

Article

The 1930s Horror Adventure Film on Location in Jamaica: 'Jungle Gods', 'Voodoo Drums' and 'Mumbo Jumbo' in the 'Secret Places of Paradise Island'

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Abstract: In this article, I consider the representation of African-Caribbean religions in the early horror adventure film from a postcolonial perspective. I do so by zooming in on *Ouanga* (1935), *Obeah* (1935), and *Devil's Daughter* (1939), three low-budget horror productions filmed on location in Jamaica during the 1930s (and the only films shot on the island throughout that decade). First, I discuss the emergence of depictions of African-Caribbean religious practices of voodoo and obeah in popular Euro-American literature, and show how the zombie figure entered Euro-American empire cinema in the 1930s as a colonial expression of tropical savagery and jungle terror. Then, combining historical newspaper research with content analyses of these films, I present my exploration into the three low-budget horror films in two parts. The first part contains a discussion of *Ouanga*, the first sound film ever made in Jamaica and allegedly the first zombie film ever shot on location in the Caribbean. In this early horror adventure, which was made in the final year of the U.S. occupation of Haiti, zombies were portrayed as products of evil supernatural powers to be oppressed by colonial rule. In the second part, I review *Obeah* and *The Devil's Daughter*, two horror adventure movies that merely portrayed African-Caribbean religion as primitive superstition. While *Obeah* was disturbingly set on a tropical island in the South Seas infested by voodoo practices and native cannibals, *The Devil's Daughter* was authorized by the British Board of Censors to show black populations in Jamaica and elsewhere in the colonial world that African-Caribbean religions were both fraudulent and dangerous. Taking into account both the production and content of these movies, I show that these 1930s horror adventure films shot on location in Jamaica were rooted in a long colonial tradition of demonizing and terrorizing African-Caribbean religions—a tradition that lasts until today.



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1. Introduction

Well before the 'era of the millennial zombie' (Lauro 2015, p. 2) in post-2000 Euro-American popular culture, and even well before the reimagining of the living dead as a flesh-eating monster in the modern world since *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the figure of the zombie had already featured in tropical gothic literature and, later, cinema as a creation of black magic in the European and American island colonies across the Caribbean. While African-derived religions such as Voodoo and Obeah were portrayed as 'wild and violent expressions of human malevolence' (Murphy 1990, p. 323), from the sixteenth century onwards, the monstrous African-Caribbean zombie started to really etch into the American popular imagination during the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934. In the second decade of this occupation, which largely coincided with the early sound period (1926–1934), the walking-while-dead 'figure of terror' (Hoermann 2017, p. 152) appeared in American cinema for the first time, in Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932). Although big-budget pirate adventure films dominated the Euro-American celluloid imaginings of the region

throughout the 1930s, the arrival of the zombie on the silver screen spurred a series of low-budget horror adventure films set in the Caribbean that were filled with ‘images of black religions as cults of violence’ (Murphy 1990, p. 23). As Lanzendörfer (2018, p. 10) states,

the success of the Halperin brother’s film ensured that the zombie would remain currency in films of the 1930s. In all of these films, the zombies followed the apparent real-world formula of mindless, but not hostile, reanimated corpses, representing to those who raised them in the first place as the chief antagonists and dangers to the systemic (racial) order. In the majority of these films, the exotic Caribbean locale and the mainly black zombies revealed the latent—and often overt—racism of the times.

Three of these films were shot in Jamaica, Haiti’s close neighbour, located 190 km (120 mi) west of the island. First, in 1933, a party of Ouanga Productions, a Toronto-based film company, set sail to Jamaica when the location shooting of their black-and-white film *Ouanga* (1935) failed in Haiti. Then, in the following year, the Arcturus Picture Corporation journeyed from New York to the British island colony to shoot several sequences of their independent film production *Obeah* (1935). Finally, in 1939, a team of *The Devil’s Daughter* (1939), another low-budget voodoo tale, landed on Jamaican shores. Being the largest British colony in the Caribbean, these North American film companies seemingly opted for Jamaica instead of Haiti because of the command of the English language and the access to the British market. While ‘African-Creole practices such as voodoo and obeah’ are nowadays often recognized as responses to ‘the pressures of colonial and neo-colonial oppression’, these three low-budget horror adventure films made in Jamaica conveyed the ‘colonialist discourse of obeah/voodoo’ by depicting these practices as ‘charms of “black” magic’ that provided ‘alibis for white colonial domination’ (Mackie 2006, pp. 191–92). In these movies, ““black” practices of voodoo and obeah’ were figured as markers of ‘racial difference’ (Mackie 2006, p. 191), either signifying supernatural evil or malicious fraud. In addition, the celluloid figure of the zombie, which came ‘into US cinema because of the American occupation of the sovereign republic of Haiti (1915–1934)’, was firmly rooted and ‘deeply connected to a colonial (...) history of oppression’ (Lauro 2015, p. 4).

In this article, I will consider the representation of African-Caribbean religions, and obeah and voodoo (including zombies) in particular, in the early horror adventure film from a postcolonial perspective.¹ I will do so by zooming in on *Ouanga*, *Obeah* and *Devil’s Daughter*, the only three productions shot on location in Jamaica during the 1930s. First, I will discuss the emergence of depictions of obeah and voodoo in popular Euro-American literature, and show that the zombie figure entered Euro-American empire cinema in the 1930s as a colonial expression of tropical savagery and jungle terror. Then, combining extensive historical newspaper research—largely based on the *Jamaica Gleaner*, Jamaica’s oldest and largest newspaper²—with content analyses of these films, I will present my exploration into the three low-budget horror films in two parts. The first part will contain a discussion of *Ouanga*, the first sound film ever made in Jamaica and allegedly the first zombie film ever shot on location in the Caribbean (since *White Zombie* was entirely filmed in the studio and on location in Los Angeles). In this early horror adventure, which was made in the final year of the U.S. occupation of Haiti, zombies were portrayed as products of evil supernatural powers, specifically of ‘tropical and feminine charms’ (Mackie 2006, p. 191) that should be oppressed by colonial rule at all times. In the second part, I will review *Obeah* and *The Devil’s Daughter*, two horror adventure movies that merely portrayed African-Caribbean religions, and obeah and voodoo in particular, as primitive superstition.

¹ Throughout this article, I chiefly use the English/American, non-capitalized spellings of ‘obeah’ or ‘voodoo’ instead of ‘Obeah’ or ‘Voodoo’ (or alternate spellings such as ‘Vodou’, ‘Vodun’, ‘Vodun’, or ‘Vaudou’, dependent on the language of the country in which it is practiced) to emphasize the focus on the (stereotypical) representation of the two African-Caribbean religions in Euro-American cinema and wider popular culture.

² Since newspaper reports of the *Jamaica Gleaner* are my primary source materials of the archival newspaper research, I use the abbreviation *JG* when quoting or paraphrasing from these reports. When referring to other newspapers and magazines, I provide their full title in the text.

While *Obeah*, which is nowadays considered a lost film, was disturbingly set on a tropical island in the South Seas infested by voodoo practices and native cannibals, *The Devil's Daughter*, which was released in Jamaica as *Pocomania*, was authorized by the British Board of Censors to show black populations on the island and elsewhere that African-Caribbean religions were both fraudulent and dangerous. Taking into account both the production and content of these three movies, I will show that the 1930s horror adventure films shot on location in Jamaica were rooted in a long colonial tradition of demonizing and terrorizing African-Caribbean religions and —a tradition that lasts until today.

2. The Emergence of the African-Caribbean Voodoo, Obeah and Zombies in Euro-American Literature and Cinema: 'Blood-Maddened, Sex-Maddened, God-Maddened'

While horror adventure films set in the Caribbean did not fully emerge in Euro-American cinema until the early 1930s, the image of the region as 'a zone dominated by the uncanny' (Torres-Saillant 2006, p. 107) has a long history dating back to Europe's initial encounter with the Caribbean. Apart from assigning heavenly virtues as well as hellish forces to its tropical nature, Columbus circulated stories of monstrous cannibals inhabiting the region ever since his very first voyage of discovery without ever having seen them (Wey Gómez 2008). These and other stories of primitive 'natives' eating human flesh and worshipping heathen gods provided a strong pretext for the Spanish conquest, colonization and Christianization of the Caribbean during the early sixteenth century, until the region's indigenous population was almost entirely wiped out (Hulme 1986).³ The entrance of enslaved Africans into the Caribbean throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also brought many African religions to the region, which were both used to provide 'resistance to the dehumanizing influences of European powers' and to create 'new spiritualities, appropriated to the needs and demands of their New World identities and cultures' (Hudson 2012, p. 39). In general terms, these new spiritualities originated from the syncretism between African religions and Christianity. By the early eighteenth century, the spiritual beliefs and practices of enslaved Africans in most islands of the British West Indies had largely become known as obeah, while in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (which would later become Haiti) a similar but unique syncretic religious tradition had developed under the name of voodoo.⁴

In the eyes of the European colonial officials, missionaries and planter elites, these syncretic religions were rebellious schemes of primitive paganism and dark superstitions that undermined the slavery system and civilizing mission, and thus had to be eradicated if order and control were to be achieved and maintained (Moore and Johnson 2004). Hence, the practices of obeah and voodoo were greatly suppressed and eventually prohibited. In Jamaica, where the term 'obeah' first appeared in early-eighteenth-century documents in relation to the resistance of the Maroons (Campbell 1988), obeah practices were made illegal after Tacky's Rebellion, a major uprising of enslaved Africans in 1760 that was allegedly inspired by an obeahman. As such, Jamaica became 'the first of the British colonies to enact legislation against obeah,' which started 'a long history of policing obeah', including 'imprisonment, floggings, and fines for colluding with persons associated with obeah' (Martin 2016, pp. 4–5). As in other parts of the British West Indies, obeah practitioners, who were represented as evil sorcerers using their influence to perform illegal acts, attracted 'hostile attention from many elite observers' until well into the twentieth century (Moore and Johnson 2004, p. 16).⁵ In Haiti, the French, who ascribed all African-derived practices to

³ Paradoxically, these stories co-existed with stories of 'natives' as childlike hosts and peaceful savages, equally serving as a justification for imperial conquest and colonial control.

⁴ According to Castagna (2010, p. 236), 'Obeah is not a religion but rather a sacred healing practice that acknowledges a spiritual belief system. In the British imagination, [however,] Obeah has historically been the umbrella term for any African-based spiritual practice unknown to the European tradition that purports to give the black population a sense of agency or authority'.

⁵ For example, in the 1870s, British author Charles Rampini stated in his *Letters from Jamaica* (Rampini 1873, p. 131): 'Of all the motive powers which influence the negro character, by far the most potent, as it is also the most dangerous, is that of Obeah. (...) The Obeah man or woman is one of the great guild or fraternity of crime. Hardly a criminal trial occurs in the colony in which he is not implicated in one way or another'.

'superstition, idolatry or satanism, if they did not simply consider them signs of infantilism or madness' (Renda 2001, p. 29), had established Catholicism as the only permitted religion under the Code Noir of 1685. As a result, voodoo was forced to go underground, out of the sight and control of the French colonial authorities. However, in 1791, a voodoo ceremony instigated a slave revolt that marked the beginning of the Haitian Revolution, which ultimately culminated in the abolition of slavery and the establishment of the Haitian Republic in 1804, known as the first black people's republic in the world.⁶

During the nineteenth century, African-Caribbean religions remained targets of suppression, even in independent Haiti, where voodoo continued to be trivialized and demonized by the French elites as an 'evil cult' (Martin 2016, p. 8). At the same time, the terms 'obeah' and 'voodoo' became increasingly familiar in both Britain and the United States through a variety of travel writings. In the run up to the abolition of slavery, a growing number of poems, novels and plays that were laid in Jamaica included obeah plots, such as William Earle's *Obi; or, the History of Three-Finger'd Jack* (Earle 1800) and Cynric Williams' *Hamel, the Obeah Man* (Williams 1827). In the period following emancipation, 'obeah's literary fortunes [mainly] took the form of anthropological curiosity about folkloric rites' (Aravamudan 2005, p. 48), such as in Hesketh Bell's *Obeah: Witchcraft in the West Indies* (1889). These accounts typically depicted obeah as 'a residual primitivism and a general turn to the irrational among the formerly enslaved population of African descent' (Aravamudan 2005, p. 48).

Similarly, horror tales of voodoo practices in Haiti started to stir the Euro-American popular imagination, in particular the myth of the zombie. Originally conceived as a mindless body forced into interminable labour on the plantation, in Haiti, the zombie served as a personification of the collective experience and memory of slavery. However, in Euro-American discourse, the zombie was isolated from this (anti-)colonial context and chiefly came to represent a dead person reanimated by voodoo priests for evil purposes (Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2011, p. 151). According to Lanzendorfer (2018, p. 9), 'the image of the mindless, drone-like slave worker resurrected from among the dead, whatever its validity as a description of the actual practices of vodou in Haiti (...), proved a fertile ground for fictional explorations, if not at first in literature'. In the early 1880s, Spenser St. John, a British diplomat, published a book about his experiences on the island entitled *Haiti or the Black Republic* (1884). This sensationalist work chiefly 'updated and repeated older images of Voodoon as a diabolical religion' (Lewis 2001, p. 274). It portrayed voodoo as a demonic zombie-driven cult of death and debauchery and sparked a public outcry over its shocking accounts of black magic, human sacrifices, and cannibalism. Being widely read in the U.S., *Haiti or the Black Republic* greatly impacted the American consciousness of Haitian voodoo, popularizing its association with the living dead.⁷

From the early twentieth century, the U.S. public's perception of African-Caribbean religions, and voodoo in particular, became directly linked with the American occupation of Haiti. In 1915, U.S. troops invaded the island and would remain there for almost twenty years. During this period, the image of the American occupation was being 'carefully orchestrated by policy-makers in Washington and American officials in Haiti' (Pamphile 1986, p. 91). The Wilson administration presented the invasion as a benevolent mission to bring order and peace among black Haitians after the assassination of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam. This white saviour rhetoric was soon echoed in the U.S. press. While the Americans had intervened in various Caribbean and Pacific countries before, it was the first time they came into contact with 'an environment in which black people were masters'

⁶ After the establishment of the Code Noir, voodoo practices were aggressively suppressed by arrests, fines, and corporal punishment. In response, the enslaved Africans conducted their rites in secrecy; under the cover of Catholic ceremonies, during clandestine gatherings at night, and on the hidden Maroon camps in the mountains. In due course, voodoo 'created a communal bond that served as the secret foundation for their various struggles for freedom' (Renda 2001, p. 33). As such, the religion played a significant role in Haitian Revolution and, eventually, the abolition of slavery and independence of Haiti.

⁷ The portrayal of voodoo in *Haiti or the Black Republic* was highly inaccurate and exaggerated. According to Lewis (2001, p. 274), the author had based his 'graphic descriptions on testimonies of voodoo priests who were tortured into false confessions and statements of former colonial planters'.

(Richardson 2010, p. 122). Encountering communication problems, cultural differences and unexpectedly stiff and resolute resistance, the U.S. army treated the Haitians as uncivilized lackeys, and practically brought back slavery through a system of corvée labour.

This generated both interest and opposition at home. While the American public had so far been generally ignorant to U.S. imperialist missions, the occupation of Haiti became ‘the first foreign adventure that appears to have made a significant impact upon US consciousness’ (Richardson 2010, p. 122). According to Baroco (2011, p. 13),

in 1920, the occupation became a controversial news topic and presidential campaign issue when allegations of excessive violence and oppressive policies surfaced. Although opposition grew, even its critics continued to characterize Haitians as an inferior population, and evaluated the level of success the U.S. had achieved uplifting them. As government officials, politicians, and the press debated U.S. withdrawal in the latter half of the occupation, memoirs and travel books that exoticized Haiti were published to great success.

First, in 1929, American adventure writer William Seabrook published his memoirs under the title *The Magic Island*. This ‘travelogue narrating Seabrook’s experiences in Haiti (...) is generally acknowledged to be the origin of Western interest in the zombie’ (Lanzendorfer 2018, p. 9). Although Seabrook defended the island’s autonomy against U.S. imperialism, his highly sensationalized and sexualized account of voodoo implied the incapacity of Haitian people for self-government. According to Jenkins (2000, p. 114), Seabrook ‘quoted extensively from voodoo rituals, describing ceremonies that are not only bloody, but also involve a powerful sexuality, with elements of perversion and bestiality: Haitians were presented as a “blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened” people’. Praised in the *New York Evening Post* as ‘the best and most thrilling book of exploration that we have ever read’ (12 January 1929), *The Magic Island* became an international bestseller and ‘set the tone for the all later writings on voodoo’ (Jenkins 2000, p. 114).⁸

These works, mostly written by American marine officers and travel journalists, furthered the image of Haiti as a perilous place in order to justify the occupation to the American public. They generally perpetuated the imperialist notion of the white man’s burden and provided a strong sense of American patriotism, paternalism, and racism. While Haitians were depicted as backward people needing American guidance and protection, the ‘barbaric’ and ‘demonic’ practices of voodoo were used to demonstrate their inferiority, incompetence and despotism (Renda 2001). According to Sulikowski (1996, pp. 80–81), these works of imperial gothic literature were all marked by ‘a tone of fear and disgust’ and a ‘want for magic, for otherness which is sensual, and for adventure, for all experiences which are excluded by modern industrial society’.

Inspired by all these literary works, voodoo tales soon also became familiar in Hollywood cinema. The gothic blend of erotic-exotic fear and desire, and particularly the myth of the zombie, matched well with the emerging horror genre of the early sound era that was prompted by the success of Universal’s talkie horror films *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931). Though not yet featuring zombies, MGM’s pre-code horror adventure romance *The Sea Bat* (1930) allegedly became the first American sound film dealing with voodoo. Shot in Mexico, the plot was set on a South Pacific island and featured a young Spanish woman who joins a voodoo cult after she hears that her brother has been killed by a sea bat. In line with the prevailing American image of Haiti, the island was governed by an inept president who has lost control over his people. Then, in 1932, *White Zombie*

⁸ Two of those writings were Faustin Wirkus’ *The White King of La Gonave* (Wirkus 1931) and John Craige’s *Cannibal Cousins* (Craige 1934). Both Wirkus and Craige were U.S. marines based in Haiti during the occupation. Their memoirs largely portrayed voodoo practitioners as cultist cannibals spreading anarchy and terror across Haiti. As Hurbon (1995, p. 56) notes, ‘Wirkus (...) gave an account of the damage he inflicted in order to “save” the Haitian people from cannibalism and black magic. As far as he was concerned, the (...) protestors against the occupation, were practitioners of voodoo. (...) [Craige’s] *Cannibal Cousins* painted a picture of Haiti as the land of ‘zombies’, for voodoo, it was reported, had the strange custom of “reviving the dead”’.

became the first feature-length zombie movie to appear on the silver screen (Figure 1).⁹ The low-budget film was produced by the independent filmmaking brothers Victor and Edward Halperin and largely shot on the Universal Studios lot in California.



Figure 1. A theatrical release poster of *White Zombie*, known as the first feature-length zombie film ever made.

White Zombie told the story of a young American woman who is turned into a zombie by a French plantation owner—with a potion he received from an evil voodoo master who runs a plantation worked by zombies—in a desperate attempt to marry her. Although the pre-code film expressed some of the complexities and ambivalences of America's imperial presence in Haiti, and partially depicted zombies in line with its Haitian origins (Richardson 2010, pp. 123–25), *White Zombie* ultimately presented a 'carefully packaged piece of sensationalism, sex and the living dead' (Russell 2005, p. 21). With its portrayal of Haiti as an exotic-erotic place of danger and mystery,¹⁰ the film perpetuated U.S. imperialism and introduced the zombie as a new 'sub-subaltern monster' in American horror cinema (Bishop 2008). Although *White Zombie* did not achieve the same box office success as the two preceding Universal horrors, it fared very well for an independent production. As such, the Halperin brothers' movie spurred a spate of low-budget horror adventure films dealing with voodoo, including *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1942), the latter being in part a loose adaptation of the 1847 colonialist novel *Jane Eyre* by

⁹ In between *The Sea Bat* and *White Zombie*, in 1931, UA released *Arrowsmith*, an adaptation of the 1925 novel of the same name, which was set in a fictional Caribbean island. While not featuring voodoo or zombies, its story of island natives suffering a bubonic plague to be saved by an American scientist, mirrored the rhetoric of the U.S. administration after invading Haiti.

¹⁰ Combining the imperial gothic themes of going native and black invasion, the white American characters, lured by the romantic promise of tropical paradise, soon come to experience the island as horrific and maddening.

Charlotte Brontë (Figure 2).¹¹ These and other early horror adventure films contributed to the popular Euro-American image of Haiti as ‘a land dominated by weird rituals and especially the myth of the zombie’ (Richardson 2010, p. 123).¹²



Figure 2. Theatrical release posters of *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936, left) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1942, right). While the first was, following *White Zombie*, again made by the Halperin brothers, the second was made by director Jacques Tourneur and producer Val Lewton. *I Walked with a Zombie* marked their second horror film for RKO Pictures following *Cat People* (1942). The third and final horror film Tourneur and Lewton made together for RKO was *The Leopard Man* (1943).

Interestingly, horror adventure films are often not included in discussions on empire cinema, i.e., the body of commercial American and British ‘films promoting ideologies of popular imperialism’ (Chapman 2006, p. 814) that reached its ‘very heyday’ in the

¹¹ According to Russell (2005, p. 27), the box office success of ‘White Zombie’ didn’t encourage any established filmmakers to turn their hand to movies about the walking corpses of the Caribbean. Most of the Hollywood establishment regarded the zombie as little more than (...) a one-hit wonder (...). Unconvinced (...), the big studios turned their backs to the zombie and the monster’s long-running association with low-budget, critically dismissed films began in earnest’.

¹² According to Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert (2011, p. 151), over time the popular genre transformed the zombie into ‘a titillating version of the Caribbean bogeyman’ and ‘one of the most sensationalized aspects of Haitian religiosity’.

1930s ([Shohat and Stam \[1993\] 2002](#), p. 124).¹³ While empire films appeared in a variety of genres, throughout the 1930s the adventure genre was most often employed to project ‘a certain vision of the empire in relation to its subjects’ ([Chowdhry 2000](#), p. 1), notably ‘the justification of empire as a political project’ ([Sinha 2011](#), p. 541). Allegedly first taken up in *The Lost World* (1925; Figure 3), imperial adventure ‘emerged as a major genre’ in the next decade ([Chapman and Cull 2009](#), p. 6). According to [Taves \(1993](#), p. 173), the 1930s imperial adventure film became ‘one of the principal avenues for presenting views (however warped) of foreign cultures and distant land to curious and receptive audiences’ in the United States, Britain and the rest of the world.¹⁴ Following [Taves \(1993\)](#), [Neale \(2004](#), p. 77), has identified five subgenres of the classical imperial adventure film, i.e., the swashbuckler adventure film, the pirate adventure film, the sea adventure film, the empire builder adventure film, and the fortune hunter adventure film.¹⁵

While the horror adventure film is conspicuously missing from this list, probably because of its prominence in the low-budget exploitation circuit, movies from this subgenre brought America’s expanding overseas frontier undoubtedly to the fore. In fact, the 1930s horror adventure films not only joined but surpassed the ‘horrific’ treatment of African religions that was present in most imperial adventure films. According to [Grella \(1980](#), p. 258), almost every imperial adventure film of the time featured and confronted the ‘exotic’ religion that the white male hero stumbled upon in faraway lands: ‘In the least profound works, alien religion in the form of bizarre practices and unspeakable rites intensifies the dangers of those dreadful natives out in the bush. (...) At the same time, even the most subtle works in the genre necessarily deal with the mysteries of native religion’. In their treatment of African-Caribbean religion, 1930s horror adventure films drew heavily from the imperial gothic tradition in Euro-American adventure literature—and it seems appropriate to add the horror adventure movie as another subgenre of the imperial adventure film.¹⁶

While the 1930s horror adventure films set in the Caribbean shared several similarities with the other imperial adventure subgenres, they also often differed from their big(ger)-budget counterparts, and particularly from the pirate adventure films which were often laid in the region as well. Of all the imperial adventure subgenres, the pirate adventure film became most associated with the Caribbean through its romantic stories of ‘the daring deeds on the Spanish Main, with rakish black schooners and tropical islands and sea chests overflowing with gold and silver coins’ ([Cordingly 1996](#), p. xiii). Whereas pirate

¹³ Already in the 1970s, [Richards \(1973](#), p. 2) defined empire cinema as ‘not simply film which are set in the territories of the British Empire but films which detail the attitudes, ideals and myths of British Imperialism’. In the following years, the definition of empire cinema was extended to include the national cinemas of other empires, notably the United States, which emerged as an imperialist power by the early twentieth century (though the British tradition remained prominent). At present, empire cinema is most closely associated with the British and American empire films of the 1930s and 1940s. According to [Chowdhry \(2000](#), p. 1), these empire films were popular in both Britain and Hollywood because they ‘shared a common viewpoint and the acceptance of certain ideological concerns and images in keeping with this vision’. [Taves \(1993](#), p. 71) similarly explains that ‘the era of colonialism was still under way, with much of Europe’s colonial system enduring and America’s own imperial tendencies still on the rise. Most English-language audiences could share equally in the vicarious thrill of stories of conquest in remote lands’. Interestingly, the 1930s cycle of American empire films generally featured the ‘old’ British Empire instead of its own ‘new’ one. [Richards \(1973](#), p. 4) even argues that most ‘American films of Empire were little different from British films of Empire’. This may be explained by both cultural and economic reasons. Culturally, Britain and the United States shared a deep Anglo-Saxon heritage. [Richards \(1973](#), p. 1) asserts that many empire films of the 1930s ‘brought to life the heroic dreams and romantic fancies that are part of the folk tradition of the English-speaking world’. In a similar vein, [Chapman and Cull \(2009](#), p. 6) refer to ‘the existence of a shared Anglo-American culture of chivalry that exerts a strong hold on the popular imagination on both sides of the Atlantic’.

¹⁴ [Crafton \(1997](#), p. 388) argues that the introduction of sound attributed greatly to the popularity of the imperial adventure film, adding yet another level of immediacy and realism to the travelogue tradition of the silent era: ‘The travel film, part ethnographic documentary, part titillating attraction, had been an important component of cinema since its beginning. Producers quickly adapted it to take advantage of sound’s transportive function. Commentators and reviewers invariably mentioned the enhanced impression of imaginary presence and “realism” that sound afforded. The overt purpose of these films was to capture the ambience of exotic lands, and sound helped complete the illusion’.

¹⁵ In addition to these five subgenres of the imperial adventure film, [Neale \(2004](#), p. 76) also mentions the—often more contemporary—colonial adventures in safari and jungle films and lost world films.

¹⁶ Generally speaking, classic imperial adventure films focused on a white male hero, or a bond of people (usually white men) led by a white male hero, who travels (voluntarily or not) to faraway places in search or need of a higher purpose (e.g., wealth, fame, land, science, justice, order, civilization), which he eventually, after overcoming numerous trials and dangers, achieves, together with a moral learning experience and the beautiful white maiden he loves (if that was not his higher purpose in the first place).

movies were usually set in the distant colonial past of swashbuckling buccaneering on the Caribbean high seas, such as *Treasure Island* (1934) and *Captain Blood* (1935), early horror adventure movies typically took place in either the near colonial past or the colonial present, e.g., in Haiti during the American occupation or on a (fictional) Caribbean island ruled by white elites somewhere in the early twentieth century.¹⁷ In addition, with the confined area of the plantation often as its main setting, the geographical locations of the 1930s horror adventure films usually diverged from the popular pirate adventure films, in which open spaces were typically explored, conquered and exploited.¹⁸

The early American horror adventure films set in the Caribbean borrowed most clearly from the southern plantation drama, another genre that proliferated in Hollywood cinema during the 1930s.¹⁹ As [Guerero \(1993, p. 22\)](#) notes, plantation dramas such as *Dixiana* (1930), *Mississippi* (1935), *Jezebel* (1938), and *Gone with the Wind* (1939), represented the Old South as a ‘mythical world of aristocratic power and aesthetic delights’ free from the ‘terror and coercion of the slave system’. [Masood \(2003, p. 14\)](#) similarly argues these films evoked an ‘antebellum idyll’ in which the plantation was presented as a ‘rural, pre-industrial southern agricultural’ landscape inhabited by indulgent whites and loyal blacks.²⁰ Most 1930s horror adventure films contained similar scenes of romantic bliss and plantation wealth, yet with the notable difference that the overseas colonial setting found itself under constant threat of black invasion. As such, these movies offered a modern frontier variation of the southern plantation drama, one that negotiated the desires and anxieties of America’s imperial presence in the Caribbean.²¹

¹⁷ For example, in Columbia Pictures’ *Black Moon* (1934), as the *New York Times* reported at the time, ‘2,000 crazed natives [set out] to exterminate all the white folk’ on the imaginary West Indian island of San Christopher (28 June 1934). According to [Senn \(1998, p. 36\)](#), in ‘making voodoo nothing more than the driving superstition of the fanatical savages (...), *Black Moon* did the religion (...) no favors,’ particularly as the name of the island closely resembled the name of a real West Indian island, i.e., Saint Christopher Island, better known as Saint Kitts.

¹⁸ More generally, in 1930s American empire films depicting the U.S. presence overseas, Americans often do not enter empty spaces to be seized—as is the case in many films set in the ‘old’ British Empire or American West—but already populated and cultivated areas to be monitored and protected. [Sinha \(2011, p. 542\)](#) argues that such films constituted ‘a way of imagining the nation not as an empire,’ as in most British empire films, ‘but rather as a global economic power’. Directly reflecting the (covert imperialist) rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy in the early twentieth century, these empire films usually featured a contemporary (post-1900) setting in which white American characters were involved in ‘mediating world conflicts, promoting international camaraderie and creating the conditions for modernization’ ([Sinha 2011, p. 542](#)).

¹⁹ The genre of the southern plantation drama reached its peak in the 1930s. Film historians have explained the genre’s popularity during this period by considering them as forms of white nostalgia and escapism in economically desperate times. According to [Williams \(2001, p. 187\)](#), ‘in the decade of the Great Depression, American popular culture would wax even more nostalgic over the traditional virtues of the agrarian southern home than it had in [earlier] day[s], to the point of reviving its most controversial symbol of white mastery: the plantation’. In a similar vein, [Guerero \(1993, p. 19\)](#) argues that ‘tendency toward denial and escapism in times of crisis accounted for the plantation melodrama’s national popularity, which resulted in the production and exhibition of more than seventy-five features about the South between 1929 and 1941’. Both the southern plantation drama and the imperial zombie film often featured segregation stories with a strict core-periphery geography and black-white hierarchy.

²⁰ The African-American characters in southern plantation dramas were generally pacified and docile slaves who happily served their functions on the plantation. According to [Masood \(2003, pp. 14–16\)](#), as such, they were not only reduced to supportive objects of white fantasies, but also detached from the ‘civilized’ and ‘modern’ world, making them ‘luminal to the expansion of an industrial economy’.

²¹ Louisiana voodoo was another African-derived religion that had developed since the eighteenth century. According to [Schmitt and O’Neill \(2019, p. 39\)](#), voodoo came to Louisiana in the early 1700s when enslaved Africans were brought to the Deep South to work on the plantations. As they were ‘not allowed to practice any religion’ except Catholicism, ‘gathering for Voodoo or any other rites in those early days was impossible’ ([Schmitt and O’Neill 2019, p. 41](#)). According to [Touchstone \(1972, p. 374\)](#), the presence of voodoo increased around 1800, ‘when many Haitian and West Indian blacks who were already acquainted with it were brought as slaves to Louisiana’ when it was a short-lived French colony. After Louisiana became a state of the United States in the early nineteenth century (the French sold Louisiana to the U.S. in 1803 and the territory was officially admitted as an American state in 1812), attempts were made to ‘curtail voodoo activities’, notably by the Union army during the American Civil War (1861–1865) ([Touchstone 1972, p. 374](#)). However, although the large commercial voodoo ceremonies deteriorated after the Civil War—in part since by the 1880s the New Orleans authorities became less tolerant of even semi-public, benign voodoo and, whenever possible, the police broke up voodoo assemblies which were now termed illegal—the ‘more clandestine New Orleans voodoos’ continued many of their activities underground ([Touchstone 1972, pp. 381–82](#)). In early twentieth-century Louisiana, the ‘remnants of commercial voodoo and of the underground variety survived in the guise of a few “hoodoo-men,” witchcraft stores and odd charms’ ([Touchstone 1972, p. 386](#)). The 1930s Hollywood zombie films thus also seemed to negotiate the presence of voodoo ‘at home’. In addition, some voodoo films of this period were especially made for the so-called ‘Negro circuit’, i.e., the ‘specialty market’ on ‘the margins of the [American] motion picture industry’ that supplied ‘independently produced material featuring all-black casts’ to ‘all-black venues called “race houses”’ ([Doherty 1999, p. 207](#)), of which around 450 existed in the United States in the mid-1930s. For example, following *White Zombie*, American cinema’s ‘second voodoo entry’ became *Drums o’ Voodoo* (1934), an ‘all-coloured’ low-budget production written by African-American playwright J. Augustus Smith ([Senn 1998, p. 29](#)). As such, *Drums o’ Voodoo* holds ‘the distinction of being the first [American] film based on the work of a black dramatist—and the first blaxploitation voodoo movie’ ([Senn 1998, p. 29](#)). Significantly, taking ‘a diametrically opposed direction from its predecessor’, *Drums o’ Voodoo* was also ‘the first picture to shine a benign light on its topic’ by capturing ‘the sense of community integral to Voudoun spirituality’ ([Senn 1998, p. 29](#)).



Figure 3. A theatrical release poster of *The Lost World*, which might have been the first feature-length Hollywood imperial adventure film. The 106-min silent film fashioned many of the basic ingredients and accompanying colonial tropes that would come to dominate the genre. *The Lost World* was an adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's 1912 safari novel of the same name and told the story of a group of British explorers who embark on a scientific expedition to the Amazon jungle in search of pre-historic dinosaurs. Upon arrival at their destination, they hit upon a plateau populated with the creatures. The adventurers manage to bring one back to London with the intention to put him on public display. However, the monster escapes and wreaks havoc on the city before swimming down the Thames. *The Lost World*, which was advertised with the tagline 'Mighty Prehistoric Monsters Clash with Modern Lovers,' premiered on 2 February 1925 in New York and became an instant domestic box office hit. At the time, Laurence Reed (1925), reporter of the *Motion Picture Magazine*, lyrically wrote that the film offered 'sheer adventure, and demonstrated that the camera knows no limitations in recording the most fanciful imagination'.

In the years following the success of *White Zombie*, obeah and voodoo started to appear in various horror adventure films set in the Caribbean as well as the South Seas, Africa and South America—showing both the conflation of African-Caribbean religious traditions and their random distribution throughout the colonial world. Again different from big-budget pirate adventure films, which were almost exclusively made in-studio and on-location in California, independent production companies of low-budget horror adventure films sometimes ventured out overseas. As mentioned, among these companies, three travelled to Jamaica to shoot their horror tales on location throughout the 1930s. Thus, while the island regularly appeared as a setting in pirate adventure films, as a location Jamaica came to serve as a wicked place of black magic, contributing to the uncanny reputation that would affect the island as well as the region as a whole.

3. *Ouanga*: The ‘Magic of Deadly Jungle Gods’ and ‘Pulsating Beat of the Voodoo Drums’

Ouanga, which carried the working title *Drums of the Night* and became known in the United States as *The Love Wanga*, marked ‘the first talking picture to be made in Jamaica’ (*JG*, 16 November 1933; Figure 4). Although the production company of *Ouanga* was based in Canada, the moving picture was intended as a British quota film to be released by the British arm of Paramount Pictures.²² According to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, 75 per cent of the actors were British, which was the exact minimum set forth in the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 (which prescribed that at least three quarters of the salaries had to go to British subjects in order to be eligible as a British quota film). The choice for Jamaica as a location, providing ‘native background’ (*JG*, 4 October 1933), was seemingly also motivated by quota criteria, as such films needed to cover production within the British Empire to count for British. Hence, according to a crew member of *Ouanga* Productions, Paramount ‘insisted that the locations must be in a British colony’ (*JG*, 25 October 1933). On the other hand, the crew member argued that Jamaica was an ideal film location in itself:

Jamaica possesses, as far as we have found out here, very many advantages from the point of view of making moving pictures (...) it has a light and climate every bit as good as Hollywood; magnificent natural scenery; is easily accessible from New York; it is British; and the people of Jamaica are orderly and intelligent, which is a good deal more than we can say of some of the other countries around the Caribbean'. (*JG*, 25 October 1933)

At the time, however, several stories circulated that the crew first wanted to go, and actually went to, Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, which would not be surprising considering ‘the timely rise in popularity of the sordid tales of Haitian Vodou’ that was ‘directly correlated to the US military occupation of the Black Republic’ (Martin 2016, p. 20). While various reports confirm that the cast and crew indeed first went to ‘the voodoo capital of the world’ (Leonard and Griffith 1995, p. 19), as Sheldon Leonard, one of *Ouanga*’s main actors, described Port-au-Prince²³, the reasons given why it did not work out varied. Eventually, they seem to have been mainly put forward to sensationalize the film’s voodoo tale.

One story that circulated at the time in Jamaica was that ‘the Haitian Government had declined to grant the company the courtesy of filming the piece on the soil of the neighbouring republic (...) by way of reprisal’ for the negative portrayal of ‘the black art’ in *White Zombie* (*JG*, 20 October 1933). However, this story was challenged by a

²² Due to shooting delays, the production was not ready for its planned release in December 1933 and consequently lost its place in the British quota that year. *Ouanga* finally premiered in Britain in 1935. From then, it would last another seven years before the film was released in the United States. According to Senn (1998, p. 41), the film ‘was not shown in America until early 1942, when states-rights distributor J.H. Hoffberg exhibited it briefly under the new title of *The Love Wanga*’ before languishing in obscurity.

²³ In his autobiography *And the Show Goes on*, Leonard recounted the following about their initial decision to travel to Haiti to shoot *Ouanga*: ‘Our first port of call was Port Au Prince, Haiti. Our picture was to be about voodoo and Port Au Prince was (...) the center of the voodoo religion. (...) [Here,] our company prop man expected to find many of the things with which to dress the sets so that they would look like authentic places of voodoo worship’ (Leonard and Griffith 1995, p. 19).

crew member of Ouanga Productions, who argued that they had left Haiti because the Haitian population constantly wanted money for their capture on film: ‘Hundreds of natives would gather round and beat tin pans (...) so that it was impossible to record anything until we had paid the whole lot to keep quiet; and this had to be done every time. Naturally we had to abandon the whole idea’ (JG, 25 October 1933). According to Leonard and Griffith (1995, pp. 19–20), their short stay in Haiti was due to the crew’s disrespect for the Haitian population. Terwilliger, the film’s writer and director, initially gained the trust of the local population but angered them when he wanted to capture their religious ceremonies on film. After his prop man Jim Harp—allegedly without the director’s knowledge and consent—stole some sacred objects from their site for use as props in their film, Terwilliger feared local repercussions and ‘very bad luck’. Though Leonard’s account seemingly contained sensationalist claims, it was reported that Terwilliger decided to move the production to Jamaica only five days after disembarking in Port-Au-Prince.

“Drums Of The Night”

**Sound Movie to be Made in
Jamaica by Ouanga Co.
Of Canada.**

ACTORS IN ISLAND.

**Arrived Yesterday From
New York and Will Soon
Start Film-shooting.**

persons on the pier had the pleasure of witnessing the “shooting” of some sequences on deck, the array of flood lights and cameras providing a novel and interesting scene.

The theme of the picture is a **NATIVE LOVE STORY**, with a native background, and was written by Messrs George Terwilliger, director, and Carl Berger, co-producer and chief cam.

Figure 4. A headline from the *Jamaica Gleaner* announcing the arrival of the team of Ouanga Productions in Jamaica in October 1933, coming to make the first sound movie on the island (JG, 4 October 1933). At the time, the film still carried the title *Drums of the Night*, which would later be changed into *Ouanga*. In the United States, the film became known as *The Love Wanga*.

The *Ouanga* team, consisting of ‘24 players and technical officers’ (JG, 14 October 1933), arrived in Kingston on October 3, 1933. Soon, several production stories about bad luck started to appear. First, the *Jamaica Gleaner* reported that some scenes filmed on board of a ship had to be reshotted ‘because of the fact that the marine background’ had ‘not shown up with the desired effect’ (JG, 27 October 1933). Additionally, the chief cameraman complained about the unstable natural lighting, which reportedly delayed the production due to ‘overcast skies and lack of sunshine’ (JG, 11 October 1933). According to Leonard and Griffith (1995, pp. 22–23), the production team also became entangled in various serious and even fatal accidents. He argued that they were attacked by hornets before any scenes were actually recorded, after which several people needed hospital treatment. Leonard himself seemingly did not get off unscathed either. While shooting a chase scene, he, by his own account, fell and pierced his leg ‘by barbed spines of a cactus plant, which had to be cut out in the hospital’. Then, in the following weeks, the key grip of the film was apparently killed by ‘probably a giant barracuda’, while the make-up artist ‘died of yellow fever’ and the assistant sound man ‘fell of the sound boom and broke his neck’. Considering these

dramatic events, [Leonard and Griffith \(1995, p. 23\)](#) described the location shooting as a cursed production.²⁴ However, although the weather conditions definitely led to a delay in production—eventually the team stayed on the island for eleven instead of five weeks—Leonard's account seems to be grossly exaggerated (in the *Jamaica Gleaner* no mention is made about the accidents). According to [Russell \(2005, p. 26\)](#), the well-documented production stories of *Ouanga* were largely plotted to emphasize the authenticity of the film, and, by extension, the primitivism of African-Caribbean religions and particularly Haitian voodoo: 'Regardless of whether they were true or false, such stories had an important role in bolstering American discourses about Haitian savagery and occultism'.

The focus on authenticity was also present at the beginning of the film itself. Following the mention of the movie's title, *Ouanga*—a term referring to the use of 'charms, amulets, packets, and other such adornments made in the healing/harming service of African-derived spiritual traditions' ([Martin 2016, p. 20](#))—the filmmakers projected the following sentence on screen: 'A story of voodoo, filmed in its entirety in the West Indies'²⁵ (more or less the same sentence was used for the theatrical poster; Figure 5). In addition, the didactic foreword stressed that the film, which conflated 'various practices into the single metonymic gloss of "voodoo"' ([Martin 2016, p. 5](#)), was 'an actual case story'. In the film, the 'sensationalized voodoo' theme was intersected with 'the trope of the tragic mulatto' and her impossible love for a white man ([Martin 2016, p. 20](#)).²⁶ As such, *Ouanga*, like several other horror adventure films of the time, featured 'romantic drama (...) intertwined with sorcery in a quest to obtain or keep a loved one' ([Polack 2017, p. 62](#)).

According to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, *Ouanga* told the 'exciting voodoo love story' (*JG*, 4 October 1933) of Clelie Gordon (Fredi Washington), 'an attractive native girl—a white-coloured girl' (*JG*, 14 October 1933) of mixed race who wants to marry her American neighbour Adam Maynard (Philip Brandon) with whom she had an affair for two years. However, 'of course, he eventually (...) tells her that he cannot marry her' (*JG*, 14 October 1933). When Adam announces to wed Eve Langley (Marie Paxton), a white American girl, instead of her ('you belong with your own kind'), Clelie reconnects with her African-Caribbean roots and turns into a 'satanic snake' and 'black sorcerer' ([Russell 2005, p. 26](#)). Resorting to 'occult means' (*JG*, 14 October 1933), she sends a death charm and two zombies to abduct Eve with the intention to sacrifice her in a voodoo ceremony. Eventually, Clelie's sinister intentions are thwarted by overseer and spurned lover LeStrange (Sheldon Leonard). In a traditional tragic mulatto ending, he kills Clelie, and with that her 'mixed blood,' in the mountain jungle. Her death re-establishes order and tranquility on the island, leaving Adam and Eve (undoubtedly alluding to the first biblical couple) in their now purified Garden of Eden, 'and everything ends happily' (*JG*, 14 October 1933).

While the *Jamaica Gleaner* at the time described *Ouanga* as a 'first class picture' (*JG*, 16 November 1933), one local resident was alarmed when he heard that the film was not only about 'pathos and love' but would also contain 'a touch of "voodooism"' (*JG*, 20 October 1933). He stated that 'if the obeah scene is (...) to depict the seamy side of Jamaica character, I have no hesitations in stating that it will be a libel upon this colony' (*JG*, 20 October 1933). The commentator did not deny that obeah practices existed in Jamaica, but resented 'imputations that this land is steeped in the black art,' which he, in line with the island's colonial elites, described as 'a terrifying feature in the home affairs of illiterate persons' (*JG*, 20 October 1933). Pointing to the 'glorious and well fought' battle of the 'suppression of obeah' and its 'ramparts of debauchery and loose living' in the previous century, he was afraid that the film would influence black people to resort to such 'forces of darkness'

²⁴ According to Leonard ([Leonard and Griffith 1995, p. 23](#)), 'there'd been three deaths, countless misadventures, we were thousands of dollars over budget, and I had lost eighteen pounds. Did it have anything to do with the things our prop man stole in Port Au Prince'?

²⁵ As the production was eventually not shot in Haiti, the 'authentic' voodoo island, they opted for the label 'West Indies' instead of 'Jamaica'. This shows the tendency to see the Caribbean as one and the same.

²⁶ At the time, in the United States a 'self-regulatory Production Code of ethics' was in place (since 1934, replacing and updating the Hays Code) that 'specified what could and could not be depicted on screen' ([Bogle 2005, p. 138](#)). On the topic of interracial sex or love, the code stated: "'Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races) is forbidden'" (in [Bogle 2005, p. 138](#)).

(JG, 25 October 1933). A few days later, a member of Ouanga Productions reassured the commentator by stating in the newspaper that *Ouanga* would ‘ridicule voodoo all through’ (JG, 25 October 1933). He explained that ‘the whole script was carefully scrutinised by the authorities in London, and you can be sure that neither they nor the releasing Company, who have immense British interests, would pass anything reflecting at all on a British Colony’ (JG, 25 October 1933). Indeed, as will be shown in the context of *The Devil’s Daughter* as well, 1930s feature films were highly monitored and customized to safeguard a moralizing view of the British Empire.



Figure 5. A 1935 British theatrical release poster of *Ouanga*, emphasizing the exotic savagery of the black population of the West Indies.

Like many 1930s Hollywood empire adventure films, the imperial thrust of *Ouanga* ‘requires no subtle deciphering; it is right on the surface, often in the form of didactic forewords ([Shohat and Stam \[1993\] 2002](#), p. 110). Indeed, the film’s ‘unsubtle subtext’ ([Russell 2005](#), p. 26) was presented at the very beginning in the form of such a foreword, projected against a picturesque backdrop of a Caribbean sunset (though the dark clouds already foreshadow the impending danger):

With the coming of science supernatural phenomena were explained and supposedly banished, yet in many out of the way corners of the earth there may still be found remnants of races that believe implicitly in the religious formulas that have come down to them from the dim and distant past. Of all these strange beliefs

perhaps the most inexplicable and disturbing is that of the Haitians, known to white men as 'VOODOO'.

Following the prelude, the imperial subtext is once more unambiguously expressed, this time through a voice-over, who first explains the film's title and then provides picturesque and ethnographic descriptions of the island, before turning to the horrifying supernatural twist:

Ouanga Wanga, that's voodoo, a love or death charm created through the magic of deadly jungle gods. It is come down through the ages from the witch doctors of ancient Africa and we find it today in the secret places of paradise island in the West Indies. Paradise Island, where majestic mountains reefed in clouds hem in verdant tropical valleys or tumble down to palm-line shores and lagoons of breathtaking beauty. Under the spell of astral skies, the daily lives of its inhabitants is marked by an unheeded peacefulness and a joyous contentment. Their simple occupations are colourful and primitive, and whether they live in the mountain valley or town, eventually they find their way to the great city markets. Night falls, and with the rise of the great white tropical moon comes a sinister awakening. Mysterious figures slip silently from shadow to shadow, nature becomes ghostly and unearthly, alive with evil movement, shuddering incantations and gruesome rights. And seemingly from everywhere comes the throbbing, pulsating beat of the voodoo drums . . . drums . . . drums . . .

During the audio message of the voice-over, images of the island impart the contrasts of tropical paradise. First, various travelogue-like shots—practically picture-postcards—show the natural beauty and daily occupations of the 'natives' (e.g., black women transporting goods, washing clothes and visiting the marketplace); then, when the voice-over announces the horror that emerges when the daylight fades, there are images of a mindless zombie, native dancing, and, most of all, drumming, the primary symbol of black evil. In fact, the film ends with the same low-angle shot of a bare-chested black man playing drums in the dark, with a palm tree in the background, while the hypnotic voice-over is again saying 'the voodoo drums . . . drums . . . drums . . .'

The spatial-temporal contrasts at the beginning of *Ouanga* leave little room for doubt as to the meaning intended by the filmmakers: 'Paradise Island/Haiti is a hotbed of native superstition, savagery and occultism (...) [and] needs white American rule to bring it back from the brink of social, political and spiritual disaster' (Russell 2005, p. 26). Throughout the remainder of film, this imperial thrust continued to be constructed through familiar binary oppositions. Consistent with early Euro-American zombie cinema, *Ouanga* displayed a strong clash between white nobility and black savagery in the Caribbean colonial setting. This dichotomy was not only represented as a cultural intersection, but also as a clear geographical differentiation: the plantation (in the valley) was the cultivated and civilized part of the white population and the jungle (in the mountains) the wild and primitive land of the black natives—with the borderland between them as the space for border-crossing. Trespassing this natural border, either by a white man going up the jungle ('going native') or a 'native' coming down to the plantation ('black invasion'), inherently marked danger to white civilization. Only the mulatto could easily cross the border, until she was revealed as the evil Other.

In *Ouanga*, black savagery was not only equated with the physical barrier of the mountain jungle, where the natives perform their voodoo rites, but also with the darkness of the night, the primal fear of the unknown and uncanny (though Clelie raises her zombies from the dead in bright daylight). The two zombies resurrected from their graves were clearly presented as inhuman and feral black brutes. Although their physical violence is the result of Clelie's dark voodoo practices, the two living dead acted similar to Bogle's description (Bogle 1973, p. 13) of the black brutes in D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), i.e., 'nameless characters setting out on a rampage full of black rage'. Their black (naked upper) bodies were routinely put on display to mark their racial difference. Other black West Indian bodies in *Ouanga*, both male and female, were also subjected to the

objectifying colonial gaze of fear and desire. In the film's many exotic scenes, natives were exhibited while wildly dancing, singing, and drumming.

In contrast, Adam's plantation, which is shown as being beautiful and peaceful in the daylight, represents modern-industrial white civilization. When Adam and his fiancée arrive in Haiti, his black overseer picks them up from the town's port with two cars and they comfortably drive to the plantation. After passing the fenced gate to the estate, they enter a lush tropical garden and eventually stop in front of a glorious Great House. Not much later, images of a white elite party replete with European instruments, classical music and polite dancing are juxtaposed with images of a native voodoo ceremony featuring African rhythmic drums, folk music, and wild dancing. Thus, replicating the imperial tropes of cultivation and primitivism reminiscent of the early Euro-American literary depictions of the Caribbean, *Ouanga* portrayed the plantation as a civilized world of order and refinement well-constituted—that is, hierarchically segregated—along racial lines, though at all times threatened by black degeneracy, this time produced by miscegenation and voodoo. Clearly, *Ouanga* was 'patently racist in its portrayal of natives' and continually played on the 'symbolic identification of black with ignorance and evil, and white with light and purity' (Dendle 2001, p. 3).²⁷

4. *Obeah* and *The Devil's Daughter*: 'Mumbo Jumbo' in 'Savage Tropical Islands'

The next 'talking picture made almost entirely in Jamaica' (JG, 6 April 1935), *Obeah*, seized upon similar depictions of black voodoo savagery. This time, however, the voodoo theme was integrated in a treasure hunt narrative set in the South Seas, the romanticized colonial imaginative geography of (the nowadays southern areas of) the Pacific Ocean. According to a review in the *Film Daily*, allegedly the only available review of the (now lost) film, *Obeah* was 'as close to being a real adventure feature of the high seas and the South Sea Island atmosphere as the talkies have yet produced' (in JG, 6 April 1935). The 'adventure film of South Sea scores' (*Film Daily* in JG, 6 April 1935), known at various times during and after its production as *White Sails*, *Jungles of the Night*, *South of the Sun*, *Mystery Island* and (*The*) *Mystery Ship*, was the adaptation of an 'epic of the sea from the pen of Robert Carse' (JG, 12 May 1934), an emerging American naval fiction author who would later, among many others, publish *From the Sea and the Jungle: Violence, Voodoo and Love in the Exotic Caribbean* (1958). Although the thematic trinity of violence, obeah/voodoo and love already preoccupied Euro-American horror adventure tales set in the Caribbean in the 1930s, the producers of *Obeah* decided to lay the plot in 'a mythical sea on the mythical island of Kio Kian', with the 'action of "Obeah" proper' taking place in 'the mythical "Tiger Island"' (JG, 6 April 1935). This decision was seemingly motivated by the negative backlash they anticipated from Jamaicans, and Caribbeaners more generally, if they had set their story in Jamaica or elsewhere in the region. In 'advance reports' distributed by the movie's production company, Arctures Picture Corporation, a small film company headed by director-producer F. Herrick Herrick, it was emphasized that there was 'nothing to the picture that refers it to Jamaica or Haiti, or even the West Indies' and that the 'vapid drama' was 'entirely fictional' and 'conveyed to the screen (...) without the pill of educationalism' (in JG, 6 April 1935).²⁸

²⁷ The two African-American characters in *Ouanga*, performed by 'vaudeville burlesque and screen stars,' Syd Easton and Baby Joyce (JG, 24 November 1933), were depicted very differently from their Caribbean counterparts. Adam brings his African-American domestics, Susie and Johnson, from Harlem to work in the plantation house. Throughout the film they appear as loyal-but-stupid servants. They are infantilized and represented as faithful and gullible children who are easily frightened and manipulated by voodoo practices. This marked an important difference with the Caribbean characters in *Ouanga*, who were portrayed as untamed and primitive. Besides the low intelligence of Susie and Johnson (particularly apparent when they foolishly confuse Adam's driver for a zombie), they were also depicted as licentious (e.g., Susie is constantly hitting on Johnson and Johnson looks playfully at black women). As in many American movies of that period, the black servants served for comic relief for the predominantly white urban audiences who endured the Great Depression and negotiated the segregated assimilation of African-Americans in 'their' American cities: 'The black servants of the Hollywood films of the 1930s met the demands of their times. (...) As they delivered their wisecracks or acted the fool, the servants were a marvellous relief from the harsh financial realities of the day' (Bogle 1973, p. 36).

²⁸ F. Herrick Herrick and his film team arrived in Jamaica in April 1934 to shoot various sequences of *Obeah* on the island. Besides Herrick, the visiting party consisted of a sound engineer, two cameramen, and a cast comprising Philips Lord, Alice Wessler and Kelly Jeanne. Other sequences of the film were allegedly shot in Haiti, Tobago, Panama and the Pearl Islands and during the sea voyage (*Film Daily*, 26 October 1934).

According to a film reviewer of the *Jamaica Gleaner*, named ‘Movieman’, the producers of *Obeah* ‘could not have made a better judgement, for had this been done, the title of the film alone would have been considered offensive to Jamaicans’ (*JG*, 6 April 1935). However, although ‘Movieman’ considered the fact that ‘no mention is made of Jamaica or its people in the picture at all’ as a ‘remarkably happy feature’, both the film’s title and plot left little to the imagination in terms of geographic and cultural reference points. The plot, replete with ‘pirate battles’, ‘derelict Spanish galleons’ and ‘man-eating sharks’ (*JG*, 6 August 1934), revolved around a seafaring adventurer and his crew’s ‘search of a lost American explorer’ who is ‘under the spell of a powerful voodoo curse called “Obeah”’ (*Film Daily*, in *JG*, 6 April 1935). When they find him on a ‘savage tropical island’ (*JG*, 6 August 1934) inhabited by a ‘high priestess’ and a cult of native cannibals engaged in dark voodoo practices, disturbingly linking voodoo with cannibalism,²⁹ they try to ‘break the spell by attacking the natives in their ritual of death’ but end up fleeing to their boat with ‘the dead explorer’s daughter and a native girl’ as well as a ‘chart of a sunken chest of gold coins from the dead explorer’ (*Film Daily*, in *JG*, 6 April 1935). While attempting to locate the chest, a ‘sex situation between the white and native girl and the star’ originates, yet the love triangle is ‘beset by the voodoo curse of the high priestess’ (*Film Daily*, in *JG*, 6 April 1935).

In total, the location filming of *Obeah* in Jamaica took place over a period of eight weeks in both Kingston and Port Royal, which ‘in the story was called “The City of Death”’ (*JG*, 8 June 1934). In Kingston, the crew built the native settlement that was used as the main site for the cannibal scenes: ‘The cannibal scenes were mostly laid in Jamaica, in preference to Haiti, for the reason that it was simpler to direct hordes of natives who understood the English tongue, though it was admitted that the Haitians were more picturesque’ (*JG*, 6 August 1934). Seemingly, black Haitians were awarded greater picturesqueness since they were considered the original voodoo practitioners and, hence, more authentic and exotic than black Jamaicans (however, the film’s title implies that the practice of obeah would conjure up similar horrific images of West Indian black magic among Euro-American audiences). Again, while Herrick was filming in Jamaica, he claimed that, despite the movie’s title, which would associate the film with Jamaica, the cannibal scenes would not harm the island’s image as no reference was made to the island and its people: ‘I wish to carefully explain that the picture is very definitely not a story in any wise casting reflection upon the people of this island. It is purely a mythical yarn, and the plot is built around imaginary figures and location’ (*JG*, 8 June 1934). Herrick further added that he was thrilled with the unprecedented cooperation of the Jamaican people during the filming of the moving picture (*JG*, 8 June 1934). This time, there were no critical editorial responses nor disapproving reader’s letters published in the *Jamaica Gleaner*. On the contrary, the location shooting of *Obeah* was celebrated by the newspaper as one of the ‘grand national topical events recorded by camera, featuring a photograph of Phillips Lord in ‘his newest starring picture’ as well as a photograph of an unidentified black Jamaican who played the role of a native character called Mumbo Jumbo, after the derogatory phrase that implies that black people are superstitious (*JG*, 16 April 1935; Figure 6).³⁰

In the remainder of the 1930s, one other feature film production got shot on location in Jamaica, which was another low-budget horror adventure film, this time designed for

²⁹ According to Schmidt (2001, p. 91), ‘despite substantial scholarly research on voodoo (...) and without a single reliable eyewitness account or any archaeological evidence, the image of voodoo still remains tied to the image of cannibalism’.

³⁰ In addition, local business men and tourism promoters valued the production for generating both film location employment and advertisement. According to the *Jamaica Gleaner*, the location filming of *Obeah* had ‘afforded employment to a total number of approximately one hundred and fifty Jamaicans who acted in the capacities of actors, actresses, assistants, electricians, etc’ (*JG*, 12 May 1934). Much interest was directed to the presence of well-known radio broadcaster Philips H. Lord, one of the film’s lead actors, who stated that he would record a radio broadcast about Jamaica that would offer ‘a great deal of publicity’ (*JG*, 8 June 1934). On the other hand, tourism stakeholders on the island did not expect ‘to derive publicity to any great extent’ from the film itself as the plot was laid in the South Seas (*JG*, 16 November 1933). Still, one local resident pointed to ‘the benefits that would accrue to the island if pictures were made here’ (*JG*, 17 October 1934). He claimed that Jamaica had much to offer to foreign film companies as the island was able to supply ‘all a film company can desire—sunshine, scenery, climate, cheap labour, etc’ (*JG*, 17 October 1934).

the all-black film circuit.³¹ In August 1939, a small production team of *The Devil's Daughter* landed on the island's soil, for the first time 'by plane' (*JG*, 10 August 1939).³² The film they came to make was a reworked remake of *Ouangá*, again written by Terwilliger, but this time directed by white American filmmaker Arthur Leonard. Leonard had just founded his own independent motion picture company, Linwal Productions, and wanted to enter the upcoming African-American film market (Senn 1998, p. 47), which he described as 'some freak field' (in Leab 1975). The cast of the 'Sensational All-Negro Drama' was made up of a group of 'first-class coloured artists' including the 'internationally known coloured star, singer and dancer' Nina Mae McKinney (*JG*, 16 August 1939). The location shooting of *The Devil's Daughter*, which was tentatively named *Daughters of Jamaica* (*JG*, 31 August 1939), took place in and around Kingston.

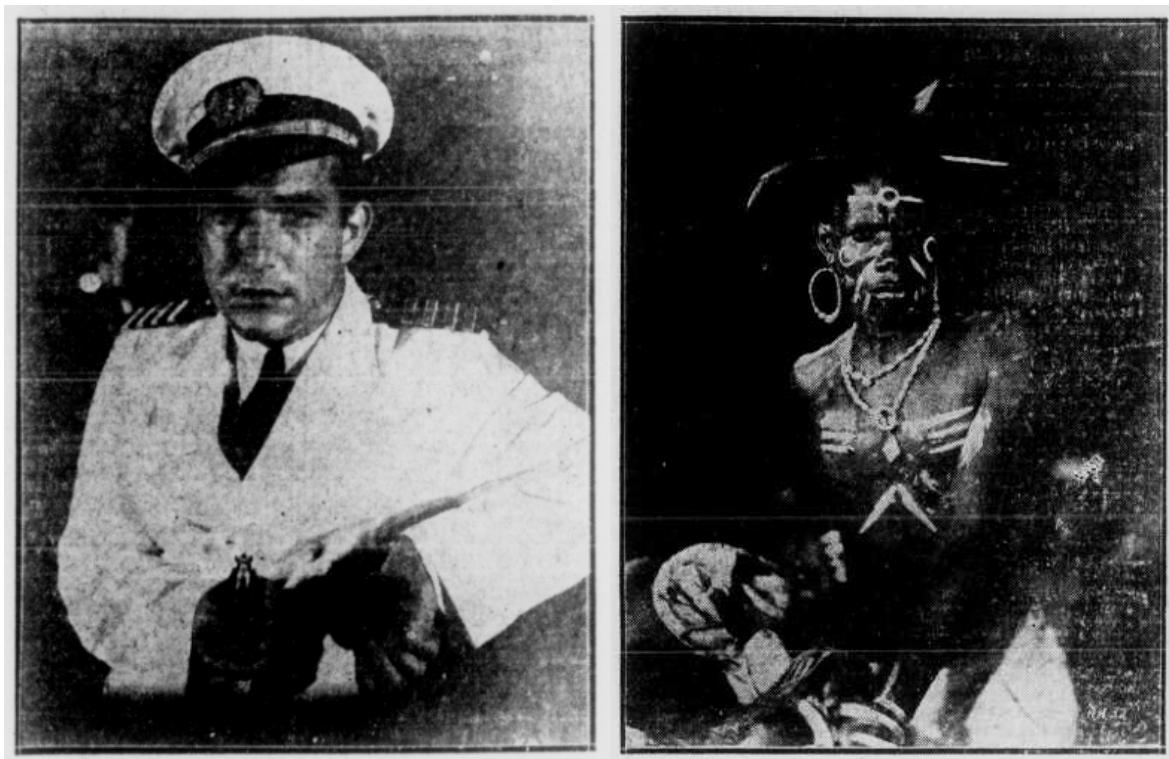


Figure 6. The photograph on the left shows *Obeah*'s lead actor Philips Lord, with the caption describing the film as 'a tale of Voodoo, death, treasure, fever ridden jungles and beautiful women' (*JG*, 16 April 1935). The photograph on the right is of an unidentified Jamaican who, according to caption, played the 'prominent role' of Mumbo Jumbo 'with startling realism' (*JG*, 16 April 1935).

³¹ Apart from a lack of push factors—for both Hollywood studios and independent filmmakers it was usually easier, cheaper and safer to remain at home base—the absence of runaway productions in the late 1930s may also in part have been due to a shortage of pull factors resulting from the unstable internal situation of the colony throughout the decade. In the early 1930s, Jamaica's economy was severely hit by the Great Depression, witnessing a collapse of banana and agricultural produce sales, a fall of wages, and a rise of unemployment. The black working class suffered widespread poverty and inequality, and in the spring of 1938 sugar and dock workers across the island rose in revolt. The labour strikes and riots continued for five months and were eventually violently put down by the colonial police force. The nationwide uprising was a direct confrontation with the British colonial officials and planter elites over the demand to end 'the semi-slavery conditions of the society' (Campbell 1988, p. 81) and marked a major turning point in the political history of the island. Out of the worker riots emerged the country's modern nationalist movement under black and brown leadership, the formation of the first labour unions, and the development of party politics (i.e., the two-party system of the People's National Party and the Jamaica Labour Party that still exists today). At the same time, driven by the work of black activist and labour leader Marcus Garvey, the 1930s saw a rise of racial consciousness and confidence among the black poor masses of Jamaica, which, among other things, led to the origin of the early Rastafari movement (Gray 2004). Still, as Thompson (2006, p. 236) notes, 'despite these new political gains, (...) racial discrimination still pervaded other social spheres, placing limits on black social mobility'. Within this wider political context, foreign film companies may have been discouraged from travelling to Jamaica, afraid for the safety of their (usually) predominantly white staff members. Perhaps both fittingly and ironically, the only film company visiting Jamaica in the late 1930s was a company consisting of an all-black cast.

³² Until then, foreign film companies had always travelled to Jamaica by boat. Although commercial aviation had commenced in Jamaica in the early 1930s, arrival by plane was still relatively rare during the first decade of aviation (though an increasing number of American tourists started to arrive by plane from the mid-1930s). The team of *The Devil's Daughter* flew from Miami to Kingston with a small flying boat that in total 'brought seven landing passengers' (*JG*, 10 August 1939), of which five were part of the filmmaking party.

Leonard's film presented a much-altered version of Terwilliger's original tale. This time, as the working title suggests, Jamaica was made the setting of the film, associating black magic even more intimately with the island. In Leonard's new rendering—which would be advertised with the tagline 'Sister against sister in a burning drama of love and hate in the tropics!'—a white woman named Sylvia Walton (Ida James) arrives from New York to manage a Jamaican plantation which she has inherited together with her half-sister Isabelle (McKinney). However, Isabelle wants the estate for herself and tries to scare her half-sister off the island with both voodoo and obeah practices. While *Ouanga* depicted black magic as a supernatural evil force, *The Devil's Daughter* portrayed it solely as a fraudulent superstition. Isabelle pretends to be a high priestess but actually drugs Sylvia before conducting a phony ceremony, which only the credulous natives believe. Consistent with its predecessor, the 60-min feature film revolved around an exotic-erotic plot. Once again, the sights of native dancing and sounds of jungle drums indicated black savagery.³³

In Jamaica, the local authorities saw the film as an opportunity to demonstrate that African-Caribbean religions were primitive superstitions that had to be eradicated if the island's 'majority African population' (Scafe 2010, p. 67) was to make any progress. When the moving picture was released on the island in 1940, the film's title was changed from *The Devil's Daughter* to *Pocomania*, referring to the Jamaican folk religion combining Christian revivalism with elements from African pagan beliefs (such as ancestor worship, spirit possession, and soul washing). Sprung up in Jamaica during the 1860s as part of a wider religious movement called the Great Revival, pocomania was viewed by many white priests and colonial officials as 'a form of rebellion and protest against European religions and the political status quo' (Gilzene 2009, p. 531).³⁴ For this reason, they repeatedly attacked the Jamaican revivalist variation as 'a form of devil worship' (Morrish 1982, p. 54) and regularly used the eighteenth-century 'laws against obeah' to 'arrest Revivalists and other church leaders' (Paton 2015, p. 248). When Terwilliger's film was reviewed by the British Board of Censors (BBFS) before being passed for exhibition in Jamaica, they decided not to ban the film, but to use it to condemn pocomania and other African-Caribbean religions practiced on the island.

The BBFS was set up in 1912 on the initiative of the British film industry to self-censor the content of the films within the United Kingdom and the British empire. Although being 'an unofficial body established by the trade' without any 'legal powers', 'most local licensing authorities' made it a condition 'that only films which have passed the Censorship shall be shown' ([Economic Sub-Committee of His Britannic Majesty's Government Economic Sub-Committee](#), p. 1). In other words, local authorities usually only granted permission to cinemas to screen a film when the BBFS had expressed its consent (and had issued a certificate to that effect). In the 1930s, the content control of the BBFS was mainly concerned with securing 'the maintenance of moral standards' (particularly on matters such as crime and sex) and 'the avoidance of all political, religious or (...) social controversy' (Richards 1981, pp. 98–99). In terms of theatrical exhibition in the British empire, 'the censorship of films for natives' was also based on 'a recognition that films suitable for exhibition to peoples of European civilisation were not necessarily suited to peoples' in the colonies ([British Colonial Office 1927](#), pp. 1–2). More specifically, the licensing authorities in the British colonies were called upon to prevent the exhibition of films that could 'rouse undesirable racial feeling by portraying aspects of life of any section of His Majesty's subjects which, however innocent in themselves, might be liable to be misunderstood by communities with other customs and traditions' ([British Colonial Office 1927](#), p. 2).³⁵ At

³³ The film also again featured a painfully gullible loyal servant from Harlem, this time performed by African-American comedian Hamtree Harrington. Senn (1998, p. 41) notes that 'the "comic relief" of Harrington, whose rolling eyes and "feets-do-your-stuff" portrayal is simply demeaning rather than funny, shows that even in all-black films such as this, it's difficult to get away from the pervasive stereotype of the day'.

³⁴ According to Morrish (1982, p. 56), 'for a very long time traditional Christian religion was controlled by white priests and missionaries, and many of the revivalist cults were an expression of protest against white domination, whilst the recrudescence of African rituals indicated an attempt to claim something which was specifically non-European'.

³⁵ This included the effort to 'prevent the exhibition of any films' that would give 'the native races (...) unfavourable impressions as to the characteristics and habit of the white races' ([Economic Sub-Committee of His Britannic Majesty's Government Economic Sub-Committee](#), p. 3).

the same time, it was ‘fully recognized’ that films were important agents for ‘maintaining and enhancing our Imperial prestige’ (Federation of British Industries 1927, p. 2).

In early twentieth-century Jamaica, the licensing authority typically consisted of a small group of four people made up of (former) policemen and educational and legislative officials. They were to give permission to the theatrical exhibition of hundreds of films that were annually imported, mainly fictional films from the United States. As per usual, they followed the verdict of the Board of Censors and paid extra attention to ‘the undesirable effects produced by the exhibition of certain types of cinematograph films in the Colonies’ (Circular Despatch 1927). In the case of *Pocomania*, the Board of Censors had informed the Jamaican licensing authority that the film was allowed to be screened on the island with the proviso that it would be used to teach the local population about the malice of pocomania and other African-Caribbean religions on the island. Therefore, in the newspaper advertisement in support of the first screenings of *Pocomania* in Kingston in February 1940, it was not only explicitly stated that the film was ‘made in Jamaica in its entirety’, but also that the Board of Censors had merely ‘permitted the exhibition to the public (...) on the understanding that it made clear to the public that it has been passed for the purpose of demonstrating the wickedness of pocomania and other pagan rites’ (JG, 14 February 1940; Figure 7). Clearly, the condemnation and suppression of African-derived religions remained intact well into the early twentieth century.³⁶



Figure 7. An advertisement for the screening of *The Devil's Daughter* in Jamaica, where the film was named *Pocomania*, featuring the decision of the British Board of Censors (JG, 14 February 1940).

The image of the Caribbean ‘a hotbed of native superstition, savagery and occultism’ (Russell 2005, p. 26) continued to be displayed in Euro-American popular culture, despite

³⁶ Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, following the theatrical release of *Pocomania* in Jamaica, the *Jamaica Gleaner* almost exclusively focused on the picturesque qualities of the production, not mentioning the content of the film. According to the newspaper, the film functioned as a travelogue providing emblematic images of the island: ‘*Pocomania* takes full advantage of the natural beauties and background of Jamaica by weaving the story in the framework of a travelogue, which opens the picture and leads the story’ (JG, 17 February 1940). However, despite its apparent picturesque qualities, the film’s portrayal of black magic as a dark superstitious practice, which dictated all promotions, undoubtedly left the most lasting impression among audiences.

(or perhaps because of) the region's nearing achievement of political independence from colonial rule. Particularly, while remaining in the field of low-budget horror moviemaking, Caribbean black magic lingered in the popular Euro-American cinema in the decades that followed. According to Sulikowski (1996, p. 87), early zombie films such as *White Zombie*, *Black Moon*, *Ouanga*, *Devil's Daughter* and *I Walked with a Zombie* solidified obeah, voodoo, and other African-Caribbean religions as a general myth of horror in American popular cinema: 'With the first movie[s] featuring zombies the USA invented their own particular *topos* of cinematic horror to enunciate evil magic, terrors and terrible secrets which are presumed to be the property of black people and their cultures'. Particularly, they established African-derived 'black magic' as a 'part of the visual filmic code' of exploitation horror cinema (Sulikowski 1996, p. 83; Figure 8).



Figure 8. A lobby card of *The Devil's Daughter* emphasizing 'black magic' as a dark force and the Caribbean tropics as a place of mystery and intrigue. In the United States the film was released on December 7, 1939, and mainly booked in exploitation theatres catering to Africa-American audiences.

5. Conclusions: Hollywood's Continuing 'Tradition of Terror Caribbean Cultures'

After World War II, both obeah/voodoo themes and zombie figures regularly featured in American and British low-budget horror movies, such as in *The Golden Mistress* (1954), *Voodoo Island* (1957), *Voodoo Woman* (1957), *Zombies of Mora Tau* (1957), *Serpent Island* (1959), *Macumba Love* (1960), *Dr. Terror's House of Terror* (1965), *Curse of the Voodoo* (1965), *The Plague of the Zombies* (1966), and *Naked Evil* (1966; Figure 9). In these movies, obeah and voodoo were not anymore confined to the Caribbean, though they still chiefly appeared in tropical island and jungle environments. In addition, the zombie figure became increasingly removed from the original Haitian setting and voodoo rationale, developing into a stock

horror monster created by an evildoer to spur rage in any locale, particularly within the United States.³⁷ In the late 1960s, independent American director George Romero forever changed zombie cinema with his low-budget black-and-white movie *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). According to Dendle (2001, p. 6), in this debut film, ‘Romero liberated the zombie from the shackles of a master, and invested his zombies not with a function (a job or task such as zombies were standardly given by voodoo priests), but rather a drive (eating flesh)’.³⁸ Despite its criticized ‘pornography of violence’ and ‘orgy of sadism’ (*Variety*, 16 October 1968), *Night of the Living Dead* became one of the most popular and influential horror movies of all time and as such marked the beginning of modern zombie cinema.³⁹

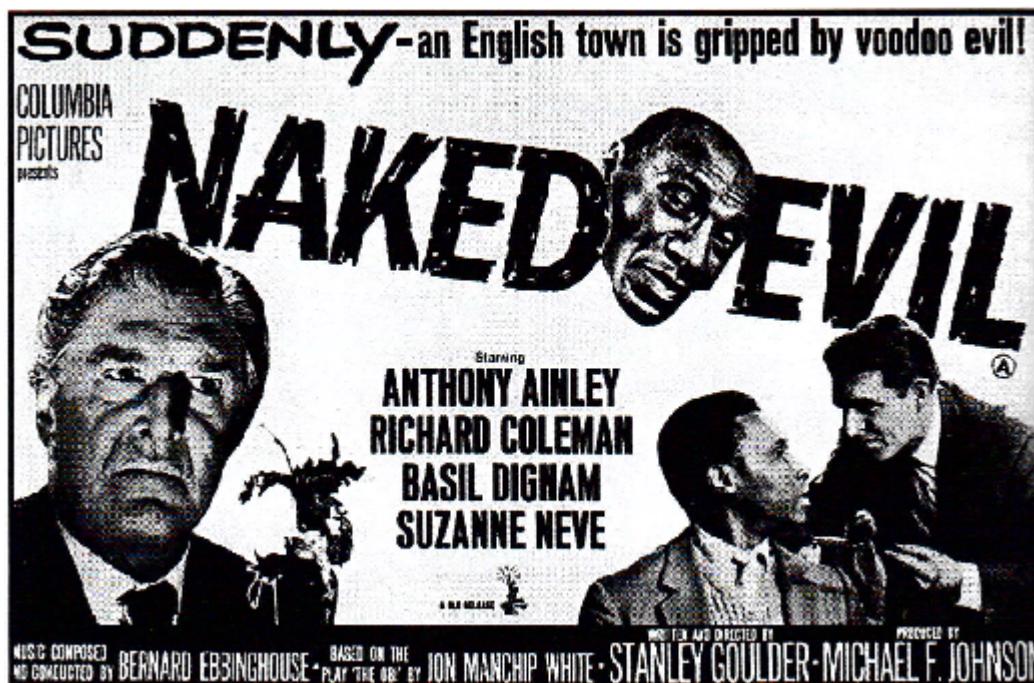


Figure 9. An original half sheet poster of *Naked Evil*, an American-British quota picture. Based on the BBC play *The Obi*, *Naked Evil* revolved around the evil spread of Jamaican black magic in a small English town. Throughout the movie, obeah and voodoo were used interchangeably. *Naked Evil* juxtaposed ‘Christianity and voodoo (...) by pitting the power of the Christian faith (...) against the power of voodoo sorcery’ (Senn 1998, p. 164), with Christianity eventually prevailing. The film seemingly alluded to the threat of the rising inflow of Jamaican and other Caribbean migrants in Britain in the 1960s.

³⁷ In horror films such as *Zombies of the Stratosphere* (1952), *Teenage Zombies* (1959), *Plan Nine from Outer Space* (1959), *Invisible Invaders* (1959), and *The Horror of Party Beach* (1964), zombies were ‘devoid of their Caribbean racial dynamic’ (Russell 2005, p. 64) and variously represented drugged villains, evil aliens and radiated creatures.

³⁸ In addition, in *Night of the Living Death*, Romero made all his zombies white. According to Dyer (1997, p. 211), the fact that ‘they are literally all skin whites’ hinted to the ‘anxiety about (as opposed to aspiration to) whiteness as non-existence’.

³⁹ *Night of the Living Dead* turned into an instant sensation in the American midnight circuits through word of mouth. Made on a US\$114,000 budget, Romero’s production eventually grossed US\$42 million worldwide. The film had an unprecedented impact on the zombie genre. In the next two decades, often labelled the Golden Age of zombie cinema (1968–1988), *Night of the Living Dead* spawned countless, mostly independent productions that followed the zombie archetype instituted by Romero, such as *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1971), *Hell of the Living Dead* (1980), *The Evil Dead* (1981), *Night of the Comet* (1984), *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985), *Night of the Creeps*, 1986, and Romero’s own successor, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978).

Notwithstanding some exceptions, of which some were (partly) shot in Jamaica,⁴⁰ from the 1970s onwards zombies in American horror films invariably came to represent ‘a threat within American polity itself’ instead of a ‘danger as being perceived out there’ (Richardson 2010, p. 121).⁴¹ As a result, the celluloid zombie became largely detached from its Caribbean origins, to the extent that, as Richardson (2010, p. 121) notes, ‘a distinction should be made between the Haitian “zombie” and the American “zombie”’. However, beyond the zombie genre, African-Caribbean religious beliefs and practices continued to appear as either evil witchcraft or sensuous magic in a variety of Hollywood genre films. From the 1950s, and particularly the 1970s, the appearance of African-Caribbean religion in other-than-horror films occurred mostly in the genres of the thriller, science-fiction, and spy and crime movie (Sulikowski 1996, p. 78). Many of these films were similarly entrenched in the ‘tradition of terror Caribbean cultures’ (Sulikowski 1996, p. 83) and further cemented the ‘horrendously bad reputation’ (Reed 1990, p. xv) of Afro-creole black magic in popular Euro-American cinema. At the same time, these films contributed to modern tourist fantasies of tropical paradise, fantasies that are, as Sheller (2004, p. 31) has aptly noted, ‘closely allied with transgression of moral codes through gluttony, intoxication and sexual encounters with exotic “others”’.

Over the past five decades, a variety of big-budget Hollywood films that were either partially or completely shot in Jamaica presented a supernatural plot, notably *Live and Let Die* (1973), *Marked for Death* (1990) and *Shattered Image* (1998)—though only *Shattered Image* was actually laid on the island.⁴² In *Live and Let Die*, the eighth James Bond film and the first to star Roger Moore as British secret agent 007, Bond found himself trapped in a world

⁴⁰ Although the celluloid zombie chiefly became a ghoulish monster plaguing a post-apocalyptic Western world, some 1970s low-budget horror movies continued to feature voodoo plots and Caribbean settings—with or without zombies. Two of those films were shot in Jamaica: *The Devil’s Garden* (1971) and *Vudú Sangriento (Voodoo Black Exorcist)*, *Bogle* 1973. Both were ultra-cheap independent productions emblematic of the offbeat splatter horror cycle of the 1970s. *The Devil’s Garden* was directed by American pornographic film director Robert Chinn and represented the emerging trend of low-budget horror porn (sometimes referred to as ‘sex horror’ or ‘torture porn’). Allegedly secretly filmed in Jamaica, this dubious sex horror opus presented, as the tagline stated, ‘Bizarre Rituals of Forbidden Ecstasy on the Island of the Possessed’. Throughout the film, voodoo ceremonies were depicted as possession rites ending in wild sex orgies. These rites were performed by dreadless Rastafarians who drugged their victims into zombie-like sex slaves. Jamaica and particularly the island’s ‘bizarre religious cult up in the hills,’ as one character in the film described the Rastafarians, represented a strange place tainted by black magic and exotic temptation. Then, the Spanish low-budget horror production *Vudú Sangriento*, directed by Manuel Caño and written by Santiago Moncada, perpetuated the association between black magic and erotic seduction. The film opened with a voodoo ceremony set in a tropical myth-time, where a Haitian voodoo priest is buried alive in a coffin for having a secret love affair with a married woman, who is, in turn, decapitated. After this prologue, the story continued in the present. The coffin is put on a holiday cruise liner during a port call in Port-Au-Prince by an eminent anthropologist and voodoo expert. On board, the priest, now a zombie-mummy, is revived and wreaks havoc on the ship for vengeance. The link between black magic and sexual desire is constantly reinforced, mainly through dramatic juxtapositions of voodoo horror and sensual dancing. The film also presented a typical confrontation between Western rationality and Caribbean mysticism, contrasting scientific explanations with the seducing lure of voodoo. *Vudú Sangriento* was largely shot on board a holiday cruise ship, but the scenes taking place ashore were filmed in Port au Prince, Santa Domingo and Kingston. After a limited release in Spain and France, the movie crossed over to the United States in May 1975. Here the horror import, now retitled *Voodoo Black Exorcist* and dubbed into English, aimed to exploit the success of the blaxploitation genre as well as William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist* (1973). However, the import only had a brief run in the American drive-in circuit before fading into obscurity (and rarity) on the video shelves.

⁴¹ Typically featuring zombies as consuming (rather than labouring) monsters spreading mayhem and disease in a post-apocalyptic western world, contemporary zombie films have since the 1970s been used to reflect social commentary on issues such as capitalism, pandemics, and global security. Especially from the 2000s, when the celluloid zombie returned from his grave and invaded Hollywood cinema and wider U.S. popular culture after being almost buried in the margins of straight-to-video splatter horror throughout the 1990s—which Bishop (2009) has called the ‘zombie renaissance’—many scholars have studied the new ‘millennial zombie’ (Birch-Bayley 2012) and the anxieties he expresses in (post)modern society (e.g., Shaviro 2002; Lauro and Embry 2008; Bishop 2009; Muntean and Payne 2009; Boluk and Lenz 2010; Birch-Bayley 2012). In doing so, these post-2000 zombie movies often did not consider the historical origins of the zombie and its continuing reverberations of imperialist intervention and racial suppression. However, as Canavan (2010, pp. 432–33) indicates, ‘zombies are always other people, which is to say they are Other people, which is to say they are people who are not quite people at all. (...) Before we can ever hope to “become zombies” we first must come to terms with the historical and ongoing colonial violence of which the zombie has always ever been only the thinnest sublimation’.

⁴² Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, two Jamaica-shot movies included a supernatural hint. The sea adventure film *City Beneath the Sea* (1953) featured a few menacing voodoo drums, while in *Island of the Sun* (1961) the hypnotic sounds of the drums were only heard in the background. Then, in the 1980s, two MGM dramas filmed on location in Jamaica integrated ‘a little voodoo’ (*New York Times*, 16 April 1989) into their plot. While *Eureka* (1981) featured a typical scene of a nightly voodoo ceremony with seducing sorcery and wild dancing, in *The Mighty Quinn*, which was set on ‘an unidentified tropical island fairly close to mainland America’ (JG, 31 March 1989), a local police chief on a quest to solve a mysterious murder on a wealthy white businessman eventually identifies a black voodoo witch as the perpetrator. Finally, in the 1987 MTM and Warner Bros. family drama *Clara’s Heart* (1988), which was partially shot in Jamaica but largely in the American state of Maryland, obeah was mentioned once. When Clara Mayfield (Whoopi Goldberg), a Jamaican chambermaid who is hired by a wealthy American family to be a housekeeper and child minder in Baltimore, an adversary Jamaican woman aims to scare the boy she is taking care of by saying that ‘where Mayfield go, death and obeah follow’.

of black gangsters and voodoo—in the film seemingly a mix between Louisiana voodoo and Caribbean black magic—as he battles to put a stop to the criminal activities of a Harlem drug lord. The voodoo rituals portrayed in the film, replete with wild dancing, drums, snakes, scarecrows and zombies, are all motivated to do evil.⁴³ *Marked for Death* depicted African-Caribbean black magic possibly as an even more brutal force. The film followed a white American drug agent (Steven Seagal) and his hunt for ‘an all-black Jamaican gang of voodoo-practicing drug pushers’ (*New York Times*, 6 October 1990). This eventually brings him to Kingston, where he violently takes down the wicked dreadlocked occult leader and his voodoo drug empire. Showing disturbing signs of xenophobia and racism, *Marked for Death* depicted Jamaican immigrants as black brutes who contaminate American cities with crime, drugs, and voodoo. Finally, trading on elements of travelogue and spectacle, the erotic physiological thriller *Shattered Image* used African-Caribbean religion, and particularly Jamaican obeah, to amp up to the mysterious erotic-exotic ambiance of the tropical landscape.⁴⁴

According to Lauro (2015, p. 10), the figure of the zombie has been ‘so prevalent in the entertainment of North Americans that the fact that the majority remain unaware of its extraordinary postcolonial significance indicates a surprising (if not malicious) cultural blind spot’. Indeed, the continuing popularity of the zombie in American cinema shows ‘the persistence of colonialism in cultural form,’ marking ‘the commodification of a people’s narrative about their ancestors’ commodification under transatlantic slavery and its persistence in the postcolony’ (Lauro 2015, p. 10). From the early twentieth century until the present day, Jamaica, and the Caribbean more generally, has remained a celluloid realm of horror, mystery and intrigue, habitually serving the colonial erotic-exotic fantasies and anxieties about obeah, voodoo and other African-Caribbean religions among Euro-American armchair and prospective travellers alike.

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⁴³ In the disguise of the Prime Minister of the fictional Caribbean island of San Monique, the villain secretly grows heroin poppies on the isle and plans to distribute the drugs for free in the U.S. Throughout the plot, San Monique signifies corruption and anarchy. The heroin fields of this so-called ‘voodoo land’ are supposedly protected by the dark forces of black magic.

⁴⁴ In *Shattered Image*, black magic contributes to the fuzzy dream world of female protagonist Jessie. The line between reality and fantasy gets blurred when Jessie develops paranoid delusions after a violent rape. She constructs a dream world for herself that is the opposite of her real one. In one world, Jessie is a cold-blooded assassin in Seattle; in the other world, she is a fragile newlywed who is honeymooning in Jamaica. The just-married Jessie is scared that her rapist has followed her to the island to kill her. Throughout the film, Jamaica functions as a surreal environment in which Jessie’s fears seem very much at home. The lush hideaway initially gives the impression of comfort and security, but from the start Jessie feels lost in the exotic surroundings. Mirroring her terrified psychological state, the island becomes a threatening landscape of alienation. One day, Jessie visits a local voodoo psychic who tells the past. The eerie experience she has there intensifies both Jessie’s state of paranoia and Jamaica’s landscape of paranoia.

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