

# Reconstructing Blackness in Select Jamaican Theatre through Modern Blackness

Aena Khalid, Independent Researcher

## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the theatrical expressions which pave the ways for select Jamaican theatre to actively reclaim and redefine notions of pre-existing notion about Blackness through the process of decolonization in *3 Jamaican Plays: A Postcolonial Anthology* (1977 1987). The objective of this study is to examine the expressions of Modern Blackness like Jonkonnu, Dancehall, Ghetto Feminism, and Creolization in reshaping Jamaican theater through resistance and redefining cultural identity in Jamaica. Deborah A. Thomas's idea of Modern Blackness, in “*Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture*” actively challenges the traditional stereotypes that have long been used to marginalise Jamaican people. Moreover, the Decolonization process serves as the theoretical foundation for this qualitative study. The study proposes that the theatrical expressions like Jonkonnu, Dancehall, Ghetto Feminism, and Creolization show how Black people are actively decolonizing the pre-existing idea of Blackness. The study highlights that Jamaican community is decolonizing themselves by bringing these contemporary cultural expressions in the select Jamaican theater.

**Keywords:** Creolization, Cultural Resistance, Dancehall, Decolonization, Ghetto Feminism, Jonkonnu, Modern Blackness

## Introduction

*3 Jamaican Plays: A Postcolonial Anthology*, edited by Honor Ford-Smith, is a fascinating compilation that reflects the complex interplay between identity, resistance, and modern cultural expressions in post colonial Jamaican theater. The anthology includes works by Ginger Knight and Stafford Ashani and the joint work of Eugene Williams, Patricia Cumper, Carol Lawes, Hertencer Lindsay, and Honor Ford-Smith. These playwrights contribute to the cultural and political liberation movement in the postcolonial era in the process of decolonization

i.e. highlighting working-class power, Modern Blackness, and its cultural expressions Jonkonnu, Dance Hall, Ghetto Feminism and the use of Creolization.

“Decolonization refers to the process through which colonised countries and people achieve independence from colonial rule, reclaim their cultural, political, and economic autonomy, and work to undo the remaining effects of colonisation” (Fanon 56). This involves dismantling colonial structures, ideologies and rebuilding society based on indigenous values, traditions, and systems. The term “decolonization” gained prominence during the mid-20th century, particularly in the global movements for independence from European colonial powers following World War II. Poka Laenui in *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* stated the “Five stages of Decolonization” which explores the psychological and cultural impacts of colonisation. Jamaican society needs to address the five stages to explain the complete sense of the decolonization process. The process of decolonization begins with “Awareness or recovery” the initial stage where the colonised become aware of their oppression and the colonial structures that subjugate them. This stage is critical as it lays the groundwork for subsequent actions towards liberation. Frantz Fanon describes the awakening of the colonised people to their plight and the realisation that change is necessary, stating, “Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (Fanon 59). This awareness creates a foundation for the next step, Rejection.

In the “Rejection or Grief stage,” the colonised people reject the colonial ideologies and identities imposed upon them. They begin to protest to reclaim their own Black identity. Edward Said *Orientalism* argues that rejecting colonial narratives is essential for reclaiming indigenous identities. Said writes, “Orientalism is more useful as a sign of European-Atlantic dominance over the Orient than it is as an accurate description of the Orient.” (Said 68). This rejection paves the way for the Reclamation stage.

During “Reclamation or Dreaming stage,” the colonised people revive their indigenous culture, language, and identity. This stage involves reclaiming the traditions and cultural practices that colonialism sought to erase. Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, in *Decolonising the Mind*, emphasises the importance of reclaiming language and culture, asserting, “Every language has two distinct personalities: it serves as a medium for communication and an exchange for culture.” (Thiongo 101). The reclamation of culture leads to the Reconstruction stage.

In “Reconstruction or Commitment stage,” the colonised society started to build its institutions, structures, and systems based on their reclaimed culture and values. This involves creating a new national identity and socio-political structures. Amilcar Cabral, in *Return to the Source*, discusses the reconstruction of culture and institutions, stating, “Culture is both the result of and a determinant of a people's history.” (19). This reconstruction process is crucial for establishing a solid foundation for the final stage of Action.

The “Action stage” is characterised by active resistance and performance. Active resistance in the sense that Jamaican playwrights counterattack Western intellectuals and elaborate Black cultural values. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said discusses the role of intellectuals in challenging power structures and exposing injustices. “Real intellectuals are supposed to expose the lies of the powerful, confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than produce them), witness persecution and suffering, and attack the status quo” (119). This highlights the importance of intellectuals in resisting and challenging dominant narratives. This action stage of decolonization is echoed in the works of Ashani, Knight, and Cumper et al. who have used their art to confront and critique Western portrayals of Black cultural values. It involves using cultural expressions such as theatre, music, and art to dismantle colonial legacies and assert a reclaimed identity.

While the earlier stages of decolonization (awareness, rejection, reclamation, and reconstruction) are essential but the action stage (Performing Art) is crucial for achieving true recognition and respect. Jamaican playwrights like Ashani, Knight, and Cumper et al. are effectively dismantling colonial legacies and asserting their cultural identity through active resistance and performance. These playwrights make significant strides towards a decolonized and empowered Black identity by reversing the roles that are historically imposed by British colonial rule. Their work emphasises the importance of visible, performative acts of resistance in the ongoing struggle for decolonization and cultural autonomy.

The action stage is essential because it translates theoretical and ideological reclamation into tangible and visible acts of resistance. Theoretical reclamation involves the re-examination and reinterpretation of theories and concepts that have traditionally been defined by dominant or colonial perspectives. Ideological reclamation involves reclaiming and reshaping the beliefs and values sabotaging the culture and politics of society. Ashani, Knight, and Cumper et al. use theatre to challenge colonial narratives to assert dignity and respectability of Black Jamaicans

and critique socio-economic inequalities. These playwrights make their resistance visible and impactful by performing their reclaimed identities and cultural practices.

The work “Reconstructing Blackness in Select Jamaican Theatre through Modern Blackness” or the utilization of Cultural Expressions like Jonkonnu, Dancehall, Ghetto Feminism, and Creolization are important as these examine how Jamaican theater uses creative cultural expressions in theatre to redefine Black identity through the process of decolonization. “Modern Blackness is migratory and urban, shaped by African-American popular style and youth-oriented popular culture. It is radical consumerist, ghetto feminist, and individualistic.” (Thomas 2). This quote highlights how Modern Blackness redefines Black identity by incorporating elements from African heritage and rejecting the constraints of colonial stereotypes. This term is not just an aesthetic or cultural movement; it is a profound form of resistance against historical and ongoing oppression. The Black working class are opt to confront and dismantle the pervasive stereotypes that have long been imposed by colonial narratives by reclaiming and redefining their cultural identity. This process involves a deliberate and dynamic expression of Black identity that is rooted in both historical awareness and contemporary realities.

This study contributes to post colonial literature by concentrating on the process of decolonization in the post colonial era in Jamaica. The study focuses at how Blackness is actively reclaimed and acted in various theatrical settings in the select Jamaica theatre. The study adds to the body of literature by providing new insights into a few Jamaican playwrights and their efforts in reframing complicated Black identity and cultural resistance to historical legacies. The objectives of this research are to analyse the ways in which select Jamaican theatrical plays reinterpret ideas of Modern Blackness, to examine how Modern Blackness expressions like Dancehall, Ghetto Feminism, Jonkonnu, and Creolization have influenced contemporary Jamaican theater in the process of decolonization and to explore the play’s performative elements and how they influence spectators to support resistance and a re-defined cultural identity.

The research questions are:

i) In what ways do select Jamaican theatrical performances function as a vehicle for redefining and reconstructing Blackness?

ii) How do cultural expressions such as Jonkonnu, Dancehall, Ghetto Feminism, and Creolized language influence the inventive themes and plots of modern Jamaican plays that depict the process of decolonization?

iii) What role can performance studies play to comprehend how these plays have influenced Jamaican culture and the development of Black identity?

## **Literature Review**

For almost a century, British colonial education was implanted in the middle-class belief that “being civilised” means respecting Western art and institutions. Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* describes that the idea of difference as a sign of subjugation (78). Capitalist domination in Jamaican postcolonial era implies that the types of cultural items (music, theatre, literature, and art) created and promoted in Jamaica are frequently impacted by market demand (Smith 128). This shows that the Jamaican working class is still colonised by new ruling class over them with the same Black skin tone.

Like many other “new states” after WWII, Jamaicans have struggled with colonial legacies. They aim to create a cultural repertoire that reflects the creolized history of Jamaica. It also inspires them to participate in a global political economy as independent citizens, embodied by the national motto “Out of Many, One People” (Thomas 1). The phrase emphasises the resilience and determination of the Black community in seeking respect and acknowledgment of their inherent worth and identity.

Jamaica gained independence in 1962 and embarked on reclaiming its national identity from British colonial rule. Independence is not just a political milestone but also a cultural renaissance aimed at rediscovering and valuing the indigenous African heritage that have been suppressed. This post-colonial period marks the beginning of a significant transformation as Jamaicans strive to establish a sense of autonomy and self-respect undermined due to colonial dominance for centuries. The process of reclaiming identity in the post-colonial era involves the rich use of cultural expressions such as folklore, dance, and performative arts to celebrate a unique Jamaican identity.

Stuart Hall says “Cultural identity is a way of life that reflects the continuous process of redefining and negotiating identity in a postcolonial setting rather than a permanent essence.” (Hall 17). The post-colonial era in Jamaica is characterised by efforts to establish a national

identity distinct from colonial influences. This involves promoting aspects of Jamaica folk culture and emphasising the African roots of the majority Black population. Bell Hooks, in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, discusses the role of cultural action in decolonization, writing, “Cultural criticism is a valid and essential pursuit in the context of modern Black liberation movements.” (Hooks 51). Also, cultural policies aim to promote a sense of pride and belonging among Jamaicans, countering the colonial hierarchies that link education and status to colour, culture, and gender. Fanon in *Wretched of The Earth* highlights the importance of reclaiming cultural identity in the process of decolonization. This emphasises the need for Jamaicans to rediscover and reinterpret their suppressed cultural heritage as part of their broader liberation struggle.

National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people's commonwealth, whatever may be the heading used or the new formulas inducted, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon (Fanon 59).

The emphasis on African heritage in post-colonial Jamaica seeks to revise the devaluation of Black cultural practices under colonial rule. Cultural institutions like theatre, television, radio, and magazines, as well as policies, helps to promote folk traditions, music, dance, and other expressions of Afro-Jamaican identity. According to Edward Kamau Brathwaite, “The folk culture is the matrix of the culture of the African diaspora” (16). The Jamaican people's sense of pride, solidarity, and respect are greatly enhanced with the role that folk culture plays in forming national identity.

The promotion of respectability becomes a significant aspect of the Jamaican cultural renaissance and also in the process of decolonization. “Respectability values education, thrift, industry, land ownership, moderate Protestantism, community upliftment, legal marriage, and educated middle-class leadership” (Thomas 3). Respectability in the Jamaican context involves asserting the dignity and worth of Black Jamaicans by challenging the colonial hierarchies that have long devalued them. A sociologist explains, “The concept of respectability is rooted in the history of slavery and colonialism, where the worth of Black people was systematically undermined” (Patterson 25). The Jamaica working class seeks to elevate the status of its Black population and counter the lingering effects of colonialism by emphasising respectability. Black capitalists played a vital role in gaining independence, but they failed to address the equal needs

of the working class. While capitalists are respected for becoming hybrid, the Black working class remains in a similar situation as described in “*Black Skin, White Masks*.” The working class may have constitutional rights, but what they want is respect. The working class is coming to the forefront and developing innovative cultural expressions to decolonize themselves from capitalist influence.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

British colonial powers manipulated Black identities through various mediums, including text and television, often portraying Black people as inferior and uncivilised. In response, Jamaican playwrights like Ashani, Knight, and Cumper et al. reverse this manipulation by using music, drama, and theatre to present positive representations of Black identity. The Jamaican playwrights counterattack the damaging effects of colonial propaganda and work toward a more equitable and respectful portrayal of Black people by reclaiming control over cultural narratives. *3 Jamaican plays: A Postcolonial Anthology* through *Masqueraders*, *Whiplash*, *Fallen Angel* and *the Devil Concubine*, actively contribute to the process of decolonization by challenging colonial narratives and asserting the dignity or respectability of Black Jamaicans and critiquing socio-economic inequalities. These theatrical works serve as powerful mediums for the action stage of decolonization thus providing platforms for the working class to voice their realities and redefine their identities.

Jamaican theatre also plays a pivotal role in decolonization by serving as an expression for cultural resistance, and identity formation platforms. Ashani, Knight, and Cumper et al. use theatre i.e. the fifth stage of decolonization to subvert and critique the colonial stories that have historically marginalised and misrepresented Black Jamaicans. They provide counter-narratives highlighting the richness and complexity of Jamaican cultural history. This emphasise that Jamaican heritage and indigenous cultural traditions is reclaiming through theater. It provides a space for Jamaican traditions, languages, stories to be performed and appreciated, fostering a sense of pride and cultural identity.

Jamaican theatre often addresses the socio-economic disparities and injustices that persist in post-colonial society. Through powerful narratives and character portrayals, Jamaican playwrights such as Ashani, Knight, and Cumper et al. highlight the struggles of the working class and advocate for social justice. Theatre acts as a form of activism, mobilising communities and raising awareness about important social issues. It empowers individuals by giving them a

voice and a platform to share their experiences and demand change. By focusing on local stories and experiences, Ashani, Knight, and Cumper et al. contribute to the construction of a new national identity that is inclusive, diverse, and reflective of the Jamaican true heritage. It helps to dismantle the remnants of colonial rule and envision a future rooted in equality and respect for all citizens.

The question arises here: How is the Black working class emerging to the forefront with their innovative methods in theatre? This evolution is best understood through the concept of “Modern Blackness,” a term that encapsulates the dynamic expression of Black identity that challenges traditional stereotypes and colonial legacies by presenting new innovative ways to be recognized with a new identity around the globe. Modern Blackness includes a sense of pride, resilience, and cultural richness articulated through innovative cultural forms.

The Jamaican working class is utilising various mediums to make the expression of Blackness to become louder around the globe. These mediums include: i) Theatre that break traditional narrative structures and incorporate elements of metadrama to critique and reflect on societal issues. Jamaican playwrights such as Ashani, Knight, and Cumper et al. in *3 Jamaican plays: A Postcolonial Anthology* have used theatre as a medium in the process of Jamaican cultural and political decolonization. ii) Music and Dance genres such as reggae, Dancehall, and hip-hop have become global phenomena, spreading messages of resistance, unity, and pride in the island of Jamaica. These musical forms are not just entertainment but serve as social commentary and political activism platforms. For example, in *Masqueraders*, characters engage in traditional dances and rituals, creating a powerful visual and emotional connection to their cultural heritage. iii) Fashion and Visual Arts includes fashion, photography, and visual arts are used to reclaim and celebrate Black aesthetics. These forms challenge Eurocentric beauty standards and provide new avenues for expressing Black identity and creativity. In *3 Jamaican plays: A Postcolonial Anthology*, the characters utilise the traditional Jonkonnu masquerade to critique colonial legacies and envision a re-traditionalized modernity. iv) *Literature and Spoken Word* includes Writers and poets who use their craft to tell stories that have been marginalised or erased, providing a voice to the voiceless and also highlighting the richness of Black Creole language. For example, the use of Rastafari dialect has played a vital role in *Masqueraders*, *Whiplash*, *Fallen Angel*, and *the Devil Concubine*.



The historical misconceptions that have long been used to marginalize Jamaicans are aggressively challenged by modern Blackness. This involves not just addressing these misconceptions but also developing fresh accounts that capture the richness and diversity of Black experiences. In the context of theatre, this can be seen in how characters in plays like *Masqueraders* and *Fallen Angel and the Devil Concubine* subvert expected roles and challenge preconceived notions about race and identity. At the heart of Modern Blackness lies a deep sense of cultural richness and resilience. This is about more than just survival, it is about overcoming hardship and succeeding in it. The Black working class draws on a rich cultural heritage that includes music, dance, storytelling, and other forms of artistic expression. These cultural practices are preserved and innovatively adapted in contemporary contexts, making them relevant and powerful tools for social change.

The impact of Modern Blackness extends beyond local communities to the global stage. The Jamaican Black cultural forms are gaining recognition and appreciation worldwide. They have challenged the dominant narratives that have historically marginalised Black voices. This global recognition helps to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of Black culture thus contributing to a more inclusive and diverse global cultural landscape. Modern Blackness, therefore, is a multifaceted and dynamic concept that encapsulates the ongoing evolution of Black identity in a modern context. It is about celebrating the past while innovatively engaging with the present and future. By doing so, the Jamaican Black working class is not only asserting on their place in the world but also redefining what it means to be Black in the modern age.

In *3 Jamaican Plays: A Postcolonial Anthology*, Ashani, Knight, and Cumber et al. show Modern Blackness with the use of different cultural expressions such as traditional Jonkonnu, Creolization, Dancehall, and Ghetto feminism in *Masqueraders*, *Whiplash*, *Fallen Angel and the Devil Concubine*. The working class of Jamaica is emerging with the use of such modern techniques making the world curious to think about the Blacks in a new way, thus paving the way for the formation of a reclaimed identity. The reclaimed identity in which the blacks are not recognized as the victims of slavery, with traumatised pasts, and uncivilised beings but as a community that has respect for their skin tone, their culture, and as equal beings of intellect. The Black working class is using theatre as a medium to vocalise their voices for the formation of this kind of reclaimed identity around the entire globe.

The fifth stage of decolonization i.e. action (performing arts) depicted in *Masqueraders* with the cultural expression Jonkonnu, a crucial element of Modern Blackness in Jamaica. Modern Blackness refers to the dynamic and evolving expression of Black identity that challenges traditional stereotypes and colonial legacies. In *Masqueraders*, the action of Jonkonnu exemplifies Modern Blackness. The play celebrates African heritage and its ongoing influence on contemporary Jamaican culture by incorporating Jonkonnu. This cultural celebration serves as a counter-narrative to colonial histories that sought to erase African contributions and highlights the richness and diversity of Black cultural forms.

Jonkonnu, a masquerade festival with roots in African and Caribbean culture, becomes a potent symbol of cultural resistance and reclamation. By incorporating Jonkonnu into the narrative, Ashani not only revives a significant cultural practice but also uses it as a tool to confront and dismantle the remnants of colonial influence. *Masqueraders* serve as a medium to critique the colonial imposition of cultural values and the erasure of indigenous traditions. For instance, the character DAY in the play emphasises the rejection of colonial scripts by declaring, “The script is a player’s prison, his cage, his coffin. Dead words, dead notes on a score. A sad song of a dead tale. I’ll set it afire. I’ll cremate it!” (Ashani 58). This powerful declaration signifies the rejection of imposed colonial identities and the burning of colonial scripts as a metaphor for reclaiming cultural identity.

Ashani focuses on the elevation of the culture and black identity through the use of dialogues and songs. In *Masqueraders*, the use of traditional performance arts exemplifies the reclamation of cultural identity, serving as both a means of cultural expression and a form of political resistance. “Art, music, and dance will strive. Our little island, Jamaica, will achieve it, and shine like a beacon of arts in the Caribbean” (Ashani 73). The characters such as LILLY and FATTY in the play when brimming with the emotions start singing and dancing. Singing and dancing are a part of Jamaica life. The working class is giving a sense of reclaimed identity through the use of singing casually. The Jamaicans are labelled as uncivilised because they speak loudly but through the use of songs at any moment Jamaicans are showing the world a reclaimed identity. This shows that speaking loudly is not being uncivilised but that is a part of their Black personalities.

The Jamaican working class is coming to the forefront to promote Modern Blackness with the use of innovative cultural expressions such as Jonkonnu, Dancehall, Ghetto Feminism

and Creolized language in the context of *Masqueraders*, *Whiplash*, *Fallen Angel* and *the Devil Concubine*. The first cultural expression used is “Jonkonnu” in *Masqueraders*. The use of traditional Jonkonnu masquerade shows that singing, dancing, and expressing emotions have been a part of the Black community for ages and it is not uncivilization rather this is a part of their Black identity and culture. According to Jon Blak in “Jonkonnu,” the Bahamas is where Junkanoo (spelled with a Bahamas accent) got its start as a masquerade in the 17th century. It was named after the John Canoe Festival in West Africa. Slaves celebrated this event by applying flour paste to their faces on Boxing Day and the day following Christmas. Later, wire masks attached to sticks took the place of flour paste. The Junkanooers blew horns and bugles and pounded goatskin drums. In Jamaica, bands that perform Jonkonnu use a variety of instruments, such as fifes, drums, rattles, and even bottles and graters.

“Remembering the days of Jonkonnu,” states that the Jonkonnu band of masquerades is usually made up of characters such as the Devil, the King, the Queen, the Belly Woman, the Horse Head, the Cow Head, the Policeman, the Wild Apache Indian, the Bride, Pitchy-Patchy and the House Head (Johnson). In *Masqueraders*, the characters take on positions that symbolise both traditional and modern identities by adopting Jonkonnu band personas. DAY assumes the role of Captain or King of the Band, exhibiting power and direction. FATTY takes on the role of the Queen, dressed as the Jonkonnu Belly Woman Queen, representing monarchy and maternal strength. LILY adopts the persona of Cowhead, standing in for the persistent image of African strength and matriarchy. HOPEY is presented as Actor Boy, a lively and adaptable performer who embodies the troupe's vitality and flexibility. As Chief Advisor and a cunning and demanding figure, HAWK transforms into the Devil. In the beginning, MAD DOG appears as the Ace of Diamonds, a trump card for the King of Babylon that denotes strength and strategic significance. PITCHY PATCHY plays the role of the Joker or Clown, offering comic relief and entertainment.

Jonkonnu has a blend of other forms like The Yoruba, Egungun, and British popular drama influences. Still, it appears to be a catalyst for raising voices about misconceptions and inequalities in Jamaica. This performance style is reinterpreted as a dramatic story in *Masqueraders*, where DAY, FATTY, LILLY, HOPEY, and HAWK represent the rebellious and aggressive nature of the Jonkonnu people. They use the theatre platform to question and renegotiate their identities and societal positions through cultural impersonation and parody that

question and subvert the colonial and postcolonial narratives. The inclusion of Jonkonnu in *Masqueraders* is not merely a nod to tradition but a deliberate act of cultural resistance.

Jonkonnu, with its roots in African masquerade traditions, represents a continuity of cultural memory and identity. By bringing this tradition to the forefront, *Masqueraders* challenged the colonial legacy that sought to fragment and erase African cultural heritage. It reaffirms these traditions importance in the contemporary cultural landscape of Jamaica. The actions portrayed in *Masqueraders* reflect the principles of Modern Blackness, which is characterised by a proactive and assertive reclaiming of Black identity. Lastly, *Masqueraders* is a vivid example of how theatrical techniques can be employed to perform cultural identity and resist colonial legacies. Through the incorporation of Jonkonnu, the play exemplifies the principles of Modern Blackness. It challenges colonial narratives, asserts the dignity and respectability of Black Jamaicans, and critiques socio-economic inequalities. By doing so, it contributes to the broader decolonization process, using theatre as a powerful medium for cultural and political action.

The second cultural expression used by Ashani, Knight and Cumper et al. to make the expression of Blackness louder or Modern Blackness is “Dance Hall.” The term “Dance Hall” originally referred to a literal hall used for theatrical performances before dancehall culture took on its current shape in the 1980s (Hope 2). It symbolises a cultural stage where artists and followers mostly from the working class narrate, mock, and perform their own imagery. It is the most powerful form of popular culture in Jamaica and the soundtrack for modern blackness. It is a culture that provides a public forum where people can express ideas different from those of the creole professional middle classes. Dance Hall plays a crucial role in promoting Modern Blackness.

Dance Hall is a genre of music and a cultural movement that provides a platform for the working class to express their realities and resist socio-economic constraints. It is characterised by its bold, direct style and celebration of Black identity (Thomas 4).

Dance Hall refers to the music as well as a dance style. It gives the Black working class a platform to share their realities, resist socio-economic constraints, and celebrate their identity. This cultural expression challenges traditional stereotypes and colonial legacies. It showcases the

resilience, pride, and cultural richness of Modern Blackness, making it an essential part of contemporary Black culture through its music, dance, and fashion. It challenges capitalist norms by emphasising community and resilience. This cultural expression serves as a popular cultural expression that plays a crucial role in explaining Modern Blackness through the following key expressions: Cultural Representation, Resistance and Empowerment, Expression of identity, Influence and Reach. This music genre reflects the lived experiences of the Black working class in Jamaica, addressing their social, economic, and political realities, and providing a powerful medium for voicing their stories and perspectives. “Dance Hall culture is a place where symbols and ideologies that represent and validate the lived realities of its followers especially those from Jamaica's inner cities are created and communicated.” (Hope 27)

Dance Hall music serves as a potent form of cultural representation for the Black working class in Jamaica. It reflects the lived experiences, struggles, and triumphs of the community. This cultural expression addresses social, economic, and political realities, providing a platform for voicing personal and collective stories through its lyrics and performances. Its vibrant expressions of life, from its raw depiction of hardships to its celebration of everyday joys, make it a significant medium for representing contemporary Black culture. Dancehall isn't just music, it's a rich culture full of unique fashion, inside jokes, and distinctive slang like 'pass the coochie'. In *Masqueraders*, the characters involve personal fights during dancing and singing. They use mocking language that mocks the personality of a person who has become transnational and also mocks the capitalists wearing the white masks. Ashani uses music and dance to promote the concept of national consciousness in the Jamaican people. The character such as HAWK sings a song and performs the traditional Jamaican dance style to tell the audience and his fellow characters to dance in order to get cultural emancipation. “Dance! Dance, old king! Dance Africa for us! Show them we have a right to rule! Dance! Dance! Dance, ole bwoy! Dance you old fool. Dance!” (Ashani 91)

Dance Hall music is a celebration of Black identity and culture. It provides a space for the Black community to express their pride, creativity, and resilience. Its vibrant and dynamic nature makes it a crucial element in the expression of Modern Blackness. This cultural expression is a much louder and faster form of music. This music type contains combinations of various conventional dance styles. In *Masqueraders*, two styles of dances are used such as Quadrille and Junkanoo. The characters in the play shows that being loud is a part of Black

cultural heritage with dance and singing. The colonisers hated them for being so loud and labelled them as uncivilised. But that loudness and aggressive nature is a part of their Black identity. This expression of identity is crucial for understanding the broader theme of Modern Blackness.

Dance Hall music influence extends beyond Jamaica that is impacting global perceptions of Black culture. Its reach helps to promote Jamaican culture on a global scale, contributing to the global dialogue on race and identity. In *3 Jamaican Plays: A Postcolonial Anthology*, Dance Hall music plays crucial roles in representing, empowering, and expressing the identity of the Black community in Jamaica. While this cultural expression uses music and dance to challenge stereotypes and celebrate cultural richness. It uses theatre as a medium to critique socio-economic inequalities and reclaim cultural narratives. The Dance Hall genre contributes significantly to the understanding and appreciation of Modern Blackness, both locally and globally.

Furthermore, the third cultural expression used is “Ghetto Feminism”. Ghetto, originally a street or neighbourhood in a city designated as a Jewish community's mandated residence. Recently, any metropolitan region that is solely home to a minority community has been referred to as a ghetto. “The practice of confining individuals to certain, delimited residential regions or to distinct institutions and facilities. Ghettos are known for their high population density, low socioeconomic status, and subpar housing, which is typically rented. They are also linked to deprivation.” (Clarke 160)

The term “Ghetto feminism” originated from the works of scholars such as T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, who explored the dynamics of Black feminist thought within urban, economically disadvantaged settings. “Ghetto feminism focuses on the lived experiences of women in “ghetto” or marginalised neighbourhoods, highlighting their unique strategies for survival and resistance against systemic oppression” (Sharpley 8). Moreover, Ghetto feminism, as depicted in Jamaican plays such as *Whiplash*, is a powerful expression of resilience, agency, and survival among women in marginalised communities. This form of feminism is characterised by the practical and strategic actions taken by female characters to navigate their challenging environments while maintaining their dignity and asserting their autonomy. The greatest example of this cultural expression is that *Whiplash* is based on only two female characters, KETTIE and LATTIE, both fighting for their rights and challenging traditional patriarchal stereotypes. Ghetto

feminism opposes the patriarchal ideological framework that gives masculinity the upper hand and rejects the idea of compartmentalised female sexuality connected to respectability and middle-class femininity.

The foundation of ghetto feminism is the economic shifts that have allowed certain working-class women to show their individuality in public and gain more financial independence. In *Masqueraders*, SWEETIE epitomises ghetto feminism through her proactive approach to addressing violence and economic hardship in her community. SWEETIE advocates for non-violent resistance and economic self-sufficiency. She believes in empowering women through economic independence, as illustrated by her plan to train women to make clothes and grow flowers: “We have to build trade centres and train women to make clothes and grow flowers” (Knight 150). This vision positions SWEETIE as a leader and a symbol of hope, challenging traditional gender roles and demonstrating her belief in systematic change and community empowerment.

MISS INEZ, another central character, also embodies ghetto feminism through her efforts to raise her children in a positive environment despite the numerous obstacles she faces. She maintains her autonomy and dignity, exemplified in her dialogue with SWEETIE about fighting for their rights: “Fight then. Fight for yuh pickney. Fight for yuhself. Fight child. Don’t give up” (Knight 162). MISS INEZ resilience is further highlighted by her strategic relationships and her ability to provide a stable family environment through her resourcefulness and strength.

Ghetto feminism in *Masqueraders*, *Whiplash*, *Fallen Angel* and *the Devil Concubine* intersects with the concept of “Modern Blackness,” which encompasses evolving female identities and cultural expressions within the African diaspora, particularly in urban settings. Modern Blackness involves rejecting Eurocentric norms while embracing African cultural heritage and contemporary realities. SWEETIE alignment of local struggles with global anticolonial and African diasporic movements showcases this connection: “Jamaican people have too much patience. Dat is fi-wi sin. We mek someting reach di brink before we do something bout it” (Knight 189). This statement reflects the broader significance of their actions, situating them within a continuum of Black resistance and resilience.

The portrayal of ghetto feminism in *Masqueraders*, *Whiplash*, *Fallen Angel* and *the Devil Concubine* is multifaceted and deeply rooted in the lived experiences of the characters. It challenges both internal and external systems of oppression by highlighting the strength,

complexity, and representation of women in marginalised communities. This type of feminism highlights the constantly evolving character of Black female identity and struggle, and it is interconnected with the themes of Modern Blackness. Through the characters of SWEETIE and MISS INEZ, *Whiplash* provides a nuanced and powerful depiction of women roles in fostering change and sustaining their families amid adversity.

Ghetto feminism and Modern Blackness offer a complex perspective that illustrates the autonomy and resiliency of marginalized groups, especially women. In plays like *Whiplash* characters such as SWEETIE and MISS INEZ exemplify ghetto feminism by navigating their challenging environments with resourcefulness and strength, advocating for non-violent resistance and economic empowerment. This form of feminism highlights the unique strategies employed by women in “ghetto” areas, showcasing their efforts to foster change within oppressive systems. The portrayal of these characters highlights the intersection of local struggles with global anticolonial movements, aligning with the broader goals of Modern Blackness to challenge Eurocentric norms and celebrate African diasporic identities. Jamaican theatre not only critiques the legacies of colonialism but also envisions new possibilities for cultural and social empowerment, making significant strides in the ongoing process of decolonization through innovative cultural expressions.

A key component of Modern Blackness in *Masqueraders*, *Whiplash*, *Fallen Angel* and *the Devil Concubine* is the inclusion of Jamaican language or kind of Patois language i.e. Rastafari dialect, which offers a vehicle for expressing and examining the complex perspectives and identities of the Jamaican people. It stands for the reclamation of cultural space as well as the validation of the richness and validity of Jamaican language and cultural legacy. The use of Jamaican language is not only a language decision; it is a powerful cultural and political stance that subverts established hierarchies of power and provides a more accurate portrayal of Jamaican identity. Language functions as a crucial narrative technique that furthers the examination of the individual’s identities and their relationships with sociocultural settings of Jamaica. In a complicated postcolonial society, language is a weapon for declaring one's identity, bargaining power, and questioning the capitalist power.

The Rastafari movement in Jamaica in the 1930s gave rise to a unique kind of speech known as Rastafari language, sometimes referred to as Dread Talk or Iyaric (Hodges 16). It reflects African diaspora roots and resistance to colonial and Western cultural hegemony by



fusing English, many African languages, and Jamaican patois. The language stands out for its unique syntax and lexicon, which work to subvert and reject the language of the oppressors and create a mode of communication that is important to Jamaican culture and politics.

First of all, Rastafari dialect gives voices to characters who identify as members of the working class or the Rastafari community. The accurate portrayal of Jamaican culture and its diverse indigenous cultural expressions is enhanced by the authenticity of language. Second, using this vernacular highlights larger cultural and political struggles, particularly those related to identity, liberation, and resistance on the part of the Jamaican people. Through the usage of Rastafari terminology, Knight highlights social justice and resistance to systemic oppression, giving their works greater resonance and significance to audiences. The Rastafari movement's attempts to reclaim their African identity and reject the Western cultural standards that were forced on them by colonial rulers gave rise to the language. This linguistic use enhances the characters' fight for liberation and broadens the thematic scope, enabling a more thorough examination of the socio political issues impacting Jamaica's working class and oppressed communities.

Ashani, Knight and Cumper et al. depict stories and characters that are deeply ingrained in the Jamaican experience by using the local vernacular, this provides a counter-narrative to sanitised Eurocentric portrayals found in traditional theatre. The language also improves the theatrical experience by providing levels of emotion and significance that connect with the local audience because of its expressive and rhythmic properties. It illustrates how transnational exchanges and influences have influenced Jamaican culture, which is dynamic and mixed. The difference between standard English and the Rastafari dialect used by Ashani, Knight and Cumper et al. given by Honor Ford Smith is as follows:

Standard English	Rastafari Dialect
Thing	Ting
Nothing	Nutten
No	nuh, noh

Can	Cyan
Boy	Bwoy

The language used is a symbol of ethnicity and ability to resist colonial and neocolonial forces, in addition to being a medium of communication. It asserts the worth and richness of Jamaican Creole as a medium for artistic expression and social commentary, challenging the linguistic inequalities imposed by colonial power. *3 Jamaican Plays: A Postcolonial Anthology* coincides with the larger goals of Modern Blackness through the use of language by challenging established power systems and cultural norms. It adds to the continuing conversation about identity, legacy, and liberty in the Caribbean Island by reflecting a postcolonial worldview that aims to recover and utilise indigenous language and culture.

The character's effective use of Jamaican Creole highlights the examination of themes regarding identity, heritage, and social dynamics within the Jamaican setting. It also helps to communicate the characters personal narratives, cultural subtleties, and resistance to outside definitions or labels. In *Whiplash*, KATIE'S conversation offers insight into her own challenges and the wider social landscape she lives in, with its heavy Jamaican Creole accent. Her use of words serves as a vehicle for self-expression and strength, emphasising her defiance of the social and cultural limitations placed upon her.

The Jamaican language is used as a powerful tool in *Masqueraders*, highlighting the identities, social circumstances, and rebellion against colonial legacies of the characters. A major character, DAY, expresses defiance against the cultural and social norms imposed by colonial power by speaking in Jamaican Creole. DAY portrays himself as an example of the local community, who is frequently excluded in society narratives and grounds his role in the Jamaican narratives through his speech in Jamaican Creole, which is full of cultural references and colloquial idioms. LILLY expresses her individuality and defiance through the language of Jamaica. "You want to utilise me only. Lemme go!" (Ashani 127), demonstrating her resistance to manipulation and control. LILLY'S use of Jamaican Creole represents the play's larger themes of identity, liberty, and cultural integrity. LILLY embodies the spirit of resistance by expressing her own voice and questioning the current power structures plays an essential role to promote Modern Blackness.

FATTY, another character speaks in Jamaican Creole to establish a more realistic and personal connection with the audience. Her words frequently highlight the intricacies of her life and decisions while adding warmth and humour to the play. In order to establish dominance and control, the theatre owner frequently speaks in standard English, symbolising colonial authority. On the other hand, it becomes a kind of resistance and a confirmation of DAY and FATTY cultural background and identity when they speak Jamaican Creole to HEIRSTONE.

In *Fallen Angel and the Devil Concubine*, Jamaican language effectively conveys the identities of characters, cultural heritage, and defiance of social standards. LETTIE is a figure deeply ingrained in the community and its problems, her use of Jamaican Creole serves as both an acknowledgment of her identity and her origins and a tool for communication. She uses language to face the socioeconomic circumstances that influence her existence, oppose the legacy of colonialism, and declare her position in the world. Her speech is full of regional vernacular, which helps to establish her persona in the Jamaican context and provides a narrative that challenges the prevailing cultural norms. LETTIE expresses her irritation and assertion of identity when she asks, “How much time mi fi tell yuh seh mi nuh name LETTIE?” (Cumper et al. 110).

In *Masqueraders, Whiplash, Fallen Angel and the Devil Concubine* the utilisation of Jamaican language by the characters accentuates the intricate relationship among language, identity, and power. Beyond being a language, Jamaican Creole is a statement of identity, a protest against cultural oblivion, and an essential instrument for negotiating individual and social identities in a postcolonial setting. The language use emphasises the influence of Modern Blackness in Jamaican theatre, breaking the dominance of standard English and giving rise to Jamaican Creole. One clear illustration of this change is the usage of Jamaican vernacular. These plays use language as a potent weapon for identity assertion and cultural expression in addition to being a medium of communication.

## **Conclusion**

People enjoy reading uplifting tales about their personal accomplishments. Every culture or civilization has its own mythology that emphasizes morality and hard work, and every nation has its own national myth. The stories are told in this way to highlight how great our country is and how our unique characteristics contribute to its success. “To seek virtue in one's own story,

one's own circumstances should be less flattering but more monstrous,” according to “Born in Blackness: The Central Role of Africans in the Making of the Modern World” (French).

Jamaican theatre actively contributes to the decolonization process and the creation of reclaimed respectful national identity. The working class in Jamaica continues to dismantle the remnants of colonial rule and advocate for a future rooted in equality and respect through the innovative use of cultural forms. In order to challenge colonial legacies and proclaim the dignity and respectability of Black Jamaicans, it is imperative that culture must be decolonized through theater and creative cultural manifestations such as Modern Blackness, Dance Hall, and Ghetto Feminism. These cultural expressions are effective instruments for active resistance because they give the working class a forum to express their circumstances, criticize socioeconomic injustices, and reinterpret who they are. Through these initiatives, Jamaican society is still working to eradicate the effects of colonial control and promote a more just and civilized future for all of its people.

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