Maria A. Robinson-Smith, *Revivalism: Representing an Afro-Jamaican Identity*.

Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2018. xv + 176 pp. (Paper US\$ 40.00)

Maria A. Robinson-Smith brings significant new ethnographic depth and theoretical perspective to the study of Revivalism in Jamaica. While she draws on the existing scholarly resources on Revivalism to explore its place in Jamaican history and society, her vivid portrayal of this religious tradition reflects memories of childhood encounters, oral histories conveyed by her relatives, her acquaintance with the Revivalist parents of her pupils while she was teaching in West Kingston, and her field trips to Revival compounds as a student of dance at Edna Manley School of Visual and Performing Arts. To this life-long association with Revivalism, she adds a rich ethnography conducted through her participation in Revivalist ceremonies and observation of the ritual spaces and activities of some of the major Revivalist bands (groups or congregations) in Jamaica today. *Revivalism* gives vivid portraits of various revival centers and their leaders. It also depicts the various aspects of the tradition's ethos in moving language and significant details: rituals and ceremonies (tables, baptism, healing), possession rites facilitated by music and dance movements, ritual spaces and the protocols observed in these spaces, "pilgrimages" (visits to important ritual centers), and iconography and symbols. This new ethnography is a significant and overdue update of earlier studies of Revivalism. Not only does it bring ethnographic study of Revivalism into the twenty-first century, it breaks new grounds because of the attention paid to the extensive iconography of the tradition—something not fully explored in previous studies.

In terms of her theoretical orientation, Robinson-Smith reads the world view, ceremonies, rituals, sacred spaces, and iconography of Revivalism as constitutive of a recreated African-centered identity. In her words, "All across the Revival landscape and the Black diaspora, Black people have found ways of recreating and reconstructing African religion and world view with the aid of mnemonic devices mobilized by force. This reconstruction is also a reconstruction of self, an identity project" (p. 139). While other scholars such as Diane M. Stewart (*Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*, 2005) and Barry Chevannes ("Notes on African Religious Survival in the Caribbean," *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 5 [1993], no. 2) have abundantly highlighted the enduring influence of Africa on Jamaica's folk religious traditions, Robinson-Smith, more than others, has placed the issue of identity front and center in her interpretation of Revivalism in Jamaica in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. She has also focused more than most other scholars on the iconography of Revivalism as the manifestation, preservation, and living presence of a sense of African identity in Jamaica.

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The book does suffer from a few shortcomings. Although it is rife with headings (too many in my estimation), it is often difficult to tell how they are related to one another, and the writing does not provide adequate transitions to help in this regard. Second, Robinson-Smith often introduces vocabulary with meanings specific to Revivalism without providing definitions. Insiders or those previously associated the Revivalism may have no problem with this, but newcomers to the topic are left in a haze of uncertainty concerning the exact meaning of what is being discussed. Robinson-Smith does define these terms, but often too late. This is particularly true for her discussion of “orders,” “tables,” and “seals.” For example, after several mentions of “seals” in the first three chapters, Chapter 4 focuses on seals, but readers are four pages into the discussion before they learn that “seals are permanent objects or defined spaces” (p. 50).

That said, *Revivalism: Representing an Afro-Jamaican Identity* updates the scholarship on a folk religious tradition that can be traced back to Myal, the first attempt of enslaved Africans to fashion a religious identity from their collective memory of Africa. Today, this tradition is still vibrant, enabling its practitioners to maintain a sense of their African selves and draw from a source of spiritual and cultural understanding not imposed by the dominant, European-derived religious ethos of the society. As Robinson-Smith says so aptly, “In Jamaica we may not sing the same songs or speak the same language as our ancestors did in Africa, but the Jamaican people have found ways to recreate and transform African beliefs and practices to meet the demands of their new environment through forms such as Revivalism” (p. 144).

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