

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines two traditional ritual genres in Jamaica: the Kumina ritual and the Burru masquerade dance. The thesis posits them as communication systems even though they operate outside of the established modes of communication. I argue that they are functional communication media in themselves and, as such, contribute to individual, community, and -- to a lesser extent, national life in Jamaica.

In outlining the communication systems in the Burru dance and Kumina ritual of Jamaica, the thesis emphasises the value of face-to-face interaction, the importance of shared meanings in the context of the ritual performances, the process of reduction of uncertainties and the creation and maintainance of homeostatic balance for the participants involved. This thesis also emphasises the function of direct reciprocity both between the individuals who participate in the ritual dances and the ancestral spirits whom they worship, as well as among the individuals themselves.

It is the performance of these two ritual genres that is the core paradigm of the study; it is the performance that is studied, tested and evaluated. The

performance contains a number of ritual activities. It is the insistence of these ritual displays that forms the characteristic features of this communication.

The methodology used in this thesis is a design which combines non-participatory observation, face to face interviews, elements drawn from the Q methodology design as developed by William Stephenson (1951), and a modified Content Analysis.

This thesis discusses the effects of slavery and colonialism on the cultural situation in Jamaica and outlines the origin and existence of the selected genres in this milieu. The thesis discusses the performances in terms of (1) their symbolic nature and (2) the psychological reinforcement they provide for the group and the community in the Jamaican contextual milieu.

Finally, the thesis offers a new theory to the already existing literature in the fields of folklore and communication by presenting its findings as a theory of folklore communication.