wid hoe, the ground to clear-o;
Me take pickinny on my back,
And work him te-me weary.

Him, Obisha, him de come one night,
And give me gown and busses;
him get one pickinniny, white!
Almost as white as missess.

Then missess fum me wid long switch,
And say him da for massa;
My Massa curse her, "lying bitch!"
And tell her, "buss my rassa!" (kick my arse, HA)

Me fum'd when me no condescend;
Me fum'd too if me do it;
Me no have no one for 'tand my friend,
so me am forc'd to do it.

Me know no law, me know no sin,
Me is just what ebba them make me;
This is the way dem bring me in;
So God nor devil take me.⁴⁶

By singing about those features of slavery that troubled them, slave women could relieve tension. Songs about the 'after life' served a similar purpose. These songs were usually sung at funerals like the following:

Gar Amighty see this very wicked world
Him say, "Sister, come away,
What for you no come to me?"
Sister say, "O Gar Amighty,
Too much glad to come away!
When one die, him sickness over;
Him leave all trouble in dis sinful world;
Him want no nyam (food, HA), no clothes, no sleep,
Him much too glad to come away."⁴⁷

Songs were thus a means by which slave women tried to survive the cruellest aspects of slavery. They were also a means to 'socialize' slave women. Slave women expressed through songs some of the mores and values of slave society. The song '*Mammy Luna*' which addressed all members of the slave community, taught slaves for instance not to steal and always tell the truth. The song is about an old woman who having left a pot boiling in her hut, found it robbed on her return. Her suspicions were divided between two children whom she found playing outside her door and some negroes who had passed her hut on their way to the market, one of them was a pregnant slave woman. One woman sang

Mammy luna's verses, which was followed by the chorus:

if da me eat Mammy Luna's pease-O,
Drownny me water, drownny, drownny⁴⁸

Some songs instructed slave women in correct sexual behaviour and appropriate gender roles.⁴⁹ The song *'Me know no law, me know no sin'*, for example, contained the message that it was 'inappropriate' for slave women to indulge in sexual relations with white men. The song about a woman whose husband had been bewitched by another woman as a result of his rejecting her advances, suggests that there was a norm of marital chastity in slave society:

Me take my cutacoo (basket, HA)
and follow him to Lucea,
and all for love of my bonny man
O- my bonny man come home, come home!
Doctor no do you good.
When neger fall into neger hands,
buckra doctor no do him good more.
Come home, my gold ring, come home!⁵⁰

Norms of correct sexual behaviour also feature in the song entitled *'Tajo! My Mackey Massa!'*. The exact meaning of the word Tajo is unknown but it clearly had an erotic connotation at the time.

Tajo, tajo, tajo! tajo, my mackey massa!
O! Laud, O! tajo, tajo, tajo!
You work him, mackey massa!
You sweet me, mackey massa!
A little more, my mackey massa!
Tajo, tajo, tajo! my mackey massa!
O! laud, O! tajo, tajo, tajo!
I'll please my mackey massa!
I'll jig to mackey massa!
I'll sweet my mackey massa!⁵¹

The 'sexual norm' referred to, however, is far from clear. The term 'Mackey massa' at the time was used as a common greeting meaning, 'how do you do, master' but it was also term used to denote 'submission and respect'. In case, Mackey massa was used in the first sense, the sexual relation referred to in this song was that of a slave woman and a white man. The song then probably conveyed the message that such a relationship was unacceptable in slave society. If the term was used in the second sense, then the song referred to the sexual relationship of a slave man and a slave woman and articulated the idea that a slave woman ought to submit to her partner's sexual wishes.

Finally, in a variety of ways slave women's songs served to uphold group cohesion. The particular singing mode united a variety of slave women: creole and African-born slave women, field and domestic slave women, old and young women etc. The language in which the majority of the recorded songs were sung, - creole, a blend of European and African languages -, protected their communal feelings even in the presence of whites. For example, it is likely that the word tajo was unknown to white commentators and that they thus did not understand the message articulated in this song. Finally, slave women criticised slaves in their songs who were disloyal to the slave community. This aspect is apparent in the seventh verse of the song *'Me know no law, me know no sin'*. It suggests that slave women who disobeyed the 'rule' not to have sex with white men were ostracized by the slave community. Slave men and women viewed these 'concubines' as disloyal.⁵² The recorded songs then reveal to some extent slave women's values and they indicate some of their deepest fears and desires.

Colonialists expressed both admiration and contempt for slave women's songs. Some colonialists were

extremely impressed by the singing ability of slave women, like planter Alexander Barclay who argued that slave women had 'generally fine voices'.⁵³ This ability was like their dancing ability regarded as something 'innate'.⁵⁴ Hector McNeill, who toured the island in the mid-1780s, articulated this idea most clearly when he stated that 'The young girls in particular, sing in parts, and as a good ear, and an African are inseparable, to the lover of music and humanity, their music is double feast.'⁵⁵ Colonialists especially expressed admiration when slave women sang 'comprehensible' songs in the European style. These were usually sung at Christmas when the slaves visited the planter's or overseer's house. John Stewart, who lived in the island in the late 18th century, was of the opinion that when slave women sang European songs, they had 'expression and melody little inferior to the finest voice of a white female.'⁵⁶ Admiration was thus based on a degree of sameness with the singing of white women. In order to sustain an amount of difference between the two categories of women, which was necessary to uphold the power relations in the slave society, colonialists dampened their enthusiasm for slave women's song as the word 'little' in Stewart's remark for instance shows.

Colonialists' contempt for slave women's song, on the other hand, was based on a perceived difference between slave women and white women. Though they were of the opinion that slave women had an ear for tune, they doubted their ability to compose lyrics as the following remark by Alexander Barclay shows:

One of their best singers commences the song, and unaccompanied sings the first part with words for the occasion, of course not always very poetical, though frequently not unamusing.⁵⁷

Colonialists expressed extreme disdain at slave women who sang erotic songs. The main character in the novel *Tom Cringle's Log* referred to the following song, which was version of '*me know no law, me know n sin*', as 'a vulgar Port Royal ditty':

young officer come home at night, him give me ring and kisses
nine months, one picanniny white, him white almost like missis.
But missis fum my back wid switch, him say de shild for massa⁵⁸

To emphasize the 'immorality' expressed in the song, he added that 'I scarcely forgive myself for introducing (it) here to polite society.'⁵⁹ The author thus indirectly contrasted 'pure' white women who did not address sexuality in their songs, and 'promiscuous' slave women. This quote also shows that colonialists and slave women attached different meanings to songs. Whereas slave women perceived this song to be about a 'rule' in the slave community against sexual relations with white men, colonialists regarded it as a song that encouraged slave women to be sexually promiscuous.

Finally, colonialists expressed contempt for slave women who sang songs that they could not comprehend. One of these were the slow sad funeral songs, known as dirges, which were primarily sung in African. They described these songs as 'wild' and 'melancholic'.⁶⁰ Colonialists made these remarks in the 1820s, however, when on most estates psalms and hymns had replaced dirges as funeral songs.⁶¹ Their focus on dirges, I would argue, served to stress the difference between slave society and white society. The dirges contrasted sharply with the 'solemn requiems' sung at European funerals at the time. An emphasis on the difference between slaves and white people was especially needed in the 1820s when abolitionists put forward several plans for emancipation. Writing about dirges, allowed colonialists to substantiate their idea that the slaves had not yet acquired the level of civilization needed for emancipation.⁶²

Colonialists then indirectly pointed out differences between the songs of slave women and white women, considering the latter superior. They, however, also mentioned differences between singing slave women. According to John Stewart, urban slave women sung 'in a style far superior to the negresses on the plantations'. He based their superiority on the fact that they sang songs 'caught up from the whites'.⁶³ 'Proximity to white society' was thus a criteria Stewart used to assign a hierarchical value to slave women.

His enforcement of boundaries between two groups of slave women, I argue, served to control the women.

Conclusion

Colonialist admiration for slave woman's song and dance was based on both a perceived similarity between slave women and white women and an 'innate' difference between the two categories of women. This admiration went hand in hand with a contempt for slave women's dance and song, which was articulated through notions of difference. Slave women 'differed' in their inability to express certain ideas in dance and compose proper lyrics. In other words, colonialists posited a single standard of value against which they measured slave women. Their failure to meet this standard was traced to a characteristic lack: lack of complexity, lack of sexual purity etc.

This paper has thus shown that 'language of difference' was as much a part of the landscape in which relations of power in a slave society manifested themselves than the whip, the long hours of work etc. It has, furthermore, tried to show that dance and song to some extent added to slave women's identity. It gave them a sense of belonging to a group as dance and song did away with divisions between slave women. Secondly, dance and song gave slave women the feeling that they were human-beings, an identity which their masters tried to deny. Thirdly, by performing dances and songs that were African in structure consolidated their African identity. Finally, as ideas about gender roles were expressed in dance and song, these modes of artistic expression added to slave women's gender identity. One could argue, however, that at the same time dance and song restricted slave women's gender identity. First of all because in their dance and song slave women confirmed and sustained an existing hierarchy between men and women. Secondly, slave women circumscribed the role of women in their songs and dance. For example, a slave girl who had displayed 'too much friskiness in her gestures' in a courtship dance was admonished by others for her 'imperance' and was told to be ashamed.⁶⁴

Endnotes

1. In the 1930s, former American slaves and their descendants were interviewed by the federal government. These interviews provide a lot of information about slave dances and songs. It has formed the basis of several studies on slave music. The most recent is that of S. White and G. White, 'Us likes a Mixtery: listening to African-American Slave Music', *Slavery and Abolition*, 3 (1999), 22-48.

2. Some overviews of Jamaican slavery have addressed dance and song, such as Orlando Patterson's *The Sociology of Slavery* (London, 1967). More specialised studies of Jamaican slave song and dance are: E. Brathwaite, *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* (London, 1981), M. Craton, 'Decoding pitchy-patchy: the roots, branches and essence of Junkanoo', *Slavery and Abolition*, 4 (1995), 14-44 and R. Cullen Rath, 'African Music in seventeenth-century Jamaica', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 4 (1993), 700-726.

3. Only Brathwaite mentions that song was the domain of slave women. But even he fails to outline the particular role of women in song and dance as well as the importance of this role. American slave studies have equally focused on the question of the African and European influences on slaves' dance and music. See for example L. W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977).

4. Bush slightly touches upon slave women's song. She considers song primarily as a means of slave women's cultural resistance and not as a means for their identity construction. This omission is not confined to studies on Jamaican slave women. None of the recent published

works on American slave women addresses the role of slave women in slave culture. That slave women's cultural performances are not addressed has primarily to do with the aim of the authors to present the women as 'active agents' fighting their oppression. They locate slave women's oppression and resistance first and foremost in the realms of work and reproduction.

5. Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 247-248.

6. The ring dance pre-eminently symbolized community and solidarity as the leaders did not lose touch with the whole. White and White, 'Us likes a mixtery', 41.

7. Brathwaite, *Folk Culture*, 17.

8. The most popular dances in Europe were: country-dance, the French contredanse, the cotillion, the minuet, the French quadrille, the waltz, Scottish reels, and the ecossaise. The introduction of the waltz, a closed-couple dance, in the early 1810s caused a lot of shock. Lord Byron, for example, called it a 'promiscuous dance'. In spite of the criticism, the dance gained in popularity and was firmly established by the end of the 1830s. F. Rust, *Dance is society: an analysis of the relationship between the social dance and society in England from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London, 1969), 66-69.

9. It is not known what dances were performed on a Saturday night dance. American slaves performed a variety of dances on these occasions, such as 'cutting the pigeon wings' and 'set de flo'. The first consisted of dancers flapping their arms. The second was an open-couple dance in which couples bowed while patting the floor in pace. E. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: the world the slaves made* (New York, 1974), 572.

10. 'Trial of Rebels in Jamaica', (British) *Parliamentary Papers* (commons) 1825, xxv, 74-75.

11. J. Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London, 1996), 142.

12. Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 238.

13. See: M.G. Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor* (London, 1834); C.R. Williams, *A Tour through the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1827); and *An account of Jamaica and its Inhabitants by a Gentleman long resident in the West Indies* (London, 1808).

14. This variant is described in *A Short Journey in the West Indies* (London, 1800), 88 and E. Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London, 1774), 424.

15. This variant is mentioned by Williams, *A Tour through the Island*, 22 and J.B. Moreton, *West India Customs and Manners* (London, 1793), 157-158. This ritual can be found in courtship dances across cultures and times. It is thus not surprising that C.R. Williams described the courtship dance as a bolero, which equally depicts a woman slipping away, approaching and escaping again. For more information about courtship dances in other cultures see J.L. Hanna, *Dance, Sex and Gender: signs of identity, dominance, defiance and desire* (Chicago, 1988), 56.

16. Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 424.

17. It is not surprising that courtship dances were performed at Christmas when the slaves had three or more days off and there were plenty of options for sexual intercourse.

18. Edward Long remarked, for example, that 'the right execution of this wriggle, keeping exact time with the music, is esteemed among them in particular excellence and they

practise this from an early age onwards', *The History of Jamaica*, 424.

19. Moreton, *West India Customs*, p. 157 and Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, p. 77. The latter suggests that there was within the slave community consensus as to who was the best dancer. Studies on aphrodisiac dances in various cultures and times have suggested that the best female dancer had a high status in the community. Hanna, *Dance, Sex and Gender*, 57.

20. Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 77.

21. Moreton, *West India Customs*, 157.

22. Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 77.

23. Moreton, *West India Customs*, 157.

24. Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 77.

25. Brathwaite, *Folk Culture*, 18.

26. Moreton's poem on dance suggests that a variety of slave women came together in a dance: old and young, coloured and black etc. *West India Customs*, 158.

27. Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 424.

28. Moreton, *West India Customs*, 157.

29. Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 424; Williams, *A Tour through the Island*, 25; and A. Barclay, *A Practical View of the Present State of Slavery in the West Indies* (London, 1827), 12.

30. The colonialists' refusal to mention that the dance was about sex should primarily be seen in the light of the growing occupation in white society at the time with sexual purity.

31. *A Short Journey*, 88.

32. Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 79-80.

33. Moreton, *West India Customs*, 158.

34. Long, *The History of Jamaica*, 424.

35. *Ibidem*.

36. Historians have argued that this structure is African. It was the common structure of slave songs in all parts of the New World. See for instance: Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, and White and White, 'Us like a mixtery'.

37. White and White, 'Us likes a mixtery', 35 and Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 258.

38. Brathwaite, *Folk Culture*, 21.

39. See for instance, Williams, *A Tour through the Island*, 22.

40. See for instance M. Scott, *Tom Cringle's Log* (London, 1834), 142 and *An Account of Jamaica*, 264.

41. Moreton recorded a variation to this song. This did not serve to characterise slave women as 'promiscuous women' but had to illustrate white men's immorality.
42. African songs were usually sung at funerals and other rites of passage that took place outside the gaze of white society. As a result there is little or no information on them.
43. This part has greatly benefited from studies on American slave songs, especially: B. C. Malone, 'Blacks and whites and the music of the old south', in T. Ownby, ed., *Black and white cultural interaction in the Antebellum South* (Jackson, 1993), 149-190; L. H. Owens, *This Species of Property: slave life and culture in the old south* (New York, 1976); Levine, *Black culture and black consciousness*; and White and White 'Us like a mixtery'.
44. Patterson, *Sociology of Slavery*, 256.
45. J. D'Costa and B. Lalla, ed., *Voices in Exile: Jamaican texts of the 18th and 19th century* (Tuscaloosa, 1989), 13.
46. Moreton, *West India Customs*, 154-155. This was a very popular song. It was sung throughout the island and several versions were in existence.
47. R.R. Madden, *A Twelvemonth's Residence in the West Indies* (Philadelphia, 1835), 139-40. This song served to confirm the abolitionists' conviction that with full freedom Jamaica would become a Christian nation.
48. Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 254. Mammy Luna is part of the genre known as Annancy stories. These were moral tales directed at all slaves and were partly told and sung.
49. D'Costa and Lalla have argued that erotic songs must have formed a subgenre of slave songs. *Voices in exile*, 14.
50. Lewis, *Journal of a West India Proprietor*, 253.
51. D'Costa and Lalla, *Voices in Exile*, 14-15.
52. Brenda Stevenson has argued for the Southern states in America that slave women who openly consorted with white men were ostracized by the slave community. 'Distress and Discord in Virginia Slave Families 1830-1860', in C. Bleser, ed., *In Joy and Sorrow: women, family, and marriage in the Victorian South 1830-1900* (New York, 1991), 113.
53. Barclay, *A Practical View*, 12.
54. An example of the musical abilities of slave women can be found in John Stewart's *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica* (Edinburgh, 1823), in which he described slave music as rude with the best part being the 'voices of the female slaves', 272.
55. H. McNeill, *Observations on the Treatment of the Negroes in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1788), 6.
56. *An Account of Jamaica*, 252.
57. Barclay, *A Practical View*, 12.
58. Scott, *Tom's Cringle Log*, 179.

59. Ibidem.

60. See for instance, Barclay, *A Practical View*, 136.

61. African-style funerals usually took place at night. It consisted of drumming, singing, dancing and drinking. In 1816 night funerals were forbidden in Jamaica. Christian funerals took place in the daytime, with a white person usually reading a service. The night before consisted usually of a wake during which attendants sung hymns and psalms.

62. Describing a slave funeral in late 18th- century Barbados, Dr. Pinckard mentioned that the chorus sung by the women was not a 'solemn requiem' but 'loud and lively'. As cited in M. Mullin, *Africa in America: slave acculturation and resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean 1736-1831* (Urbana, 1994), 65.

63. *An Account of Jamaica*, 264.

64. Williams, *A Tour through the Island*, 25.

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