

Locating Montserrat Between the Black and Green

Kate Spanos¹

Abstract: This article is an ethnographic investigation of Montserrat's "triangular" cultural heritage, comprised of Irish, African, and Montserratian identities. I examine the annual St. Patrick's Festival and short-lived African Music Festival (2013-2014) through a performance studies lens to understand how national symbols, masquerades, and music and dance contribute to ambivalent, often contradictory cultural narratives about Irishness and Africanness on the island. I illustrate how such performances prompt important dialogues and debates among the community that promote local cultural development twenty years after the island's volcanic crisis of the mid-1990s. This article complicates the touristic image of Montserrat as the "Other Emerald Isle" and details how individuals experience festival in differing ways and how they dialogue productively as they strive for decision-making power.

Keywords: Montserrat, festival, dance, music, heritage, cultural identity

The first time I attended Montserrat's St. Patrick's Festival in 2013, I observed vestiges of Irish-themed celebrations throughout the streets as I wandered before the evening events. I saw faded shamrocks in store windows, recycled "Happy St. Patrick's Day" banners in restaurants, and dusty misshapen Guinness bottle caps on the sidewalks. I had read John C. Messenger's work on this "other Emerald Isle" (1967; 1975; 1994), so I was not surprised to see these Irish-themed objects, but the fadedness of these symbols suggested that Montserrat's relationship to Irishness was more ambivalent than the island's tourist board website had led me to believe. My thoughts were echoed in the song, "Shamrock Hanging from my Window" sung by Randy Greenaway, played repeatedly on the local ZJB Radio station during St. Patrick's Week:

Should I have a shamrock hanging in my window to remind me—
We're connected?
Because Ireland in Europe and the island of Montserrat
Have many things in common—
Names and traditions, fife and fiddle, played by the musicians
Ireland in Europe and the island of Montserrat – is this evidence enough?
Rhythm and romance, in the Irish jig and the heel and toe of dance.

The voice of Greenaway singing this melody seems hesitant and unsure. He sounds nostalgic for a time in Montserrat's history that he never experienced directly but senses is an important part of himself. During St. Patrick's Festival, leprechaun costumes and other "paddywhackery" contribute to Montserrat's Irishness, but throughout the rest of the year, the dusty shamrocks hanging in the windows become unremarkable.

By itself, a shamrock hanging in the window is not evidence enough to prove the connection between these two "Emerald Isles." Irishness on Montserrat must be explained and made

¹ Kathleen A. Spanos, Ph.D. specializes in dance, music, and festival/carnival in Brazil, the Eastern Caribbean, and Ireland. She is interested in examining kinesthetic strategies involved in "dances of resistance" from cultures around the world. University of Maryland, College Park.

conspicuous through explicit narratives told and performed during St. Patrick's Festival. In March, Montserrat's national white, green, and gold madras-patterned dress is juxtaposed with leprechaun costumes, kilts, and shamrock-everything. Is dressing up as leprechauns and dancing Irish steps an appropriation of Irish symbols that gives Montserratians agency over their own cultural identity? Are they "playing Irish" – like Philip Deloria's notion of "playing Indian" (1998) – in an inversion of colonial power that contributes to postcolonial identity formation? Or is such masking a type of "subaltern mimesis" (Taussig, 1993) that ultimately relinquishes power to "the Irish" – which may symbolize the colonizer, the West, or some other oppressor?

This article is about understanding how Irish and African elements of Montserratian identity are performed during St. Patrick's Festival and the short-lived African Music Festival that was added to the St. Patrick's calendar in 2013 and 2014. My research is based on six months of fieldwork on Montserrat from December 2013 to July 2014 and three other two-week trips between 2013 to 2015. I attended three consecutive St. Patrick's Festivals from 2013 to 2015, as well as the 2013 Christmas Festival and 2014 Calabash Festival. In this ethnographic work, I am particularly concerned with individuals who express and understand the island's Irish and African heritages in varying and often contradictory ways. This article is less about pinpointing Montserrat's Irish influences with historical accuracy and more about identifying the viewpoints, cultural inventions, and performances that arise from historical narratives about Montserrat's Irishness.

Introducing Montserrat

Montserrat is an Anglophone British Overseas Territory in the Leeward Islands of the West Indies.² In 2018, the island is approximately 39.5 square miles with a residential population of about 5,000 consisting of about ninety-two per cent locals of African descent and three per cent of European origin (primarily expatriates from the United Kingdom and North America). The remainder of the population consists of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nationals from islands such as Jamaica, Haiti, Dominica, and Guyana, and the Dominican Republic (not a member of CARICOM), as well as Southeast Asians from Sri Lanka and India.

Montserrat is still redeveloping after two consecutive natural disasters. Hurricane Hugo destroyed much of the island's infrastructure in 1989, and then from 1995 to 1997, just as the community was getting back on its feet, the island's still-active Soufrière Hills volcano ravaged the southern region, where most of the population lived at the time. Nineteen people died in the volcano's pyroclastic flows and the disaster destroyed the capital city of Plymouth, resulting in forced abandonment of homes and leading to the dislocation of ninety per cent of the island's resident population (about 10,000 before 1995) from the southern area to the northern (safer) side or abroad (Clay *et al.* 1999). Montserrat remains relatively isolated due to its small population, small economy, and on-and off-island transportation difficulties.

The Montserrat Tourist Board promotes the island as "the Emerald Isle of the Caribbean" or "the Other Emerald Isle". These evocative sobriquets, which link Montserrat and Ireland as transatlantic siblings, were popularized by John C. Messenger, a North American

² Montserrat is an internally self-governing U.K. territory, though the United Nations Committee on Decolonization includes it on their list of Non-Self-Governing Territories (see General Assembly resolution 66(I) from December 1946; <https://www.un.org/en/decolonization/nonselfgovterritories.shtml>). The local government is a parliamentary representative democratic dependency with a multi-party system. The executive branch is comprised of three parts: the sovereign monarch, a monarch-appointed governor, and a locally appointed premier. Although Montserrat is not technically a "nation," I refer to "national" identity to describe performances that represent the community's distinctive "Montserratianess."

anthropologist who conducted research on Montserrat in the 1960s and 1970s. Messenger is largely responsible for circulating the idea of Montserrat's connection to Ireland in scholarly literature. He argued that Montserratian culture was strongly influenced by the Irish due to the island's history of Irish colonization and the presence of Irish indentured servants. He cited the prominence of Irish surnames (e.g., Allen, Ryan, and Galloway) and place names (for example, Kinsale, St. Patrick's, and Cork Hill) on the island. He made claims for a wide variety of Irish retentions on Montserrat in terms of language, religion, food and drink (including the island's national "goat water" stew), artefacts, storytelling, music, and dance (Messenger 1967; 1975). In his widely cited 1967 article, "The Influence of the Irish on Montserrat", he referred to mixed-race Montserratians of African and Irish ancestry as "Black Irish",³ a notion that has been discussed by scholars in other contexts dealing with the "black and green" (Williams 1932; Miller 2000; Carby 2001; Garner 2004; Eagan 2006; O'Neill and Lloyd 2009; Onkey 2010). This is not, however, a term that is commonly used by Montserratians today to describe themselves, even if they claim Irish ancestry.

Montserratian scholar Sir Howard A. Fergus led a response to Messenger's speculations and, in his article, "Montserrat 'Colony of Ireland': The Myth and the Reality", he acknowledged the "relatively fair skin of [Montserrat's] people" (compared to nearby island populations), but he opposed the notion of a "hybridized Black Irish" population (1981: 337). He did not recognize a significant Irish influence on Montserrat's cultural traditions. As a politician and professor at the University of the West Indies (UWI) on Montserrat in the 1970s, Fergus focused his efforts on designating St. Patrick's Day as a national holiday. His campaign aimed not to celebrate a special affinity to Ireland, but rather to commemorate a group of slaves who, in 1768, led a St. Patrick's Day rebellion against Irish slave masters (1971; 1972). The rebellion failed, but this was the first attempted slave insurrection on the island – and some locals claim in the entire Caribbean – that spurred the movement towards emancipation (finally achieved in the British West Indies in 1834). Fergus' agenda was (and still is) the promotion of Montserrat's earliest heroes, these first "national freedom-fighters". He prefers to call March 17th "Heroes Day". However, the name was never government-approved, perhaps, in part, because it does not create the same allure for tourists as a "Caribbean St. Patrick's Day".⁴

In 2013, I attended a dinner reception at the Governor's House for a new African Music Festival during St. Patrick's Week, where then-Premier Reuben Meade repeated this widely accepted historical narrative:

Part of the thing that a lot of people don't understand: 1768, we were still slaves. The Irish loved to drink green – what, beer? – on St. Patrick's Day, and our forebears thought, what a wonderful day to kill these people. But one of us sold us out, and the seven persons who started the revolution were killed, so we are in fact celebrating a failed revolution in 1768. But it is a very significant revolution, where as a people we are trying to free ourselves from slavery. Over the years, we have celebrated St. Patrick's as an Irish festival, but not the same way as they celebrate it in Ireland. We are celebrating a fight for freedom. We always saw the Montserrat-

³ In 1976, Irish-language television network TG4 aired "The Black Irish of Montserrat: Irish Accents in the Caribbean" (<https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1378-radharc/355633-the-black-irish/>) to introduce Ireland to this "unique race of people" residing in the Caribbean.

⁴ Jonathan Skinner's ethnographic work in the mid-1990s, just before the volcanic crisis, described St. Patrick's Festival as an "ethnic spectacle" that was primarily used to attract white tourists to an exotic Afro-Irish Caribbean celebration. He observed, "The only Black Irish voices I came across came from the reverberations of Messenger's writings" (2004: 161).

Irish connection. This year, what we have done is to close that triangle. So you have Montserrat, Ireland, and Africa (17 March 2013).

St. Patrick's Day on Montserrat is by no means a non-controversial holiday; some Montserratians are proud of their Irish heritage, but some reject it, and, in either case, most insist that their African heritage not be forgotten. As one local telephone caller exclaimed on a radio talk show during St. Patrick's weekend in 2013, "We're Africans! [...] We aren't Irish. We're Africans!" (*The Culture Show*, ZJB Radio, 15 March 2013).

The narrative expressed in Meade's speech has been debated in Montserrat's written archives for years and it is annually negotiated and contested through community dialogues and debates. During St. Patrick's Festival, the appropriation of Irish symbols is evident in cultural activities – for example, wearing leprechaun hats, drinking Guinness, and listening to Irish songs like "Danny Boy" and "Cockles and Mussels" played repeatedly on steel pans. The national masquerade dance is performed year-round. However, it becomes part of Montserrat's Irish narrative during St. Patrick's Week, when some emphasize that it juxtaposes West African dance postures and rhythms with Irish dance footwork and European instruments. In this article, I illustrate how such performances prompt important conversations that contribute to the successes and failures to "complete the triangle" of Montserratian cultural identity.

Montserrat's Irish history

Montserrat has been described as the "most distinctively Irish settlement in the New World" (Gwynn 1929b), an idea that has become embedded in the island's national consciousness today. Much of the literature has focused on how the Irish arrived on the island – some coming directly from Ireland and others via other Caribbean islands and North and South America as indentured servants, political or religious refugees, or colonists (Gwynn 1929a; 1929b; 1932; Irish 1973; Fergus 1975; Akenson 1997). In the mid-seventeenth century, the colonial social structure consisted of an English and Anglo-Irish planter class, Irish Catholic indentured servants and religious prisoners, and African slaves (Fergus 1981; Goveia 1965). By the late seventeenth century, most Irish indentured servants on the island had been released from their labour contracts and had moved up the social ladder to become independent landowners working in the local sugar economy (Akenson 1997).

Because this article deals with ambivalent attitudes about Montserrat's Irishness and Africanness, I will briefly address the notion of the "forgotten white slave" or the "Irish slave". Historiographical accounts of indentured servitude on the Leeward Islands and Barbados in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have described Irish servants as "slaves", which has effectively (and problematically) equated white indentured servitude with black slavery. Authors such as Hilary Beckles (1986; 1990) and Sean O'Callaghan (2001) have suggested that the Irish experience on islands such as Barbados was "slave-like" and they were "black men in white skins" (Keagy 1972 quoted in Beckles 1990: 511). Although the treatment of white servants may have been especially brutal in places like Barbados, it is important to avoid allowing this brand of historiography to colour that of the entire Leeward Islands, especially on Montserrat where conditions differed significantly. On Montserrat, whites (primarily Irish) outnumbered blacks, unlike on neighbouring islands (Akenson 1997: 105-111). When Irish indentured servants on Montserrat were released from their contracts, they were given more opportunities for upward social mobility and became landowners (and slave owners) themselves.

Determining who suffered more – Irish or Africans – is an exercise in futility, and I am interested in narratives that either enact or deny shared histories of oppression, traumatic loss, exile, and displacement. In this article, I aim to demonstrate how the community negotiates connections and conflicts between Irish and African identities embedded in this history, and how people create local “Montserratian” interpretations of Irishness and Africanness to serve individual agendas. The documentation of Irish experiences in colonial Montserrat as both “victims” and “victimizers” establishes a background for the sometimes ambivalent, conflicted, or contradictory feelings that some Montserratians feel towards the island’s nationally proclaimed Irish heritage. Some deny any Irish heritage, but many Montserratians openly embrace both Irishness and Africanness as part of their cultural identity. Some recognize a shared history of oppression between Irish and Africans, while also remaining aware that the Irish on Montserrat were slave owners themselves. These conflicts in Montserrat’s cultural narrative are recited, performed, and danced during St. Patrick’s Festival.

St. Patrick’s Festival

In general, creating an annual festival calendar is important for Montserratians to exhibit and negotiate a singular national identity. In line with Diana Taylor’s theory of archive and repertoire (2003), established annual festivals such as Christmas Festival (December), St. Patrick’s Festival (March), Calabash Festival (July), Cudjoe Head Festival (August 1), and Alliouagana Festival of the Word (November) produce a performed archive of cultural memory and intangible heritage that is crucial when material archives are lost (e.g., in natural disasters) or perhaps never recorded. Kathleen Gough argues that festivals on Montserrat provide a space and time for reassembling the cultural memory of a dispersed community: “Every year brings a succession of new performances reassembled out of old fragments” (2012: 110). These festivals provide opportunities throughout the year for Montserratians to discuss how they are represented locally, regionally, and globally through performance.

I agree with Gough’s postmodern interpretation that festival reassembles the fragments of Montserrat’s collective past, but like any rewriting of history, that assemblage often glosses over conflicting identities and personal values. Theories of carnival tend to focus on collectivity, *communitas* (Turner 1986), renewal (Bakhtin 1984), and symbolic representation (Da Matta 1984), and this is certainly the case for Montserrat – in its overall public form, festivalgoers comment on the powerful unifying experience of festival. However, I focus here on the instances when performances do not quite fit Montserrat’s cultural narrative of “Irishness” and “Africanness”, but instead stir up pre- and post-show debates on the radio, on social media, and in conversation about Montserratian identity and representation.

St. Patrick’s Festival on Montserrat ties together and unravels the tangled Irish and African threads embedded in the island’s cultural history. In 2015, the festival’s slogan explicitly referred to Montserrat’s triangular identity: “Definitely Irish, Confidently African, and Distinctly Montserratian”. It was touted as a time to commemorate the eighteenth-century African slave revolution, recognize the island’s Irish heritage through stereotypical Irish imagery (shamrocks, Guinness, and leprechauns), celebrate local culture, and attract foreign tourists to Montserrat to participate in this Irish/Afro/Caribbean St. Patrick’s Day “like you’ve never experienced it” (according to the Montserrat Tourist Board).

The idea for the St. Patrick’s Festival began in 1972 with a “Know Your Past” program at the Montserrat Secondary School that commemorated the 1768 St. Patrick’s Day rebellion. By 1978, St. Patrick’s Day was an annual event at the University of West Indies campus in

Plymouth where students and faculty celebrated Montserrat's first freedom fighters. Events combined religion, culture, and history – there was a St. Patrick's Day Catholic Mass, a local music concert, and a special lecture organized by Howard Fergus to educate the community about the rebellion. The first festival also included activities that have endured throughout the years: the Freedom Run (marking the slave uprising for freedom), the Slave Feast (serving local food from the "old days;" see Photo 1), an exhibition of Montserratian artefacts and crafts, and a street "jump up" (a soca⁵ dance parade in the early morning hours).



Figure 1: Festival-goers and masquerade dancers gather in Heritage Village in Salem for St. Patrick's Day Slave Feast (2014) to commemorate Montserrat's slave ancestors and is configured to resemble a "maroon community" of communal sharing.

After Christmas Festival, St. Patrick's is the second largest festival; in 2014, it attracted about thirty-two per cent more visitors in March compared to other months (data provided to the author by the Montserrat Governor's Office, 14 September 2015). The St. Patrick's Festivals that I attended in 2013, 2014, and 2015 were all similar, with only a few variations in events. Each year I heard the same repeated excerpts from Fergus' history books about the St. Patrick's rebellion and ensuing traditions recited by schoolchildren during "Family Reading Time" on ZJB Radio, an important channel for spreading news and information on the island. I also attended the annual St. Patrick's Catholic Dinner, featuring a large buffet of Montserratian foods, an Irish sing-a-long led by Father George Agger (Pastor of the Lookout Catholic Church, originally from County Cork in Ireland), and performances of Irish tunes by the Martin Healy Band from Dublin. Each year the Emerald Community Singers folk choir gave a concert of traditional Irish and Montserratian songs. In the car park behind Gary Moore's bar in Salem (renamed "Heritage Village" for St. Patrick's Week), Rhythm Night featured steel pan, string band, and masquerade performances. Vendors at the Slave Feast sold handmade crafts and foods: the national "goat water" stew, jerk chicken, fried fish, *duckna* (a sweet potato and coconut treat), curried rotis, and fresh coconut water. Other events throughout the week included a nature hike, the Freedom Run and Walk, and a Rum Tour of the island's bars (popular with tourists). Perhaps the most recognizable and striking backdrop for each of the island's festivals is Montserrat's national dress, a madras pattern of green, gold/orange, and white. Although those familiar with Ireland's flag may immediately recognize the colours as Irish, the pattern (designed in 2003) alludes to specific Montserratian symbolism. The colours

⁵ Soca is a musical genre that originated in Trinidad and Tobago in the 1970s and has become popular throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. It is related to calypso music, with influences from other styles such as funk, soul, and Latin music. The most famous soca artist from Montserrat was Alphonsus "Arrow" Cassell (1949-2010), who is known for his international hit, "Hot Hot Hot".

of the deeply researched design reflect the island's ancestral heritage and values of peace and harmony (white), natural resources (green), and faith, creativity, and courage (gold), ("The Origins of Montserrat's National Dress", 2015). In descriptions of such symbolism, no mention of Ireland is made.

Another crucial element of St. Patrick's Festival – and, indeed, all of Montserrat's national events – is masquerade performance (see Photo 2). As an Irish dancer, I was intrigued when I first heard the story that the masquerades originated as a parody of Irish dancing dating back to the eighteenth century.⁶ The Heel and Toe Polka (the fifth dance of the eight-part repertoire) is said to be especially Irish, and when I told people that I was an Irish dancer, they exclaimed, "Oh, then you must know the Heel and Toe!". Although the heel-toe footwork is certainly reminiscent of Irish step and *sean nós* ("old style") dance,⁷ both of which rely heavily on heels and toes for their percussive character, there is no so-called "heel and toe polka" in the repertoire of Irish step, *céili* (social), or set dancing.⁸ In addition, polka-like dances were not referred to as such until the nineteenth century in Bohemia in Central Europe. Thus the Heel and Toe Polka likely has European origins, but when it was borrowed is unclear and it would have been designated as a "polka" retroactively (not in the eighteenth century) to be included in the island's Irish lore.



Figure 2: The Emerald Shamioles masquerade troupe performing at Calabash Festival, July 2014. Author's photograph (18 July 2014)

⁶ See culture icon Rose Willock and masquerade dancer James "Titus" Frederick speak about the origins of the masquerades: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S1PTFE93Ks&t=193s> (YouTube video, 10 February 2010, user davidwseitz).

⁷ It is unclear what Irish dancing on Montserrat would have looked like in the eighteenth century, when the masquerading parodies of Irish slave masters were said to have originated. While it may seem that *sean nós* ("old style") dancing would be closer to Irish dancing in eighteenth-century Montserrat, *sean nós* comes specifically from the region of Connemara in Ireland's western province of Connacht. Aubrey Gwynn has suggested that the majority of Irish settlers on Montserrat came from southwestern Munster province (1932: 219-220), and thus I believe that the Irish dancing that would have been done on Montserrat would be closer to older forms of Munster-style step dancing. For more on the distinctions between step dance and *sean nós* dance, see Brennan's *Story of Irish Dance* (2001).

⁸ This conclusion is based on my personal knowledge of Irish dance, consultation with peers, and research into authoritative Irish dance texts (Breathnach 1971; Brennan 2001; Murphy 1995; Ni Bhriain 2008). Although I found no "heel-and-toe polka" in these sources, such heel-toe footwork could easily be related to other styles from the British Isles, such as Scottish highland dancing or English Morris dance. Plenty of "New World" examples of heel-toe polkas use the same pattern ("heel, toe, one two three") as the masquerades—for example, American line and square dancing, Canadian folk dance, and even Australian bush dancing, which likely originated in Ireland or the British Isles.

The masquerade dance becomes especially tangled in Montserrat's Irish narrative during St. Patrick's Week. In 2015, Montserratian scholar Dr. Vernie Clarice Barnes gave the annual Sir George Irish Lecture and described the masquerade dance tradition as a post-traumatic coping strategy in the aftermath of slavery and, more recently, the volcanic crisis. Afterwards, local journalist Nerissa Golden questioned whether "playing Irish" (for example, by dressing up as leprechauns or insisting that the Heel and Toe Polka is Irish) signified a masked desire to identify with Irish slave masters rather than slave ancestors. She encapsulated this concern during the post-lecture discussion:

[...] if you look around at the way we market ourselves, we put lots of emphasis on this Irish part of us, this identity that's really not ours. And we keep pursuing this desire to be something other than who we clearly are. We continue this masquerade, not just the ones that wear the masks, but this actually is a country of mask-wearing people! [...] What's going to be the process of us finding out who we really are beyond all these masks that we wear? How much of the four hundred years do we keep, or how do we transform it so that going forward it is actually helpful for us, and not a continuation of this coping, just to survive, just to make it through another day? (12 March 2015).

As an outsider, it is not my place to answer these questions. However, I can say that the contradictions that arise from the multivalent ways that Montserratians perform Irishness on St. Patrick's Day indicate that the community is in an ongoing process of negotiation in this post-volcano era. Masked performance has been theorized as a passive means of attaining agency and can constitute real social transformation through subtle but political artistic manipulations, such as parody or satire (Scott 1990; Aching 2002). Mimesis "provides a welcome opportunity to live subjunctively as neither subject nor object of history but as both, at one and the same time" (Taussig 1993: 255); it furnishes "the power of the copy to influence what it is a copy of" (*ibid.*: 250). I have argued that when Montserratians dance the Heel and Toe and dress up as leprechauns, they have the subjective potential to influence local interpretations of their performances through improvisational methods (Spanos 2017). That is, they can please the tourist gaze with an exotic Afro-Caribbean St. Patrick's Day and still maintain the parodic trope at the root of masquerade performance. Only those with sufficient local cultural knowledge recognize the socio-political commentary that is hidden behind the masks.

Performing Irishness each year on St. Patrick's Day provides economic potential and distinguishes Montserrat as "the Emerald Isle of the Caribbean." Golden's concern is: at what point does this masquerade hinder cultural (re)development? Is Irishness fundamentally at odds with the other two points on Montserrat's triangle – its African and Caribbean identities? If the "Irish" side has its own festivalized assertion each year, what about the African population that was forcibly brought to the island and later enslaved by Irish masters? What happens when Irishness and Africanness encounter one another on the island, and is there a way to reconcile the apparent conflicts between them in Montserrat's cultural identity? In the following section, I explore the notion of Montserrat's Africanness and how the community has created a space and time for reconfiguring and renegotiating Irish and African elements in the local community.

African Music Festival

The African Music Festival (AMF) was first incorporated into St. Patrick's Festival activities in March 2013.⁹ It featured two acts, a Francophone pop singer from Mauritania named Daby Touré and a troupe of six West African drummers/dancers (from Senegal, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast) called Jalikunda (see Photo 3) that was managed by a British entertainment company. In 2014, Jalikunda returned for a second time, this time sharing the bill with Oliver "Tuku" Mtukudzi from Zimbabwe and his band, the Black Spirits.



Figure 3: Jalikunda performs at V's Bar in Cudjoe Head as part of the African Music Festival during the 2013 St. Patrick's Week. Photo by the author (15 March 2013).

The African Music Festival was the brainchild of Kato Kimbugwe, who explained during the festival's opening ceremony in 2013 that it was his goal to establish the festival as a permanent part of St. Patrick's Week. He hailed it as the first of its kind in the British West Indies (BWI), claiming that never before had an African band performed in the BWI, though it was common on nearby French islands like Guadeloupe and Martinique (see Evans 2014). Kimbugwe, an economist from Uganda, was posted on Montserrat in 2010 as the island's representative for the U.K.'s Department for International Development (DFID), and he explained that when he arrived, he realized that few people on the island knew where Uganda was. Thus, he wanted to educate Montserratians about life in Africa, and he started a ZJB Radio music program called "African Journeys". The festival grew from there. Colin Riley, the 2013 St. Patrick's committee head and then-Minister of Education, explained that he included the AMF in St. Patrick's Week because he recognized the importance of "how the rhythms of Africa transfer across the Atlantic" in parallel with the island's transatlantic connection to Ireland (31 March 2014, interview with the author).

The introduction of African music and dance into St. Patrick's Week was meant to help Montserratians more fully narrate and "accept" the story of African and Irish relations around St. Patrick's Day. AMF committee member, Jonette Silcott, explained to the *Spirit of*

⁹ It is important to note that an annual Calabash Festival in July had already been established in 2006 by local businesswoman Florence Griffith. The specific purpose of Calabash Festival is to celebrate the island's African heritage and educate the community about its African and Afro-Caribbean ancestors, before they were brought from Africa and before the volcanic disaster. Unlike the Calabash Festival, the African Music Festival was intentionally scheduled to coincide with St. Patrick's Week to highlight the island's Africanness amidst Irish-theme celebrations.

Montserrat newspaper that “[The African Music Festival] makes so many links to so many different entities. I think we tend to forget the ancestry in relation to our African roots” (“Montserrat Links Its African and Irish Ancestry” 2014). The St. Patrick’s Festival was originally crafted to expose Montserratians and visitors to the island’s multifaceted heritage. Therefore, the AMF was an initiative to incorporate an African element that would round out the festival’s overarching goal of representing the island’s “triangular” Irish, African, and Montserratian heritage. The AMF committee suggested that the exclusion of African music in previous years was an oversight, and bringing in artists from the African continent was a long overdue recognition of Montserrat’s African heritage.

In the first year of the African Music Festival in 2013, the event was hugely successful and well attended; I heard rave reviews among the local community. Free performances drew large crowds and both locals and tourists danced excitedly, enthralled by Jalikunda’s *djembe* drums. The lasting effects of the festival were so promising that the two-day event was already touted as an “annual” festival by the AMF committee in its debut year, even though it had yet to prove its endurance.

In 2014, the committee brought the popular Jalikunda band back, but community response was just lukewarm. Ahead of their performance, I heard mutterings among residents who expressed resentment that (1) Jalikunda was no longer a novel act and the organizers should bring in someone new, and (2) local performers were cast aside in favour of these expensive international acts. Why would the AMF committee send money out of the island to these African artists who, incidentally, resided in the U.K.? As Montserrat is an Overseas British Territory, sending money that was allocated for developing local cultural activities back to the U.K. was troublesome. Despite plans to bring in new bands from Rwanda in 2015, what would have been the third African Music Festival was cancelled at the last minute due to budget issues (Anita Nightingale, Montserrat Tourist Board director, 11 March 2015, personal communication). As of the time of this writing, the AMF has not been revived.

I believe that the African Music Festival failed, in part, because it was unnecessary to assert a so-called “authentic” African identity from a foreign source. That is, no one disputes that Montserratians have African heritage, and Africanness, unlike Irishness, certainly does not distinguish Montserrat from other Caribbean islands. African bands would be welcomed to Montserrat solely for entertainment, but the performances were not presented as such. Instead, they became politically entangled in the story about Montserrat’s Afro-Irish cultural heritage. Caribbean Africanness is already performed through, for example, masquerades and calypso, which are re-enactments of West African music and dance traditions that reveal interwoven sounds and movements resulting from centuries of circum-Atlantic cultural transmission (Reed 2007: 81; Zeleza 2010; Nicholls 2012). Perhaps the translation failed because Jalikunda’s African musicians were foreign to this Afro-Caribbean community; they performed an exciting but unfamiliar Africanness, not the sense of Africanness that had evolved in Montserrat’s particular sociocultural context over the past four hundred years. Or maybe it failed because funds simply ran out that year; or maybe it was the fact that Kimbugwe, the principal organizer, was re-posted for a job elsewhere before the 2015 festival was fully fleshed out. The reason is likely a combination of these and other hypotheses – different reasons from different people created a conflict that made it impossible to sustain the AMF.

When the African Music Festival was not included in St. Patrick’s Week in 2015, local residents noticed the gap in the schedule and the lack of “big acts,” but the St. Patrick’s Festival was as celebratory as always. Local musicians and dancers (especially youth) had more time

in the spotlight in the absence of foreign performers. People also remarked how many Montserratian emigrants came home for St. Patrick's in 2015. Based on attendance at the culmination of the festival at the Slave Feast, residents noted that this year indicated a shift away from attracting foreign tourists and towards inviting emigrants back home for St. Patrick's Week, as they do for Christmas Festival, seeking a return to community roots and traditions. Attitudes suggested less of a search to reconcile tangled Irish and African elements, and more of a celebration of Montserratian culture as a more complete lived experience. Festivalgoers that year commented on a palpably calmer, more confident, and less self-conscious atmosphere.

Keeping it local

Local writer, poet, and musician Edgar Nkosi White commented on the cultural contradictions that arose during the 2015 St. Patrick's and African Music Festivals. He was a featured performer at the opening night of St. Patrick's Week and he introduced his spoken word and African drumming performance with: "You know what I love about Montserrat? The hypocrisy!". Accusing the Montserratian community of hypocrisy may at first come across as an insult, but the next day, he published a clarification in an *MNI Alive* editorial entitled "The Mad Men of Montserrat":

Great care must be taken this 20th year [since the volcanic disaster] in Montserrat, especially with how we record our culture. Take care that we don't sanitize it to death. The road to hell, as I always say, is paved with good intentions. We no longer need the approval of Britain to breathe or fart. Historians beware! [...] We are ourselves and without apology. [...] We love and grudge at the same time. And always will (2015).

He went on to say that the "hypocrites" of Montserrat, the masqueraders, the "mad men of Montserrat" – those whose identities or agendas cannot quite be pinned down or explained – are who make Montserrat vital and unique. He emphasized that the community is a conglomerate of people, many of whom identify simultaneously with different, sometimes conflicting, groups, but this does not necessarily make them mask-wearing hypocrites. Or if it does, it is okay, because, as I have discussed, there can be parodic power in the mask.

The twentieth anniversary since the volcanic eruption signified a time to source local talent and look at "weself" (said in the Caribbean to express unity) to further the healing process through continued cycles of performance. Montserratian culture icon Rose Willock told me that, for her, it is important to include Irish, African, and Montserratian elements because ignoring one or more aspects of one's multifaceted heritage prevents one from finally "becoming whole" (19 March 2015, interview with the author). She described her own family as "rainbow coloured", a patchwork quilt, and said those who call themselves Montserratian may also be African, Irish, English, Indian, Spanish, Portuguese, or Caribbean – Trinidadian, Guyanese, Jamaican, or Haitian.

This imagery of the "happy family" is reassuring but idealistic, and thinking about Montserrat's heritage as multicultural fragments patched together – as in the common concept of a "melting pot" or "salad bowl" – does not entirely address the issue. As Edgar Nkosi White urged, make sure not to "sanitize it to death". In memory, festivals are remembered and anticipated as a time of "we-ness", when families and neighbours come together to share food, music, and dance. In

the moment, however, individuals experience festival in differing ways – they argue productively as they compete for authenticity and decision-making power.

Local culture expert Franklyn “Daddy Algie” Greaves commented that, while other cultures are welcome in the mix, the most important ingredient in the recipe of local identity must be Montserrat (“Montserrat Memories,” ZJB Radio, 29 November 2015). That is to say, Montserrat (defined as a place, an archive of traditions, and a community of people) must remain prominent. When festivals are kept local, the events are more exciting, conversations are more vital, and the local community exhibits more personal investment. When Montserratians perform their own interpretations of Irishness and Africanness – not those imported from Ireland or Africa – their festivals become more confident and dynamic. This is not to say that foreign visitors or influences are not welcome. They are, but they cannot replace local community expressions. A festival becomes an established part of the cycle when it provides an annual opportunity to dialogue and debate about local concerns – not to resolve them necessarily, but to keep the conversations going and community development moving forward.

Works Cited

- Akenson, Donald Harman, *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630-1730* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997).
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
- Beckles, Hilary, “A ‘Riotous and Unruly Lot’: Irish Indentured Servants and Freeman in the English West Indies” in *William and Mary Quarterly* 47 (1990), pp. 503–522.
- . “‘Black Men in White Skins’: The Formation of a White Proletariat in West Indian Slave Society” in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 15:1 (1986), pp. 5–21.
- Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1971).
- Brennan, Helen, *The Story of Irish Dance* (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 2001).
- Carby, Hazel V., “What is this ‘Black’ in Irish Popular Culture?” in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (2001), pp. 325–349.
- Clay, Edward, Christine Barrow, Charlotte Benson, Jim Dempster, Peter Kokelaar, Nita Pillai, and John Seaman, “An Evaluation of HMG’s Response to the Montserrat Volcanic Emergency.” Department for International Development, December 1999.
- Da Matta, Roberto, “Carnival in Multiple Planes” in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Critical Performance*, edited by John J. MacAloon (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), pp. 208–239.
- Deloria, Philip J., *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
- Eagan, Catherine M., “Still ‘Black’ and ‘Proud’: Irish America and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia” in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, edited by Diane Negra (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 20–63.
- Evans, Jennie, “Montserrat Hosts the 1st Festival on African Music in the Caribbean,” Hop Till You Drop!, 13 March 2014. <http://www.hoptiludrop.co.uk/bandhireguide/montserrat-hosts-the-1st-festival-on-african-music-in-the-caribbean-4391>. Accessed 20 March 2014.

- Fergus, Howard, "A Window on Our History: St. Patrick's Day 1768," *Montserrat Mirror*, 28 January 1972.
- , *History of Alliouagana: A Short History of Montserrat* (Plymouth, Montserrat: H. A. Fergus, 1975).
- , "March 17 May Become a National Day," *Montserrat Mirror*, 20 March 1971.
- , "Montserrat 'Colony of Ireland': The Myth and the Reality" in *Studies* 70 (1981), pp. 325–340.
- Garner, Steven, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).
- General Assembly resolution 66(I), *Transmission of Information under Article 73e of the Charter*, A/RES/66/I (14 December 1946), available from [undocs.org/A/RES/66\(I\)](http://undocs.org/A/RES/66(I)).
- Gough, Kathleen M., "Natural Disaster, Cultural Memory: Montserrat Adrift in the Black and Green Atlantic" in *Readings in Performance and Ecology*, edited by Wendy Arons and Theresa J. May (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 101–112.
- Goveia, E. V., *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).
- Gwynn, Aubrey, "Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies" in *Analecta Hibernica* 4 (1932), pp. 139–286.
- , "Early Irish Emigration to the West Indies" in *Studies* 18 (1929), pp. 377–393.
- , "Early Irish Emigration to the West Indies: Part II" in *Studies* 18 (1929), pp. 648–663.
- Irish, J. A. George, *Alliouagana in Focus* (Plymouth, Montserrat, 1973).
- Messenger, John C., "African Retentions in Montserrat" in *African Arts* 6 (1973), pp. 54–57, 95–96.
- , "Montserrat: The Most Distinctively Irish Settlement in the New World" in *Ethnicity* 2 (1975), pp. 281–303.
- , "St. Patrick's Day in 'The Other Emerald Isle'" in *Éire-Ireland* 29 (1994), pp. 12–23.
- , "The Influence of the Irish in Montserrat" in *Caribbean Quarterly* 13 (1967), pp. 3–26.
- Miller, Kerby A., "'Scotch-Irish', 'Black Irish' and 'Real Irish': Emigrants and Identities in the Old South" in *The Irish Diaspora*, edited by Andy Bielenberg (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 139–157.
- "Montserrat Links Its African and Irish Ancestry with a Week of Activities Including an African Music Festival." *Spirit of Montserrat*, 14 March 2014. <http://zjb.gov.ms/2014/03/13/12634/>. Accessed 19 March 2014.
- Murphy, Pat, *Toss the Feathers: Irish Set Dancing* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1995).
- Ní Bhriain, Orfhlaith, *The Terminology of Irish Dance* (Madison: Macater Press, 2008).
- Nicholls, Robert, *The Jumbies' Playing Ground: Old World Influence on Afro-Creole Masquerades in the Eastern Caribbean* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).
- O'Callaghan, Sean, *To Hell or Barbados: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland* (London: Brandon, 2001).
- O'Neill, Peter D., and David Lloyd, *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- "The Origin's of Montserrat's National Dress" in *Truly Caribbean*, 12 March 2015. <http://www.trulycaribbean.net/discovermni/the-origins-of-montserrats-national-dress/>. Accessed 13 March 2015.
- Onkey, Lauren, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity: Celtic Soul Brothers* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
- Reed, Peter, "'There Was No Resisting John Canoe': Circum-Atlantic Transracial Performance" in *Theatre History Studies* 27 (2007), pp. 65–85.
- Scott, James C., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

- Skinner, Jonathan, *Before the Volcano: Reverberations of Identity on Montserrat* (Kingston, Jamaica: Arawak Publications, 2004).
- Spanos, Kathleen A., "Dancing the Archive: Rhythms of Change in Montserrat's Masquerades" in *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 49, (2017), pp. 67–91.
- Taussig, Michael, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Taylor, Diana, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
- Turner, Victor, "Carnival in Rio: Dionysian Drama in an Industrializing Society," in *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), pp. 103–124.
- White, Edgar Nkosi, "The Mad Men of Montserrat" in *MNI Alive: A Global Caribbean Connection*, 13 March 2015. <http://www.mnialive.com/articles/on-the-mad-men-of-montserrat>. Accessed 14 March 2015.
- Williams, Joseph J., *Whence the "Black Irish" of Jamaica?* (New York: Lincoln Mac Veagh, Dial Press Inc., 1932).
- Zezeza, Paul Tiyaambe, "Dancing to the Beat of the Diaspora: Musical Exchanges between Africa and Its Diasporas" in *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 3 (2010), pp. 211–236.