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**Rooted and Grounded: Spiritual-Revival Churches in Contemporary  
Panama**

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**Rooted and Grounded: Spiritual-Revival Churches in Contemporary  
Panama**

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**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my family, the righteous ancestors, and the West Indian people of Panama. I thank my family for their love and support. I first learned the history of our people at their feet, and for that I am eternally grateful. I honor my ancestors in whose footsteps I follow. Finally, I salute those West Indians in the Antilles, Panama, and throughout the Diaspora who are committed to preserving, developing, and transmitting our cultures to the next generation.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not be possible without the support of several individuals and communities. Although it is not possible to adequately thank all those who have played a part, I would like to make mention of a select few. I thank my readers, Dr. Lorraine Leu and Dr. Virginia Garrard Burnett, for their advice and guidance throughout the writing process. I also wish to recognize Dr. Juliet Hooker for her mentorship and for continuously making herself available to me throughout these two years in Austin.

I must also acknowledge some individuals who were instrumental in providing me with concrete knowledge about Panamanian Revival. The first are Roberto and Lydia Reid, who run the Silver People Heritage Foundation and website. It is because of their page that I first learned of the existence of the Spiritual-Revival churches in Panama, which Mr. Reid used to attend during his youth. Thank you for the work that you do in keeping the memory of the ancestors alive. I must also thank Dr. Melva Lowe DeGoodin and the other members of the Sociedad de Amigos del Museo Afro-Antillano de Panamá (SAMAAP) who helped me to locate my first field sites and informants.

I want to thank the community of Spiritual and Revival churches for their patience, forbearance, and affection. I could not have done this work without you. Specifically, I want to mention the leadership of St. Joseph Spiritual Episcopal Church and Sacred Heart Deliverance Temple for their additional support. Although I am absent in body, my spirit is with you.

Finally I have to thank my intellectual community here at the University of Texas, Austin. You have helped me form, refine, and articulate my ideas throughout the various stages of this project. Our exchanges have enriched my experience here. Thank you.

## **Abstract**

# **Rooted and Grounded: Spiritual-Revival Churches in Contemporary Panama**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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The Panamanian state has historically marginalized West Indian people and excluded them from its national narrative. This thesis focuses on one particular kind of West Indian institution, the Spiritual-Revival churches, and utilizes ethnographic methods to recover the history, theory, and politics of contemporary Panamanian Revivalism. Chapter One traces the interpellation and self-making of black people in Panama from the sixteenth century to the present day, engaging with elite and subaltern discourses on race, citizenship, and diaspora. Chapter Two discusses the arrival of the Spiritual-Revival churches in Panama and provides an in-depth survey of the beliefs, practices, and rituals of the religion. Chapter Three explores Revivalist thought on blackness, diaspora, and citizenship in the present political moment. I explore the possible epistemological contributions of Spiritual-Revival churches to the black movement and to the wider Panamanian polity. The Spiritual-Revival churches form part of a long and contiguous, black radical tradition on the isthmus that speaks to the historical and present marginalization of black Panamanians. Revivalist theology and ritual practice not only affirm spiritual teachings, but also form an integral part of what the faithful believe it means to be West Indian, black, and autonomous. Currently, Revivalists are at a crossroads as they attempt to navigate and various discourses on

tradition, orthodoxy, culture, and identity while establishing their own counter-discourses.

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## Introduction

### Terminology

The Spiritual-Revival community in Panama is largely comprised of West Indians. Here, the term “West Indian” refers to those persons in Panama whose ancestors came from the insular West Indies at any point in the past. The bulk of such persons arrived to central Panama between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The use of this term is in keeping with much of the scholarship on black Panamanians (Conniff, 1985; Westerman, 1980; Russell, 2003; O’ Reggio, 2006; Putnam 2010) and also reflects how my informants self-identify. “West Indian” is coterminous with *Afro-Antillano*, which is how the population is referred to in Spanish. I have limited my use of the term Afro-Panamanian for two reasons. First, my informants do not refer to themselves as such. Second, the term is overly general, as there are other black ethnicities in Panama besides West Indians, namely the *Negros Coloniales*, which have traditionally not been involved in Spiritual-Revival churches, although this is changing.

The Spiritual-Revival churches are known by several names. Jamaicans refer to them as “Revival,” “Poco,” or occasionally and most derisively, as “Obeah churches.” In Jamaica, the most popular appellations are “Poco church,” “Pocomania,” “Zion,” or “Revivalist,” or “Revival.” Despite the differences between Poco and Zion, which I enumerate in Chapter Two, they are often confused by non-practitioners. In Panama, these churches are popularly known as “Iglesias Espirituales/ Spiritual Churches” “Beji-Nite<sup>1</sup>/ Benjinite<sup>2</sup>”, “Jump Up-Jump Up,” and “Jumpy-Jumpy” which is a hispanicization of the former.<sup>3</sup> It appears that the appellation “Spiritual,” though it is not used widely in contemporary Jamaica, does have some precedence on that island.<sup>4</sup>

One Jamaican colleague informed me that she heard of “Beji Nite Church” during her youth, but this appellation appears to be uncommon on the island. According to one

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<sup>1</sup> This is the spelling and pronunciation used by Roberto Reid of the Silver People Heritage Foundation

<sup>2</sup> This is the spelling used by R.S. Bryce-Laporte.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communication from Dr. Melva Lowe de Goodin

<sup>4</sup> See Seaga, (1956), and Lewin, (2000).

informant who used to attend Spiritual Churches, “Beji-Nite” means “all night,” due to the fact that worshippers used to keep services late into the night, and sometimes into the early morning. Although the latter half of the term is self-explanatory, there is still the problem of etymology; the origins of the term are ambiguous. The term is not found in *The Dictionary of Jamaican English* (1967), which is the most comprehensive, if dated, source on Jamaican Patois lexicon.<sup>5</sup> Nor is it found in Brereton’s *Dictionary of Panamanian English* (2001), which is the only such dictionary on the subject. One bishop argues that Beji-Nite is merely a corruption of “Bedwardite,” that arose due to carelessness and illiteracy. If her explanation is true, then this particular name could not have arisen before 1895, when Alexander Bedward, a Revivalist preacher from whom the eponymous movement drew its name, began his ministry. Her assessment is identical to that of Bryce-Laporte (1970), who also links “Benjinite” to “Bedwardite.” If both are correct, it would mean that the definition of “Benjinite” given earlier arose as a folk etymology as the actual meaning of “Bedwardite” was lost. If the prefix “Beji” means “all” or “entire,” and does *not* derive from “Bedwardite,” then its origins remain obscure at the present time, in the absence of any apparent alternative etymon.

According to a *Colonense* pastor, “in Colón they call it a ‘jumpy-jumpy church’- ‘iglesia de jumpy-jumpy,’ ‘la iglesia de los que amarran la cabeza,’ they would call it ‘la iglesia dónde hacen hipi-hapa hipi-hapa,’ eh they would say la iglesia dónde están practicando satanería. They would call us satánico, they would call us santero, all kind of names.”<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding, congregants most commonly refer to their churches as “Spiritual Churches” or “Iglesias Espirituales,” whether they are of the Spiritual or Revival branch. But not everyone is keen to group these together. One informant says:

*People tend to class you as a sect when you use the word ‘Spiritual Churches.’  
Our churches are Revival Churches because the word ‘spirit’ involve all kind of  
spirit, and if you visit churches in the West Indies that say they are spiritual, the*

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<sup>5</sup> Older works often conflate Jamaican English, the dialect of English spoken by Jamaican Anglophones, and Jamaican Patois, the English-lexified language spoken natively by the masses.

<sup>6</sup> The exonym “hipi-hapa hipi-hapa” is derived from the hyperventilation witnessed during Revivalist services.

*way they work is different from the way we work...Spiritual Church can involve anything. But we are Revival Church- to revive you, not to call on spirit! We speak in tongues and have revelation according to how the Spirit gives vision.*<sup>7</sup>

However, for the pastor of St. Joseph's Spiritual Episcopal Church, the main difference between the two groups has to do with the style of head coverings for women, as well as the use of a liturgical book during the service. During his church's services I did not witness the invocation of, or possession by any spirit other than the Holy Spirit. In this thesis, I use the term Spiritual-Revival due to the shared cosmology, theology, and worship style that these churches possess, as well as due to the high rate of cross-attendance between Spiritual and Revival churches. Most of my informants would see the division between "Spiritual" and "Revival" as a distinction without a fundamental difference. And yet, because people refer to themselves as "Spiritual" or as "Revivalists," I have elected to use this compound term.<sup>8</sup> I also use "Revival" as shorthand for "Spiritual-Revival," and designate followers of the religion as "Revivalists."<sup>9</sup> When I speak of "Revival Zion," I am referring to the religion by the name in which it appears in scholarship in Jamaica. I reserve the term "Spiritual-Revival" for the Panamanian churches; this is solely a geographical distinction. For the sake of brevity, I occasionally refer to the adherents of the religion as "Revivalists." In keeping with the custom of my informants, I also employ the terms "work," or "Revival Work," which they also use to describe their tradition.

Throughout, I refer to the Spiritual-Revival churches as part of a wider Afro-Creole, or Afro-Christian religious tradition. I do this to distinguish Revival from Euro-Christian denominations (ex. Catholics, Baptists, Methodists), and because my informants locate their religion's genesis in Africa. Despite the numerous African elements in Revival, I avoid the term "syncretism" for its imprecision; it implies that there exists a certain purity of theology, cosmology, or practice that in fact exists

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<sup>7</sup> This is Rev. Ruthibell Livingston's explanation.

<sup>8</sup> Bishop Brenda Barber also used this descriptor during our interview.

<sup>9</sup> The designation Revivalists is used in most scholarship on the subject and is also used by Revivalists themselves.

nowhere, save in the minds of those who have vested interests in fashioning themselves as orthodox believers and denigrating the traditions of those who occupy the margins of power. “Syncretism” occludes the long processes of intercultural contact and diffusion in Europe, Africa, and other places. Most, if not all religious traditions borrow from their geographic and cultural antecedents, whether it is the spirit possession of black diasporic churches, or European Christians who celebrate Easter and Christmas, or keep the Sabbath on Sunday.

### **Racialized Geographies: Locating the Field**

Although the demographics of Panama City have changed significantly, many of the city’s neighborhoods are still racialized.<sup>10</sup> When I first arrived in Panama, a friend accompanied me on a bus from the airport to my lodging. As we crossed Avenida 12 de Octubre, he remarked that it was the dividing line between the black and non-black areas of the city. Some of the neighborhoods east of 12 de Octubre are Rio Abajo, Pueblo Nuevo, Parque Lefevre, Llano Bonito, and Juan Díaz, among others. These areas have had high concentrations of West Indians since the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. All of these areas, are home to at least one Spiritual Church. Most of my informants live in those neighborhoods, and it was there that I did most of my ethnographic observation.

Yet even these neighborhoods are home to many non-blacks, yielding an ethnically mixed space that is still registered as black by Panamanians. My informants generally disapproved of these demographic changes, noting that the sense of community and cohesion that once existed in those spaces had gone; formerly black neighborhoods were now “mix-up.” One informant noted with regret that in Parque Lefevre, he could count the number of black-owned businesses on two hands, and that many West Indians had been bought out, moving to peripheral areas outside the city where land was cheaper. None of the *corregimientos* of Panama City currently have a majority black population,

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Leu (2014)

though Rio Abajo has the greatest percentage with just under 24 percent of its inhabitants declaring themselves as *negro o afrodescendiente*.<sup>11</sup>

There are several historically West Indian neighborhoods like Curundú, Chorrillo, San Miguel, and Calidonia, which hosted Spiritual Churches until as recently as the late 1980s. The churches in Chorrillo were destroyed in the American invasion in 1989.<sup>12</sup> Most of my informants used to frequent these areas for religious and social activities. However, most agreed that these areas in the city were not as West Indian in character as in former times.

### **Methodology**

Much of my knowledge of the Spiritual-Revival churches in Panama comes from the bishops and laity themselves. This information is either contained in oral histories passed down through generations, or information revealed as part of a leader's own research into the history of their church. All information that I present herein, unless footnoted from a secondary source, was collected in my interviews, or through my observation and participation in Revival services. During the course of fieldwork, I made several trips to the *Biblioteca Nacional* and the *Archivo Nacional*; these yielded little information and thus I did not undertake any substantial archival research. I found information for one church, Panama Spiritual Center, whose paperwork corroborated what is written on the church cornerstone, namely the name of the founder, location, and the date of establishment. My informants told me that most Spiritual-Revival congregations in Panama used to worship in private homes or in open fields, although this is not the case now. In light of this information, the archive is even more limited as it can only reveal those churches which were large enough, willing, or sufficiently established to register with the government, rather than meeting privately. What the

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<sup>11</sup> Principales indicadores sociodemográficos y económicos de la población de la República, por provincia, distrito, corregimiento y lugar poblado: Censo 2010," Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo, accessed March 1, 2015,

[http://www.contraloria.gob.pa/INEC/Publicaciones/Publicaciones.aspx?ID\\_SUBCATEGORIA=59&ID\\_PUBLICACION=355&ID\\_IDIOMA=1&ID\\_CATEGORIA=13](http://www.contraloria.gob.pa/INEC/Publicaciones/Publicaciones.aspx?ID_SUBCATEGORIA=59&ID_PUBLICACION=355&ID_IDIOMA=1&ID_CATEGORIA=13)

<sup>12</sup> This is according to Rev. Jaramillo.

appearance of Panama Spiritual Center in the archive can tell me is that, although all the Spiritual-Revival churches are registered with the government now, Panama Spiritual Center's formal recognition by the government was early (1932) and unusual. Furthermore, the archive provides no information on church belief, structure, governance, or cosmology. Due to these aforementioned archival limitations, I turned to the ethnographic interview and participant-observation as my principal methods, which scholars of Revival Zion have traditionally employed.<sup>13</sup> These methods have allowed researchers to gather familial, individual, and church histories, while granting them first-hand exposure to Revivalist ceremonies and practices. Jamaican and Panamanian Revival churches do not keep archival records, which means that the faithful, and particularly the elders, become the primary source of historical and contemporary knowledge.

### **Research Questions**

The ethnography of R.S. Bryce-Laporte (1970) is the only available ethnography on the Spiritual-Revival faith in Panama, although he is not extensively concerned with religious history, or abundant details regarding rituals, ceremonies, and their cosmological import. Chevannes (1978) and Edmonds and Gonzales (2010), writing in the Jamaican context, argue that Revivalism is disappearing, or at least shedding its distinguishing features in order to conform to the doctrines and aesthetics of contemporary Pentecostal churches in Jamaica. Since Bryce-Laporte's ethnography is dated, I did not know if I would find a church when I began my research. My conversations with Panamanians in the United States had led me to believe that they were diminished or vanished; their very existence was unclear to me. In light of the gaps in the scholarship, I set out to address the following questions:

1. Are there still Spiritual-Revival churches in the Republic of Panama?
2. What is the ethnic composition of Spiritual-Revival congregations?
3. What do the churches believe?

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<sup>13</sup> See Bryce-Laporte, (1970); Barrett (1976); Chevannes, (1978); Guano (1994); Stewart, (2005).

4. What are their rites, rituals, and relations with other belief systems in Panama?
5. To what extent in the tradition disappearing, declining, or changing?
6. How do the churches conceive of their relationship to wider Panamanian society?

The thesis is a preliminary attempt to answer these questions, and due to Spiritual-Revival churches' independent and decentralized character, their wide geographic distribution throughout Panama, and the limited duration of fieldwork, further study needs to be done in order to verify and complicate my findings. Notwithstanding, I am reasonably confident that the answers to my questions are somewhat generalizable beyond the few churches that I attended, though they may not universally apply.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

I employed semi-structured interviews and participant-observation as my means of information gathering. A combination of these approaches allowed me to make cultural inferences as an ethnographer from the things that my informants said, how they acted, and the artifacts that they used.<sup>14</sup> I selected ethnography for its ability to document the existence of alternative realities and to describe those realities on their own terms.<sup>15</sup> The interviews allowed me to get further acquainted with my informants, and glean basic personal information, church history, endonyms, exonyms, and beliefs. Employing a definition of culture as “the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior” and a conception of culture as a “system of meaningful symbols” allows me to explore particular phenomena and ritual objects in Panamanian Revival while ultimately apprehending the *meanings* and the uses thereof.<sup>16</sup>

My primary method of ethnography was a modified Developmental Research Sequence (D.R.S.) method, which holds that “ethnographic interviewing and participant

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<sup>14</sup> James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning, 1979), 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.



observation, whether done separately or in combination, involve a series of tasks best carried out in some kind of *sequence*.”<sup>17</sup> D.R.S. method contains twelve steps which are:

1. Locating an informant
2. Interviewing an informant
3. Making an ethnographic record
4. Asking descriptive questions
5. Analyzing ethnographic interviews
6. Making a domain analysis
7. Asking structural questions
8. Making a taxonomic analysis
9. Asking contrast questions
10. Making a componential analysis
11. Discovering cultural themes
12. Writing the ethnography<sup>18</sup>

This method distinguishes between “informant,” and other related concepts such as “subject,” “friend,” or “actor.”<sup>19</sup> They met the definition of informant in that:

1. They were native “speakers” (in the linguistic and cultural sense).
2. I encouraged them to speak in their own language and using their own terms.
3. They provided a model for me to imitate.
4. I aimed to use language and jargon in the way that my informants did.
5. They were a source of information, and thus my teachers.<sup>20</sup>

They did not qualify as subjects since I was interested in understanding cultural knowledge, and not testing a hypothesis.<sup>21</sup> I would not classify them as respondents, since

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

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 29.

I did not employ the lexicon of the social sciences; I aspired to speak in their language, both literally and figuratively. They were, however, actors since they became the targets of my observation in their congregations. Thus, a more accurate descriptor than the general “informant” might be “informant-actor,” in the same fashion that I am “participant-observer.” Beyond mere informants or actors, several of the persons I worked with during fieldwork now count me as a friend or spiritual advisee. Therefore, although I refer to my interlocutors as “informants” throughout the thesis, this is a partial but necessary oversimplification for purposes of clarity and brevity.

### **Language**

The language of my interviews varied. Only with Rev. Jaramillo did I converse entirely in Spanish, which is his primary language of communication. With the rest of my informants, we spoke in a mix of English, Spanish, Panamanian Creole English, and Jamaican Patois. Panamanian Creole English (hereafter PCE) is an English-lexified creole language spoken natively by many West Indians in Panama. Panamanians usually refer to it (misleadingly) as “English.” PCE is mutually intelligible with Jamaican Patois (hereafter Patois), which I speak. Although my typed interview questions were in Spanish and English only, we code-switched as necessary and sometimes I delivered my questions in Patois depending on the flow of the conversation. Both Patois and PCE are largely oral languages, and any text in this thesis in either language is written free-form and not according to any official orthographic standard. The frequent code-switching in interviews is normal, as my informants code-switch in their daily lives, with greater use of Spanish among younger West Indians and greater facility with English and PCE among the middle-aged and elderly.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Once I had introduced myself to a potential informant, and they had accepted my solicitation for an interview, I provided them with an English-Spanish bilingual consent form, to which they agreed verbally.<sup>22</sup> Our conversations were taped on my voice

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<sup>22</sup> This form was reviewed and approved by the IRB at the University of Texas at Austin.

recorder for later transcription. The semi-structured ethnographic interviews, which I conducted in either their private residences or their churches, followed a pre-prepared questionnaire from which I posed questions about their family history (place of birth, ethnicity, and country of familial origin), religious background, occupation, or ritual practice. Examples include “What languages did you grow up speaking?” and “Where does this religion come from?” We often diverged from the questionnaire in the natural course of conversation. This allowed me to craft a demographic profile of my informants, who overwhelmingly ended up being Revival leaders and ethnic West Indians, while also discussing the topics that they felt were important. Insofar as I collected data, my informants also solicited data from me. They were eager to know my connection to Panama, my motivation for research, familial background, and relationship to Revivalism. Answering their questions honestly and forthrightly helped to establish trust and solidarity between us. Church leaders were very much the “gateways” into the congregation, and I realized that it would be fitting to solicit interviews from them before approaching anyone else in the church. I did this as a means of showing respect and deference, but also out of the realization that they likely had the most experience and knowledge about the faith.

Basic demographic questions aside, my main inquiries were descriptive, structural and contrast question, as per the D.R.S. method. My descriptive questions were largely of the grand tour, example, experience, and native-language varieties. These kinds of inquiries are useful since “they lead directly to a large sample of utterances that are expressed in the language used by informants in the cultural scene under investigation.”<sup>23</sup> The structural questions were mostly verification and cover-term questions, which permitted me to gauge the validity of my preconceived ideas about Revival beliefs and ceremonies and to understand how Revivalists categorized things in any given domain (e.g., kinds of tables, seals, churches, or plants).<sup>24</sup> The final set of questions are the contrast questions which are useful in locating differences in folk terms. Within that

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 126-29.

category, I deployed contrast verification and dyadic questions for their usefulness in confirming differences and similarities among groups of folk terms.<sup>25</sup> I interviewed some people more than once, and had many relevant conversations outside the scope of the formal interviews. There are also other individuals who discussed various aspects of Revivalism with me that I did not have the time or capacity to interview, or that could not concede one to me.

Following the interviews, I transcribed the conversations verbatim. During services, I made notes on the order of events and any relevant discourses. I digitized both of these records for later use. Transcribing the interviews within a couple days after they transpired allowed me to make notes and relate or compare various topics discussed in different interviews. It also refreshed the material that I discussed with my informant. In my analysis of the transcripts, I employed domain analysis in order to isolate the domains whereby informants organize their cultural knowledge (ex. a table is a type of service).<sup>26</sup> I used the taxonomic analysis to find subsets in a domain and the relationship among them (ex. Sacred Heart, Prosperity, Thanksgiving are kinds of tables).<sup>27</sup> After this, I turned to componential analysis for its utility in understanding the components of meaning associated with cultural symbols.<sup>28</sup> As I conducted my interviews, reflected on the ceremonies attended, and analyzed interview transcriptions, I came to demarcate several cultural themes; these are cognitive principles, “tacit or explicit, recurrent in a number of domains and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Recruitment of Informants**

Dr. Melva Lowe DeGoodin helped me to locate my first field sites and informants. I attended a weekly meeting of the Sociedad de Amigos del Museo Afro-Antillano de Panamá (SAMAAP), where I introduced myself to her and the other

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 162, 164.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 186.

members, and afterwards discussed my project.<sup>30</sup> She gave me the location of a few Spiritual-Revival churches and I first went to St. Joseph's where I introduced myself to the leader, Pastor Oswald Gilpin. Through Dr. de Goodin and my contacts at Pastor Gilpin's church, I eventually came to know other leaders, congregants, and churches.

Upon arriving at any church, I would introduce myself in one of two ways. I preferred to wait until the conclusion of the service and speak to the leader of the church, in order to present my thesis project and obtain permission to conduct research at the site. This rarely happened. Usually, the leader would call me out at some point during the service and ask me to come to the front of the church and introduce myself to the congregation. I complied with this, and I would speak to the leader afterward and solicit permission. No leader refused me entry to the church or forbade me from participating in the service. All agreed that the church was an "open door" and that nobody could be prevented from entering. Despite that, not all of the leaders that I met granted me an interview, though I interviewed all who had the time and desire to sit with me.

I have used the real names and titles of all my informants save one, who requested anonymity. The names to which I refer to them throughout the thesis are in parenthesis. Those who are spiritual leaders have their churches following their names and titles. They are:

1. Pastor Michael Brown (Pastor Brown) – San Martin de Porres
2. Pastor Oswald Gilpin (Pastor Gilpin) - St. Joseph's Spiritual Episcopal Church
3. Reverend Jorge Jaramillo (Rev. Jaramillo) - St. Joseph's Spiritual Episcopal Church
4. Right Reverend Ruthibell Livingston (Rev. Livingston) - Gospel Truth Mission
5. Bishop Brenda Barber (Bishop Barber) - Sacred Heart Deliverance Temple
6. Bishop Norma Beckles (Mother Pet)<sup>31</sup> - Sacred Heart Deliverance Temple
7. Ms. Albertina Pusey
8. Carlos Brown<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. DeGoodin is a West Indian activist, author, and playwright and is one of the board members of SAMAAP.

<sup>31</sup> This is the name by which she is known in the Revivalist community.

<sup>32</sup> I have used a pseudonym, as per his request.

## 9. Christine Reynolds

With the exception of Pastor Brown and Christine Reynolds, who are Jamaican-born, all of my informants were born in the Republic of Panama. Rev. Jaramillo is the only informant who is not ethnically West Indian. They range from 24 to 78 years of age, but most informants are middle-aged or elderly people who have been leading their churches for at least ten years. Some have led their churches for over twenty years. None of the leaders make their living from their spiritual work. They are either retired, or work in the private sector. Like many West Indian Panamanians, some of my informants have resided in the United States and possess residency or dual citizenship. Most have close relatives and extended family living in the United States and travel there regularly for personal and family reasons.

Any particular title, such as “Reverend” or “Bishop” are the honorifics that my informants employ. These titles do not necessarily correspond to their specific use in other Christian traditions. They choose any particular title, such as “Bishop,” “Reverend,” or “Prophet,” based on divine guidance or revelation. Some titles, such as “Ambassador,” may be conferred upon one leader by another. Titles are not necessarily indicative of a particular function. For example, one may have the gift of prophecy, but not take the title “Prophet.”

Most of the congregations I visited belong to the *Asociación de Iglesias Afroantillanas Espirituales del Mundo*,<sup>33</sup> founded in 2004, which is a federation of independent Spiritual-Revival churches. According to Bishop Livingston, churches wishing to register with the government must have at least fifty members. Registering as an association in this way permits churches with less than fifty members on the books to have formal legal status. As of May 2014, the churches in the association are:

1. Iglesia Bautista Internacional Nueva Vida
2. Templo de Liberación Sagrado Corazón
3. Iglesia Espiritual Emmanuel

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<sup>33</sup> hereafter referred to as “the Association”

4. Iglesia Santa Ana Hermandad Pentecostal (defunct)
5. Iglesia San Martín de Porres
6. Iglesia Bautista Monte Horeb (defunct)
7. Iglesia Misión Evangelio de la Verdad
8. Iglesia Cristiana Pasos de Jesús

Churches visited that are not in the Association are:

1. Iglesia Episcopal Espiritual de San José
2. San Judas Tadeo
3. Iglesia Bautista Internacional Cristo La Roca
4. Centro Espiritual de Panamá

All of the churches have English names and with a few exceptions, most are commonly referred to as such. However, Panamanian law requires that all organizations be registered in Spanish. I visited Iglesia Bautista Internacional Nueva Vida, Templo de Liberación Sagrado Corazón, Iglesia San Martín de Porres, and Iglesia Misión Evangelio de la Verdad, which I will henceforth refer to by the appellations most commonly used by leaders and members, “Nueva Vida,” “Sacred Heart,” “San Martín de Porres,” and “Gospel Truth Mission,” “St. Joseph’s,” “San Judas Tadeo,” and “Cristo la Roca.” I did not visit Pasos de Jesús or Iglesia Espiritual Emmanuel.

One informant told me that the leader of San Judas Tadeo, *Cardenal* Magdalena Flores, was in association with another group of churches. However, I was not able to interview her during fieldwork to confirm or solicit further information and thus cannot provide any information about her church or associated churches beyond one field visit to her church. As such, any theological, organizational, or ritual differences that her association *may* have will not be reflected in this thesis.

The order in which I visited churches for services was: St. Joseph’s, Sacred Heart, Nueva Vida, Cristo la Roca, Gospel Truth Mission, San Martín de Porres, Panama Spiritual Center, and San Judas Tadeo. The more time that I spent in Panama, I developed more contacts and was invited and made aware of different events. I was unable to visit

Panama Spiritual Center or San Judas Tadeo until the last week of fieldwork. Likewise, I was only able to visit Gospel Truth Mission and Cristo la Roca once. The first church that I visited was St. Joseph's, and it is at this church that I spent the greatest number of research hours and have the most numerous social connections. After St. Joseph's, I spent the most time at Sacred Heart and Nueva Vida. These three sites are responsible for the bulk of my field recordings and notes. Unless I traveled to Bocas or Colón for a service, which I did once, respectively, my week was as follows:

Sunday- service at St. Joseph's followed by the service at Nueva Vida

Monday- personal day for interviews, transcription, and archival/library research

Tuesday- evening service at Nueva Vida

Wednesday- personal day for interviews, transcription, and archival/library research

Thursday- same

Friday- evening service at St. Joseph's

Saturday- service at Sacred Heart

If I arrived at a given church before the service, one of the members might give me some task to do, like setting up chairs, or moving furniture. Otherwise I made small talk with the members or leaders before the start of the service. I always carried my notebook to services, and made notes of the general order, pertinent conversations, and any other material I thought relevant. I also participated in the services by joining in the congregational singing, communion, prayer, and processions around the communion or journeying table, events that I describe in greater detail in Chapter Two. After the service, I would usually remain near the church and talk with members until we parted ways or it was time for me to head to another service.

### **Positionality**

My interest in Afro Central America is personal and academic; my family is from Jamaica and relatives on both sides resided in and traveled to Costa Rica, Panama, and



Belize for work during the mid-twentieth century. This familial history helped develop my sense of diasporic consciousness and led me to the realization that the circuitous migratory routes which my family traveled were pervasive, and formative for several generations of Caribbean people. It was this shared “West Indianness,” both real and imagined, that facilitated interactions with my Panamanian interlocutors. Part of this was my ability to code-switch between English, Jamaican Patois, and Spanish.

Linguistic competencies aside, my upbringing in the Christian faith facilitated my understanding of Spiritual-Revival services. Though Revivalists have rituals and songs that are particular to them, they share a good deal of spiritual vocabulary with other Christians, so I would participate in the choruses, prayers, and hymns with relative ease. Practices such as praying, fasting, and the laying on of hands are commonplace in Revival services and in many other Christian traditions. Despite this, I was a religious outsider at the initiation of my fieldwork, and most of my informants received me with a reserved curiosity that ultimately grew into mutual respect and affection. I have had spiritual experiences during Revival services, which were beautiful, vulnerable, personal, and communal; at times I was more participant than observer. I have elected not to discuss these below as there are limits to the things that rich ethnographic description can articulate. Other things remain unsaid, for as the elders used to say “a nuh everyting good fi eat good fi talk.”

There is also the issue of ritual secrecy in Revival. There are things which I could not know for several reasons, not least of which is that I am not a baptized Revivalist or a member of any particular church. Knowledge acquisition in Revival proceeds hand in hand with spiritual power and maturity; my interlocutors were open about this fact. Moreover, many elders have passed, taking their knowledge and their work with them to the grave. This thesis is, of necessity, incomplete and fragmentary. Alternatively, due to the culture of secrecy, even if I did possess certain knowledge, there is no guarantee that I would be at liberty to discuss a given topic. With that said, I have attempted to fill in some ethnographic gaps in the study of the Spiritual-Revival faith and I am indebted to my informants for their cooperation, patience, and forbearance.

## **Limitations**

Though the aforementioned research questions are straightforward and I have provided answer to them based on my fieldwork, there are nonetheless contingencies and uncertainties in the scope and results of this preliminary study on contemporary Panamanian Revivalism. Perhaps the most obvious one is that I am an outsider; I am not a baptized Revivalist nor am I Panamanian. Despite my cultural proximity to my informants as a fellow West Indian, there is still the issue of difference that I cannot overlook. Furthermore, the study was limited by the duration spent in Panama, a mere seven weeks, as well as my limited mobility. I made a total of four day trips to Colón and one weekend trip to Bocas del Toro. The rest of my time was spent in Panama City. Moreover, since most services at Spiritual-Congregations are held on weekends, the time factor is compounded; choosing to attend one Sunday or Saturday service necessarily involved foregoing another. Although I attempted to branch out as much as my time constraints would allow, I ended up spending most of my time at the churches I had already visited where I had a rapport with the leadership and the members.

Also, since Revivalists appear to have a liturgical calendar, I was limited by the time of year in which I did my fieldwork. For example, the months of May and June were the time for the Sacred Heart journey, which I describe in Chapter Two. Had I been present at a different time of year, I might have witnessed other kinds of tables firsthand. The other issue is the limited sample size of the study, with only eight informants. I could not do anything about this as developing a rapport with individuals took time and was by no means guaranteed process. There were individuals who I suspect did not understand or appreciate my presence. Eventually, I noticed a change in my relations with Revivalists at the services I attended. Formal and brief interactions became more warm and personable, and I could sense that the beginnings of trust were forming beyond my limited circle of informants. Unfortunately, by the time that process began, I had to conclude my research and return to the United States.

In terms of future study on Panamanian Revival, I recommend a few topics not covered sufficiently by this thesis. First, a greater demarcation between Revivalist

practice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century would be helpful in providing greater details on intergenerational shifts in practices and rituals. There is also room for more research into the ethnomusicology of Panamanian Revival. The religion has a great diversity of song types and styles. The Revival songs are particularly noteworthy as they are *sui generis* to the Spiritual-Revival churches and they appear to be dying out without being catalogued. Finally there is also the issue of ethnic identity. Spiritual-Revival congregations are overwhelmingly West Indian. However, there are increasing numbers of *Coloniales* and mestizos in the church, which has long been a site of strong racialized identity. Perhaps their presence in the church will alter the internal discourses on race, identity, and the nation, although it is too early to tell.

*A decir verdad – dijo el hijo – no sé cuál es peor: la bomba de dinamita o el mestizaje. Por todas partes dicen que hay que mejorar la raza, o sea, hay que blanquearse. Opino que este tipo de racismo es peor que la dinamita asesina porque el mestizaje es una muerte lenta, muy lenta, lentísima.*

Carlos Guillermo Wilson, *Chombo* (pg. 28)

## Chapter One: Five Centuries of the African Diaspora in Panama

Africans and their descendants have been a continual presence in what is now the republic of Panama since approximately 1511.<sup>34</sup> They have identified and organized themselves in various ways: African nations, *Negros coloniales*, *Afroantillanos*, *Congos*, West Indians, Creoles, and most recently, Afro-Panamanians. In this chapter, I examine secondary sources, ethnographic interviews, exonyms, and endonyms, in order to understand how black Panamanians and the mestizo-white elite employ and contest ideas about blackness and diaspora for the purposes of statemaking, resistance, and political organizing. Influenced by Drake (1993) who periodizes twentieth century pan-africanism<sup>35</sup> and Priestly and Barrow (2009), who divide black activism into a pre and post- U.S. invasion context, I argue that the African diaspora in Panama can be divided into four discrete periods, each marked by elite shifts in racial attitudes and black Panamanians' attempts at self-making and activism. I conclude by discussing how Panamanian Revivalists situate themselves within these larger contemporary debates.

### **The Colonial Period (1501-1821)**

The first era is that of slavery and marronage, which overlaps with the colonial period (1501-1821). This period was marked by the importation of Africans as a labor force and the subsequent creation of maroon communities in the interior of the country. In Panama, slave surnames, usually applied by the Spaniards, detail the diverse regions from which the enslaved hailed. For example, the records of a certain don Cristóbal

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<sup>34</sup> Melva Lowe de Goodin, *Afrodescendientes en el Istmo de Panamá 1501-2012* (Panama: SAMAAP, 2012), 5.

<sup>35</sup> St. Clair Drake, "Diaspora Studies and Pan-Africanism," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph Harris. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993), 349.

López de Letona in 1660 reveal that he owned male slaves named “Pedro Angola,” “Pedro Congo,” “Gregorio Mozambique,” “Ignacio Mandinga,” “Jacinto Criollo,” and “António Caboverde.”<sup>36</sup> Free persons of color often adopted the surnames of their former masters, but they also frequently employed of these ethnic groups.<sup>37</sup><sup>38</sup> These exonyms, with the exception of “Mandinga” and “Criollo,” all refer to broad regions of African territory indicative of a point of embarkation. Such labels cannot explain the intricacies of how persons identified in their daily lives prior to enslavement, but they permit scholars to make approximations as to the range of possible ethnicities or regions of provenance of a person with the surname “Congo” or “Mozambique,” for example. One of the chief responses to the systematic alienation, commodification, and terror of the enslaved was the creation of communities of escaped slaves, or marronage.<sup>39</sup> Maroon communities were called *palenques*<sup>40</sup>, and the memory of famous leaders such as Bayano, Antón Mandinga, and Felipillo and Luis de Mozambique have persisted into contemporary times.<sup>41</sup> The number and size of palenques appears to have peaked in the sixteenth century, although they were still in existence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>42</sup> These communities sustained themselves by raiding the trade routes of central Panama for goods, clothing, and women, sometimes allying themselves with English and French corsairs to that end.<sup>43</sup> Religious rites and rituals were important in these communities, and motivated maroons to continue their struggle for freedom.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mario José Molina Castillo, *La Tragedia del Color en el Panamá Colonial 1501-1821: Panamá, Una Sociedad Esclavista en el Período colonial* (David, Panamá: Imprenta Impresos Modernos, 2011), 7.

<sup>37</sup> I translate *Etnia* as “ethnic group.”

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi. “*Por eso el cimarronaje era su opción de dignidad y expectativa de libertad.*”

<sup>40</sup> The Spanish name for maroon settlements. The text records that maroons lived in both palenques and pueblos.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. Details on the rites are not forthcoming, but the text records that in one instance, “*Hacían ritos religiosos por parte de un negro cimarrón llamado Obispo quien incluso los arengaba a concluir su lucha por su libertad a través de una especie de sermón.*”

Maroon communities aside, African and creole blacks were also well represented among urban populations. The demographic profile of Panama City at the end of the eighteenth century reveals that 86 percent of the city's population was either black slaves (21.37 percent) or *Afromestizos*<sup>45</sup> (65.32 percent).<sup>46</sup> Neither freedom nor demographic preponderance precluded marginalization, and many of the free blacks lived in coastal peripheral areas of the city, where they engaged in fishing and agriculture. Due to their proximity to the sea, they were able to hawk shellfish as another means of sustenance.<sup>47</sup> Slaves were engaged in a variety of work, including sugar cane mills<sup>48</sup> and the collection of pearls.<sup>49</sup> Wherever their location and whatever their status, the experience of Africans and blacks during the colonial period in Panama was one of dehumanization and violence under the whip if they were slaves, courage and precariousness if they lived in a maroon community, and physical and economic marginalization if they were a free person of color. African-born individuals in this era likely retained their own identities from Africa, but also acquired the identities gained during the slave trade, as evidenced by the use of "African" surnames by free people of color. The memories of most African "nations" (ex. Angola, Mozambique), diminished, as did acts of marronage, but blacks created their own Catholic brotherhoods, folk dances, and musical styles during the colonial era. African "ethnic" memory appears to be limited to the *Congo* community in the province of Colón. By the close of the colonial period, the processes of creolization and cultural innovation were well underway, although the exclusion of blacks from the economic and political life of the country would persist. As a colonial possession, Panama had not yet embarked on the racialized nationalist project that would come to characterize the post-independence era. The descendants of the black populations residing in Panama during this period came to be known as *Negros Coloniales*.

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<sup>45</sup> I use the terms *Afromestizos* and *Negros Coloniales* interchangeably.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

### **Nationalism, Canals, and the Race Question (1821-1941)**

Several major shifts occurred in the second period, encompassing 1821-1941.<sup>50</sup> The first was independence from Spain, which Panama achieved in 1821, followed by union with Gran Colombia.<sup>51</sup> The second was the emergence of a Bocatorean Creole culture in the far west of the country in the 1820s.<sup>52</sup> English planters from San Andrés and Old Providence took their slaves and settled the region, which was already home to indigenous people.<sup>53</sup> The third was the drastic decline of slaves as a percentage of the population; they were .4 percent of the national population in 1851, although they were 9.6 percent of the population a century prior.<sup>54</sup> This is not indicative of a decline in the black population however, for the mulatto population “exploded” in the two centuries prior.<sup>55</sup> On 1 January 1852, slavery in Panama, and in all of Colombian territory, was abolished.<sup>56</sup> Despite the already large numbers of blacks living in coastal and riverine regions of Colombia proper, Colombians came to call Panama their “black province.”<sup>57</sup> The years 1855-85 were notable for the rise of liberal black factions that Szok calls the “Black Liberal Party.” These groups agitated for a less closed political climate that would benefit the country’s black and racially mixed populations.<sup>58</sup> However, these leaders did not have an explicitly racialized consciousness; they articulated their struggle in terms that were more populist or class-based than race-based.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the absence of formal and overt racial politicking among blacks, racist attitudes among elite whites continued unabated throughout this period. Justo Arosemena,

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<sup>50</sup> I employ Peter Szok’s periodization here.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Szok, *Wolf Tracks: Popular Art and Re-Africanization in Twentieth-Century Panama* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 20.

<sup>52</sup> An ethnic group of mixed African and European background. They speak an English-lexified creole language known as Guari-Guari and practice Protestantism.

<sup>53</sup> Michael L. Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal: Panama, 1904-1981* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>54</sup> Szok, *Wolf Tracks*, 19.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> de Goodin, *Afrodescendientes*, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Conniff, *Black Labor*, 11

<sup>58</sup> Szok, 25.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

the scion of an elite nationalist family, declared in an 1846 article that Colombia's black, indigenous, and Spanish inhabitants were the "three most indolent races."<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding, the 1849 California gold rush provided the impetus for the construction of the Panama railroad in 1850, which was completed using imported labor from Jamaica. This marked the start of the free migration<sup>61</sup> of West Indians to Panama which would continue throughout the 1920s.<sup>62</sup> During the era of the French Canal attempt of the 1880s, 50,000 West Indians migrated to Panama; some of these remained until 1904 when the United States began its own canal project. The thousands of Antilleans who migrated to Panama possessed an insular consciousness as Barbadians, Jamaicans, and Antiguans, as well as an explicitly raced consciousness.<sup>63</sup> Putnam argues that West Indians demonstrated this consciousness and articulated their grievances through the establishment of a black press.

Putnam argues that these black English-language papers were able to endure first because Antilleans in Panama were literate, much more so than their compatriots back home, or the locals in the receiving countries to which they went.<sup>64</sup> They brought this literate tradition with them to Panama. Such papers included the *Central American Express* (founded in 1905 in Bocas del Toro, Panama), *the Belize Independent*, *the Panama Workman*, *the Panama Tribune*, and *the Limón Searchlight* (Costa Rica), among others. In light of the almost monoracial nature of the West Indian community in Central America, and due to the Jim Crow segregation practiced in the Canal Zone and on UFC banana plantations, Putnam argues that these periodicals came to speak "from an explicitly raced position."<sup>65</sup> West Indians in Harlem, London, and Paris founded similar

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>61</sup> Although free people continued to arrive in Bocas throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the genesis of Bocatorean Creole society is due to slavery, and thus I make the distinction between free and unfree West Indian migration.

<sup>62</sup> Conniff, *Black Labor*, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: The University North Carolina Press, 2013), 128.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 132. Although the West Indies are home to many ethnicities and racial groups, the overwhelming majority of migrants to Central America were black.



papers not only to connect them to each other and their islands of origin, but also to serve as vehicles for denouncing racism and demonstrating the worth of the community in their new societies.<sup>66</sup> These black-owned newspapers also saw the circulation of news and ideas about Garveyism, racial pride, religious sentiment, and most importantly, black unity instead of insular factionalism.<sup>67</sup> These ideas were linked to contemporary (mid-1920s) calls for self-government in the British West Indies which newspapermen such as Sydney Young supported.<sup>68</sup>

I want to suggest that these diverse newspapers were not only attempts at collective self-making by black diasporic travelers, banana pickers, and newspapermen, but that, examined in the Panamanian context, they also signify a black consciousness that had started to wane since the days of Afro-Catholic brotherhoods and maroon *palenques*.<sup>69</sup> The West Indian presence there served not only as a demographic “re-Africanization”<sup>70</sup> of the country, but also made Panama an important node in the internationalization of black identity. I employ re-Africanization in two senses. The first is in a simple racial sense; the number of African-descended people increased in Panama during the era of migration from the Antilles. The second and more profound way concerns the articulation of an explicitly racialized identity.<sup>71</sup> Bedward, Garvey, and the Rastas all saw black people as oppressed under a racist system. Indeed, the isthmus was historically a place of racial consciousness and self-awareness for West Indian people. Alexander Bedward was living in Colón when he received a vision to return to Jamaica to “save the souls of his people,” thus launching the eponymous movement, marked by his personal leadership, physical healing, and immersion in the Mona River, just north of

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>69</sup> The *Congo* endonym aside, the lack of racialized solidarity by the black liberal parties that Szok profiles is probably the biggest indicator that black consciousness had retreated in Panama.

<sup>70</sup> Using popular art to make his case, Szok argues that contemporary Panama is undergoing a period of cultural re-Africanization. If he is correct, then this chapter demonstrates that it is merely the latest iteration of former Africanization trends that have waxed and waned with various generations.

<sup>71</sup> The mid-twentieth century iteration of this would be black power, but using that term for the period under consideration would be anachronistic.

Kingston.<sup>72</sup> He was arrested for charging that blacks should overthrow white rule in Jamaica.<sup>73</sup> Panama was also a site of Marcus Garvey's activism, marked by the establishment of Universal Negro Improvement Organization (UNIA) halls and sympathizers there.<sup>74</sup> UNIA's *Negro World* was read all over the hemisphere, including Panama.<sup>75</sup> Although all three were distinct, the Bedwardite, Garveyite, and Rastafari movements were concerned with the redemption and vindication of black modern subjects, though the grammar and vocabulary employed sometimes differed. Racism and Jim Crow segregation in the Canal Zone and United Fruit Company plantations provided part of the impetus for the re-Africanization process, and the black press was a vehicle to that end.<sup>76</sup> Jim Crow aside, the West Indians in Panama, particularly the Jamaicans during the early twentieth century, possessed what Price (2009) calls "a morally configured black identity" that had been in development since the days of slavery and the injustices of the post-emancipation era.<sup>77</sup><sup>78</sup> All three movements were able to tap into the same "moral economies of Blackness."<sup>79</sup> They were either birthed or came of age during the period of Jamaican migration to Panama. According to Rasta Nini, one of the pioneers of Panamanian *Reggae en Español*:

*Rastafarianism was born in the Republic of Panama, in the province of Colón. Marcus Garvey worked during the building of the canal as a journalist, and he fought for better wages as a trade unionist. At that time wages were set according to the so-called Silver Roll for the blacks and the Gold Roll for the whites. It was here that he met prophets like Freddie Douglass. They foretold that a black king would come from the east who would free the black race from its suffering. And*

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<sup>72</sup> Noel Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology*. (University Press of Florida, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 27. The Bedwardites were in fact Revivalists, distinguished from other coreligionists by the fact that they followed Bedward.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 131. According to Putnam, Garvey visits Panama briefly in 1910 after leaving Limón while en route to New York

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica*. (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 43.

<sup>78</sup> Price also notes throughout the book that many of the early Rastas, including some of his informants, were Bedwardites before converting to Rastafari, and many of them held Garvey in high regard.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

*this emperor would be called Haile Selassie I. All that happened here. Then Garvey returned to Jamaica and preached what the others had taught him.*<sup>80</sup>

Thus Panama figures prominently in this particular tale of origin for Rastafari and global black culture, as the country was important for the “transnationalization” of working-class black life.<sup>81</sup> The Revivalists, Garveyites, and Rastas represent a popular and internationalist black radical tradition of the period under analysis here. Perhaps more so than any other period in black Panamanian history, the diaspora openly articulated itself as a “counterculture of modernity.”<sup>82</sup>

The elite response to the arrival of West Indian migrants was one of horror, nostalgia, and racism. Black intellectuals and the black public constituted themselves as diasporic citizens in the early twentieth century via the black press, warriors in the battle for racial uplift (Garveyites), or as people in bondage awaiting a black messiah (Rasta). Alternatively, Panamanian statemakers responded to the demographic increase of blacks in their country by a repositioning of the nation’s values in the *interior*,<sup>83</sup> as opposed to the terminal cities of Panama and Colón and the periphery of Bocas, which had suddenly been “contaminated” by thousands of racially inferior and culturally incompatible West Indians. Octavio Méndez Pereira, a Panamanian statesman and novelist, is an example of this elite reactionary xenophobia. His novel, *Nuñez de Balboa el Tesoro de Dabaibe*, locates the literary genesis of the Panamanian nation in a fictitious romance between Balboa and Anayansi, an indigenous noblewoman with whom Balboa falls in love.<sup>84</sup><sup>85</sup> In the literary imagination of Pereira, the mestizo, who is symbolized by the harmonious

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<sup>80</sup> Christoph Twickel, “Reggae in Panama: Bien Tough,” in *Reggaeton*, eds. Racquel Z. Rivera, Wayne Marshall, Deborah Pacini Hernandez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 84.

<sup>81</sup> Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 139.

<sup>82</sup> A phrase that I borrow from Chapter One of Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Rasta, even though it embodies a millenarian back-to-Africa ethos is thoroughly modern insofar as it responds to and rejects such modern phenomena as racial capitalism, wage labor, and the nation-state.

<sup>83</sup> Specifically, the provinces of Los Santos, Veraguas, and Herrera. These are the provinces imagined to have little to no African influences, despite the presence of African slaves.

<sup>84</sup> Szok, *Wolf Tracks*, 66.

<sup>85</sup> To this day, Anayansi is a popular girls’ name in Panama.

union of Balboa and Anayansi, is charged with liberating Latin America and creating a new civilization in the region.<sup>86</sup> Méndez Pereira provides a convenient national history for Panamanian elites that romanticizes the Spanish conquest and excludes blacks from the nation's genesis or contemporary constitution, thus declaring that Panama is a mestizo country and that blacks have no place in it. The 1930s in Panama were demarcated by an increased diasporic awareness among black West Indians, and a rural mestizo nostalgia among statemakers. The *Negros Coloniales* did not see themselves as belonging to the same community as West Indians, and in fact they were separated from their West Indian counterparts by language, religion, and institutions.<sup>87</sup>

By the late 1920s, there remained between 50 and 60,000 West Indians in Panama who formed a unique subculture that was an amalgamation of British, West Indian, American, and Panamanian folkways and habits.<sup>88</sup> Again, the black press reveals this initial trend towards a localization of black identity. While the *Panama Tribune*, whose motto was “dedicated to the West Indians and the Panama Canal,” began printing in 1928, the *Workman*, whose motto was “Learn all the important happenings in your West Indian [island] home,” ceased publication in 1930.<sup>89</sup> This is indicative of the wider shift among West Indians in Panama from insular Caribbean identities to a West Indian-Panamanian one, and it is perhaps the most significant change in black identity in Panama during the period 1821-1946.

The twin pillars of Panamanian nationalism during and after construction of the canal would be anti-black racism and anti-American sentiment. “The huge West Indian black community reminded the Panamanians constantly of their compromised aspirations and their impotence in dealing with the United States. The West Indians often became scapegoats.”<sup>90</sup> A 1926 law by the Panamanian National Assembly to block Black

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>87</sup> West Indians brought their religious institutions and fraternal lodges to Panama with them.

<sup>88</sup> Trevor O' Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship: The Evolution of Black West Indian Society in Panama 1914-1964* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 147.

<sup>89</sup> Conniff, *Black Labor.*, 68.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 176

immigration was the first in a series of bills that culminated in the 1941 constitution that de-naturalized the children of West Indians in Panama (the measure was later reversed).<sup>91</sup> Despite this measure, the authorities did not forcibly deport any West Indians,<sup>92</sup> and president de la Guaria abrogated the 1941 constitution in 1944.<sup>93</sup> This constitution marked the height of organized and formal political expressions of xenophobia and antiblack racism. The black press served as a response to the pressures to which black immigrants were subjected. The *Panama Tribune* would eventually become the lead voice advocating for the West Indian community in the early to mid-twentieth century. Regarding the first anniversary of the *Panama American's* West Indian Section, "Sidney Young, a Jamaican-born journalist, explained that the page's reason for being was to "refute the charges that we are a backward people here, that we are shiftless and incompetent, and that we are a charge on the government of the republic. We will prove that we are a valuable asset to the country, that we have added to its material wealth, economic progress and cultural advancement."<sup>94</sup>

Although West Indians in Panama would not fully lose their diasporic commitments, they directed their attention after 1941 to making a life in their Panamanian home and winning acceptance from their host country and fellow citizens. A separate West Indian-Panamanian racial consciousness developed and the peak of legal and overt xenophobia had passed. Racially based organizing and politicking was almost entirely a West Indian affair, and the *Negro Colonial* was largely absent from this.

This period of the black diaspora in Panama was marked by a rise of a West Indian subculture in Bocas del Toro and then in the provinces of Panamá and Colón. The identities of Antilleans in this period were numerous and diffuse- Jamaican, Haitian, Antiguan, St. Lucian, and Bocatorean Creole. Eventually, a localized West Indian identity arose that displaced these insular Caribbean ones. The West Indian communities

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<sup>91</sup> Conniff, *Black Labor*, 65.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

in Colón, Panama City, and Bocas del Toro maintained active economic and cultural links with other such communities in the Antilles, Limón, Bluefields, the United States, and England.<sup>95</sup>

### **Assimilation, Canal Treaties, and the American Invasion (1941-1989)**

In the period following President de la Guardia's abrogation of the 1941 constitution, West Indians increasingly integrated into national life. Nevertheless, the presence of the Canal Zone, which served as a reminder that Panamanians did not exercise full sovereignty over their territory, impeded integration, as did latent and overt racism from ordinary Panamanians.<sup>96</sup> By the mid-1940s, the West Indian community in Panama had 10-15,000 Antillean-born individuals, 60-70,000 first generation Panamanians, and 20,000 second generation Panamanians.<sup>97</sup> The dense network of West Indian civil life comprised of Protestant churches, lodges, and private schools saw both their zenith and decline during this time.<sup>98</sup> Leaders and private citizens within the West Indian community also debated what kind of politics they would pursue. Some held that assimilation would be the best route; this entailed marrying Hispanics, converting to Catholicism, speaking Spanish instead of English, and using skin lighteners and hair straighteners.<sup>99</sup> Others in the community believed that assimilation would force West Indians to lose their unique identity; George Westerman, the director of the Panama Tribune, chose a middle path between these two options.<sup>100</sup> Although West Indians would be courted by later leaders (e.g. Torrijos, Noriega) they would never comprise a solid, reliable, and politically powerful voting bloc.<sup>101</sup> A provision of the 1955 treaty between the United States and Panama permitted many West Indian Panamanians to immigrate to New York, causing a brain drain; they were some the most talented individuals in the

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<sup>95</sup> Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 36-37.

<sup>96</sup> Conniff, *Black Labor*, 176.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

West Indian community.<sup>102</sup> Some went to work or study while others signed up for military service in the Korean War. By 1965 3,000 Panamanians had enlisted, and New York alone was home to 15,000 Panamanians.<sup>103</sup> This new age saw the genesis of a thrice-diasporic people- first Africans in the Caribbean, then West Indians in Panama, and finally Panamanians in America.

During the 1970s, the West Indian subculture declined further on the isthmus. Many of the canal laborers passed, few ethnic West Indians in Panama had visited the islands, and most were bilingual, in contrast to the English monolingualism of earlier years.<sup>104</sup> In the 1960s, island-specific fraternal groups and social organizations also began to close.<sup>105</sup> In 1968, young West Indians formed the Afro-Panamanian Union in Colón and the Afro-Panamanian Association in Panama City in order to unify the *Colonial* and West Indian communities. I interpret this too as a shift toward a more national, rather than “particular” articulation of blackness, wherein the West Indian and *Colonial* identities, at least at the level of political discourse, begin to compete with an *Afro-Panamanian* identity.

The government of Omar Torrijos took advantage of the historical moment to redefine West Indians as Afro-Panamanians.<sup>106</sup> In 1972 Westerman closed the *Panama Tribune*, marking the end of an era for the West Indian press. However the apparent decline of the subculture did not necessarily portend an end to an explicitly raced consciousness; in the late 1960s Afro hairstyles, Swahili robes and the ephemera of the Black Power movement in Panama gained currency among younger people.<sup>107</sup> This does not mean that the black communities in Panama were united. A *Colonial*, Juan Materno Vásquez, published a 1974 book stating that the West Indians could not fit in to Panamanian society without assimilation, and that all ethnic groups had to conform to the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 165

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

national Iberian-derived culture.<sup>108</sup> Meanwhile, the Panamanian diaspora in New York carried on a ratification campaign for the Torrijos-Carter treaty which would eventually return the canal to Panamanian control and which impressed their mestizo counterparts.<sup>109</sup> The era after the revocation of the 1941 constitution and leading up to the US invasion saw the decline of the West Indian culture in Panama, particularly in the use of traditional languages,<sup>110</sup> insular benevolent societies, and religious practices. This was not a “natural” phenomenon that was destined to occur with the passage of time; it was the logical outcome of Panamanian racism that incentivized West Indians to surrender their peculiar characteristics in order to assimilate to the dominant culture. The Afro-Panamanian diaspora, largely comprised of West Indians, consolidated itself in the United States but still played an active role in Panamanian political life. Yet, despite their contributions to Panamanian politics, West Indians would continue to experience marginal citizenship.

### **Diaspora in the Neoliberal Era (1989-Present)**

George Priestly and Alberto Barrow’s (2009) appraisal of the black movement in Panama reveals a diverse and heterogeneous assembly of social, cultural, and religious groups, falling under the leadership of the National Coordinating Committee of Black Panamanian Organizations.<sup>111</sup> In another article (2003), they refer to the 1970s and 1980s as the “apogee”<sup>112</sup> of West Indian political activity, and it is their contention that the movement needs to be revitalized in order to confront the economic and racial issues in contemporary society.<sup>113</sup> The American invasion of Panama in 1989 marked a turning

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>110</sup> Although Conniff focuses mostly on the culture of British West Indians, I make the same argument for French West Indian culture. The French-lexified creole of Panama is near moribund and in my three trips to the country, I have only met one person who spoke the language and I have never heard it spoken in public. PCE use, and transmission though on the decline, is much more robust.

<sup>111</sup> George Priestly and Alberto Barrow, “The Black Movement in Panama: A Historical and Political Interpretation, 1994-2004,” in *New Social Movements in the African Diaspora: Challenging Global Apartheid*, eds. Manning Marable and Leith Mullings. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 49.

<sup>112</sup> *Apogeo*, in the original text

<sup>113</sup> George Priestly and Alberto Barrow, “The Black Movement in Panama,” 50.



point in the bilateral relationship, but more importantly, it had disastrous effects on the largely black and brown populations of Colón, Chorrillo, and San Miguelito. The residents, who were already in a precarious situation due to the structural adjustment policies of the Noriega regime, were also adversely affected by the American military incursion, which also destroyed much of the existing popular movements and set the country firmly on a neoliberal economic trajectory.<sup>114</sup> In the aftermath of the invasion, the government jailed, killed, or persecuted brown and black activists, and many who were not were subsequently co-opted into partisan politics.<sup>115</sup> In their examination of the period under consideration (1994-2004), Priestly and Barrow contend that the movement was initially marked by fragmentation, disorganization, and limited organizational capacity, as well as the disappearance of pre-existing black organizations and the appearance of others.<sup>116</sup> The movement began to show signs of political maturity in the early 2000s as evidenced by the passage of anti-discrimination laws, recognition of the Black Ethnicity Day, and participation by Panamanian activists in the UN Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerances in Durban.<sup>117</sup>

The authors assert the need for a deepening of the current movement, and the importance of reaching out to working-class blacks, as the movement is currently represented by the middle class.<sup>118</sup> More importantly, they argue that one persistent shortcoming of black organizations is that they do not have any sustained or robust critiques of the neoliberal project, which adversely affects black, indigenous, and other marginalized populations. They contend that issues such as affordable housing, cost of living, utilities and transportation, criminal justice system, racial, gender, and sexual stigmatization need to become more prominent on the political agenda. Aside from the political program, Priestly and Barrow also maintain that black organizations need to be

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 56-7.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 49.

truly autonomous and wean themselves from the control and patronage of political parties in order to “preserve its autonomy, credibility, and effectiveness.”<sup>119</sup> Perhaps most significantly from an historical perspective, the current movement has managed to somewhat repair the breaches between West Indians and *Negros Coloniales*, at least at the level of formal political organization.

### **Conclusion**

My periodization is, of itself, a fairly conventional historiographical approach. What I believe is salient and distinguishing here is my emphasis on the interpellation, self-making, and activism of black Panamanian populations as my guiding measure for dividing the last five centuries of Afro-Panamanian history. By focusing on the various articulations of blackness throughout Panamanian history I center the black experience in my reading of the past and present. The current iteration of the black movement in Panama has made substantive progress since the American invasion, and has won important concessions from the government. The challenges that Priestly and Barrow lay out are indeed formidable, and the success of the black movement is by no means guaranteed.

The debate between Priestly and Barrow on one side, and Carlos Russell on the other reflects the differing notions of diaspora that contemporary Afro-Panamanians have. Although blacks have engaged in self-making as Afro-Panamanians since the 1960s, this term raises some questions regarding the communities’ relationships among the various sub-groups as well as with the state. The Afro-Panamanian community is internally diverse: does the emergence and possible predominance of this identity (over *Colonial* and West Indian) imply cultural loss or homogenization between the two groups, or is this merely a strategic move for political unity? Césaire asks the rhetorical question “We can renounce our patrimony. We can renounce our heritage. But do we have the right to renounce the struggle?”<sup>120</sup> Priestly and Barrow (2003) suggest that the

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>120</sup> Aime Césaire, “What is Negritude to Me?” in *African Presence in the Americas*, ed. Carlos Moore, Tanya R. Saunders, Shawna Moore. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1995), 18.

struggle against racial discrimination and economic inequality is what should matter to Afro-Panamanians, and they give issues of culture, patrimony, and heritage short shrift, believing that it is precisely engagement with the struggle for full citizenship that takes predominance and that adherence to traditional notions of West Indian culture is not only of little importance, but that it is potentially divisive and essentialist.<sup>121</sup> I read in Priestly and Barrow a politics that is committed to the place of Afro-Panamanians in the nation-state while simultaneously serving as a sort of counterculture in the sense that Gilroy (1993) deploys.<sup>122</sup> This is similar to Spillers' (2006) idea of black culture as "the reclamation of the critical edge," and as opposition to oppression.<sup>123</sup>

Carlos Russell, on the other hand, privileges a diasporic consciousness above a national one. "As a man of African-Caribbean cultural extraction; born in Panama and matured in the U.S., I am fully cognizant of the diasporic nature of my being. As such, I will not permit myself to be lulled into believing that I am a national of a nation in which my people are despised and have no power."<sup>124</sup> For Russell, Barrow and Priestly's commitment to the nation state is antithetical to a true commitment to wider diasporic citizenship. His conception of the black diaspora comes close to that articulated by Iton, who imagines diaspora as a culture of dislocation and alternative location to the nation-state,<sup>125</sup> and he believes that the imaginative and fantastic power of the black diaspora is lost once it allows itself to be captured by the nation-state. In this respect, I fall firmly on Russell's side of the debate, while fully understanding that the nation-state must be contended with if the black movement in Panama is to be successful in achieving greater representation and concessions from the state.

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<sup>121</sup> George Priestly and Alberto Barrow, *Piel Oscura Panamá: Ensayos y Reflexiones al Filo del Centenario*, (Panama City: La Universidad de Panamá, 2003), 265.

<sup>122</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>123</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, "The Idea of Black Culture," *The New Centennial Review* vol. 6, no. 3 (2006): 26.

<sup>124</sup> Carlos Russel, *The Last Buffalo: Are Panamanians of Caribbean Ancestry an Endangered Species?* (Charlotte, NC: Conquering Books, 2003), 10.

<sup>125</sup> Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200.

This review of black Panamanian history reveals several articulations of black thought and action. In the colonial period, this is mainly expressed through the memory of African nations (e.g. Congo), resistance to enslavement via the formation of maroon communities, and the creation of Afro-catholic brotherhoods. In the era of nationalism and canals, Panamanian elites view black populations as a social contaminant that is antithetical to the values of the myth of *mestizaje*. Members of the diaspora express themselves through the language of black (inter)nationalism through Garveyism and the black press. From 1941-89, diasporic consciousness as West Indians or Garveyites is sidelined, though never fully abandoned, in favor of an Afro-Panamanian identity that seeks accommodation with and acceptance from the nation-state. A tension between two schools of thought characterizes the present moment. There are Panamanians who see their community in terms of a dislocation<sup>126</sup> vis à vis and alienation from the nation state, as expressed by Carlos Russell. This position advocates robustly for maintaining West Indian culture against encroaching Hispanicization. The second camp, which Priestly and Barrow represent, is less focused on West Indian culture and more focused on championing a national Afro-Panamanian identity. They also emphasize the struggle against economic exclusion and neoliberalism. How black Panamanians will define themselves and what kinds of politics will ultimately prevail is an open-ended question, although it appears that the current movement is leaning towards the position advocated by Priestly and Barrow.

Revivalists have been in Panama since the 1890s and have thus had to contend with many of the hardships described above that the Panamanian state and American authorities inflicted upon them. They, too, are struggling to navigate the shifting discourses on black identity and Panamanian-ness. For their part, most of my informants identify as West Indians, as racially black, and as Panamanian. “Afro-Panamanian” is either not in their vocabulary, or is a sub-optimal descriptor. They value their religion, foods, customs, and English language as things which their Antillean forebears

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<sup>126</sup> I borrow the term “dislocation” from Richard Iton

bequeathed to them; these are constituent elements of their blackness, without which their community would cease to exist. During my research they expressed that they were aware that their Panamanian West Indian culture was different from that in the Antilles, and we discussed these various idiosyncrasies at length. However, they ultimately see themselves as preserving their ancestral patrimony. The pride that they derive from being cultural standard-bearers is accompanied by numerous tensions and anxieties regarding the future of their community and its viability in a society where blackness is subordinate and the memory of the West Indies grows increasingly dim. In the following and final chapters I will elaborate on these themes of cultural preservation and resistance.

## Chapter Two: All the Way from Africa Land: Religious Life in the Antilles and Panama

In this chapter, I develop not only the history of West Indian religion in Panama but also the establishment and growth of the Spiritual-Revival churches, discussing nomenclature, organization, theology and cosmology. I hope that this initial study, along with R.S. Bryce-Laporte's important but dated (1970) ethnography of Revival, will provide further fodder for sustained and critical study of Panamanian Revivalism, and the religious lives of ethnic West Indians more broadly. I opened my study of the Spiritual-Revival churches by posing six research questions that I had at the outset of my fieldwork:

1. Are there still Spiritual-Revival churches in the Republic of Panama?
2. What is the ethnic composition of Spiritual-Revival congregations?
3. What do the churches believe?
4. What are their rites, rituals, and relations with other belief systems in Panama?
5. To what extent in the tradition disappearing, declining, or changing?
6. How do the churches conceive of their relationship to wider Panamanian society?

Here, I address questions one through six, although I develop the last question more in the following chapter. In doing so, I make several arguments. The first is that the Revival churches of Panama were and are transnational institutions led and maintained by dedicated individuals who preached their gospel and performed their spiritual work under conditions of duress, discrimination, and pressure to assimilate to the dominant mestizo culture.<sup>127</sup> Another is that contemporary Revivalists are undergoing a period of consolidation and cooperation not only in terms of church governance, but also in terms of re-evaluating old orthodoxies and establishing new ones. The bulk of my analysis examines how Panamanian Revivalists, a religious minority within an embattled ethnic

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<sup>127</sup> I detail that assimilationist pressure in Chapter One.

minority, negotiate their place within the larger Christian community and the Panamanian nation.

In order to historicize and the significance of the Spiritual-Revival churches, it is necessary to trace the movement of people and ideas from Africa, Europe, and North America to the West Indies, and ultimately to Panama. None of the West Indian denominations were originally established in Panama; they were transplanted by Antilleans from their societies of origin. This of course does not preclude the possibility of further bricolage, syncretism, or institutional change in Panama. Furthermore, since Panama was merely one stop in the circuitous route of twentieth century Caribbean migration, I cannot claim that all practices in Panamanian Revival are mere retentions from Jamaica; it is possible that Revivalists developed certain practices in Panama that returning migrants brought those innovations to Jamaica. Indeed, it is unlikely that the movement of ideas would be linear when the migratory currents were circular and cyclical.

The plantation societies of the West Indies were multi-confessional, although in each of the islands, the established church was that of the metropole. The Anglican church was the state church in England, but many other denominations were active during the years leading up to and following emancipation in the colonies including the Moravians, Baptists, Wesleyan Methodists, and Plymouth Brethren.<sup>128</sup> Those islands with a French colonial past like Grenada, St. Lucia, Dominica, and Trinidad, as well as the territories of Martinique and Guadeloupe, which remained under French control, had Catholic majorities. Enslaved and indentured Africans brought their various religions. Perhaps the most widespread is Obeah, practiced in many of the English and French-official territories. Afro-creole religions such as Myal, Revival Zion and Pukkumina in Jamaica, the Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad, Tobago, St. Vincent, and Grenada, and the Jordanites in Guyana, also developed in-situ. In the post-emancipation era, indentured laborers from Central and West Africa developed the Kumina and Orisha traditions in

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<sup>128</sup> Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 52.

Jamaica and Trinidad respectively. These faiths would come to influence the Afro-Creole churches.<sup>129</sup> However, since Jamaicans brought the Spiritual-Revival faith to Panama, I focus my following analysis on Jamaica.

Although fewer than ten percent of Jamaican slaves were evangelized upon abolition in 1838,<sup>130</sup> by the time that migration to the isthmus occurred in earnest in the 1880s, most Jamaicans would have been associated with some kind of church, and this was true of migrants from other islands as well. Catholic priests from the French Antilles ministered to laborers from Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>131</sup> There were also small numbers of Jamaican Catholics who immigrated and established churches such as San Vicente de Paul.<sup>132</sup> Many of the aforementioned denominations established large congregations, schools, and missionary efforts, and many of those Panamanian churches persist to this day; several are bilingual.

### **From Jamaican Myal to Panamanian Revival**

Having discussed the larger religious environment of the West Indian community in Panama, I must address the diachronic, spiritual, and historical genealogy of Panamanian Spiritual-Revival churches. The Spiritual-Revival faith is the most recent manifestation of Afro-Creole religion in Jamaica, specifically the *Myal*, tradition. According to Stewart, Myal was a type a religion marked by the Myal dance, and introduced by Obeah-men, ritual specialists that Jamaicans sought out for their esoteric knowledge.<sup>133</sup> Although Myal, Obeah, and Revival are distinct traditions, there is a measure of overlap, as I discuss below.<sup>134</sup> Stewart argues that in the past Obeah had a wide variety of uses which included building solidarity, divination, healing, and

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>131</sup> Conniff, *Black Labor*, 18.

<sup>132</sup> George Westerman, *Los Inmigrantes Antillanos en Panama* (George Washington Westerman, 1980), 58.

<sup>133</sup> Dianne Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 35.

<sup>134</sup> Many Revivalists repudiate any such association with Obeah while acknowledging that there are some leaders who mix the two traditions. Barrett (1976) observed this in his fieldwork in Jamaica. Stewart (2005), among others, delineates extensively the historical connections between Myal and Revival.



protection, despite the contemporary idea among Jamaicans (and the idea among White observers in the past) that Obeah is malevolent sorcery.<sup>135</sup> She suggests that Afro-Jamaican religions, like most traditional religions in Africa, had a much more nuanced view of divine power when compared to the Manichaean view of European Christianity. Possible etymologies of “obeah” abound; Joseph Williams and Leonard Barrett have proposed *obayifo/bayi* (Twi), Cassidy and LePage suggested *ubio* (Efik), and Orlando Patterson offered *obeye* (Twi) as respective etymons.<sup>136</sup> It is this moral ambivalence that led Patterson to propose *obeye* as the root of Obeah, since the Twi word signifies “moral neutrality.”<sup>137</sup> Stewart, citing the work of Fu-Kiau Bunseki links the Jamaican Myal to the Kikongo *miela*, which among other things is linked to the “breath and energy of plant life.”<sup>138</sup> Indeed, in Myal and other Bantu religious traditions, rituals involved trees or took place near them.<sup>139</sup> Similarly, the Spiritual-Revival churches in contemporary Panama worship in fixed structures, but it was not always so; congregations formerly held services outdoors in what my informants called “wilderness services.”

Edmonds and Gonzalez (2010) maintain that the distinction Jamaicans made between Obeah and Myal was a retention of the African distinction between malicious and antisocial witches and wizards, and the healing activities of medicine men and women.<sup>140</sup> They contend that although there were many similarities between the two, Myal was a communal form of religious practice, while Obeah was an individual practice between a supplicant and a practitioner for malevolent ends.<sup>141</sup> Although they positively appraise Stewart’s work, it is here that their contention with her is strongest. They see Obeah and Myal as distinct, whereas Stewart views them as part of the same historical

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>140</sup> Edmonds, Ennis Barrington, and Gonzalez, Michelle A. *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction*. New York: (New York University Press, 2010), 123.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 124-25.

complex, even referring to the traditions jointly as “Myal-Obeah” at one point.<sup>142</sup> Their opposing positions reflect two different readings of the sources; Stewart sees the juxtaposition or conflation of Obeah and Myal as evidence that the traditions were mutually constitutive, while Edmonds and Gonzalez charge that the conflation of the two traditions in the archive reflects the ignorance of the European observer, and not the actual religious worldview of Africans and Creoles in Jamaica. According to Stewart, African Jamaicans at some point came to associate Obeah with malevolent spiritual power, although she is clear that this view is a “truncated and narrow reading of mystical power.”<sup>143</sup> She says that in the pre-emancipation (1838) period, Myal is always described as a component of Obeah and is never mentioned separately from it.<sup>144</sup> Edmonds and Gonzalez note, however, that if the antagonism between Obeah and Myal is not endemic, then the campaigns of Myalists against Obeah in the 1840s and 1850s are difficult to explain.<sup>145</sup> Although I cannot resolve the theoretical dispute among these authors, the line that Edmonds and Gonzalez draw between malicious (Obeah) and healing activities (Myal) neatly mirrors the distinction that my own informants draw between Revival and Obeah. In any case, it was outsiders who wrote the descriptions of Obeah and Myal that we have available today (and with which the scholars above reference); we do not know what initiates and practitioners of those traditions would have had to say about their spiritual work.

Despite the difficulty in disambiguating Obeah and Myal, the link between Revival and Myal comes into clearer focus in the late eighteenth century. Efforts to evangelize enslaved Jamaicans began in earnest in 1784 with the ministry of African-American Baptists George Leile and Moses Baker. In 1816 the Baptist Missionary Society sent missionaries to proselytize the slaves. This religious encounter gave rise to the Native Baptists in the 1830s, and it is from this group that Revival appears during the

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<sup>142</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes*, 144.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>145</sup> Edmonds and Gonzales, *Caribbean Religious History*, 123.

Great Revival of 1860-61.<sup>146</sup> This revival was an outgrowth of the North American revival in 1857, which by 1860 had spread all across Jamaica.<sup>147</sup>

Although Myal as a discrete form of corporate worship has all but disappeared in contemporary Jamaica, the Afro-Creole churches are a product of this encounter between missionary Baptists and Myalists.<sup>148</sup> Yet despite the Revivalists' use of the Bible, adoption of the sacrament of Baptism, and belief in Jesus Christ, Stewart says that it is essentially linked with Myal and the Native Baptists, traditions incorporating

*the beating of drums; a community of spirits, which are linked with the elements of nature; possession trance; animal sacrifice; ancestral veneration, and a strong belief in neutral mystical power. In short the cosmology, metaphysics, rituals and spirituality of Revival Zion are steeped in ancient African values about the world and human responsibility for preserving the continuity of life...it is the African religiosity as opposed to the Christian belief system that gives the religion its structure and purpose.*<sup>149</sup>

In her survey of the Jamaican religious experience, Stewart identifies six continuities between African religions on the continent and those in Jamaica. These are: a community of deities or invisible beings (communotheism), ancestral veneration, possession trance and mediumship, food offerings and animal sacrifice, divination and herbalism, and a strong belief in neutral mystical power.<sup>150</sup> These cosmological and ritual retentions have been observed by most scholars of Revival Zion, and strengthen the case for reading Revival as an African-derived religious tradition.

There is, however, the issue of Euro-Christian symbols and theological precepts present in Revival. Noel Erskine argues that these are merely superficial trappings to a clearly African faith. This raises the question as to what in fact was being revived during the 1860s in Jamaica. Two concurrent revivals were taking place, the first being that of the Anglo-Christian world, and the second in the Afro-Creole one that black Jamaicans

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<sup>146</sup> Stewart calls Native Baptists "Christian Myalists;" this appellation is unique to her.

<sup>147</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes*, 106.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

inhabited. Erskine, quoting Leonard Barrett in *Soul Force*, argues “How can the Great Revival be interpreted? Was it really a revival of Christianity? The answer is no. There was no Christianity to revive among the slaves...the Great Revival is thus better understood as a rejection of Christianity and a revival of the African force-vitale...what really took place was a forcible amalgamation of Christianity with the African ethos.”<sup>151</sup>

Nonetheless, Revivalists justify their practices as having Biblical support and consider themselves to be Christians,<sup>152</sup> even if their religions cosmology is fundamentally African, as Stewart asserts. Scholars divide Revival into two camps: Revival Zion and Pukkumina. The latter comes from the Kikongo “mumpoko,” a plant used in healing rituals in the Congo Basin.<sup>153</sup> Although the specific differences between the two sects have not been perfectly demarcated by scholars and are often muddled in the Jamaican vernacular, there are some general differences. Olive Lewin sees Zion and Poco (sic) as separate branches of “Revival.”<sup>154</sup> She notes that they are separated by the classes of spirits served<sup>155</sup> as well as the structure of songs, with Revivalist hymns being sung in triple time, and Pukkumina songs being sung in duple or quadruple time.<sup>156</sup> The Pukkumina sect serves the Holy Trinity, ground spirits, and fallen angels. The Zion sect serves only the Trinity, heavenly spirits, and the apostles and prophets; ground spirits and others are generally avoided.<sup>157</sup> She briefly describes Revival as a blend of Christian and West African elements,<sup>158</sup> and says that it includes “singing, dancing, instrumental and body percussion accompaniment, healing, divination and spirit possession as integral to rituals.”<sup>159</sup> Revivalists sing Christian hymns in their services and preach from the Bible as

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<sup>151</sup> Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley*, 26.

<sup>152</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes.*, 111.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>154</sup> Lewin, *Rock It Come Over*, 196.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>158</sup> She follows most scholars in attributing a West African cosmology to Revival, while Stewart emphasizes its Central African aspects.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

well.<sup>160</sup> As of the year 2000, she says that those who practice the Pukkumina variety of Revival have ceased to call themselves as such, since the name has been transformed through linguistic shift into “Pocomania,” giving rise to the etymology that the meaning of their sect is “little [poco] madness [mania].”<sup>161</sup> Although Stewart is attentive to the scholarly distinctions made, she questions whether bands of Revivalists *ever* applied the label “Poco” designation to themselves. Stewart cites an interview given by Seaga based on his research in the 1950s and 1960s where he states that he himself never found anyone who used the label “Poco,” even though his research has become the standard by which ethnographers of Revival Zion demarcate between Poco and Revival.<sup>162</sup> Based on this information, it is unsurprising that I did not find any congregations or leaders who employed “Poco” as an endonym. Like Simpson (1956), “I found no one who would unequivocally admit belonging to a Pocomania group; all claimed to be revivalists of one kind or another.”<sup>163</sup> Thus “Poco/Pukkumina” has acquired a negative connotation and it seems that this has been the case for several generations, although I do not know what historical process that led to this. The tension between Revival and Pukkumina seems similar to the relationship between Myal and Obeah, which I mentioned above.

I suspect that this shift has occurred because of the stigma attached to Pukkumina, and the idea that it is malevolent. According to one colleague who was raised in Portmore, Jamaica, residents erroneously referred to a nearby congregation as an “Obeah church.” Despite this, Obeah is not a Christian tradition like Pukkumina, nor does it employ corporate worship. In any case, my colleague could not say definitively whether the church was in fact of the Pukkumina or Zion sect. While Stewart, who sees Revivalism as a fundamentally African religion, might take no issue with such

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<sup>160</sup> These hymns are called “Sankeys,” which derive their name from Ira D. Sankey, a Methodist composer and hymn-writer.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 189. I myself was given this explanation by my mother when I inquired as to the meaning of Pocomania.

<sup>162</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes*, 271.

<sup>163</sup> George Eaton Simpson, “Jamaican Revivalist Cults,” *Social and Economic Studies* vol. 5 no. 4 (1956): 342

<sup>163</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes.*, 130.

designation, as her project aims for the recovery and revalorization of all African-derived forms of spirituality in Jamaica, there is great ignorance surrounding these practices in Jamaica today and these churches have not historically been “respectable” or prestigious. Notwithstanding, these religions were products of an Afro-Caribbean cultural reality, and they continued to remain so in Panama, adjusting further to meet the needs of West Indian people there.

### **Arrival of the Spiritual-Revival Churches in Panama**

#### **Captain Isaac Hall**

Putnam dates the presence of Revivalist churches in Panama to the late 1890s.<sup>164</sup> My informants generally agree with this chronology, and they credit the genesis of the Revival work in Panama to the ministry of a Jamaican, Captain Isaac Hall, also known as “Father Hall,” who legally established and registered his church with the Panamanian government on 10, January 1910. His church, Mt. Puro International Baptist # 1, was located on 22<sup>nd</sup> St., Guachapalí (also known as Marañón), and is now defunct. Several leaders in both Panama and Colón told me that this was the man that they associated with the arrival of the work in Panama. Since Jamaican migration to the isthmus was underway for several decades prior to his arrival, it is possible that there were individual Revivalists who settled or sojourned in Panama and either worshipped privately, or in the churches of other denominations. Often, Revivalists will meet in a home as a “praying band,” sometimes developing into a full church congregation, remaining as such, or dissipating. If Revival was present in Panama before Father Hall’s arrival, then it likely took this form.<sup>165</sup> Besides Panama City, he also ministered in Colón and it is likely that he traveled to Bocas and perhaps further up the Caribbean coast, following Caribbean settlements, to engage in preaching and proselytization. None of my informants had met

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<sup>164</sup> Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 57.

<sup>165</sup> I say that it is likely since all my informants credit him with establishing the religion in Panama and I could not find any older records than that of Panama Spiritual Center (1932). Therefore, whatever Revivalists may have been present in the country either did not register with the government or worshipped in private houses.

him personally, but several of them were mentored or introduced to the faith by people who had worked directly with him. His church started as a one-room meeting house, and as members attained ranks in the church, some branched off to form other one-room churches. These were formed mostly by women who were called by the title “Mother,” an appellation that exists to this day in Revival.

### **Establishment of Congregations**

According to my informants, the earliest churches on the Pacific side were located in or near the Canal Zone, in adjacent areas of Panama City. As I mentioned, Father Hall’s church was at 22<sup>nd</sup> St. Guachapalí, a traditionally West Indian neighborhood towards the western end of the city, heading towards the old Canal Zone.<sup>166</sup> Of the churches visited, the oldest is Panamá Spiritual Center, located at 7<sup>th</sup> street in Pueblo Nuevo, registered as a *personería jurídica* with the Panamanian government on 5 March, 1932 by the founder, Rev. Lillian Allen.<sup>167</sup> However, the church’s cornerstone has the founding date as 31 November, 1931. This leads me to believe that the church worshipped privately, likely in Rev. Allen’s house, for some time before. I was not able to interview the leader, so I cannot say with certainty if the congregation began in the zone, or if congregants had always worshipped in Pueblo Nuevo. The current pastor is the only mestizo leader of a Spiritual-Revival congregation in Panama that I am aware of.

The next church is St. Joseph’s Spiritual Episcopal Church, which Reverend Estella Lee founded in the Canal Zone town of Red Tank in 1934.<sup>168</sup> According to Pastor Oswaldo Gilpin, the current leader of the congregation, Mother Lee was Jamaican-born but raised in Panama. She established the church after returning to Panama from the United States. Sometime after its founding in Red Tank, the congregation moved to San Miguel, another neighborhood in Panama City not far from Guachapalí. At some point in the 1970s, the congregation moved to 10<sup>th</sup> St. Parque Lefevre. Throughout this period, the

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<sup>166</sup> This information comes from Bishop Ruthibell Livingson

<sup>167</sup> This comes from the church’s *personería juridical* located in the Archivo Nacional.

<sup>168</sup> This is according to the mother of the current pastor of St. Joseph’s, who used to attend the church in Red Tank. Pastor Gilpin himself claimed that the church was founded in Paraíso, another Zone town.

members worshipped in a house across the street from the current building. They finally acquired the present building in 1981. Formerly, the church was called St. Joseph's Spiritual Orthodox Church before assuming the current name. According to Pastor Gilpin the name change was purely administrative and financial. They were under a "board," and decided to stop financially supporting that collective of churches. When they did so, the then-leaders changed the name from "Orthodox" to "Episcopal." There was no change in rite, liturgy, or practice. Whatever this board was, it was not affiliated with the Orthodox Church,<sup>169</sup> and despite its name, St. Joseph's is completely autonomous and was never affiliated with the Episcopal Church, although the leaders do have good relations with Episcopal priests and use a modified version of the church liturgy. This is likely evidence of what Bryce-Laporte referred to as "the increasing evidence of Roman Catholic or Anglican High Church influence among the cults [sic]."<sup>170</sup>

The only church in Colón that I visited was San Martín de Porres Baptist Church, although there are at least three other churches in Colón and Cativá, just outside the city. According to Pastor Michael Brown, the current leader, the founder was a Mr. Rogelio Morgan, who I assume was Panamanian-born due to his Spanish first name. According to the cornerstone, the church was organized on 21 January 1957, and dedicated on 15 April 1984. However Pastor Brown said that the church was established in approximately 1972, when I asked. This may refer to the actual construction of the building, as the congregation obviously existed before then. Prior to the present location, which is on Calle Arosemena, between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> streets, they worshipped in various parts of Colón city.

Nueva Vida is located in Parque Lefevre at 11<sup>th</sup> st. and is led by Bishop Roberto Weir, who is the *Obispo Mayor*, or archbishop, of the association. According to my

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<sup>169</sup> There are however, Greek Orthodox churches in Panama. These are unrelated to St. Joseph's.

<sup>170</sup> R.S. Bryce-Laporte, "Crisis, Contraculture, and Religion Among West Indians in the Panama Canal Zone" in *Blacks and Blackness in Latin America*, edited by Norman E. Whitten, Jr. and Arlene Torres, 110. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998. Originally published in Norman E. Whitten, Jr. and John F. Szwed, eds., *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1970).



informants, the church was built within the last year, although I am not sure where the members met beforehand.

### **Cosmology, Theology, and Ritual Practice**

Having answered the first two questions regarding the continued existence and ethnic composition of Spiritual-Revival churches in Panama, I turn to questions three through five which focus on belief, ritual, and change. My discussion of Spiritual-Revival cosmology, theology, and ritual is an initial contribution to the study of the faith in contemporary Panama and is not exhaustive or authoritative. However, I hope to elucidate the unique and distinguishing features of the Revival work, those things that have traditionally made the Spiritual-Revival churches what they are, and which edify the spirit and the community.

### **Statements of Belief**

Thus far I have traced the growth and development of the Spiritual-Revival religion in Jamaica and explained how the faith arrived in Panama. My elaboration on the role that Myal and Christian missionaries played in the creation of the Spiritual-Revival churches foregrounds my discussion of Revival theology and practice. Having discussed the historical development of African and Afro-Creole religion in Jamaica and Panama, I now address the question of what Revivalists profess. Two texts, which serve as formal professions of faith, provide some initial answers. The first document is called “The Doctrines of the Association,” which the various churches comprising the Association have drafted and agreed to.<sup>171</sup> The second comes from St. Joseph’s, which the church reads weekly during the Sunday service.

The doctrines enumerated officially by the Association are similar to those espoused by Protestant churches in Panama. They are:

1. We believe the Bible is the inspired word of God (II Timothy 3:16)
2. We believe there is only one God in the universe

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<sup>171</sup> A bilingual copy of this document was graciously provided to me by Rev. Livingston.

- a. God is the source of life (Job 33:4, Ps. 36:9, Acts 17:24, 25)
  - b. God is Spirit (John 4:24, 1 Cor. 3:17)
  - c. God is love (1 John 4:8)
  - d. God is wisdom (Prov. 2:6, Rom. 11:33)
  - e. God is intelligence (Rom. 11: 33-36)
  - f. God is light (1 John 1:5)
  - g. God is power (Gen 17:1, Job 37:23, Rev. 16:14)
3. We believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified, and died, and buried. The third day, He arose from the dead, ascended to heaven, where he reigns as Lord and Master. (Luke 1:26-38, Luke 23:1-5, 50-56, 24:6, 50-51)
  4. We believe in the triune God- God the father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Matt. 24:19)
  5. We believe that repentance of sin, the confession of faith and baptism by immersion are prerequisites to the full fellowship of the Church.
  6. We believe that continual spiritual growth depends on the believer's exposure to the truth and his ability and willingness to claim these truths for himself. (John 15:1)
  7. We believe holiness to be the spiritual standard that God requires for His people. (II Timothy 1:9, Rom. 12:1, Eph. 1:4, Ez. 6:3)
  8. We believe God has provided spiritual sustenance for His people which can be attained through prayer and fasting and the laying on of hands. (Acts 17:26-27, Ps. 145:16)
  9. We believe in the help and protection of the angels of the Lord and that those who died in the Lord make up a great loud of witnesses.
  10. We believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the great judgment at the end of time, the eternal happiness of the believers and the eternal torment of the unbelievers.

St. Joseph's Declaration of Principles reads differently:

1. We believe in the everlasting life of the universal consciousness.
2. We believe God can express himself spiritually and materially, as all things are made and created by him.
3. We affirm that a correct understanding of these expressions and living in accordance with them constitute a true religion.
4. We affirm that the personal identity of any person or animated object continue after they have made the transition.
5. We believe in the communication with God, and those who live in the spirit world.

6. We believe that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
7. We affirm that man makes his own happiness or unhappiness as he disobeys nature’s laws.
8. We affirm that the doorway of reformation is never closed against any human soul, here or hereafter.

Although the Association’s document overlaps with the creeds of mainstream Protestantism and St. Joseph’s is more distinct, my interviews and participation in Spiritual-Revival services lead me to believe that the Afro-Christian cosmology of Spiritual-Revival churches is best understood through a joint reading of both documents. Neither text alone provides a sufficient perspective on Revivalist belief and practice. All my informants believe the doctrines outlined in the first document, whether their church is part of the Association or not. The first declaration reveals the similarities that the Spiritual-Revival churches have with other Christian groups; their beliefs on scripture, the Trinity, baptism, and the divinity of Jesus Christ match those of many Christian sects. Moreover, Revivalists view themselves as orthodox, though peculiar, Christians who are a part of the wider *ecclesia*.

However, St. Joseph’s document equally articulates much of what my informants expressed in our interviews or during services. For example, Revivalists believe in a multiplicity of spiritual powers (what Stewart calls *communotheism*); God, angels, and ancestors all inhabit the spiritual realm, and they are able to communicate with those who are alive. These declarations, along with Stewart’s enumeration of characteristics that African and Afro-diasporic religions share, help to contextualize the claims Revivalists make that their work is a fundamentally African work. They also reveal how and why they view themselves as Christians, with no conflict between their African-ness and their Christianity.

Both documents affirm the existence of God, the immortality of human souls, and the necessity of living in accordance with basic moral principles. Taking Stewart’s enumeration of common African and diasporic religious principles, several are absent: possession trance and mediumship, food offerings and animal sacrifice, divination and

herbalism, and a strong belief in neutral mystical power. Despite this lack of mention in either statement, possession trance, mediumship, divination, herbalism, and a belief in neutral mystical power are present to varying degrees among Revivalists. I did not witness food offerings or animal sacrifices during fieldwork, but this does not mean that Panamanians have not or do not currently engage in such practices. Finally, I do not want to imply that the Doctrines of the Association is a full and complete record of what each church in the Association believes. Rather, it likely reflects those beliefs which they hold in common and cannot account for the differences in practice or belief among various leaders.

### **Divine Community**

Revivalists believe in the existence of several kinds of Spirits. There is first the Holy Spirit, which is the only spirit that my informants work with. Then there are the spirits of the dead; they may be present during services, although they are never served or propitiated. There are also heavenly spirits, such as the spirits of the four angels who are represented by candles in the four corners of each church. These, too, are present, and although none of my informants invoked them, Pastor Brown informed me that some churches call upon the angels, such as the Archangel Michael, directly.<sup>172</sup> There are also earth-bound spirits; these are the spirits of fallen angels. According to Rev. Livingston the presence of these spirits distinguishes the Revival work from Pukkumina:

*There's no blood or rum here; that's Poco. They go down and come up. They roll on the ground. That's the moment you will know how it workin. If you use rum or blood you not invoking God's spirit. And Jesus neva use white rum yet. I not workin no earth-bound spirit. I work heavenly spirits. We are spiritual. We no work wid no fallen angel.*

Finally, there are other malevolent spirits that may not even have particular names or titles, but they possess the power to afflict the living. Mother Pet related to me a story

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<sup>172</sup> My informants did not mention the Old Testament prophets, like those of Simpson (1956), nor did they mention other spirits such as the fish, river maid, hunter, and dove, like Guano's (1993) informants.

about a *duende*<sup>173</sup> who had made her young son ill several decades before. The matter was resolved when one of her friends, a Revival Mother, cast the evil spirit out.

Both Pastors Gilpin and Brown disavowed the *invocation* (as opposed to the mere presence) of human spirits. Pastor Brown linked the invocation of human spirits with the use of hard liquor on the table:

*DH: So [you use] just a moderate amount of alcohol [for your crystal table].*<sup>174</sup>

*PB: Yes, I don't put alcohol. The only alcohol you would find is like the wine. Because what I've heard about from the ancient people is that when you use too much alcohol is because you going in a next order. You understand? And if I'm in the celestial realms, I'm only supposed to deal with the things of God. So if I'm dealing with the things of God, what I'm I doing with a big bokkle of rum on my table if I'm working God? When you using the next order that would be a man order, like for example, they're invoking man spirit. They would use rum if dem invoking dead people, things like that. I don't do these things.*

Simpson (1956) found that some of the spirits were associated with a particular color- red with the Archangel Gabriel, blue with the Archangel Michael, and white with Miriam, for example.<sup>175</sup> In my fieldwork, colors could be associated with a particular spirit, though informants usually explained them to me in terms of their attributes: green represented the earth, white stood for purity, orange signified prosperity, and purple/mauve was the highest spiritual color. Perhaps the one exception is the Archangel Michael journey; Pastor Brown runs the journey using red and green, which he says are Michael's colors.

## **Baptism**

Despite the differences in dress, style, or ritual practice that individual congregations may have, baptism is a universally practiced rite in the Spiritual-Revival faith, and it is the precondition for membership in a church.<sup>176</sup> Individuals must be able to consent to baptism, and while babies are dedicated and blessed shortly after birth, infant

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<sup>173</sup> She translated *duende* as “dwarf,” although the literal meaning would be closer to “imp” or “sprite.”

<sup>174</sup> Pastor Brown planned to have this table in mid-July. My fieldwork concluded before then, so I was not present for it and cannot speak about what it entails.

<sup>175</sup> Simpson, “Jamaican Revivalist Cults,” 361.

<sup>176</sup> Information in this subsection comes from Rev. Livingston, Bishop Barber, and Pastor Gilpin specifically.

baptism is unknown. Prior to baptism, individuals will usually receive instruction in the Bible from one of the leaders of the church.

In the churches of the association, members will “tarry a night” with the baptismal candidate, which is the name that they give to staying in a church overnight. The next day, the entire church accompanies those being baptized to the site. Traditionally, Revivalists baptized in the ocean or in a free flowing river- never at the head or foot of a stream. According to Pastor Brown, Revivalists in Colón would baptize in the ocean. Revivalists in Panama City would baptize either in the numerous rivers around the city, or in the ocean. Rev. Livingston and Bishop Barber were baptized in the rivers in Juan Díaz, and congregations in Guachapalí used to baptize in the Bay of Panama, near the current location of the *Mercado de Mariscos*. Although the entire church accompanies the candidates to the baptismal ground, the most important persons in a baptismal ceremony are the leader, shepherd, armor-bearer, and water mother. The shepherd leads the flock when traveling to the baptism ground. When it is time for baptism he goes into the water before the church leader and he “cuts” the water. He goes into the water while praying, and he finds a spot that is waist-deep. He then marks the spot with the long rod with the cross<sup>177</sup> and awaits the leader of the church to give instruction. The water mother assists the leader in baptizing; her attire is a blue dress and a blue or blue and white turban. One water mother will assist the leader while the other covers the candidate after the baptism. The leader of the church presides over the baptism and physically immerses the candidate in the water. Before immersion, the leader will ask the candidate for their favorite hymn, and the congregation will sing it. Revivalists also preach at baptism, and the leader makes a call for those who wish to be baptized right there, without any preparation or study. Revivalists call people who get baptized in this way “eunuchs,” after the Ethiopian eunuch in the New Testament who was baptized by the apostle Philip.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Rev. Livingston showed me a white staff in the shape of a cross that her attendant brought out. This is different than a crozier; it is merely a wooden cross.

<sup>178</sup> Acts 8:26-40.

Presently, the rivers of Panama City are unsuitable for bathing due to pollution and urbanization. Now, Revivalists must go to Pacora, a peri-urban area northeast of Panama City, if they wish to baptize in a river, and due to pollution the rivers there are not always suitable. Increasingly, Revivalists in Panama City baptize in tanks or pools adjacent to the church which are brought in specifically for that purpose. As the pace of urbanization increases in the Panama metro area, I suspect that river baptisms will become scarcer and the ceremony that I have described above will only be seen in Bocas or Colón, where suitable coasts and rivers abound.

### **Architecture**

Revivalist beliefs are also reflected in the construction of formal worship spaces. From the outside, Spiritual-Revival churches do not have any remarkable features apparent to the uninitiated; they are small to medium-sized buildings made from brick and mortar with tiled floors whose construction is indistinguishable from other small churches in Panama. The exception is St. Joseph's, whose roof is in the shape of a triangle which, according to Pastor Gilpin, represents the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The exterior of a Spiritual-Revival church, either in front or anywhere around the perimeter, may contain several plants used during services, either on the seal, altar, or on a table. These are generally the tree of life (known as leaf of life in Jamaica), Jeremiah plant (also called "croton"), chiney dragon (which comes in red and green), and the sword plant.<sup>179</sup>

The organization of space in Revival is used to attract the presence of spirits.<sup>180</sup> One feature that Panamanian churches do not seem to have is the center pole, which was a vertical pole located in the center of Revival churches. Older Revivalists believed that spirits used the center pole to "descend from the sky into the earth and then into the

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<sup>179</sup> In listed order, these plants are *Bryophyllum pinnatum*, *Codiaeum variegatum pictum*, *Dracaena fragrans*, and *Sansevieria trifasciata*

<sup>180</sup> Edmond sand Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History*, 133.

worshippers through their feet.”<sup>181</sup> None of the churches that I attended currently have a center pole, however.

### **Altar**

The interior of Spiritual-Revival churches is also imbued with sacred objects and spaces. Inside, there are usually two to three areas of folded out metal chairs (occasionally there are pews) where members sit. Common to all churches, with the exception of San Martín de Porres, is an altar at the back of the church. In front of the altar is the elevated platform where the bishop, preacher of the day, and other dignitaries sit. The altar usually contains a Bible, often open to the church’s “foundation lesson,” a passage of scripture given to the leader of the church in revelation by the Holy Spirit, usually at the moment of the church’s founding. The foundation lesson may also be painted onto one of the adjacent walls. The altar will also contain bells, candles, live plants, and vials of water. There may also be bottles of holy water, Florida water, Kananga water, olive oil, or sweet oil.<sup>182</sup> On St. Joseph’s altar there is a wooden box in the shape of the church containing some materials to be used in the administration of sacraments. As members are directed, they may approach the altar as a sign of repentance, or in order to obtain healing or favor from God for any particular problem. However, Pastor Brown’s view on the altar is different.

*DH: How is the altar in your church set up?*

*PB: In my church we only have a pulpit. We don’t use an altar.*

*DH: You don’t use an altar?*

*PB: No. I found it like that. My past bishop, he taught me that the altar is a very holy place, and he said “Mikey if you are not into having the altar under the will of God, it’s better not to have it, because it bring a lot of confusion in the church, and then everybody waan go up on the altar and touch the altar.” So he was very*

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Both Florida and Kananga water are types of scented waters commonly sold in the Caribbean and Latin America. According to Mother Pet, Florida Water is preferred for the altar while Kananga Water is for funerary purposes.



*strict in that. So right now we really don't have an altar. Sometimes the people come and say "that's your altar?" I say no. That's where the communion stand is. I have 2 candle, the tree of life...*

In my interviews and conversations with Pastor Brown, we touched upon many things common to Revivalists, such as seals, altars, and certain kinds of rituals. He said that for him, while many things may be permissible, they may cause "confusion" if the leader is not accustomed to them, adequately trained in the use of the power that they possess, or has not been directed by the Holy Spirit to place them in the church. This may be because, as he explained, many of his congregants are new to the Revival religion, and are not even ethnic West Indians. Such individuals would be even less likely to know and understand the rudiments of Revivalism than those from West Indian community. Yet for most Revivalists in Panama and elsewhere, the altar is an important and ubiquitous feature of the church.

### **Corners**

Revivalists also consider the four corners of the church to have sacred meaning. They represent the four gospels, the four poles of the earth, and the four archangels, Michael, Uriel, Gabriel, and Raphael. Their respective colors are red, yellow, blue, and green. Various objects are located at these four corners, sometimes candles (white or colored) and water, limes, and occasionally a sword or machete, or some combination thereof. As with the exact details of many things in a church, the exact arrangement will depend on who trained the presiding leader, and upon the instruction of the Spirit.

### **Seals**

The most peculiar feature of Panamanian Spiritual-Revival churches is the "seal." Rev. Livingston defined it as a sacred thing, a "seal of symbols, set with some messages in it." Bishop Barber, who agrees with this definition, mentioned that "It's a way of communicating with God." The sacredness and power of a seal are pretty much the only uniform attributes, as seals differ in purpose, form, and content. Often, members will circle the seal upon entering the church. According to Rev. Livingston, "when you come

and circle [the seal], whatsoever bad influence you come in with, you circle the candle, circle the sword, and it cleans you.” In Panama, seals can be solid fixtures in the ground, as is Mother Pet’s seal, or they can be “dropped,” which is accomplished by placing certain objects on the ground, as is that of Cardinal Flores’s and Bishop Weir’s church or they can be drawn with a piece of chalk. Although I did not observe that third type, Bryce-Laporte saw and described such a seal in a ceremony in a private residence in the Canal Zone. “To get into the inner room where the ceremony took place one had to ‘spin his role’ (turn around counter-clockwise three times under the supervision of one of the cult members) before a ‘seal’ (a Bible with a candle and other chalk markings on the floor).”<sup>183</sup> In the three churches that had them, the seals were located just past the front entrance of the church, in the aisle between two rows of pews or chairs. Often when entering the church, members would circle the seal in whatever fashion it is circled during seal-work. In two of the three churches, this was a counter-clockwise direction.

Seals are usually surrounded by a multi-folded cord, which serves to symbolically enclose it. Such is Bishop Weir’s seal, which contained limes, soft drinks, bells, incense, a crucifix, an open bible, vials of water, an orange candle, a purple candle, two curved rods, and a plant which Panamanians call “dragon blood.” In June, Bishop Weir conducted a weeklong revival meeting. The following week, he mentioned to the church that he would now conduct meetings going forward with the seal “opened,” and thus with the cord removed. This has the connotation of opening spiritual power, or blessings. The components of the seal are also found elsewhere in Spiritual-Revival churches, such as the bells, also found on most altars, and the limes, which are usually located underneath fasting and communion tables.

Mother Pet’s seal, on the other hand, contains a patch of black earth about five feet in diameter, enclosed by a circular concrete ring. Her church takes great pride in the fact that theirs is the only such seal in all Panama; other congregations must drop or draw their seals if they wish to use them. In the early days of Sacred Heart, the members

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<sup>183</sup> R.S. Bryce-Laporte, “Crisis, Contraculture, and Religion,” 111.

worshipped in her house in Juan Díaz, and then began worshipping in an open field next to the house. Over time, the members collected money to start construction on a proper building. During this time, worship was still held at the construction site in the open air, with members gathered around the seal, which was used in lieu of a table for certain services. According to Mother Pet and Bishop Barber, each time the workmen tried to cover the seal with concrete during construction, the earth would spring up through the concrete, rendering attempts to cover it ineffectual. Finally, due to the urging of the Holy Spirit, Mother Pet decided to leave the ground uncovered, and this her seal remains enclosed within the church, the only remnant of the wilderness church in which her congregation used to worship. While things may be added or taken away from the seal depending upon the occasion, it usually contains 15 stones painted in red, white, and blue, the colors of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which she received from the Spirit, various plants and flowers immersed in water, pitchers of water, a crucifix with a red cord around it, incense burners, a sword, bells, and a mirror. According to Bishop Barber, the number 15 signifies unity.

The third and final seal is that of Cardinal Flores, which is dropped and not fixed. It was comprised of two vials of water with a large white crucifix and stand in the middle. There was a yellow candle at the base with candles atop and at the sides of the crucifix. At its base were several painted white stones. Hanging on the front of the crucifix is a Star of David, also painted in white.

The chalk-drawn seal, which I did not see, is evidently akin to Haitian Vévés<sup>184</sup> and may bear some similarity to Guyanese Faithist cosmograms.<sup>185</sup> I suspect that, as is the case with fixed and dropped seals, drawn seals are designed in accordance with a

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<sup>184</sup> Leonard Barrett, *The Sun and the Drum: African roots in Jamaican folk tradition* (Kingston, Jamaica: Sangster's Book Stores, 1976), 57.

Vévés are cosmograms in the Vodou tradition and each vévé corresponds to a particular spirit. I am not aware of any such correspondence between seals and individual spirits or deities in the Spiritual-Revival faith.

<sup>185</sup> Kean Gibson, *Comfa Religion and Creole Language in A Caribbean Community* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 59. The Guyanese Faithists are an Afro-Creole church. Their cosmograms are drawings which visually display certain beliefs or spiritual principles.

specific revelation given to the leader of the church. For those churches that have them, the seal is perhaps the most sacred ground in the church, and a procession around it, or a manipulation of the elements therein is referred to as “seal work,” which I describe later.

Although many will circle the seal upon entering a church in order to cleanse themselves of any bad influences that they bring with them, Revivalists are cautious in this matter, and Bishop Barber instructed me not to immediately circle a seal if I entered into a new church; I must first observe and ascertain the integrity of the service, as there are those who “mix” their work:

*Some seal work for evil too. Just like there’s good, there’s bad. It’s always two spirit fighting against each other. The seal carries a message according to what the leader needs to accomplish.*

### **Tables**

Unlike the other elements, the table is not a permanent fixture in the congregations visited. There are several different categories of tables, but all of them are usually located in the center of the church, and are the site of possession, supplication, offering, and circumambulation. There are diverse kinds of tables. Common to almost all tables are candles, plants (usually the tree of life), vials of water (usually mixed with Florida water), cups and saucers. Although Stewart does not clarify if the tables are permanent features in Jamaican churches (she seems to indicate that they are), I agree with her in that, when Panamanians have tables “everything significant in the worship service occurs around the table or one of the external sacred stations. The congregation sings and prays; the leader speaks; the mediums go into trance; and the sick are healed around the table. The table is the locus for mystical encounters between the visible and the invisible, between humans and the Divine Community...the table invites intimacy, bonding, fellowship, and fulfillment. It is a place where the spirits, especially the Ancestors, can feel welcomed and united with the living in a comfortable and familiar setting.”<sup>186</sup> Indeed, the preacher may preach while walking around the table, which often

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<sup>186</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, pg. 113

stands in the midst of the church. Members may approach the table to light candles during journeys and at other times; these are known as “petition lights.”

## **Order and Types of Service**

### **Normal Service**

The frequency with which each church meets is entirely at the discretion of the leadership, and is dependent upon the size and needs of the congregation. Most churches meet biweekly, with their main service on either Saturday or Sunday, and then another service in the week. One of these is usually a “praise and worship” service, while the other is more formal. St. Joseph’s *culto de adoración* on Fridays is notable for being entirely in Spanish, a rarity for Spiritual-Revival churches.<sup>187</sup> Usually, only one of these services involves possession trance, seal work, or the use of formal attire for members.

Regarding the order of service, it is here that I must distinguish between St. Joseph’s and the other churches, for St. Joseph’s uses a modified form of the Episcopal liturgy in the Sunday morning worship. Before Sunday service, one of the leaders, either Pastor Gilpin or Rev. Jaramillo, will walk around the exterior of the church while chanting a hymn. Meanwhile, the *diaconesa* or *diaconesa-electa*<sup>188</sup> will organize the altar and platform, placing any things necessary for the service. One of the members will distribute printed copies of the liturgy and hymns to be sung for the day. Most members, however, know the liturgy and common prayers by heart. At the start of the service, those sitting on the platform, led by a member bearing a crozier, proceed to the front of the church, and place the crozier in front of the platform. Singing and drumming accompany the procession, as is the case with most other aspects of the service, save preaching. At this point the service has officially begun. Henceforth, the congregation sings, chants various readings from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, the Declaration of Principles of St. Joseph’s Spiritual Episcopal Church, and a collective prayer. Elements from the Book of Common Prayer include a Collect for Peace, a Collect for Grace, and a

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<sup>187</sup> The Spanish service was implemented several years ago by the current leadership of the church.

<sup>188</sup> Two positions within St. Joseph’s. I do not know the explicit differences in the functions performed.

Prayer for the Clergy and People, among other readings. The leader or some designated person will then ring bells from the altar; this symbolizes the arrival of the Holy Spirit, at which point the congregation sings an invocation. During the prayer, the pastor walks about the church, spraying the congregation with some scented oil from the altar. Afterward, there is a song service of variable length. At this point, about midway through the service's progression, there is singing and dancing, and members who are impressed to do so go to the front of the church, or dance about the center aisle. This is also the portion of the service where members may fall into possession trance. After the song service, the leader or another member will make announcements, acknowledge visitors in the church, or make various remarks. It is through the announcements that members hear of events at other churches, such as revivals, special tables, journeys, dinners, and commemorations. After announcements, one of the leaders introduces the speaker of the morning, who then preaches the sermon. After this, there may be further announcements. There is another prayer, where people may kneel before the platform while the pastor anoints their head with oil in the form of a cross. Members are also welcome to give testimony at this time. The leader raises one final song as an officer lifts the crosier from its place. Finally, a leader prays the benediction and concludes the service.

With the exception of the use of the Book of Common Prayer, the order of service in Revival churches is largely similar. When enough members have arrived, an officer of the church will lead out in song. Then, the person leading worship that day reads various lessons from the scriptures, with congregational singing punctuating the individual readings. After the reading of the lessons, a member rings bells to welcome the Holy Spirit.<sup>189</sup> Usually an officer will ring the bells in the four cardinal directions of the church as the leader rings the bells on the altar. At this time, someone will walk around the church and distribute Florida water, which members use to wash and scent their hands. Depending on the congregation, a member may spray water towards the four corners of the church. There is an extended song service of varying duration, and members usually

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<sup>189</sup> This is usually an altar, water, or table mother, but it need not be.

dance and may fall into possession. After this, there is a corporate prayer, a sermon, announcements, an offering and then a closing song and benediction.

### **Communion, Journeys, and Thanksgivings**

Aside from the regular services, I will discuss three other kinds of services that I witnessed in Spiritual-Revival churches: communion, journeying, and thanksgiving tables. These services have many of the same components described above (e.g. intercessory prayer, preaching, seal work), so I only focus on the differences here.

The most frequent is the communion service which the Association holds approximately once a month in a “united fasting.” A church officer sets the table with biscuits, bread, candles, plants, and water. For the communion table, as with the journeying table, members fast from the night before if physically able. St. Joseph does their monthly communion service in the Episcopal style, while the Revivalists run their communion service as described above, with slight modifications; they conduct the service as normal, through the sermon and collection of the offering. The congregants then assemble around the table for a period of singing and dancing, sometimes culminating in possession, which Panamanians call “moving in the spirit, or “moving spiritually.”<sup>190</sup> A table mother will invite members to take their cups and saucers from the table, and another will distribute bread or biscuits. One peculiar feature of Revivalist communion is that they often use a mixture of Florida water and water in lieu of wine. After alternate readings from the scripture, the congregants consume bread and water, and after another song, an officer will say the benediction.

The “journey” refers to the concept of a spiritual journey. Revivalists will say that they are having or “running” a journey or table. These tables may last for three, five, or seven weeks, and are concluded by a thanksgiving service, which will feature a thanksgiving table. While not all tables require a journey (such as thanksgiving tables held for a particular event), most journeys incorporate the use of a table, decorated in the particular colors of that journey. Revivalists go on journeys in order to obtain favors or

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<sup>190</sup> This is the same process that Jamaicans call “trumping and laboring.”

blessings from God, or to seek help for any particular problem; the reasons are deeply personal. During this time, participants are to abstain from certain worldly pleasures that may be permissible, as well as any things which they should not be doing otherwise. There are many types of journey tables, including the Archangel Michael journey, prosperity journey, and Sacred Heart journey. During fieldwork, I only witnessed the Sacred Heart journey, although I was informed that another type of journey, the prosperity journey, was to be had after my departure. A journey may be interrupted if a member dies during that time. While Mother Pet was running a journey, one of her altar mothers died. After the funeral, I returned to her church the following week, expecting that the journey would be resumed. When I arrived, I saw that the table was not set and inquired after the meaning. She responded that she could not conclude the journey because “you can’t mix the living with the dead.” The spirit of her deceased alter mother was still in the church and for that reason, Mother Pet could not continue the journey.

Journeying, communion, and thanksgiving tables are interrelated and form part of the same complex in a worship service. Journeys will often incorporate communion, and after the designated time of journeying is complete, there will be a thanksgiving table to conclude. However these three duties can also occur independently of each other. While I am not aware of a standardized journeying calendar common to all churches, Mother Pet informed me that June and July were traditionally the months for the Sacred Heart journey, which both her church and Panama Spiritual Center were undertaking.

Possession and procession around the table seem to be most common during journeying services, and I witnessed them at almost all the journeying tables. A mother will call congregants to the table, where they proceed in a counterclockwise fashion, singing and stomping their feet in time as they circle the table. Led by one of the mothers, individuals begin to take elements from the table and hold them in their hands as they circle. Eventually, the singing turns to into groaning and hyperventilation as the intensity and frequency of the stomping increases. In journeys this is when possession and trance are most likely to occur. At this point, drumming may cease, and the only percussion is provided by the feet of the participants as they move in the Spirit. Following the breaking



of the fast, the congregants may consume the foods on the table. At the two sites where I attended Sacred Heart journeys, the composition of the table was fairly uniform, including such things as bread, milk, and apples. The colors, red and yellow, were also the same.<sup>191</sup>

There are Thanksgiving tables, which may be held to conclude a journey, or on any particular occasion on which it is deemed proper to give God thanks. For example, Mother Pet had such a table for her son, after he returned from Operation Desert Storm. Iglesia Cristo la Roca in Isla Colón also held a thanksgiving table for its 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Formerly, Revivalists held the Mother Mary and Green Pasture tables more frequently, although these are relatively rare in contemporary Panamanian churches. St. Joseph's church no longer has journeying tables, or tables of any sort, with the exception of the "Forty Days," a table held during the Lenten season to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ.

### **Hierarchy and Attire**

Revivalist attire is also connected to the various journeys and tables. For example, during the Sacred Heart journey, members will dress in red and yellow. The uniform for a green pasture table would be green, and that of a Mother Mary table would be blue and white. Traditionally, their ceremonial garb distinguished Revivalists from other Christians, but in contemporary times members may come in regular clothing if not on a journey or a special occasion. In the days when outdoor meetings were the norm, the sights and sounds of believers at worship could be quite arresting for the uninitiated who happened to pass by, with chanting, groaning, drumming, and hand-clapping simultaneously assaulting the senses. The aesthetics of Revivalist worship have given rise to the aforementioned exonyms "*los que amarran la cabeza*," "*iglesia hipi-hapa hipi-hapa*," and "tie-head." During my fieldwork, Older Revivalists remarked with displeasure that the discipline in dress of former times was no more; formerly, members

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<sup>191</sup> Both the table and the uniform for the members during the journey are in red and yellow.

of individual congregations could be distinguished by their particular colors and manner of tying their head. One used to be able to distinguish rank and baptismal status by the full Revivalist uniform. Formerly, newly-baptized members could not have any colors in their turbans, only white. Due to the declining adherence to custom in this regard, the schema I discuss herein is somewhat antiquated, and more of an ideal than a strictly adhered to practice. Again, there is divergence between the ritual garb of St. Joseph's and the other churches.

The basic attire for Revivalists is all-white. This is particularly so for newly-baptized members, and those not having any church office. On a special occasion, or for a united event, members may be instructed to wear a particular uniform. Members come to the Friday worship service of St. Joseph's in plain clothes, while Pastor Gilpin and Rev. Jaramillo wear vestments. On Sundays however the members are in their formal clothing which is a white gown with a cord tied about the waist for men and women. The women wear a flowing head covering which they call a "canopy," and it is similar in shape to those worn by nuns.

The head covering for Revivalist women is a turban. The leaders agreed that the turban was obligatory for women and voluntary for men, with all suggesting that it was in accordance with the biblical injunction for women to cover their hair.<sup>192</sup> Bishop Barber also suggested that the practice of head-tying came from Africa, but she justified it based on biblical grounds. Generally speaking, the longer the turban and the more color there is, the higher the ecclesiastical office of the wearer. The turban of a new convert is made of three yards of white neatly wrapped together. That of a secretary is identical, save the presence of a fan-shaped fold of cloth on the right side of the turban. The deacon's turban is made of five yards of white material, and it is deep below the line of the neck and coming down the shoulder. The turbans for reverends and evangelists are seven yards. Mothers' turbans reach down to the waist. The largest wrap is that of a shepherd, which is 21 yards long, and comprised of three yards of the seven different colors of the rainbow;

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<sup>192</sup> 1 Cor. 11:16

there is no white in that wrap, and it reaches to the end of the gown or to the heel. Officers use lace on the end of their turbans, and can also use flowers and appliqué for decoration. Depending on the occasion, bishops may instruct their congregations to dress in uniform, in which case the leader may be distinguished by a clerical collar.

The offices in Revivalism are ranked thus: well-wisher,<sup>193</sup> member, missionary, deacon or deaconess, evangelist, various kinds of “mothers,” leaderess, shepherd, armor bearer, pastor and bishop. The duties of altar, table, and water mothers are fairly consistent across individual churches and include baptizing, preparing the altar, and setting various tables, respectively. The shepherd, along with the armor bearer and water mother is responsible for conducting baptisms. The church offices are not mutually exclusive. A table mother can serve as an altar mother, and a leaderess is qualified to perform the roles of the altar, table and water mothers. The altar mother is responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of the altar, as is the table mother for the table. The altar and table mothers cannot perform their duties during menstruation; they must be ritually “clean.” Usually this role is performed by an elderly woman, though several leaders told me that they were training regular members to do these roles, and that they could discharge them in the absence of the office-holders. I suspect that this is due to the small size of congregations, in addition to a sincere desire to ensure that members know and understand the practices of their religion. I could not ascertain the duties of the other offices such as “missionary” or “deacon,” and I suspect that any particular duties falling to members holding these titles is likely to differ among individual churches. Proper offices aside, there are several honorifics and titles, such as “prophet;” Pastor Brown officially had that title conferred upon him, although he does not use it or expect to be addressed as such. Pastor Oswald takes the title “pastor,” although he says that he could take the title “bishop” since he is the leader of the church. However he has elected not to do so, waiting on the permission of the Holy Spirit before taking on a title. While some

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<sup>193</sup> This was my rank as a non-baptized participant-observer in services. I am not sure if they recognize other baptisms as valid, although I suspect that since I was baptized via immersion, as opposed to sprinkling, that at least some Revivalists would.

leaders may be called “cardinal,” “pastor” or “bishop” there is in effect little difference in terms of the individual responsibilities that come with leading the congregation.<sup>194</sup>

Again, some of these offices are rare or no longer existing. Bishop Barber mentioned that the office of leaderess is not occupied at Sacred Heart, and I did not see leaderesses at any of the other visited churches, although Sacred Heart’s sister church in New York City has a leaderess.<sup>195</sup> Another seemingly absent position is that of band-seeker, one who is able to look into the spiritual realm. During services, they search and uncover various things at the bidding of the Holy Spirit. They might, for example, see sickness in a person and give warning or counsel. Alternatively, they may see something spiritual on the table or elsewhere in the church. In any case, the leaders of a particular church will grant offices within that congregation. I do not have any particular explanation as to why the offices of leaderess and band-seeker appear to have diminished. Due to the highly decentralized nature of Revival churches, it is possible that these positions were never as common as others (e.g. water mother, altar mother) to begin with, although this is speculation on my part.

### **Music**

With the exception of the sermon and prayer (and even these may contain music), there is no part of a Revivalist service that is not preceded, followed by, or inclusive of music in some way. Revivalist music reflects the diverse cultural influences on the lives of ethnic West Indians, with influences coming from all over the hemisphere. As with other aspects of contemporary Antillean life in Panama, the repertoire reflects the tension between traditional and modern, West Indian and Latin, and Spanish and English. Virtually all singing is congregational, and is accompanied by tambourines, two vertical drums played with the hands, which Revivalists call drums, *tumbas*, *tumbadoras*, or *congas*, hand clapping, and occasionally *güiros* and *claves*. If a drummer is not present, then hand-clapping, foot stomping, and tambourines provide the percussive element to

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<sup>194</sup> These offices have distinct meanings in other Christian traditions and ought not be conflated with their use in Revivalism.

<sup>195</sup> Bishop Barber is also a bishop at St. Mary’s

the service. Some churches employ drum kits and keyboards, but this is currently the exception rather than the rule. While women tend to outnumber men in Spiritual-Revival congregations, the drummers are usually men, although this is not a universal rule; women and girls can and do play the drum. At the time of Bryce-Laporte's (1970) publication, he reported that there was "no drumming in the Isthmian cults [sic] in recent times,"<sup>196</sup> and this is in harmony with what Rev. Jaramillo told me about Spiritual-Revival churches in Panama city in mid to late-twentieth century. It appears then that the use of drums was on the decline but has now revived, although I am not sure how that specifically came about.

Spiritual-Revival musical repertoire is eclectic, and draws on a wide range of sources for worship. As in Jamaica, there are the "sankeys," which derive their name from Ira D. Sankey's compilation of hymns, *Sacred Songs and Solos*. Many of these hymns have been translated into Spanish and often both English and Spanish versions of choruses are sung in the same service. The most common hymnbook used is the *Himnos de Gloria y Triunfo*, with some English-language hymnals also in use. Such songs are common in English and Spanish-language congregations throughout the hemisphere and are not particular to Spiritual-Revival churches, though they are no less beloved by them than by other Christians. There are also what my informants call "Revival songs," such as "I Hear a Sounding," and "Zion Children"<sup>197</sup> which are not found in the aforementioned hymnbooks and are peculiar to the Spiritual-Revival tradition. The Spiritual Baptists of the Caribbean share some of these Revival songs, with slight modifications. Revivalists are aware that these songs are not shared by mainstream Christians and cherish them as being part of their religion's unique heritage. More elderly informants would express joy and nostalgia upon hearing an "old-time Revival song" being sung or chanted or at its mere mention. These songs are poorly catalogued, which is reflective of the general dearth of scholarly attention given to the ethnomusicology of Spiritual-Revivalist churches. Some of these songs are quite widespread and well-known, while others are in

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<sup>196</sup> R.S. Bryce-Laporte, "Crisis, Contraculture, and Religion," 110.

<sup>197</sup> These are the names that my informants and I use.

danger of disappearing. In a service, singing often turns into chanting or humming, particularly during extended song services or seal-work, and usually precedes and accompanies possession by the Holy Spirit. If there are no or insufficient hymnbooks present, then a leader in the church will “track” the songs, calling out the proceeding stanza just before the conclusion of the current one so that the congregation can know the words for the next line.

Contemporary Spanish-language choruses such as “Alabaré” and “Jesús está pasando por aquí” are common in services; these are shared with Spanish-speaking congregations in Panama and throughout the hemisphere. Panamanian revivalists also consume gospel music from the United States, where several of my informants have lived, as well as the West Indies. Although it is not usually heard during services, taped gospel songs may be played before or after the service. These may range from Caribbean Gospel-Reggae and Gospel-Soca to American artists from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Jim Reeves, which is not only logical but unremarkable given the hypermobility of West Indians in past and present times, their transnational family networks, and their relationships with churches in the West Indies and America.

### **Healing**

Most works on Revival Zion have discussed the healing component of the faith in one way or another. Part of Alexander Bedward’s fame derived from his physical healing of sick individuals in the Mona River.<sup>198</sup> According to Christine Reynolds, daughter of the late Jamaican Revivalist leader Kapo, her father used to keep various ointments and infusions made from plants, bark, and roots in his compound; he made these for their curative properties.<sup>199</sup> Barrett describes the healing compound of Rita Forbes, a Revivalist leader who was known throughout Jamaica for her ability to heal various illnesses, a diagnostic process involving spirit possession or a spiritual “eye,” ritual baths, and the use of water, among other means.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Edmonds and Gonzalez. *Caribbean Religious History*, 135.

<sup>199</sup> Personal communication

<sup>200</sup> Barrett, *The Sun and the Drum*, 60-66.

In our interviews, my informants tended to de-emphasize the idea that they are particularly adept at healing or that they themselves heal people. According to Rev. Livingston, “We depend on prayer and fasting for everything depending on the Holy Spirit...there used to be a healing night at the church, with the Mother that used to be here, but I cut it out. It is your faith that heals you!” Having said that, she informed me that she uses physic nut and arnica bush if someone is in need of healing, but reiterated that it is ultimately the person’s faith that makes the difference. Likewise, Pastor Gilpin iterated that he does not use plants, or bushes to conduct physical healing, and that whatever may happen in such a situation is a product of faith and divine intervention.

Bishop Barber believes in physical healing, but asserts that this only happens if it is called for. If this is the case, then the Holy Spirit may reveal something to a leader in vision, and the leader or other church member will direct the afflicted person to take a spiritual bath; the composition thereof will usually be given by the Spirit.

Pastor Brown believes that he has the gift of healing, particularly to heal children or young people. However, he does not employ any herbal or pharmacological knowledge; his instruments are prayer, olive oil, and water:

*DH: Do you practice any sort of physical healing?*

*MB: What I have noticed with me myself is that my area is mostly with children or young people, because the healing that I can say that I go through- a lot of people have been bringing their kids to me, their babies, and they have a thing in Panama, that they “overlook” their children, que están ojeao. It’s like somebody with a strong eye may look at your child and they may get sick. And they would bring them to me and I would be saying the same thing over and over- I don’t know when a child is overlook, but I can tell you if something is wrong with the child, and I just go to what the Lord tell me to do. Anoint the child, present him to him and pray for the child.*

There are several explanations for the apparently diminished role of pharmacological expertise among my informants in light of their ubiquitous mention in works on the Jamaican tradition.<sup>201</sup> The first is that these healing practices have decreased with the

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<sup>201</sup> See Barrett, (1976); Stewart, (2000); Erskine, (2007)

passing of older Revivalists and the lack of knowledge transmission. Another explanation is that my informants chose to retain this information for themselves and not discuss healing in great detail; I noticed a little uneasiness among some when I raised the subject. There is also the possibility that my informants de-emphasize healing because of the association that the uninitiated make between healing and obeah, or because people seek to take advantage of Revivalists' healing knowledge for themselves. A case from Pastor Gilpin's experience illustrates this best:

*I have some Spanish people dem coming from one of them outstanding community and they used to come regular. And this woman come like six times to the church, and she would say "But I want heal! My foot hurtin me," and she want to get heal so I would rub her wid some oil or something, but she not seeing that too quick. So she start to show up herself, and I tell her, "No! You in the wrong church, or in the wrong place." Because she understand that in the church here, she will get some kind of superpower or something like that. But she was in the wrong place. People act like [they will get] some kind of superpower.*

Cases like this illustrate the uneasiness that Revivalists have about some of their more peculiar characteristics. They are well aware that there are individuals who will solicit them for the spiritual gifts which they possess, including healing, out of selfish, antisocial, or insincere desires, rather than out of genuine necessity. However, since there are many churches that I did not visit, it is possible that there are other Panamanian Revivalists who have elaborate healing rituals beyond those described above.

### **Change and Continuity in Panamanian Revival**

Edmonds and Gonzalez (2010), in agreement with Chevannes (1978) argue that center poles, seals, and other particularities of Spiritual-Revival churches are being replaced by the increased "Pentecostalization (my word)" of some congregations.<sup>202</sup> Chevannes thought that the churches could not follow their own path, and went as far as to say that Jamaican Revivalism "may still be found here and there, but it is more like an anachronism."<sup>203</sup> Stewart similarly acknowledges that changes in the Jamaican Revival

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<sup>202</sup> Edmonds and Gonzalez. *Caribbean Religious History*, 138.

<sup>203</sup> Barry Chevannes, "Revivalism: A Disappearing Religion," *Caribbean Quarterly* 24 (1978): 15-16



work have been pronounced in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>204</sup> These authors have analyzed Revival Zion in the Jamaican context, and share the conclusion that the hegemonic influences of mainstream Christianity portend a loss for Revival's distinguishing characteristics, and ensure greater conformity to mainstream Protestant churches. Moreover, they discuss Revival Zion in relation to not only the Euro-Christian tradition, but in relation to the other folk religions of Jamaica, namely Obeah and Kumina. The rightful emphasis on the social-religious continuum of Jamaican religions and religious institutions (with the Anglican church on one end and Kumina on the other) provides valuable lessons on talking citizenship, race, orthodoxy, and class in past and present Jamaica. But despite the size and long historical duration of the Jamaican diaspora in Panama and other parts of Latin America, painfully little theorizing and ethnography has been undertaken, not only on West Indian religious traditions there, but on the social and religious contexts within which they operate. The initial parts of this chapter traced the development of Afro-Creole religions in Jamaica, focusing on Obeah, Kumina, and Revival Zion. The concluding portion of this chapter clarifies how the Spiritual-Revival work has evolved in Panama since its genesis in the 1890s, the importance and construction of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and the place of Panamanian Revival in the country's larger religious matrix. I contend that although there have been many changes, contemporary scholars of Revival have been keen to emphasize those changes suggest weakening, disappearance, or a loss of vitality. In doing so, they have ignored how contemporary leaders are making use of the current moment to ensure continuity and preserve tradition.

In light of the concerns that Panamanian Revivalists have about the survival and continuity of their work among future generations, who are reluctant to embrace various aspects of their culture, including spirituality, I cannot dismiss the arguments of the aforementioned scholars who declare that Revival is moribund or at the very least under pressure; my Panamanian informants make similar claims and possess the attendant

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<sup>204</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes.*, 130.

anxieties that come with being an ethno-religious minority in a society that is often ignorant of and sometimes hostile to their practices. Contemporary Panamanian congregations are engaged in a spirited debate over the validity and direction of the changes in the religion. Mother Pet sees herself as part of the “old school,” a phrase that she employed often in our interviews. She says “If you come here, you will see old work. Because now they say ‘this not necessary, that not necessary,’ but I know that God is the same God yesterday, today, and forever. So I stick with my tree of life and candle.” Her mention of the tree of life and candle is significant; they are some of the distinguishing marks of Spiritual-Revival churches. Bishop Barber, her daughter, also agrees that the use of candles, while not going out of style, is less than before due to a more textual, rather than visual, understanding of how worship should be conducted and how tables should be constructed.

*BB: They [older generations] used the bible, but they worked more in the spiritual realm. But after you realize that some of the things... You go with the foundation, but you build on the foundation. And the Word can do a lot of the things. They did these things to manifest a lot of what they wanted to say, what we are already getting in here [lifts bible], you understand? So we would put certain things because it means something, but you don't put it so much in abundance. So a lot of things have cut down.*

*DH: So other than the candles what are some of the changes on the altar?*

*BB: Mainly the candles. We used to use a lot more candles. We used to use a lot more candles, but, you know the tall skinny ones? We used to use a lot of those. We don't really use a lot any more like that. It's a little more calm.*

Bishop Barber's remembrance of old-time Revival work tracks with the distinction that my informants have made between the former and contemporary times. The picture that emerges from my discussion of Panamanian Revival in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is that of dedicated and passionate believers who made up for their lack of biblical knowledge by the sincerity of their work, which served as physical guides to, or spiritual representations of Biblical truths. Several leaders told me that they remember their elders in the church who could quote passages of scripture at length despite being

illiterate. The faithfulness of past generations contrasts with what they would perceive as the laxity of contemporary practice, despite the latter's emphasis normative biblical truth rather than oral tradition. This seems to support the position of other scholars outlined earlier, although I want to suggest that the turn towards a textual orthodoxy does not necessarily portend the disappearance of Revival's unique characteristics. Rather, there are those Revivalists who merely use the current emphasis on biblical teaching to enshrine beliefs or practices which the religion has always had, and such opportunities are numerous. For example, when inquired about the wrapping of their heads, leaders gave several answers; most said that it comes from the biblical injunction for women to cover their hair, another offered that the practice came from Africa (in addition to affirming its biblical mandate), and still yet another leader said that Revivalists tie their heads because of how the linen in Jesus' tomb was folded when he rose from the dead on Resurrection Sunday. This same bishop also asserted that the groaning and hyperventilation of Revivalists when they circle the table comes from the labored breathing of Jesus as he hung on the cross. The foot-stomping that becomes progressively harder as Revivalists worship around the table is explicated thus by Mother Pet: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."<sup>205</sup> Bishop Barber further clarified, stating that in Genesis there was no rain; a *vapor* came up from the ground.<sup>206</sup> They reasoned that not only did the earth itself, the source of the plants and leaves that they use on their tables and in their seal, belong to God, but that making contact with the Earth was a way to obtain wisdom and understanding. When I asked about the use of tables, another peculiar feature of the religion, the response was "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies,"<sup>207</sup> and indeed, from the moment of disembarkation in Panama, West Indians and their institutions have lived and labored in the presence of their enemies, as did their African ancestors in the Antilles.

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<sup>205</sup> Psalms 24:1

<sup>206</sup> Gen. 2:6

<sup>207</sup> Psalms 23:5

While the low-prestige status of Revival combined with the increased popularity of Pentecostals and other evangelical denominations mean that the process of assimilation to mainstream protestant practices will continue for some, scholars should also consider that an emphasis on biblical orthodoxy can provide opportunities for Revivalists to defend, enshrine, and legitimize their distinguishing features, giving their members tools with which to arm themselves against charges of unorthodoxy, obeah-working or devil-worship, which non-Revivalist West Indians and mestizos occasionally allege they practice. Perhaps the best example comes from a journeying table at Mother Pet's church. Before the procession began, she explained the purpose and structure of a table to her congregation:

*Bredrin, I gwain teach you all to read a table. Mira la mesa porque la mesa guia la iglesia. And when you look at this table, everybody is of one accord! And you see how beautiful it can be?*

*La manzana representa corazón. Naranja representa el mundo entero. La vela representa la luz. Jesus is the light of the world. Las flores- amarillo representa el sol y brilla la vida de nosotros. El blanco significa purity. El morado significa su muerto. El blanco significa la resurrección. Verde significa sangre. El agua- que cuando cristo estuvo en la cruz, agua y sangre salió from his side. Pan representa su cuerpo. El pescado representa abundancia. Dios es un dios de qué? Abundancia. So don't play cheaply with this. What you put in is what you take out.*

In providing her congregation with this theological explication, Mother Pet breaks with the tradition of many older Revivalist leaders who did not explain the significance of certain rituals or traditions to those under their authority, or outright refused to do so. Moreover, she does not justify the Sacred Heart table solely on the basis of tradition, but instead explains it in terms of the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thus demonstrating her ability to speak in a manner intelligible to the wider Christian community while also ensuring the continuity of one of Revival's most unique features.

### **Relations With Other Faith Traditions: Complicating the Continuum**

While the ethnographic data and theoretical perspectives that Chevannes, Stewart, and Edmonds and Gonzales present is rich and, in many places compelling, one further area that I examine in detail is the intersection between the Spiritual-Revival churches and other religious institutions and beliefs in contemporary Panama. Most scholars of Revival in Jamaica examine the relationship that Revivalists have with other African-derived faiths as well as the mainstream Christian churches. In Panama, there is an analogous situation on the Euro-Christian end of the continuum. In the British West Indies, the Anglican church was the most prestigious; in Panama Catholicism that occupies this historical position, and the Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist churches were only prestigious within the West Indian community.<sup>208</sup> Adventists and various Pentecostal groups are also well-represented in Panama.<sup>209</sup> The latter two have made much greater inroads into the mainstream, while the Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists derive more of their membership from the West Indian community.

If the European end of the religious continuum is largely similar, then what of the African or Afro-Christian side? A form of Obeah distinct from that of the Antilles had been practiced in Bocas by the Creoles, and Antillean migration during the periods of the French and American canals brought that form of Obeah to Panama as well.<sup>210</sup> I have already discussed the process whereby Jamaican Revival was brought to Panama, which survives in the contemporary Spiritual-Revival churches. Jamaicans practicing Kumina, Kromanti Play, Convince, Burru, and Pukkumina, and Trinidadians and Windward Islanders practicing the Spiritual Baptist and Orisha faiths almost certainly participated in the migration to Panama, and yet none of these faiths appear to have survived to the contemporary period.<sup>211</sup> The prominence of bell-ringing in Panamanian Spiritual-Revival

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<sup>208</sup> O' Reggio, *Between Alienation and Citizenship*, 70.

<sup>209</sup> This comes from my observations and discussions with informants during fieldwork.

<sup>210</sup> Carlos Reid, *Memorias de un Criollo Bocatoreño/ Light in Dark Places*, ed. Stanley Heckadon Moreno (Panama: Asociación Panameña de Antropología No 1., 1980), 107.

<sup>211</sup> While few of the mentioned African-derived religious traditions appears in Panamanian archives or secondary sources, I find it inconceivable that among the thousands of West Indians who migrated to the isthmus, none of these religions were practiced. Kumina, Kromanti Play, and Convince are Jamaican traditions marked by spirit possession and drumming. Burru was a genre of Jamaican music that does not

services *may* be the legacy of Spiritual Baptists who gravitated toward Revival congregations, but this is not certain; Jamaica is considered to be the immediate source of the Panamanian tradition, and Trinidad and the Windward islands, while present in the genealogical narratives of my informants, are decidedly absent from spiritual genealogies.<sup>212</sup>

Panamanian Revivalists, regardless of age, are eager to distinguish their work from Obeah, freemasonry, spiritualism, and Santería.<sup>213</sup> Only three of my informants had heard about Kumina, and these were elderly individuals, two of whom had travelled to Jamaica. They did not assert any kind of relationship between Revival and Kumina, which is logical as the religion appears to have disappeared from Panama, if it ever existed there. Despite the lack of knowledge about Kumina among Panamanians, in both Jamaica and Panama, a Revival table may be referred to as a “duty,” and I believe that this word choice is not incidental; Jamaican Kumina bands also refer to their tables as “duties.”<sup>214</sup> This lexical similarity is evidence of a shared epistemology, and approach to the spiritual realm, which Stewart discusses at length in her chapters on Kumina.<sup>215</sup> The leaders who knew about Pukkumina also distanced it from Revival, with Mother Pet insisting that “they work too deep.” Rev. Livingston also drew a distinction among Revival, Beji-Nite, and Pukkumina. None of the congregations I visited identified themselves with Pukkumina, and it may be that the sect no longer exists in Panama. One explanation for Kumina’s apparent absence in contemporary Panama is that, unlike Revival Zion, which is practiced all over Jamaica, Kumina is only to be found in the

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appear to have survived to the present. The Orisha faith exists in Panama, although I am not aware that West Indians brought the tradition to Panama. The Spiritual Baptists are another Afro-Creole church in Trinidad, Grenada, Barbados, and St. Vincent.

<sup>212</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes*, 218. It is instructive that ritual bell ringing is conspicuously absent from ethnographies of Revival Zion. This leads me to believe that its use in Panama may be the legacy of Spiritual Baptists who joined Revival churches.

<sup>213</sup> I use the popular Panamanian appellation for the Yoruba-derived faith.

<sup>214</sup> Both religious groups also employ similar terminology such as “work” and “spirit lash.” The former is a synonym for “religious tradition” (hence the phrase “Revival work” to speak of the Revival religion), and the latter is a malady that occurs due to supernatural causes, often the work of a malevolent or a displeased spirit.

<sup>215</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes*, 161.

eastern parishes of the island, and chiefly among the descendants of indentured laborers from Central Africa.<sup>216</sup> For this demographic reason the “spiritual camaraderie and religious solidarity”<sup>217</sup> which Stewart observed during her fieldwork in Jamaica between Revivalists and Kumina practitioners cannot hold in Panama. Unlike some Trinidadian Spiritual Baptists who are affiliated with the Shango religion,<sup>218</sup> Panamanian Revivalists disavow any connection to Santería, which they equate with Obeah. Although my informants denied any connection to Obeah, they candidly informed me that there were individuals who did mix their Revival work with Obeah, and they condemned this. At one particular feast, a bishop told the congregation that some of the older Revivalists “left a stain” on the Revival work by their association with Obeah. He said “Some people have the wrong idea because in Panama there was a saying: ‘I goin tie my head and fix you business.’” The bishop’s link between Spiritual-Revival members (tie my head) and Obeah (fix you business) reflects a longstanding and ongoing conflation of the two traditions in the West Indian community.

Revivalist leaders took pains to explain this to me and made sure that I understood the difference between their work and Pukkumina or Obeah. During one interview, I asked Pastor Oswald about appropriate activities and conduct for a Spiritual-Revival church. His answer was telling.

*Well dem [a congregation that is in error] will invoke, let us say dem will invoke John [not the prophet, here it is the name of a deceased person], and dem will start to call John and maybe light a fire on a floor and all kind of ting that you can’t understand. Then that get you into duda- te lleva duda. Y tú dices, ah esta iglesia tá como raro. You know? Porque estan haciendo cosas, primeramente no es Bíblico, y puede que vengan de nuestras raizes, la raiz de gente moreno, pero no es acceptable en la sociedad, y hay un rechazo. And you gwain say “well I gwain go because I can win dem help. I want dem to bless me because I can win the lottery, and when I get what I get- I gone!”*

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<sup>216</sup> Monica Schuler, *Alas, Alas, Kongo: A Social History of Indentured African Immigration into Jamaica, 1841-1865*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 1.

<sup>217</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes*, 115.

<sup>218</sup> Frances Henry, *Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad: The Socio-Political Legitimation of the Orisha and Spiritual Baptist Faiths*, (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), 40.

Therefore it seems that contemporary Panamanian Revivalists do not have close relationships with other African-derived religions on the isthmus, and those members that do so participate clandestinely and without the overt approval of the leadership. Revivalists have the closest relationships with other Christian groups, chiefly the evangelical and mainline protestant denominations.<sup>219</sup> Leaders and lay preachers from other denominations speak at Spiritual-Revival congregations, and their leaders are also welcomed in Protestant churches. Many leaders told me that they attended and still attend the services of other Christian churches, although it is the Spiritual-Revival faith which commands their chief loyalty.

Relations with other Revival congregations reflect the transnational character of the faith and of West Indian family networks and mobility; Panamanian Revivalists are in fellowship with their daughter and sister churches in the New York area, as well as with Revivalist congregations in Canada and Jamaica. Leaders, individual members, and evangelists circulate freely between New York and Panama, and Jamaica to a lesser extent. Panamanians in New York attend Trinidadian or Grenadian-led Spiritual Baptist churches. Panamanian congregations from New York and Panama have participated in the pilgrimage to Watt Town, St. Ann, Jamaica, perhaps the largest gathering of Revivalists in the country. Bishop Barber was made an ambassador by Bishop Ray Foster, a Jamaican Revivalist from the parish of Westmoreland, who traveled to Jamaica and brought his church (also called Sacred Heart) into fellowship with Sacred Heart Deliverance Temple.<sup>220</sup> Technological advances have also managed to reinforce international connections among the churches and helped younger Panamanians identify themselves as part of a movement that is global, rather than as a provincial or particular aspect of the West Indian subculture in Panama. My younger informants and their friends had all seen YouTube videos of Jamaican Revivalists and Trinidadian, Grenadian, and Vincentian Spiritual Baptists, all of which they grouped under the umbrella term “spiritual,” along with Panamanian churches. Leaders were also aware of the religion’s

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<sup>219</sup> I witnessed this during services and in interviews.

<sup>220</sup> Mother Pet, Bishop Barber, and Rev. Livingston provided this information.



digital footprint; during one service, a Bishop reprimanded his congregation for their lack of sartorial conformity, citing the Jamaican Revivalists he saw on YouTube who adhered to the uniform for the day in a way he found admirable.

The relationship between Spiritual-Revival churches and Catholicism is more nuanced. My informants related that some of the innovations in Panamanian Revival occurred due to the contact with a Catholic public, an influence that did not exist or were muted in Jamaica. Some Revivalists formerly attended Catholic churches in their youth, and more churches used to keep statues of saints, a practice that I only observed on two occasions and seems to be much diminished than in former times. Rev. Livingston said “The only mediator in Revival Church is Jesus Christ. I don’t call no saint! Leaders affiliated with other religions, to keep a congregation, they accepted having novena, a specific time of praying and fasting to a specific saint for favors. All going against Psalm 115 to worship saints!” Rev. Jaramillo concurred: *“Antes se practicaba eso...en las iglesias, pero debido a que hemos aprendido con el tiempo, y de acuerdo con el Salmo que dice que ‘tiene ojos, pero no ven, tienen manos pero no palpan, tienen pies pero no caminan...’”* This was a scripture that I would hear from several Revivalists, and it appears that the practice of altars to saints in Spiritual-Revival churches is declining as part of the increased orientation to matters of Protestant scriptural orthodoxy, although I cannot say with any certainty how widespread the practice was in former times. Did Revivalists employ statues under the influence of their new mestizo neighbors, or did the impetus come from Catholic West Indians who were worshipping in Spiritual-Revival congregations? Most Revivalists would attribute this to the former, although I cannot discount the occurrence of the latter. In any case, the move away from Catholic icons is in keeping with wider religious trends in Latin America and the Caribbean occurring under the aegis of Protestant evangelization. Yet the significance in this issue lies in the fact that many of my informants sincerely believed, and they may be right, that the introduction of Catholic saints was due to influences from mestizos. In this case the removal of saints, theological reasons aside, can also be read as a desire to purify the church from not only elements deemed unbiblical, but also un-West Indian. Admittedly,

the increased use of Spanish in services, a process that has been accelerating since the 1970s, would belie my suggestion. However I can propose a practical explanation; linguistic attrition among fourth and fifth-generation ethnic West Indians is high and Spanish is the preferred language of literacy for bilinguals. Leaders removing saints from their congregations brings Spiritual-Revival churches in line not only with the Evangelical and Protestant communities, but also aligns with the practices of Father Hall and the earliest Revivalists in Panama.

### **Conclusion**

The Spiritual-Revival churches in contemporary Panama are dynamic, internally diverse, and have undergone numerous changes since their arrival in Panama in the 1890s. Although they exhibit characteristics in common with the various Protestant groups throughout the country and have generally positive relationships with them, Spiritual-Revival churches are distinct and autonomous entities. While it is doubtful that they will ever attain the prestige or popularity of other faiths, and they are concerned about their future membership, Revivalists are continuing to preach, teach, and perform their spiritual work. The increased focus on the Bible as authoritative source of faith and practice need not indicate an abandonment of the most unique Revival practices, and may in fact spur their retrenchment and transmission to the next generation. Despite the rise of a distinctly Panamanian West Indian identity, Revivalists see themselves as maintaining the traditions of their Antillean forbears and the churches of the Association have a firm commitment to a transnational witness, mission, and fellowship, a condition which has been the case since the work's inception in Panama over a century ago. Although my informants conceive of themselves as preservers of West Indian culture, insofar as they are culturally conservative, they are also innovative. Thus, my informants were able to agree that Panamanians "work different" compared to people in Jamaica, even if they could not always give concrete or numerous examples of such difference.<sup>221</sup> However,

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<sup>221</sup> Due to my limited time in Panama and the concentration of my fieldwork in Panama City, I remain open to the possibility that there are sub-national differences in Revivalist rite and practice within the

they are in increasing contact with Jamaican churches. It remains to be seen what the impact of this contact will be in terms of belief, ritual, or organization. It is clear that whatever internal and localized differences may exist between Panamanian and Jamaican Revivalists, both groups recognize each other as co-religionists and heirs to a tradition that they see as fully African and fully Christian.<sup>222</sup>

The history of the modern era bears witness to an ideological, epistemic, and ontological conflict between Europe and Africa. West Indians in Panama have been agents in this multigenerational struggle for dignity, freedom, and equality despite and because of their status as subalterns, for whom the prospects of meaningful citizenship and racial equality were and remain chimerical, fantastical, and utopian. As did their forbears in the Antilles and Africa, West Indian Panamanians turn toward the institutions which they have retained and created as a means of sustenance and survival under hostile conditions. The Spiritual-Revival tradition is one such institution. In my final and concluding chapter, I explore the political valence and potential of Spiritual-Revival churches as they relate to the contemporary black movement.

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country. Whether these are individual differences between differing schools of thought, or between geographical locations, I cannot say pending further research on the matter.

<sup>222</sup> Based upon my interviews I believe that the differences are fairly minor and that there is no substantial theological division between Jamaican and Panamanian Revivalists.

### Chapter Three: This is the Etnia Negra Church

*In a slave society and in a post-slavery society in which advancement has so far been determined by how non-black the blackest of men can be, a sense of yourself as being black has to be achieved before a sense of yourself as a full man can ever be approached. Freedom and black consciousness, therefore, go together. The first cannot exist inside your being without the second.*<sup>223</sup>

Richard Small, Introduction to Walter Rodney's *The Groundings with my Brothers*, pg. 8

On 11 May 2014, various black organizations gathered to participate in the annual *Desfile de la Etnia Negra* in Rio Abajo, a traditionally West Indian neighborhood of Panama City. For the first time, the Spiritual-Revival churches participated, dressed in both ceremonial and "African" attire.<sup>224</sup> When a reporter questioned one participating bishop about the Spiritual-Revival churches, he responded: "We believe in our ancestors. If we are sick we will get a shot from the doctor but we will also boil some bush and drink some tea." May, the *Mes de la Etnia Negra* is the month in which NGOs, schools, and the Panamanian government publically emphasize black history on the isthmus, commemorating the contributions that Panama's various black communities have made to national life. In the context of a month dedicated to black history, the bishop's affirmation of his ancestors is expected, and does not appear out of place. What is worthy of elaboration is that the pro-African orientation of Revivalists is expressed in quotidian practice and predates the contemporary black movement in Panama.<sup>225</sup>

In chapter One, I reviewed Panamanian history through the lens of black identity formation, mestizo nationalism, and diasporic commitments. Chapter Two detailed the arrival of Revival in Panama, with attention to ritual, cosmology, and belief. In Chapter

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<sup>223</sup> Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times Publications, 1975), 8.

<sup>224</sup> This "African" attire is a transliteration of what is called *atuendo aficano* by my informants. This usually refers to dashikis, and clothing made out of kente cloth, although other prints, such as leopard, or other animal skin prints.

<sup>225</sup> Among other aims, the movement seeks official recognition of black culture and history from the Panamanian state, as well as a positive appraisal of Afrodescendants in Panama, many of whom do not identify as black.

Three, I employ a diachronic perspective in order to understand Revival as a political project in colonial and post-colonial contexts. To that end, I examine the social valence of Revival by analyzing three case studies to draw out revival epistemologies across time and space. These examples elaborate on the social role of Revival in several contexts, revealing their commentary on society, and demonstrating that the cosmology and practice of Panamanian Revivalists asserts their African and West Indian heritage. Revivalist belief focuses on ancestry, and also provides ample opportunities for the leadership and active participation of black women. I conclude by discussing the relevance of Spiritual-Revival churches for the current iteration of the black movement in Panama as well as for the West Indian community at large.<sup>226227</sup>

Revival in Panama is a minor sect, largely restricted to ethnic West Indians, although there are increasing numbers of mestizos and *Coloniales* in the churches. It may seem unlikely that a little-researched and relatively small group without political or economic power clout should be the focus of my attention. Other religious groups (e.g. Catholics, Pentecostals, etc.) possess numerical preponderance, and other minority groups, such as Chinese, Arabs, and Jewish Panamanians possess greater commercial influence. Revivalists are a religious minority even within the West Indian community, but most, if not all of the traditionally West Indian religious groups have gone into decline over the last several decades.<sup>228</sup> In light of the particular history of West Indians on the isthmus, I aim to “examine the ways in which persons thus decentered strive to reconstruct themselves and their universe.”<sup>229</sup>

This involves revisiting Revivalist belief and practice in order to understand this tradition as part of a wider political project that makes necessary interventions about blackness and its place in relation to the Panamanian nation. Revivalists are “decentered”

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<sup>226</sup> George Priestly and Alberto Barrow, “The Black Movement in Panama,” 49.

<sup>227</sup> Priestly and Barrow define the black movement in Panama as a heterogeneous assortment of social, cultural, civic, and religious organizations under the leadership of the National Coordinating Committee of Black Panamanian Organizations

<sup>228</sup> These include Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and the Salvation Army, among others.

<sup>229</sup> Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 3.

(to borrow Comaroff's language) because of their small size, low-prestige status, lack of prominence in the archive, and the ways in which the bulk of its practitioners, regardless of economic status, are excluded from the national narrative. Due to the historical and present marginalization of black people in Panama (and elsewhere), a reading of politics that takes into account only the formal or partisan realm assures insufficient readings of black political thought.

Revival as a social phenomenon must be understood in the particular context of Panamanian society where the idea of a "racial democracy" is pervasive. "Racial democracy in Panama is a myth that ignores the disparate subordinate positions of Afro-Antilleans, colonial blacks, Latinos (sic), indigenous groups, and other minorities. Since there are no practices of formal exclusion in terms of marriage and residence, Panama is perceived by Panamanians as a racial democracy."<sup>230</sup> Regardless, mestizos have historically found West Indianness, and perhaps blackness more broadly incompatible with their own *Panameñismo*, which is historically grounded in an Iberian-Indian mestizaje and the Catholic religion. Thus, I begin by examining the intersection of Revival and politics in a historical perspective.<sup>231</sup>

### **Moral Economies of Blackness**

Most of the scholarship examining the political and social valence of Revivalism has focused on the Jamaican context, but sustained analyses of the Panamanian tradition are few.<sup>232</sup> Therefore, any analysis of the political and epistemological import of Revival must begin in Jamaica. Nevertheless, there are continuities between the two sites across various periods that make comparison and contrast fruitful exercises in understanding the social role of the religion. Moreover, a diachronic approach is useful in identifying the

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<sup>230</sup> Carla Guerrón-Montero, "Racial Democracy and Nationalism in Panama," *Ethnology*, Vol. 45, no. 3 (2006): 222

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>232</sup> See Price (2009), Erskine (2005), Simpson (1956), Stewart (2005), Lewin, (2000), Seaga (2005), Guano (1994), Chevannes (1978)

resources that people utilize in order to make decisions, build community, and craft institutions.

Although the process of ethnogenesis in Panama has resulted in the loss of insular Caribbean identities and produced the rise of a West Indian-Panamanian identity, the Jamaican past is still relevant in understanding Panamanian Revival because “ethnogenesis is about the emergence and development of new groups, and to fathom this process, we must identify the cultural resources that people draw upon as part of identifying a particular collectivity.”<sup>233</sup> The two case studies elaborate on the social contexts in which Revival operated as a mode of social protest and resistance, first among Revivalists in colonial Jamaica and then among their counterparts in the Canal Zone. For both the Jamaican and Panamanian contexts, Price’s (2009) understanding of morally configured black identities is useful. This identity operates in

*Jamaican moral economies of Blackness [which] are informed by a racialized set of themes and values I call justice motifs: truth, righteousness, freedom, liberation, autonomy, and self-reliance. These justice motifs are used to articulate grievances and alternative visions of their world...Race-Blackness in this case- can be put to many uses; it can provide a sense of affinity and security, and furnish a framework for interpreting the past, present, and future.*<sup>234</sup>

For historians, such as Robinson (1983), and Price (2009), this tradition of resistance and rebellion, begins with Obeah and Myal, transitions to the Native Baptists and Revivalists, and ultimately leads to twentieth century Rastafari.<sup>235</sup> I have elaborated on the connection between these traditions in Chapter One, so I will limit my discussion here to the Bedwardites, a now-defunct Revivalist sect, in order to demonstrate the continuity and significance of this morally configured black identity to present times.

The Bedwardites were arguably the largest popular movement in twentieth century Jamaica prior to Garveyism and Rastafari. Bedward’s charismatic leadership,

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<sup>233</sup> Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 20.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>235</sup> Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 137.

popular following, and the reaction of the colonial administration has drawn scholarly attention to a movement that was overtly black, militant, and messianic. Bedward healed, baptized, and attracted thousands with his messages of justice and condemnation of colonial rule. In an 1895 speech, he declared:

*There was a white wall and a black wall. The white wall was closing around the black wall, but now the black wall was stronger than the white wall, and must crush it. The Governor is a scoundrel and robber, the Governor and Council pass laws to oppress the Black people, take their money from their pockets and deprive them of bread.*<sup>236</sup>

His followers clashed with local authorities, and after a large public march from August Town to Kingston, they tried Bedward and around 70 of his followers under the Vagrancy Law. Authorities sent Bedward to an asylum where he died on 8 November, 1930.<sup>237</sup> Bedward, who had originally taken the title “Shepherd,” gave himself the title “Incarnation of Christ,” and claimed that he would ascend to heaven, destroy the rule of white people, and establish his own earthly kingdom.<sup>238</sup> “Alexander Bedward and his followers, the Bedwardites, were among the first Jamaicans to turn the cultural resources of the moral economy of Blackness, and a morally configured Black identity, into a collective identification and social movement capable of posing an organized challenge to White and colonial hegemony.”<sup>239</sup> It is important to note that Bedward was active from the 1890s until his incarceration in 1921, and therefore his message would surely have been carried to Panama and other places in the diaspora by his immediate followers, as well as by those affected by his preaching, teaching, and healing.<sup>240</sup> Though his movement probably marked the crescendo of Revival as a militant political force, the social injustices against which Bedward preached were present in Jamaica as well as in Panama.

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<sup>236</sup> Price, *Becoming Rasta*, 45.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>238</sup> Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley*, 28.

<sup>239</sup> Price, *Becoming Rasta*, 43.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.



However by 1978, Barry Chevannes wrote that Revivalism was disappearing in Jamaica for several reasons: the paucity of Revivalists at his field site in Kingston, (which he interpreted as evidence of a larger trend), integration with mainstream denominations, and the low number of Revivalists recorded in the census.<sup>241</sup> Not only was the Revivalism disappearing, but it had ceded ground as a religion of the urban poor to American-led sects and Rastafari.<sup>242</sup> Chevannes' use of the term "disappearing" is a bit deceptive, though, for he concluded that Revival would not disappear as an identifiable religious tradition, but that it was no longer an "organized force"<sup>243</sup> and could neither withstand, direct, nor alter the forces of change in any meaningful sense. He posited that for the Jamaican peasantry, the age of spiritual leaders (whether Obeahmen, Myalmen, or Baptist preachers) as voice of rebellion and social change had given way to the primacy of secular leaders in a post-independence context.<sup>244</sup> I suspect that Chevannes would make a similar assessment about the situation of Revivalists in Panama, where many West Indian institutions and cultural practices were transplanted. Churches, masonic halls, and ethnic schools were the primary formal institutions during the early and mid-twentieth century and there is a modest amount of literature analyzing their role in the political-cultural sphere between the early 1900s through the 1980s.<sup>245</sup> These institutions were key in advocating for citizenship, the franchise, and antidiscrimination statutes.<sup>246</sup> Neither the available historiography on West Indians in Panama nor the oral data that I have collected has revealed that the Spiritual-Revival churches galvanized West Indian communities to action for these causes, although it is likely that individual Revivalists participated in these initiatives; larger and more prestigious religious and social institutions played this role. In light of these gaps in the historical record, a more complete account of the social role that Revivalists played in the West Indian community

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<sup>241</sup> Barry Chevannes, "Revivalism Disappearing," 1.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>245</sup> See Conniff, (1985), O'Reggio, (2006), Putnam, (2013)

<sup>246</sup> Priestly and Barrow, "The Black Movement in Panama," 52.

during its earliest decades is yet to come. However, a case study from the Canal Zone, while not fully representative of West Indian communities outside central Panama, provides some instructive lessons.

### **Revival in the Canal Zone**

Though the scholarship is admittedly limited, the prominence of Protestant churches in West Indian Panamanian civil society raises questions as to the exact role that the Spiritual-Revival churches played in the West Indian community, if Revivalists were not at the forefront of black activism.<sup>247</sup> R.S. Bryce-Laporte attempts to answer this by analyzing the intersection of religion, class, and the prevailing political climate. In his study *West Indian life in the Canal Zone*, he aims to understand why a respected West Indian Anglican family would resort to low-prestige folk traditions (Revival and Obeah) for conflict resolution.<sup>248</sup> The parties in this case turned to Revival (referred to as Benjinite) and Obeah in order to obtain justice in a serious legal dispute. The social climate of the Canal Zone was unequal and presented great difficulties for the black population. Black Zonians (employees who worked on the canal and lived in the Canal Zone) were not able to establish their own formal legal or judicial systems, and the jurisdiction under which they lived was arbitrary, austere, and asymmetrical; West Indian policeman (when they existed) could not arrest white Zonians who committed infractions, and by the mid-1950s, the police force was all white.<sup>249</sup> The Zone until the early 1950s resembled the plantation in that it was “a closed and exclusive system...rigidly hierarchical, bureaucratic, pluralistic, paternalistic, authoritarian, and totalitarian.”<sup>250</sup> He concludes that not only did West Indians living on Panamanian territory experience racism and discrimination from the host government and citizens, but that those living and working in the zone also suffered under a “quasi-caste” economic and legal system

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<sup>247</sup> I discuss the trajectory of twentieth century black activism in Chapter One.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

that offered limited class mobility.<sup>251</sup> West Indians in the zone “were *always* living on the *brink* of crisis. People in such situations are likely to make greater demands on their gods, spirits, and their clergy than would be expected of ordinary Protestant Christians.”<sup>252</sup>

Thus he illustrates how material and legal conditions influenced the fervor and urgency with which folk religion was practiced. He insinuates that it is the imminent threat of crisis that gave Panamanian Revival and Obeah their saliency in that context.

Although I present instances of what might rightly be called resistance in this chapter, I do not intend that a simplistic notion of subaltern resistance be the only way to understand Revival. West Indians adhered to the religion for more quotidian reasons such as physical healing, fellowship, and personal belief in its moral and spiritual precepts. In fact, Revivalists were content to collaborate with authorities if they deemed it in the interest of their community. One informant, a black Zonian who grew up in the community of Red Tank, related to me that the (white) policemen and firemen would often solicit the help of Mother Lee (the founder of St. Joseph’s Spiritual Episcopal Church) if there were issues in the community. One such event occurred when a young West Indian child, whose family lived next to my informant, was lured away from his home and into the bush surrounding the community by the spirit of his deceased grandfather. The authorities solicited the help of the religious leaders in Red Tank, including Mother Lee. The day after the parents reported the child missing, the firemen and police found him in the bush, unharmed and without blemish. This, my informant credited to Mother Lee’s timely spiritual intervention which included prayers, among other things.

While discussion of the social role of Revival among black Zonians is a necessary point of departure, the contemporary context is different than when Bryce-Laporte collected his field notes in the 1950s. The West Indian question no longer dominates Panamanian political discourse as it did for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the Canal Zone with its attendant American presence has faded into memory. West Indian Panamanians

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<sup>251</sup> R.S. Bryce-Laporte, “Crisis, Contraculture, and Religion,” 105.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

possess full *de jure* citizenship rights. Though Panama may be economically dependent on foreign commerce and tourism, it cannot be reasonably called a colony of the United States as the Canal Zone was. Despite the resolution of the political uncertainty in which West Indians found themselves, West Indian religions persist, as do overt and latent racism and discrimination in Panama.<sup>253</sup> These continuities likely explain the retention and development of a morally configured black identity among my informants, nurtured by the shared experiences of racial subordination and injustice in Jamaica and Panama. The racialized consciousness of Revivalists (and other West Indians) did not appear *ex nihilo*; it was birthed in an insular Caribbean context and further nurtured by the lived experiences of West Indians in Panama.<sup>254</sup>

### **Revivalists Speak: Political Project or Anachronistic Retention?**

Thus far I have suggested that the site of formal politics is a necessary, but altogether insufficient means of analyzing black politics, and my focus on Spiritual-Revival churches attempts to fill in the lacunae left by taking such an approach. I have provided a diachronic approach to the study of Revival Zion which demonstrates the existence of a morally configured black identity among Jamaican Bedwardites and Panamanian Revivalists. While I accept Bryce-Laporte's conclusions, the present socio-political condition of West Indians in Panama have shifted, and the crisis paradigm is insufficient for a reading of the current context. What remains then is an explication and demonstration of contemporary Revivalist theory and practice which speak to the present moment.

Chevannes concluded that Jamaican Revival was a mere cultural artifact, an Afro-retentive element in Jamaican society exploited by a national intelligentsia in search of its roots.<sup>255</sup> His position distinguishes between the political, revolutionary, or substantive, on

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<sup>253</sup> The West Indian question posited if West Indians could be properly assimilated into the Panamanian polity. See Chapter One for more details.

<sup>254</sup> A racialized consciousness does not *a priori* reify or re-inscribe racism. Rather, it acknowledges the existence of race as a social (not biological) phenomenon, thereby allowing those who are racially conscious to identify racism in all of its manifestations.

<sup>255</sup> Chevannes, *Revivalism Disappearing*, 15.

one hand, and the cultural, folkloric, and retentive, on the other hand, thereby placing these two categories on opposite ends of a spectrum. However, the binary between the culturally retentive and the overtly political must be challenged in the Panamanian context, where many West Indian institutions and cultural practices have either had to change or be abandoned in the face of a virulent and persistent anti-blackness that has been historically constitutive of Panamanian nationalism. If it is Panamanian statecraft, with its attendant racist pathologies that reinscribes and perpetuates anti-black racism even as it declares the country to be a *crisol de razas*, then the “retentive” is inherently political, insofar as it disturbs and contests the hegemonic values of the nation-state, and provides spaces for black counter-discourses, autonomy, community, and self-making.<sup>256</sup>

Although Revival is not central to discourses on West Indian identity in Panama the way that Candomblé is for black movements in Brazil, the spiritual and racialized consciousness of Revivalists holds political potential in a moment where the black movement is looking to expand beyond its current narrow constituency and entrench itself among the grassroots.<sup>257</sup> A basic precondition for the success of any black movement is simply that individuals of African descent are cognizant of and positively esteem their heritage. This potential is not lost on the Revivalists. On the last Saturday in May 2014, I attended a service in Juan Díaz, one of Panama City’s peripheral neighborhoods in which Spiritual-Revival congregations are located. The speaker was a young West Indian from Parque Lefevre, another historically West Indian community. During his address, the speaker said:

*Today is the last day of May. What is May? Month of the Etnia Negra. They say that black people know how to dress, know to smile, know to cook, know to dance, but this is the Etnia Negra church!*

Thus, he critiques the facile representations of black Panamanians that limit their achievements to the realms of fashion, dance, and gastronomy. A couple weeks earlier Pastor Gilpin expressed similar sentiments. His remarks were in response to *los*

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<sup>256</sup> See Chapter One for an in-depth discussion on Twentieth Century Panamanian nationalism.

<sup>257</sup> Priestly and Barrow, “The Black Movement in Panama,” 49.

*Brownies*, a television show that had just debuted in Panama, about a West Indian family that moves from Colón province to Panama City. Replete with racial and regional stereotypes, the show drew the consternation of segments of the Afro-Panamanian community. In an address to his congregation, Pastor Gilpin said “*Dicen que los negros son payasos. Nosotros, no somos payasos. Somos muy inteligentes, amén? Amén!*”

In our interview, he confessed his ambivalence about the *Mes de la Etnia Negra*. While the month is nice for food, traditional dress, and dance, he intoned that black history was more than that; he wanted to hear more about the “*aporte del negro*.” These examples illustrate the awareness that even as Afro-Panamanian culture is officially recognized, perhaps more so than at any time in Panamanian history, the contributions of blacks to the development of the country remains largely obscured and relegated to musical and gastronomic accomplishments. This is reflected in the dichotomy that Pastor Gilpin draws between the portrayal of blacks as *payasos*, and being intelligent. These two informants both argue that celebrations of black culture in Panama are lacking without a discussion of black intellectual activity. When the young man says “this is the *Etnia Negra* church,” he is in fact articulating a transgressive break regarding what is considered the *aporte del negro* by expanding it beyond popular limitations and representations. His statement suggests that the “*Etnia Negra* church” is a site of intellectual activity, and that Revivalists, despite their small size, have something to contribute to West Indian society and Panamanian society more broadly. In my fieldwork, I came to understand that part of Revivalist particularity was not just accoutrements of worship or dress. Their theology and praxis not only affirm the basic humanity of West Indian people, but also make the Spiritual-Revival churches sites not only of resistance against the mestizo hegemony but also sites of creating community with each other based on a commitment to a certain kind of blackness.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> I say “a certain kind of blackness” rather than “blackness” in general as this might imply that there are not *Congos* or *Coloniales* who also are committed to a black identity. While West Indians are well-represented in twentieth and twenty-first century racial activism in Panama, there are *Coloniales* and *Congos* involved in the struggle for racial justice in Panama, and I would not want to omit them.

But what does this commitment look like, and what is its substance? During one of my conversations with the young speaker from Parque Lefevre that I quoted above, we came to the topic of the *Negros Coloniales*. He interjected “*I call them pintao- paint-up black people.*” I pushed him a little further, reminding him that there were people in Colón who called themselves *Congos* whose complexions were darker than either of us. Were they *pintao* as well? He paused for a moment and conceded that I had a point. Although his designation of *Negros Coloniales* writ large as “paint-up black people” is problematic, it is equally revealing. His understanding of blackness is dependent on an explicit identification with a larger community that is grounded in culturally distinctive practices, as opposed to that of the *Colonial*. This must be understood in the Central American context. Hooker (2009) says “*Afro-mestizos*, who can be either urban or rural, have not developed a collective racial/cultural group identity or made demands for collective rights. The situation of *Afro-mestizos* is not untypical of that of many Afro-descendants elsewhere in Latin America.”<sup>259</sup>

However, Panamanian Revivalists are engaged in an active struggle to maintain and define their distinctive way of life that mestizo nationalisms do not leave room for. Perhaps one of the most salient examples is language; by and large, Revivalists conduct bilingual services, and encourage the use of English in addition to Spanish.<sup>260</sup> Unlike some West Indians, who have succumbed to the pressure to relegate English-speaking to the private sphere or to not speak it at all, they insist upon the use of their ancestral and communal language which their forebears brought from the West Indies. During an anniversary service for a church in Bocas, the first 15 minutes or so were conducted entirely in Spanish. Then one of the presiding bishops, a native of Bocas, took the microphone and interjected: “We are a bilingual church, so we are going to speak English and Spanish! We have thrown our culture under the table, and we wonder why so many things are lost.” He then proceeded to do simultaneous translation for large parts of the service from the Spanish into English. At the peak of the service, an elderly West Indian

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<sup>259</sup> Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75.

<sup>260</sup> In fact, a mix of English, Spanish, and Panamanian Creole English

woman from Panama City gave a short preamble before her sermon, which she delivered in English and Spanish:

*I should have brought some stones so you could stone me, 'cuz I'm a Panamanian, but I'll tell you what. The Spanish- is not my ting! Bocas del Toro is all Spanish now! We [used to] talk all bara bara bara bari guari guari guari.<sup>261</sup> Bajan, Jamaican, Grenadian! Now? Is pura 'Panish!*

By insisting on the use of English and Spanish in their services, Revivalists not only assert the uniqueness of their culture and the connection to their ancestors, but they also disrupt official proclamations of what it means to be Panamanian via a careful and deliberate negotiation. All the Revivalists that I encountered were proud to be Panamanian and West Indian; they identify themselves as such and see no need for the two identities to be in conflict. Notwithstanding, Panamanian state formation has historically required ethnic minorities to lose their particularity and integrate into the national culture. Conniff (1985) states that Panamanian pressure to assimilate has been successful in many respects, as many West Indians did not transmit English to their children, adopted Catholicism, and Hispanicized their first names.<sup>262</sup> Not all have acquiesced however, and Revivalists are among those who resist. Pastor Gilpin says “You have to be yourself and you have to know where you come from, because even when you speak Spanish, the Spanish man will not accept you.”<sup>263</sup> He speaks for those who recognize that not only is assimilation futile, and without transformative potential, but that it is also antithetical to West Indian communal practices and self-making. My informants believe that assimilation can only offer a marginal citizenship in return for the loss of a cultural patrimony and a connection to the ancestors. In this context, “English” becomes a repository of folk wisdom, proverbs, and history. The choice to habitually speak and transmit it to the next generation is laden with political significance because:

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<sup>261</sup> Guari-Guari is the English-lexified creole language spoken natively by the creoles of Bocas del Toro province.

<sup>262</sup> Conniff, *Black Labor*, 137.

<sup>263</sup> In West Indian vernacular, “Spanish” refers to those who habitually speak Spanish, usually mestizos.



*We all need histories that no history book can tell, but they are not in the classroom- not the history classrooms anyway. They are in the lessons we learn at home, in poetry, and childhood games, in what is left of history when we close the history books with their verifiable facts.*<sup>264</sup>

In this way, Revivalists provide spaces in the home and in places of worship where West Indian people can speak to each other and speak against the dominant narratives. In these counter discourses, Africa figures prominently; it is not only a racial place of origin, but it is also the genesis of the Revival Work.<sup>265</sup> Although my informants explained that Jamaicans brought the religion to Panama, they believed that it had its origins in Africa, and they were proud of that fact.<sup>266</sup>

Revivalist music reflects these beliefs, as the singing is usually bilingual, with some of the old Revival songs from Jamaica translated into Spanish.<sup>267</sup> In services, both versions are sung alternatively. However during fieldwork, there was one particular song, “All the Way From Africa Land,” that I only heard in English:

*And I comin' and I comin' and I comin' and I comin'  
Comin' to hear you pray-ay  
And I comin' and I comin' and I comin' and I comin'  
Comin to hear you pray  
All the way from Africa land I comin' to hear you pray-ay  
All the way from Africa land I comin' to hear you pray*

Music, and specifically communal singing, pervades Revivalist services. It is therefore unsurprising that one of the most profound theological and political statements, the assertion of a bold and unapologetic pro-African identity, is expressed in song. Moreover, I do not believe it incidental that this is *only* sung in English. While the shift from English-only to bilingual services began the 1970s as a response to instances of language attrition among ethnic West Indian youth, the increasing presence of *Negros*

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<sup>264</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 72.

<sup>265</sup> Dianne Stewart had the same experience during her fieldwork with Revivalists in the mid-1990s in Jamaica.

<sup>266</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes*, 106.

<sup>267</sup> These are songs unique to the Spiritual-Revival churches.

*Coloniales* and to a lesser extent, mestizos, is a major reason why all-English services were quite rare at the churches I attended. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the most overt denunciations of *mestizaje* and anti-black racism have come from the West Indian community. The vibrant black press of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was exclusively a West Indian affair.<sup>268</sup> Throughout Central America, English-speaking is racialized as black and spatialized on the Caribbean. The tension between the Pacific and Caribbean regions results from the colonial legacy between Spain and England, and in the popular imagination between mestizos and blacks. This raises a question: can “All the way from Africa Land” be sung in Spanish? This is more than a matter of translating lexicon and transposing syntax. The incorporation of “All the way from Africa land” into the Spanish-language corpus of Revival music might indicate an awareness and acceptance of an explicitly black and pro-African consciousness that has not been visible or viable among the Afro-mestizo grassroots, with the notable exception of the *Congos*.<sup>269</sup> It might also signify that the Spiritual-Revival faith had become an *Afro-Panamanian* institution instead of a West Indian one.

These are more than racial or identitarian claims. My informants believe that there is a *moral* valence in being black, preserving one’s culture, worshipping in the ways of the ancestors, and in resisting *mestizaje*. In a context where many West Indians assimilated into the dominant culture and abandoned their heritage, speaking English and attending a Spiritual Church are conscious decisions to retain and assert a black identity that is not co-opted by the Panamanian state; they become expressions of a moral community dedicated to resisting anti- blackness. One might argue that granting such attention to language and long-held practices is myopic, and perhaps even essentialist. Priestly and Barrow (2003) make such a claim.

*Promover la conservación del inglés como herramienta cultural para los nietos y nietas de habla inglesa también es bueno. Pero presentar al inglés como la base*

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<sup>268</sup> Putnam, *Radical Moves*, 132.

<sup>269</sup> A subset of *Negro Colonial*. They inhabit Portobelo and the villages of the *Costa Arriba* of Colón province. They have an autochthonous style of drumming, dance, and speech.

*fundamental de nuestra identidad panameño-caribeña no me luce como una propuesta del todo buena. En efecto, ello niega la riqueza multicultural y multilingüe de nuestra gente, congelándolo en el pasado, creando límites innecesarios, no aconsejables, que nos separan de otros negros hispanoparlantes de nuestro país, incluidos nuestros progenitores...no creo necesario ni posible recrear en Panamá lo que él llama una identidad caribeña.*<sup>270</sup>

I partially agree with the authors; my West Indian informants do not advocate the use of English or PCE as “la base fundamental” of West Indian culture, although they do believe that were it to disappear from the Panamanian landscape, their culture would be impoverished. Barrow and Priestley’s point here misses the mark, as I have never heard my informants advocate for an English/PCE monolingualism. Nor has Russell (2003), to whom they respond in the quote cited above, made such a claim. In any case, their argument fails to acknowledge the social and historical context in which language is linked to identity. In fighting against what they perceive to be a form of essentialism, they sideline the violent and anti-black impulse of the Panamanian assimilationist project. The comments of a family friend from Rio Abajo are instructive here. Upon disclosing my research topic to her, she responded:

*Getting information from different generations is vital. Things have really changed. There was a time when West Indians made sure English was passed on to their kids...that is not happening too much anymore. There have always been people with the crazy idea that, "if I don't speak English, that makes me less black." Yup, I said it!*

Putting language use, personal, and communal identity claims in their historic and social contexts is key. Barrow and Priestley’s idea that the recognition and preservation of West Indian identities in Panama is a possible challenge to the cohesion of the black movement must be brought into question as it reproduces discourses about West Indian particularity that encourage the surrender of those distinguishing or autochthonous characteristics. My informants do not believe that a West Indian identity should be frozen in time; as discussed in the last chapter, they acknowledge differences between their religious

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<sup>270</sup> George Priestley and Alberto Barrow, *Piel Oscura Panamá*, 264-65.

practices and those of Jamaicans. Rather, they believe that West Indian young people in Panama have the right and the privilege to critically engage with their culture, an engagement that mestizaje does not permit.

### **Traveling in the Spirit**

Revivalists engage in self-making and experience *communitas* through their contact with the ancestors and travels in the spiritual realm. Expressions of this come from two sources: spirit possession and the liturgy of St. Joseph's Spiritual Episcopal Church. Revivalists engage with the spiritual realm through "traveling" and possession. Among my informants, possession occurs through the will of the Holy Spirit and the openness of the believer to the experience. "Traveling" is a kind of trance whereby they are transported to other places in the spiritual world.<sup>271</sup> Their activities in the spiritual realm are very much like those in the physical realm; they pray, sing, dance, and worship. Despite being several generations removed from Africa, it remains important as an important part of their religious practice and experience. During a journey at one church, the presiding bishop anointed one of her drummers with flowers from the table as well as olive oil. After the service, I inquired as to the meaning. She responded "you didn't hear what happen? He was beatin di drum wid dem in Ethiopia!" That her congregant traveled to Ethiopia, which occupies a mythical and mystical role in black diasporic consciousness as a symbol of freedom and resistance to oppression, is not insignificant; it may be understood as a kind of spiritual repatriation to Africa. "Repatriation emerged as a spiritual desire, a yearning, an appetite and need for home, freedom, and fulfillment."<sup>272</sup>

Zane's (1999) analysis of spiritual traveling among the Converted (Spiritual Baptists in St. Vincent), whom my informants consider co-religionists, further demonstrates the salience of spiritual travels for West Indians:

*Africa, India, and China (the sources of British colonial labor) are part of the spiritual world. However, Europe is not. America is, only inasmuch as the*

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<sup>271</sup> In my attendance at services I observed people fall into possession who declared afterwards that they had traveled to such locales as Africa (generically), Jamaica, Ethiopia, and India.

<sup>272</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 60.

*Converted have been there physically...the excision of Europe from the spiritual earth (and especially Great Britain, which has such a strong presence in St. Vincent) is a wonderfully creative inversion. Europeans, who created the world in their own fashion, moving populations hither and yon and drawing the boundaries of Earth in geographically impossible straight lines, are not a part of Converted cosmology. The British, who debated so long about whether or not African slaves should be Christianized and allowed into heaven (and freedom), are denied all spiritual reality in the Converted world.*<sup>273</sup>

More research is necessary to fully map the spiritual geographies of Panamanian Revival. While I cannot state with certainty the extent to which Europe or America are included or excluded from the spiritual realm, the inclusion of Africa, Ethiopia, Jamaica, and India is reflective of three processes at work, “creation, constraint, and inversion.”<sup>274</sup> Spiritual travels are an inherently creative endeavor, but this creativity constrained insofar as Revivalists travel to places that reflect the lived experiences and historical memories of West Indians. Inversion then becomes “a way of addressing the restrictions of colonially structured experience.”<sup>275</sup> Their mental and spiritual return to Africa is both reflective of its importance for group identity and spiritual sustenance, and symptomatic of the continued subjugation of black people in Panama. This is because “African-based cosmological systems are complex manifestations of the geographies of crossing and dislocation. They are at the same time manifestations of locatedness, rootedness, and belonging that map individual and collective relationships to the Divine.”<sup>276</sup>

The declaration of principles of St. Joseph’s, which the church reads weekly, is another example of Revivalist self-making. While they are the only church that recites these principles it is my understanding that they are common to most, if not all Spiritual-Revival churches.<sup>277</sup>

1. We believe in the everlasting life of the universal consciousness.

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<sup>273</sup> Wallace W. Zane, *Journey to the Spiritual Lands: The Natural History of a West Indian Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 146.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 290-91.

<sup>277</sup> There are eight; I cite five here.

2. We believe God can express himself spiritually and materially, as all things are made and created by [him].
3. We affirm that a correct understanding of these expressions and living in accordance with them constitute a true religion.
4. We affirm that the personal identity of any person or animated object continue after they have made the transition.
5. We believe in the communication with God, and those who live in the spirit world.<sup>278</sup>

For Revivalists, communion is possible between those present and the departed ancestors; their presence is acknowledged, though they are not propitiated. While not everyone can see them, those who have the gift of sight are able to see and communicate with them. Communion with the ancestors provides a respite from the disregard for the past which are pursued in a quest to be increasingly “modern.” Indeed, many West Indians that I have encountered associate their folk religions with backwardness, and poverty. While there are those within the Spiritual-Revival faith who desire to be more modern, there are others who understand the inherent fruitlessness of such a task, as Iton reminds: “Instead we aspire to be modern, as if this were somehow a new position and if blacks and nonwhites were not already clearly *and uncomfortably* modern, as if modernity were sustainable without the nigger and the fluid in/convenience that is blackness lying, albeit differently both outside and inside its borders.”<sup>279</sup> The personal relationships that Revivalists have with each other and their ancestors permit the retention and reconstruction of genealogies that are neither reflected in, nor legible to the state discourses. What is ultimately at work in spiritual traveling, and statements of faith that recognize ancestors and other powers in the spirit world is a signifying practice, whereby “persons, acting upon an external environment, construct themselves as social beings.”<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> This comes from the handout distributed at the beginning of every Saturday service.

<sup>279</sup> Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 288.

<sup>280</sup> Comaroff, *Body of Power*, 6.

## **Gender and Revival**

The preponderance of women as members and as leaders is one of Revival's historically distinguishing characteristics; this is true at the level of laity and leadership. While Protestants and Catholics may debate women's authority to lead congregations, it is an uncontested norm in Panamanian Revival for women and men to lead with equal power and authority. They set tables, preach, teach, heal, and participate fully in religious life. Unlike other Christians, whose leaders undergo formal ministerial training, Revivalists rise to the rank of leader and come to head their own congregations through a process that they describe as "learning the work." This is a deeply personal and intimate process that involves trust, willingness to learn and teach, a firm commitment to the community, and a desire to master the Revival work. Whenever I asked my informants how they came to the work, the response was inevitably that they trained under a particular Mother or Bishop. The relationships that black women develop among themselves are the conduit whereby the cosmology and ritual of Panamanian Revival are taught and retained. Generally, Revivalists do not attend theological seminaries or ministerial training schools. Therefore, these interpersonal and intergenerational relationships are the means by which knowledge and tradition are transmitted and they are central to the continued existence of Spiritual-Revival churches.

Women control the setting of tables and help officiate the ordinance of baptism, two of the most important features of the religion. The "table mother" and "water mother" respectively are responsible for setting up communion tables and other tables for ceremonies in the church, while the water mother assists the leader in baptizing new candidates. While the roles and hierarchy of the Spiritual-Revival churches are not as rigid as they used to be, I still have not heard mention of a table or water father. This leads me to believe that although it was never said explicitly, Revivalists assume that it is a woman who will occupy these roles. Women's work is not incidental, but *foundational* to their religious life. Notwithstanding, there is a conspicuous lack of what might be called a feminist discourse. Borrowing from Obioma Nnaemeka, I suggest that this may be because "[T]he majority of [Revivalist] women are not hung up on 'articulating their

feminism'; they just do it."<sup>281</sup> <sup>282</sup> While my informants all believe that there are differences between men and women, these differences do not appear to extend to the realm of spiritual authority or power; such things are reflective of one's relationship with God and ability to live an upright life before congregation and surrounding community. Mother Pet informed me that unlike other churches, where the foods on the table are consumed after thanksgiving services, she does not permit that in her church; she boxes it up and distributes it to orphans or destitute individuals. Similarly, Rev. Livingston undertakes weekly visits to incarcerated young men in Panama City.

However I would not want to give the impression that Revivalist women, by their affiliation with this religion, have entered into a paradise free of gender distinction. I share Guano's (1994) skepticism that "Revival Zion should be a sort of women's world, a happy island in the male dominance of the other Christian denominations."<sup>283</sup> She describes stricter requirements for women (e.g. restrictions regarding dress and makeup) and argues that men are actually overrepresented among Revival leadership and have an easier time attaining prestige within a given congregation than women do.<sup>284</sup> While my fieldwork does not support all of her points (men may be slightly overrepresented among Revival leadership, though they are not the majority), I did observe several things that would complicate reading Revival as a matriarchy. In any given church, women were more likely to adhere to the uniform.<sup>285</sup> Furthermore, Pastor Gilpin informed me that although Mother Lee founded his congregation, she would always carry a man with her to perform baptisms. At one church, on Father's Day, a visiting female bishop preached to an audience of mostly women (of varying ages, none of whom were married) about the importance of biblical submission to their husbands, and the corresponding importance of men loving their wives as Christ loves his people. During one service I attended in Bocas, several guest speakers saluted the bishop of the church for her missionary work in the

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<sup>281</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2000), 31.

<sup>282</sup> I replace the original "African" with "Revivalist."

<sup>283</sup> Guano, "Revival Zion: An Afro-Christian Religion in Jamaica," *Anthropos*, Bd. 89, H 4./6. (1994): 526

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 526.

<sup>285</sup> See Chapter Two for an in-depth description of the uniform.



bordering province of Limón, Costa Rica. One of the facts about her newly-established congregation that they emphasized repeatedly was that it was comprised of mostly men, to which the members responded favorably. The presence of men in the church is strongly encouraged, and is desired, due to the gender imbalance in congregations. It is not that Revivalists esteem men over women- far from it. However, Revivalists know that their membership is mostly female, and they would like to see greater involvement on the part of their men. This reflects their belief that the church should reflect the demographics of their community. If this is to be so, then the presence and participation of West Indian men is a must.

What to make of these seemingly ambivalent statements? I offer a few suggestions. The first is that that Revivalist thought on gender must be understood on its own terms; they have their *Matriarch Mothers* and their *Patriarch Bishops*. *Mothering and fathering* are equally important metaphors that describe the relationship of men and women to those who are under their spiritual care. Moreover, the Revival faith in Panama is largely composed of women, and that there are no evident barriers to their assuming leadership positions within the faith. I do not know of any other religious institution in Panama where women can participate and *lead* as fully as they do in Spiritual-Revival churches.<sup>286</sup> Their presence and contributions to the life of the church are vital. Furthermore, when the Spirit possesses a believer, gives revelation, or calls one to give testimony to uplift the church, there is no gender distinction. As one leader said to me “anybody [regardless of gender] can do this Work,” The body, which is often a *woman’s* body, due to the demographics of the church, then becomes of epistemic importance to Revivalists as it is a means through which the Divine reveals itself, gives revelation, and consoles the faithful.

*In Eurocentric Christianity, theology has encouraged the belief that body and spirituality are contradistinct... within the context of African-derived religions, theological ideas emerge from concretized practice, ritual, and embodied spirituality. Because Africans understand the body to be a vehicle for spiritual*

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<sup>286</sup> There is at least one community of Orisha worshippers in Panama, but I do not know them personally. It is likely that women in that tradition have comparable opportunities for leadership.

*expressions, theological sources are composed in the “text” of corporeal mobility where a somatic memory of the community’s heritage is recorded and recalled through ritual performance.*<sup>287</sup>

I submit then, that for most Revivalists, it is this “embodied spirituality” that operates in and through *black women’s bodies* that make them the loci of divine power and communion. Ultimately it is not for me to say whether and to what extent the Revival Work is properly “feminist;” the term is not in the vocabulary of my informants. I therefore await the response of scholar-practitioners whose engagement with the tradition is longer than mine, and whose depth and breadth can eclipse my own. But what has emerged unequivocally from my research is that black women and men together carry their work with them and in them. This is probably why Spiritual-Revivalists are wont to say that all Christians worship God, but that they serve him *in spirit and in truth*.<sup>288</sup> And as I have demonstrated, the Spirit does not discriminate.

### **Conclusion**

This discussion of Revivalist epistemology, practice, and identity began with the Bedwardites in Jamaica, continued with the “Benjinite” churches of the Canal Zone, and ended in an analysis of contemporary Spiritual-Revival belief, practice, and gender roles. My aim was to ground historically and ethnographically the development of a morally configured black identity among a particular subset of the West Indian community and to understand their contribution to black life and black thought in Panama. The political project of Panamanian Revival is the conservation and development of an explicitly racialized consciousness that furnishes “*a framework for interpreting the past, present, and future,*”<sup>289</sup> to the end that their children may know themselves and their ancestors.

To address the place that Revivalists may occupy in the wider aims of the black movement, a brief discussion of the trajectory and aims of said movement is in order. Priestly and Barrow (2003) assert the need for it to become more entrenched among the

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<sup>287</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 198.

<sup>288</sup> John 4:24

<sup>289</sup> Price, *Becoming Rasta*, 21.

grassroots, and not just the middle class.<sup>290</sup> More importantly, they argue that black organizations need more sustained or robust critiques of the neoliberal project, which adversely affects Panama's black, indigenous, and poor. Issues such as affordable housing, cost of living, utilities and transportation, criminal justice system, racial, gender, and sexual stigmatization need to become more prominent on the political agenda. Aside from this particular agenda, Priestly and Barrow also maintain that the black movement needs to be truly autonomous and wean themselves from the control and patronage of political parties in order to "preserve its autonomy, credibility, and effectiveness."<sup>291</sup> Perhaps most significantly from a historical perspective, the current movement has managed to somewhat repair the breaches between West Indians and *Coloniales*, at least at the level of formal political organization.

As black Panamanians from various communities struggle for racial justice, where do the Revivalists fit? Historically, Panamanian Revivalism has been a largely West Indian institution, there are increasing numbers of *Coloniales* and mestizos in their midst, and some have risen to leadership positions. Although the tension between the country's two communities will not fully abate for some time, Spiritual-Revival churches are welcoming spaces for *Coloniales* and it is likely that they will become increasingly integrated. According to Pastor Brown, most of the people he ministers to in Colón are *Coloniales*, and it is in that population that the Revival work is growing.

More importantly, Revivalists have developed personal relationships with and lead NGOs that serve black Panamanian communities. For example, Pastor Brown is the Co-Founder and Co-Director of Cambio Creativo, an organization that educates and helps feed children from approximately one hundred families living in Coco Solo, one of Colón's most impoverished neighborhoods. Brown and his mentor, the late Bishop Alejandro Headly, were also involved with the Fundación de la Etnia Negra de Colón, which among other aims, seeks to "*preservar y divulgar las tradiciones, cultura,*

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<sup>290</sup> Priestly and Barrow, "The Black Movement in Panama," 49.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

*creencias y aportes de la Etnia Negra al desarrollo de la República de Panamá.*”<sup>292</sup> The participation of the Association in the *Desfile de la Etnia Negra* in 2014 for the first time may be a sign of increasing public visibility in the wider community. It remains to be seen how the Association will present itself to the public going forward. For the time being, perhaps the most important role that Revivalists play is manifested in their presence in the community and their relationships with believers and nonbelievers alike. For example, Pastor Brown’s work has a much wider impact than on the twenty or so persons that come to his services on the weekend, or even the families whose children come to Cambio Creativo for feeding and after-school tutoring. In this way, Revivalists have an influence on their surrounding communities that belies their small size. How their engagement with black civil society, the state, and various black communities will develop ultimately remains to be seen. Spiritual-Revival churches will continue to meet the needs of those around them for at least a little while to come; my informants related that their constituency far exceeds their baptized membership. Nonbelievers routinely solicit them for healing, conflict resolution, personal advice, and prayer.

Revival’s relationship to the wider question of class within Panamanian society is also ambivalent. While many Revivalists are poor, several have entered the middle class. Panama’s commitment to neoliberalism and its attractiveness to foreign capital have allowed for the proliferation of call centers and an increasingly important tourism industry. Mastery of English, which many Revivalists have, has provided them with increased economic opportunities under the present neoliberal framework. However, like other Panamanians they are also affected by the rising cost of living, corruption, and institutional racism. These present common ground for coalition-building going forward. Again, what role the present and future generations of Revivalists will play is as yet unclear. However, there is little in the ideological or institutional character of Panamanian Revival as a whole that would restrict it from participating in the aforementioned alliances necessary for the success of the black movement.

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<sup>292</sup> “Acerca de la Fundación,” last modified 2013, <http://www.fundacionetnianegracoln.net/nosotros.html>.

I share Comaroff's observation that Revival "cannot really change the structural basis of its followers' malaise, although it might alter considerably their consciousness and modes of practice. Such reform is not historically unimportant, though..."<sup>293</sup> What the Spiritual-Revival churches do provide are morally configured identities that develop a connection with the past, encouragement for right living, and a commitment to an ancestral and autonomous blackness. That a small and dedicated band of believers have continued to resist the cultural currents toward mestizaje and a forgetting of the West Indian past and present is remarkable.

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<sup>293</sup> Comaroff, *Body of Power*, 251. The "malaise" to which she refers is that of racism, poverty, joblessness, underemployment, etc.

## Conclusion: Rooted and Grounded

*This work is about our people's struggle, the historical Black struggle. It takes as a first premise that for a people to survive in struggle it must be on its own terms: the collective wisdom which is a synthesis of culture and the experience of that struggle. The shared past is precious, not for itself, but because it is the basis of consciousness, of knowing, of being. It cannot be traded in exchange for expedient alliances or traduced by convenient abstractions or dogma. It contains philosophy, theories of history, and social prescriptions native to it. It is a construct possessing its own terms, exacting its own truths.*<sup>294</sup>

Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*

Rooted and grounded. I heard these words frequently during my research, and their meaning operates in at least two registers. "Rooted and Grounded" is the name of a popular church chorus. To be rooted and grounded is to know what one believes and why. It connotes a steadfastness and purity of faith, and a firm belief in the power of God. Rooted and grounded also serves as a metaphor for my informants' understanding of themselves, their history, and their place within and without the Panamanian body politic. Rootedness places Revivalists within the context of a larger historical struggle in Panama, even as many black Panamanians, both West Indian and *Colonial*, remain estranged from their heritage, and alienated from critical and morally configured black identities that can situate Panama's black communities within the larger historical struggle between Europe and Africa. Like Price's (2005) Rastafari informants, my fieldwork has revealed that the bulk of Panamanian Revivalists are a "religiously *and* racially conscious people."<sup>295</sup>

For scholars of the African Diaspora, "roots" implies, fixity, conservatism, and even essentialism. I have not labored to prove that Revivalism is a religion possessing this much from Africa, or that much from Europe. I have not argued that it is a watered down African tradition because the gods of Africa are absent, nor that it is a deficient Christianity because outsiders do not always understand what they believe. Revivalists

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<sup>294</sup> Robinson, *Black Marxism*, Preface.

<sup>295</sup> Price, *Becoming Rasta*, 1.

describe themselves as Christians and say that their work originates in Africa. I have found both claims to be historically and anthropologically sound. While both roots and routes are helpful metaphors for the study of Diaspora, I close with a few thoughts on rootedness, since the concept was important to my informants, and came up repeatedly in our conversations.

I do not believe in “essences” but my research demonstrates that an understanding of oneself in relation to ancestors and to the past provides individuals and communities with the ability to make sense of their lived experiences and grants them access to communal histories that might otherwise be lost. This translates into an awareness of transgenerational and diasporic black suffering that holds slavery, the silver roll, segregation, and Panamanian nationalism as constituent elements in the suffering of black people in Panama.<sup>296</sup> Through the history of the Spiritual-Revival churches, I have explicated the nature of religious and racial formation among Panamanian Revivalists. To do this, it was necessary to review the history of black self-making (*Congos*, Creoles, West Indians, *Coloniales*, and Afro-Panamanians) in Panama, as well as how the particular epistemology of Revivalists might relate to the wider black movement. More than an ethnography or religious history, I have attempted to write a history of consciousness that is not only rooted and grounded in the particular experiences of West Indians in Panama, but one that is also *routed*, connected to Jamaican Revivalists across time, and connected to Africa, Ethiopia, Jamaica, and India through their spiritual journeys. Their experiences in the Spirit, that is, their *routedness* as diasporic travelers, reinforces their *rootedness* as Revivalists. I do not pretend that Revival is a panacea for the unemployment, crime, or systemic racism that black Panamanians must contend with. Rather, I charge that examining the history of Panamanian Revival brings into full view the anti-black and anti-West Indian character of Panamanian state formation and *mestizaje*. I share Jamaican anthropologist Barry Chevannes’ observation that

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<sup>296</sup> The system of race-based wage discrimination during the years of canal construction, wherein blacks were paid at a lower scale than whites.

*The question is not whether Revivalism can be found in Africa, or even the matter of spirit possession, the drumming and the dancing. It's not whether voodoo is traceable to Dahomey, as it is, or Santería to the Yoruba, and Kumina to the Congo. That's not the point. The point is to understand the outlook of the people on the world, and how that outlook has shaped their institutions.*<sup>297</sup>

Revivalists understand the present and historical condition of black people in Panama in a manner that both defies celebratory and uncritical ideals of racial democracy, and makes blackness a thing of beauty, valor, and esteem. Hegemonic understandings of race in Panama operate as they do in part because whiteness is not visible. Making whiteness visible “is to thus transform the ethical self-understanding of the political community such that its character as a racial polity is acknowledged.”<sup>298</sup> The American civil rights movement was one such moment, forcing whites to see their political community as it appeared from a black perspective.<sup>299</sup> Not only is whiteness invisible to many socially white Panamanians, but blackness is either invisible or repulsive to many Afrodescendants. Like others in Panama’s black movement Revivalists make blackness visible and viable as an identity. In doing so, they bring whiteness and blackness into a dialectical relationship that thus manifests Panama’s historical legacies and present processes of racial subordination. This is not a promise of success, but rather an invitation to struggle.

As I concluded my interview with Pastor Gilpin, our topic of conversation turned to his children, racism, and what would become of Spiritual-Revival churches in the future. I asked him if he thought that things would improve for black Panamanians. With his characteristic frankness, he responded, “*las cosas van a cambiar un día!...un día no cercano. Pero hay que ser optimista.*”

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<sup>297</sup> Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 209

<sup>298</sup> Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity*, 51.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.



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