

# The first Mrs Garvey: Pan-Africanism and feminism in the early 20th century British colonial Caribbean

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It is puzzling to most feminist historians of the British colonial Caribbean that histories of pan-Africanism could be written without examining the extensive contribution of women.<sup>1</sup> This concern is echoed by pan-Africanist scholar Horace Campbell when he notes that its ideological history has tended to focus on the contribution of great heroes, mostly males, an approach which denies the link to a broader social movement and the role of women (Campbell, 1994:286). This article examines the complementary and contradictory relationship between pan-Africanism and early feminism in the British Caribbean colonies.

In highlighting the work and life of one pan-Africanist, feminist Caribbean woman, this article does not seek to propose a counter-history of great women. It seeks rather to distinguish the specific contributions made by one woman feminist – among a host of many others – to these social movements in local and international contexts and to explore the reasons why these movements provided such possibilities and the contradictions involved. The focus on Amy Ashwood Garvey highlights not just her individual significance but also allows us to acknowledge the work of countless other women (and men), some mentioned in this text, who have been excluded from the meta-narratives of these early movements. So pervasive is this narrative that Michelle Stephens in a recent review noted:

The discovery of a persistent, structural, never ending, never deviating, masculinist gender politics in the discourse of black internationalism reveals a pattern that one can only explain through a deeper structural analysis of the very gendering of constructions of global blackness. Again, it is the political unconscious that provides the source for and explanation of the limits of a liberatory gender politics in black internationalist discourse (Stephens, 2005:109-110).

In this article, the term pan-Africanism is used in a broad sense: it is used to refer both to the conscious identification with Africa and critique of European domination and racism, as well as to the mutual responsibility of persons of African descent dispersed throughout the world, to each other, wherever they may be located. Campbell notes that, “pan-African identification has taken many forms, but it has been most clearly articulated in the project of achieving the liberation of the continent of Africa and the dignity and self-respect of all Africans” (Campbell, 1994: 205).

Approaches to pan-Africanism have always varied, and the activists presented here present various positionalities. It emerged from the experiences of slavery and colonialism on the continent and the Diaspora and the legacy of racism and discrimination that followed (Lemelle, 1992:12; Campbell, 1994: 285-286). Not surprisingly, therefore, most of the early activists came from the Diaspora, in particular, the Caribbean and the United States; and the early conferences and congresses through which much of the history of the movement is traced, took place outside of continental Africa.

In the last two decades, the scholarship on pan-Africanist women, in particular of the Garvey Movement, has highlighted the contradictions inherent within this patriarchal nationalist movement (Bair, 1992; Ford-Smith, 1988; McPherson, 2003). More recently, Ula Taylor coined the term “communal feminist” to describe Amy Jacques-Garvey, second wife of Marcus Garvey, when she notes:

In essence community feminists are women who may or may not live in male-centred households; either way, their activism is focused on assisting both the men and the women in their lives—whether husbands or sisters, fathers, or mothers, sons or daughters—along with initiating and participating in activities to uplift their communities (Taylor, 2000: 64).

Taylor contends that Jacques-Garvey simultaneously rejected *and* accepted codes of patriarchy. In the Garvey household, she noted, as in most homes during the 1920s, “the parameters for the wife, helpmate, mother, and daughter were based on patriarchal principles” (Taylor, 2000:104, 107) .

This article suggests an alternative trajectory of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Caribbean pan-Africanist women’s consciousness and organising, one that was unapologetically feminist albeit in the context of that time. It also builds on the assertion of Honor Ford-Smith, that early pan-Africanism, in particular the

Garvey Movement, provided an important training ground, a social and political base for emerging early 20<sup>th</sup>-century feminism in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

In examining this intricate linkage between feminism and early nationalism/internationalism, Kumari Jayawardena argues that the movement towards women's emancipation in Asia and the Middle East was "acted out against a background of nationalist struggles aimed at achieving political independence, asserting national identity and modernizing society" (Jayawardena, 1986: 7). In similar vein, this article identifies an indigenous Caribbean feminism emerging from the racialised and colonial histories of Caribbean peoples, a feminism which was located in the ongoing struggles of its peoples at that time. Despite the colonial and colonising influences which no doubt affected the early women's movement, emergent feminisms were a distinctive response to the specificities of women's subordination within particular social, political and economic contexts.

Among the additional external influences identified by Jayawardena for this emergence were: the development of girls' education; the spread of Western secular thought; the wider context of resistance to imperialism; the expansion of capital and the emergence of a local bourgeoisie; the influence of the Irish struggle<sup>2</sup> and male reformers who wished to conform to Western ideals of "civilisation" (Jayawardena, 1986: 6-12). Both in Asia and in the African Diaspora, nationalist and identity struggles opened spaces for women's consciousness and organising which contributed to the growth of the early feminist movement. Activism by early middle-class and working-class feminists of this region was embedded within their overall concern for the social uplift of their "race" and "nation" and, in the case of the latter, their class.

The terms "feminist" and "feminism" are late 19<sup>th</sup>-century and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century terms, therefore, they were in active use during this period. Many of the women activists of this period called themselves feminist, and when they did not use the term to describe themselves, it was used by their detractors and supporters to describe them. The term "feminist" is understood as someone who manifests an awareness/consciousness of the subordination of women and seeks actively to change it. By this definition it follows that there might be different starting points for conceptualising the causes of this subordination and, by extension, there would be differences in the solutions proposed and acted upon.

Jayawardena, in her book, identifies the role of male reformers and writers in the early feminist struggles of Third World countries. In a context of nationalist struggle, the status of women in a country was often taken as a “popular barometer” of “civilisation”, therefore many reformers agitated for legislative change, especially in the areas of education and freedom of movement (Jayawardena, 1986:12). Despite the overall patriarchal character of the movement some male pan-Africanist leaders could be counted among this group. In some instances women’s empowerment came as a by-product of their actions; while in others it reflected a genuine desire to improve the status of women in the context of a larger nationalist vision.

### **Amy Ashwood Garvey and the UNIA**

The UNIA, according to Honor Ford-Smith, was “unquestionably, the most influential anticolonial organisation in Jamaica prior to 1938” (Ford-Smith, 2004:19). One can even suggest that it was one of the most successful pan-Africanist organisations of all time and certainly the most internationalist. Recent scholarship, in critically evaluating its legacy, has examined the experiences of women members. Garvey historian, Tony Martin has contended that Marcus Garvey’s progressive position on women was reflected in the fact that, unlike those of other black leaders, his two wives (the two Amys) were activists in their own right.<sup>3</sup> Garvey and his movement’s “progressiveness” in relation to women, however, has been severely challenged.

Like most nationalist organisations, the UNIA was organised around a discourse of manhood contextualised by Booker T Washington’s ideology of Black self-reliance. As noted by Barbara Bair, this self-made construction of manhood was translated in the movement into a petty bourgeois ideal with “the ideals of the nuclear family and of a sexual division of labour in which women’s roles were largely privatised”:

UNIA women used the phrase “real manhood” ...emblazoned on their blazers in UNIA parades--but in their usage it meant a code of chivalry, men who were gentlemen and providers, responsible fathers and husbands, who respected black women, supported black children, and did not reject them for white girlfriends and wives (Bair, 1992: 158-159).

Yet despite this over-arching patriarchal ideology, what Bair calls its “dual-sex structure” (1994:131) provided a space for women’s organisation, awakened consciousness and public action. These were the separate but parallel women’s

and men's auxiliaries such as the Black Cross Nurses and the Universal African Legions; separate Ladies Divisions under women's leadership and established women's (or ladies') positions on local executives and the celebration of Women's Day. This "dual-sex" UNIA structure she noted "...afforded women a separate sphere of influence as well as leadership roles within the hierarchy of the women's wings of the divisions" (Bair, 1994:131).

This structuring of women's involvement in the organisation is usually credited to the early influence of Amy Ashwood Garvey, Garvey's first wife. Amy Ashwood, in her account of "The Birth of the UNIA", claims to be a co-founder of the organisation. Martin, however, rejects this, suggesting that she may have exaggerated her role (A.A. Garvey, 1983). While still a teenager, she and Marcus became the earliest members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA) at its formation in 1914.<sup>4</sup> From the age of seventeen, Ashwood worked with Marcus in establishing the early UNIA in Jamaica<sup>5</sup>, becoming its first secretary and member of the Board of Management. She was involved in planning the inaugural meeting in Collegiate Hall in Kingston, helped organise the weekly elocution meetings and fund-raising activities. She also started the Ladies Division, which later developed into the Black Cross Nurses Arm<sup>6</sup>, and was involved in early plans to establish an Industrial School. The UNIA office was established at a house on Charles Street, rented by the Ashwood family (French & Ford-Smith) some members of which were active in the early UNIA.<sup>7</sup> In 1914, the early organisation organised a debate on the question "Is the intellect of a woman as highly developed as that of a man?" (*Daily Chronicle* 1914), while in 1915 the Objects of the organisation included two clauses mentioning "boys and girls" specifically and not the generic "children" (Hill, 1983:117).

In describing the birth of the UNIA, Amy Ashwood reflects romantically on her meeting with Marcus at the age of seventeen, outside the East Queen Street Baptist Church Hall in July, 1914, where she had been involved in a debate. She recalled:

Grandiose schemes would avail naught unless they could be translated into reality. If as he considered he was Napoleon, he would need a Josephine. He had reached the moment in the life of all great men when the testing period between ideas and their execution became more challenging and acute. ... It was at this period that our paths met.

Marcus Garvey and I met for the first time as if by some design of fate and conspiracy of destiny. It was no casual meeting, for its timing was significant for both of us. It changed much of life of each of us. ...The occasion was a simple one. ...On that particular Tuesday evening in the late July of 1914, I had proposed the motion that "Morality does not increase with civilisation ..."

When the meeting had dispersed, I went off to catch the usual tram home. But waiting at the stop was a stocky figure with slightly drooping shoulders. He seemed vaguely familiar, and then I realised that he was the gentleman who had argued so forcibly for my point of view. At closer quarters the stranger arrested my attention. Excitement over the debate had vanished, and I saw clearly that an intense light shone from the eyes of my unknown supporter. In that evening light they were such black twinkling eyes. A world shone from them.

Then followed the greatest surprise of my life. The bold stranger came forward impulsively, and without any invitation addressed me in the most amazing fashion.

"At last", he said in his rich deep voice, "I have found my star of destiny! I have found my Josephine!" (A. A. Garvey, 1983: 220-221).

**This was followed by many exchanges where they shared their concerns for Africa and Africans. Eventually she concluded:**

Our joint love for Africa and our concern for the welfare of our race urged us on to immediate action. Together we talked over the possibilities of forming an organisation to serve the needs of the peoples of African origin. We spent many hours deliberating what exactly our aims should be and what means we should employ to achieve those aims. Out of this lengthy tete-à-tete we finally improvised a policy and formulated a programme for our infant "organisation". In fact the two-member movement was christened the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities Imperial League (A.A. Garvey, 1983: 225).

Amy had been born in Port Antonio, Jamaica, in 1897, and spent many years of her childhood in Panama. At age 11 she returned to Jamaica to attend high school and at age 17 she met Marcus Garvey. This relationship was not approved

of by her parents, who sent her back to Panama in 1916. The relationship continued through letters, although Garvey left for the United States that same year. What was clear from all sources was the way in which in this relationship “personal and racial liberation mingled”. The following extract from a letter from Marcus to Amy reflected this: “Your Napoleon is longing to see you, longing to gaze into your beautiful eyes in fond devotion, let no mother, no father, no brother stand in the way of the redemption of Africa. I will always worship at your shrine. Your devoted Napoleon, Marcus” (Stein, 1986:32).

In 1918 Amy Ashwood joined Garvey in the United States and worked with him as Chief Assistant and as secretary of the New York branch. United States Secret Agents, monitoring the UNIA reported that “Miss Ashwood seems to be Marcus Garvey’s chief assistant, a kind of managing boss” (Hill, 1983: 14-15). In October, 1919, at the time of Garvey’s arrest, an FBI Report recorded Amy Ashwood, Marcus Garvey and Henrietta Vinton Davis as leaders of the UNIA (Hill, 1983: 54). As early editor of the *Negro World*, she also sold it door-to-door. They were married in October, 1919, in a private Catholic ceremony followed by a public reception at Liberty Hall on Christmas Day, 1919. Also in that year, she was made secretary of the Black Star Line and one of its first directors (Shepherd, 1999:181).

Despite the long relationship that preceded it, the marriage was disappointingly short. Some suggest it lasted six months thereafter and ended in controversy. Garvey sought an annulment in early March, 1920, and he claimed to have obtained a divorce in Missouri in July, 1922, but she never recognised it. In June that year, Amy Ashwood suffered a miscarriage soon after Garvey removed his personal effects from their home.<sup>8</sup> Almost immediately, Marcus Garvey remarried Amy Jacques, who had been a maid-of-honour at his first wedding and his constant companion since the end of his marriage. Amy Jacques was also a Jamaican and a UNIA activist. She had replaced the first Amy as his chief aide and personal secretary since 1920. What followed was a messy and controversial affair including legal proceedings, attempts to stave off bad publicity and threats.

In analysing the turn of events, Judith Stein argues that “the clash of two strong wills must have been at the centre of the conflict, which erupted almost immediately after the two returned from their honeymoon” (Stein, 1986:150-151). She noted that Garvey was drawn to strong women who could help him. Clearly the first Amy saw herself as an equal participant in the

movement and the struggle and was not satisfied merely to be his supporter. The second Amy, however, also an attractive and strong woman, Stein argues, “chose to invest her strength and talents in her husband’s career. She defined herself as Garvey’s comforter and surrogate, whereas Amy Ashwood had viewed herself more as an equal” (Stein, 1986: 150).

Barbara Bair supports this view, noting that Ashwood was “an avowed and dedicated feminist”, whose feminist explanation for the failure of her marriage identified “the clash between Garvey’s dominating ways and her own forceful and extroverted personality. She stated her unwillingness to meet Garvey’s expectations of a wife who would sacrifice her own goals to devote herself to the career of her husband” (Bair, 1992:164–165).

Although Amy Ashwood never accepted the legality of her divorce from Garvey, she was able to move on and develop an independent life as a pan-Africanist, politician, cultural activist and feminist, first in the U.S., then in Jamaica and England. Her musical *Hey Hey*, a comedy set in the United States, was produced at the Lafayette Theatre in New York in 1926. She travelled to Europe, the Caribbean and West Africa and settled in London in the mid-1930s. In all this she was supported by her companion Sam Manning, Trinidadian musician and calypsonian.

## The UNIA and Women’s Empowerment

While the UNIA never espoused as radical a position on women as did some contemporaneous organisations such as the Peoples’ Convention, its “dual-sex” structure allowed for the participation of women like no other organisation had before.<sup>9</sup> The ideology of “separation” and “difference” which characterised UNIA philosophy on race was also true of their position on gender. In addition, the distinct male and female divisions assured the representation of women at the highest levels of the organisation (Reddock, 1994: 106). Yet, as noted by Barbara Bair,

... women were “technically” granted an equal share of power based on the division of authority by gender. In practice, however, the organisational pattern of men’s and women’s leadership roles was not separate and equal but separate and hierarchical. The predominant model of gender relations was similar to that of the companionate marriage with wife/woman and husband/man cooperating while asserting authority over separate spheres of influence (Bair, 1994: 155).



The masculinity espoused by the UNIA was also a militarised one, formed in the post-World War I period, 1914 to the 1920s, and influenced by the racism experienced by Afro-Caribbean soldiers during that war. So, for some, the UNIA was a “new manhood movement”, a movement to restore masculine pride, power and self determination to black men. The language of the organisation, the names of its divisions, its uniforms and parades all reflect this militarism, a militarised black masculinity which required for its existence a strong hard-working black “motherhood”. While many women accepted these gender definitions and the related division of labour, some rebelled against them, “creating modified positions of authority for themselves and reconstructing the prevailing views of womanhood and manhood in the process” (Bair, 1994:155). Yet while most scholars would agree that the UNIA was a patriarchal organisation, the visibility which was given to women was unparalleled at that time and among pan-Africanist organisations since then, even at local level. In Toco, Trinidad, for example, the Herskovitses report that the Cumana Branch of the UNIA was referred to as the only “lodge” which both women and men could join (Herskovits, 1947:263). According to Barbara Bair, women were involved in UNIA enterprises; served on boards of the Black Star Line and the *Negro World* and were delegates at the UNIA conventions, which featured women’s days and exhibits of women’s industrial arts and crafts. They participated in rituals, marching in UNIA parades, appearing in UNIA pageants and concerts and were frequent contributors to fund-raising projects and owned stock in the Black Star Line (Bair, 1993).

Ford-Smith argues further that, while the UNIA was patriarchal, it also subverted conventional gender roles of the time. Similarly, although a proletarian organisation, it pursued a middle-class “respectability”, resulting in a space of unstable contradictions within which alternative possibilities could be grasped by active subjects.<sup>10</sup>

In her examination of the case of the middle-class-oriented Black Cross Nurses in Belize, Anne McPherson found that, in the 1920s, Garveyite membership did not result in any feminist consciousness or discourse on black sisterhood. These women, she found, were primarily maternalists, who occasionally addressed issues of women’s equality and rights and were not even anti-colonial (McPherson, 2003). Yet this was not the case in other locations. Both Ford-Smith and Bair agree that the UNIA, despite its contradictions, provided a space for women’s empowerment. Bair notes

that through their involvement in local divisions and women's auxiliaries women learnt "organisational skills and cooperative/empowering patterns of leadership", skills which they ultimately transferred outside the Garvey movement to other causes.<sup>11</sup>

But this was not only the case in Jamaica, this was also the case in other parts of the region and farther away. Sierra Leone feminist and pan-Africanist Adelaide Casley-Hayford, pioneer in girls' education in Africa, for example, was influenced by her membership in the Freetown UNIA. In a 1926-27 trip to the United States to raise funds for her girls' school she became a member of the Black Feminist Circle of Peace and Foreign Relations, the Black Women's Club, the YWCA and the NAACP Suffrage Department and was involved in the Fourth Pan-African Congress, which was organised mainly by women (Bair, 1994). For these women it was impossible to distinguish their womanness from their blackness. The two were intertwined; their struggle, therefore had to take place on all fronts (Ford-Smith, 1988: 80-83; Altink, 2006).

Whatever the assessment of their gains, Ford-Smith concluded that the UNIA was clearly the training ground for black feminists of the 1930s. From its ranks came both the liberals and the working-class women of the early labour movement. It is an example of how political practice often outstrips the theoretical limits of stated philosophy and how study of that practice ultimately leads to wider analysis of the problem under study (Ford-Smith, 1988: 82).

### **Amy Ashwood Garvey – Beyond Marcus**

Much of the later activism of Amy Ashwood outside of the UNIA took place in England. There she was heavily involved in pan-Africanist activities as well as feminist activities through her friendship with Sylvia Pankhurst, Ethiopianist and feminist. One of her earliest activities was the collaboration with Nigerian law student Ladipo Solanke in the formation of the Nigerian Progress Union (Adi: 3; Martin, 2007: 86).

On 17 July 1924, The NPU was formed with thirteen students. At the inaugural meeting, Amy Adeyola Ashwood was given the Yoruba title of "lyalode" (Mother has arrived) "in appreciation of her love, interest and services for the Union as its organiser and in view of her position and future activities on behalf of the Union". According to Adi, the Aims and Objects of the NPU reflected Garveyite ideas on self-reliance and self-help, although

these were also popular ideas in West Africa.<sup>12</sup> After five months however, Amy left Britain for the United States via Jamaica. It was while in the United States during this period that she became an impresario, staging her successful musical.

In 1937 Ashwood joined George Padmore, C.L.R. James and others to form the International African Service Bureau (IASB). This replaced the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA),<sup>13</sup> later IAFE (changed to Ethiopia, formed in 1935 in response to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (Yelvington, 1993: 215). In London, her West End Florence Mills Nightclub became a regular meeting place for activists, artists and students. Jarrett-Macauley quotes CLR James as stating that this was the place where “the only good food in town was served and if you were lucky, the 78s of Trinidadian Sam Manning, Amy’s partner, spun late into the night” (Jarrett-Macauley, 1998:84; Sherwood, 1995: 135). In 1929 Amy and her companion toured the Caribbean region, visiting Jamaica and Trinidad. In Jamaica *The Gleaner* of 18 June 1929 published an article by Sam Manning with the following headline:

WELL KNOWN COMEDIAN ON WOMEN TODAY:

Sam Manning, Recently Here, Deplores Conditions Affecting Weaker Sex:

LACK OF RESPECT:

Degrading Position in Western World of Many of Them. The Source of Prosperity (sic).

This article reflected Manning’s sensitivity to women’s causes. He asked the question: “What race or group of men could ever amount to anything unless they can cultivate regard and respect for their women?” and called on Negro men to protect their rights and edify them (*The Gleaner*, 1929).

In Trinidad, in July, 1929, *The Labour Leader* announced the “Arrival of Three Popular Negroes” –Mrs Garvey, Sam Manning, Trinidadian comedian and Syd Perrin, musical composer. It was reported that they had come to get in touch with prominent citizens (*Labour Leader*, 1929). Other reports stated that Mrs Garvey had come to collect material for a book and had been interviewed by Captain Cipriani (*Franklin’s Yearbook*, 1929; Reddock, 1994: 107).

During World War II, from 1940 to 1944, Amy Ashwood returned to Jamaica, where she founded a domestic science institute for girls; was active in the movement for self-government<sup>14</sup> and became a candidate for the

Legislature hoping “to use her position to champion the rights of women as well as those of labour”. In 1940 she attended memorial services for Marcus Garvey held at Saint Ann’s Bay after his death.<sup>15</sup> In 1944, while in New York for “medical treatment”, Amy made a number of written requests for women to be included in the US Emergency Farm and War Industries work program of 1943-1945. She hoped to have jobs arranged for 50,000 Jamaican women as domestics in the United States. Her requests were unsuccessful despite, apparently, support from Eleanor Roosevelt (Sherwood, [http://www.basauk.com/aa\\_garvey.htm](http://www.basauk.com/aa_garvey.htm)). According to Fitzroy Baptiste:

[J. Edgar] Hoover went on to advise the State Department that Amy Ashwood Garvey must be stopped. The FBI, he said, had no information to implicate her in ongoing investigations against some Marcus Garvey cohorts “for sedition and conspiracy to commit sedition” in connection with the disposition of funds collected through the United Negro Improvement Association. Still, her influence was such that “any success she may have in causing the importation of these Jamaican workers may be used to advantage by the United Negro Improvement Association as a device to augment their membership and increase its influence upon the members” (Baptiste: 18).

In 1945, back in England, along with George Padmore, T.T. Makkonen, Kwame Nkrumah and Peter Abrahams, Amy Ashwood was involved in organising the historic Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester from 13-21 October.<sup>16</sup> This conference, significant to the decolonisation process, was attended by many of the future leaders of independent Africa. Amy Ashwood Garvey who, along with fellow Jamaican Alma La Badie, were the only two women presenters, chaired the opening session during which she called for freedom and self-rule for the British colonies. She also called for the liquidation of racial discrimination and other prejudices (Adi et al 1995: 35-36).

Not until the session on 19 October, however was the issue of women raised. In the first session for that day, Amy Ashwood, in a substantial address, remarked that: “Very much has been written and spoken on the Negro, but for some reason very little has been said about the black woman. She has been shunted to the background to be a child-bearer. This has principally been her lot. ...” In relation to Jamaica, she noted that “The women in the civil service who belong to the intellectual section take no active part whatever in the political development of the country” (Padmore, 1963:52).

On this day Amy and Alma La Badie spoke of the problems facing Jamaican women of various classes and ensured that, in the final conference resolutions on the West Indies, five clauses relevant to women were included. These were on: equal pay for equal work regardless of nationality, creed or race; removal of all disabilities affecting the employment of women, for example the removal of the bar on married women in the government services; modernisation of existing Bastardy Laws, with legal provisions for the registration of fathers with adequate safeguards and the abolition of the “schoolgirl” system in domestic services (Padmore, 1963: 61). Only the resolutions on the West Indies included clauses related to women. Between 1946 and 1950 Ashwood visited West Africa tracing her ancestry to the Ashanti of Ghana, returning to London in 1950, where she opened the Afro-Woman’s Service Bureau (Sherwood, [http://www.basauk.com/aa\\_garvey.htm](http://www.basauk.com/aa_garvey.htm)).

It was with this background that Amy Ashwood embarked on her second Caribbean tour, in 1953. She visited Antigua, Aruba, Barbados, British Guiana, Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. At a time when colonial relations tended to determine contacts the pan-Caribbean character of this tour is significant. On this tour Amy Ashwood tried to reach out to Caribbean women of different ethnic groups despite her pan-African sensibilities. The separatism characteristic of the later Garvey movement was not reflected in Amy’s relationship with other women. Her approach allowed for collaboration and friendships with progressive and feminist women of other “races”. This supports Campbell’s idea of pan-Africanist humanism as part of the struggle for human emancipation (Campbell, 1994: 286).

In Barbados, Ashwood presided over the formation of the Barbados Women’s Alliance comprising representatives of a number of women’s organisations (*Barbados Observer*, 1953) and also had the opportunity to meet some members of Trinidadian women’s organisations visiting Barbados. Gema Ramkeesoon, Indo-Trinidadian women’s activist, for example, chaired the large meeting at the Bridgetown’s Queens Park. Ramkeesoon paid tribute to Marcus Garvey and spoke of the future advancement Africans and Indians could achieve by marching side-by-side. Also addressing the meeting was Violet Thorpe, woman activist and future politician of the predominantly Indo-Trinidadian Democratic Labour Party, who later headed the Garvey welcoming committee for her visit to Trinidad (*Barbados Observer*, 1953).

In Trinidad Amy circulated widely around the women activists and women's organisations of the educated middle-strata, the group she felt most qualified to become actively involved in local politics. The first of her series of lectures took place at the Himalaya Club in San Juan, an Indo-Trinidadian institution,<sup>17</sup> under the patronage of Lady Rance, wife of Governor Hubert Rance. Her subject was "Women as Leaders of World Thought".

Her lecture noted that women in the West Indies were not conscious of the influence which they could exert on world thought; they were not politically conscious. She called on them to become conscious of their responsibilities and their potential to make a significant impact. Like many black nationalists of her time, her vision of progress was shaped by the European experience and this was reflected in her presentations (*Port of Spain Gazette*, 1953).

During her month long visit Amy lectured throughout the country to a range of institutions and on a variety of topics. In addition, on two consecutive Sundays she presided over a conference of women representing a number of women's groups (*Port of Spain Gazette*, 1953). While in Trinidad she published her pamphlet *Liberia: Land of Promise*, with an introduction written by Sylvia Pankhurst (Martin, 1982).<sup>18</sup>

Absent from these activities was Audrey Layne Jeffers, local women's activist and member of the Legislative Council, at that time in London, representing Trinidad and Tobago at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. At a dinner organised by her organisation, the Coterie of Social Workers, to mark the coronation, Amy Ashwood raised a toast, congratulating the organisation on its 32-year history and hailed Audrey Jeffers as "a long-standing feminist and politician" and "No. 1 social worker in the West Indies" (*Port of Spain Gazette*, 1953).

Through correspondence with Thelma Rogers, Trinidadian member of the Coterie of Social workers, information on the later years of Amy Ashwood Garvey is available. In 1954 she opened The Afro Woman's Centre<sup>19</sup> and Residential Club, in Ladbroke Grove, London. The Centre, she stated, was established to answer the long-felt need of the coloured woman for spiritual, cultural, social and political advancement. It seems that it was not as successful as envisaged. In July 1954, she wrote: "We are still moving very slowly. I have two white girls in, they are staying together on the top floor, I am trying to get two Indians, then we can say we have a Multi-Racial Centre" (A. A. Garvey, 1954).

But her travelling continued. In 1955 she wrote from Paris and Jamaica, and in 1967 from New York. In 1967 her spirit and concern for her people was still evident, when she wrote:

America has changed so much, I did not know it again. Nothing is the same. However I am glad I can hold on to my memories. Most of my friends are gone but God has provided new ones. God is good my dear. A terrible fight is going on here in this very country. It's between Black and White. It's purely racial.

The Blackman is holding trumps. He has the moral right. A little 14 year old boy the other day stood off across the road and yelled to a big white man... say you, we ain't scared a you no more, and if you don't give us what is ours we gwine bun down the country. That's the answer, and that is what is happening dear (A. A. Garvey, 1967).

Amy Ashwood Garvey died in 1969, leaving two unpublished manuscript drafts of her memoirs of her life with Garvey and the UNIA.

## Conclusions

This article sought to examine the link between early pan-Africanism and feminism. It argued that despite the patriarchal character of early pan-Africanist organisations, they heightened women's consciousness of social justice and provided space for the acquisition of organisational skills which were crucial for an emergent feminist discourse and praxis. The UNIA, with its dual-sex hierarchy, provided a space for women to acquire skills and experience in organising, leadership and cooperation. In focussing on Amy Ashwood Garvey, this paper challenges many of the assumptions about early Caribbean feminism.

Like many other middle-class black women of the period, Amy Ashwood was influenced by the work and teachings of Marcus Garvey, who was able to cross the class barrier in his far-reaching impact. Garvey's ideas of black pride and his recognition of the significance of black women struck a sympathetic chord among women in a context where black womanhood was not always valorised by the factors which in those days valorised womanhood, factors such as "beauty", upwardly mobile marriage, participation in charitable works and visible employment in respectable professions. Amy Bailey, of the Jamaica Women's Liberal Club, for example, acknowledged the influence of Garveyism

in the organisation's stress on "Negro History" and advocacy on behalf of Black women (A. A. Garvey, 1967). This continued a trend started by Henry Sylvester Williams himself, the Trinidadian lawyer usually credited with coining the term "pan-Africanism," and convener of the first pan-African conference—at the dawn of the pan-Africanist movement, where women's emancipation was established as important and necessary to African liberation. At the same time, however, their notions of progress were shaped by their colonised sensibilities.

Another characteristic of Ashwood was her internationalist and regional visions. Her concerns with Africans—at home and abroad—did not preclude her making strategic alliances and friendships with women of other ethnicities and nationalities, especially those who shared her concerns. These international and intra-regional linkages are particularly impressive in an era without modern communications technology. The regional conferences, international and regional tours and attempts to convene regional organisations are all testimony to this. This internationalism, it could be argued, was part of the "black internationalism" identified by Brent Edwards in his book *The Practice of Diaspora* (Stephens, 2005). But, as noted by Jayawardena, it was also part of a feminist internationalism which characterised feminists in the South, as in the North, in the early 20th Century (Jayawardena, 1986:21). The influences of wider international developments on Caribbean developments, therefore, cannot be ignored. Strategic links with other activist men and women—African-descended and otherwise—were used to further their own political ends.

In contrast to the work of Ula Taylor, this article has argued that for early 20<sup>th</sup>-century "race women", "community feminism" was not the only or the most significant option. As the life and work of Amy Ashwood Garvey demonstrate, involvement in these movements created the consciousness and imagination which allowed women to go beyond the parameters of these movements, to challenge patriarchal constructs as they understood them, both in their personal and their public lives as well as in their artistic and literary production.



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## Endnotes

1. LaRay Denzer suggests that one of the reasons why the influential political organizer, educator and journalist of Sierra Leone felt more at home with the League of Coloured Peoples while a student in Britain was the involvement of women in this West Indian dominated organisation. The West African Students Union, on the other hand, she found was ‘totally dominated by men’ (Denzer, 1986).
2. Robert Hill (1983:lxvi) suggests that Garvey in the second, more radical phase of the UNIA, had been influenced by Irish revolutionary nationalism.
3. Personal communication, 1980.
4. In a number of places, Tony Martin suggests that Amy Ashwood may have exaggerated her role in the formation of the UNIA. See for example, Martin, 1983: 219. Similarly, in a letter to the editor of the Jamaica Gleaner Garvey’s son with his second wife Amy Jacques, also supported this, saying “statements that Amy Ashwood was cofounder of the UNIA is an exaggeration in that Marcus Garvey returned from England to Jamaica on July 14 and within 5 days founded the UNIA” (Julius Garvey, [www.raceandhistory.com](http://www.raceandhistory.com)). In spite of this challenge however, most sources refer to her as co-founder of the UNIA in 1914.
5. Early correspondence records her as being: Associate Secretary (August 1914); Associate Secretary, Ladies Division (Oct. 1914); Associate Secretary (January 1915); General Secretary, Ladies Division, (April, 1916).; Associate Secretary (May 1916). (Hill, 1983: Appendix 3).
6. Launched in 1920 and patterned after the Red Cross Nurses of World War 1 (McPherson, 2003:509).
7. See Robert Hill (1983: Vol 1: 112-113; 128; 151-152) for participation by her brother, mother and father.
8. The Yard Collection, 1969 (Hill, 1987: 358-359).
9. Winston James notes, however, that as the organization grew in the United States, the influence of women declined. He reports on a revolt of UNIA women in New York at the 1922 Convention (James, 1998: 138-141).
10. Ford-Smith, 2004. “Unruly Virtues of the Spectacular: Performing Engendered Nationalisms in the UNIA in Jamaica, *interventions* Vol. 6(1) 18–44
11. Examples included: Maymie de Mena, Henrietta Vinton Davis and Amy Ashwood Garvey and Laura Kofey (Bair, 1992: 164).
12. Adi notes that Henry Carr, a former resident of Nigeria and supporter of the NPU,

wrote Du Bois in the US to ask him to help the NPU's fund-raising efforts (Adi: 5-6).

13. Members of the IAFA included CLR James (founder), Jomo Kenyatta, ITA Wallace-Johnson, George Padmore and Amy Ashwood Garvey (Martin, 1983: 25).
14. According to Fitzroy Baptiste, in 1944 Ashwood was president of the largely female JAG. Smith Political Party.
15. *New York Amsterdam News* 4, May 1944 (cited in Hill, 1987b: 359).
16. It is possible that CLR James was also involved in planning this conference. In the conference report prepared by Padmore, Ashwood Garvey's name is excluded from the list of organisers.
17. Violet Thorpe mentions the collaboration of women of the prominent Indo-Trinidadian Ackbarali and Kangalee families of San Juan, Trinidad in her preparatory work for Mrs Garvey's visit.
18. Tony Martin was a nephew of Audrey Jeffers.
19. Apparently she also tried to publish: *Afro Woman's Magazine: An International Monthly* (Schomburg Legacy Exhibition).

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