

CREATIVE VISION:

I create, perform, coordinate and study theatre performances that mainly comment on race and racialization, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class. My main influences are African and African-descended artists who continue to develop innovative techniques while learning from rich performance practices found across the globe. I continue to assert through my art and scholarship, that theatre and performance are essential components in the production of knowledge on how human beings form, negotiate and contest racial, gender, sexual, ethnic and other hierarchical structures. Like a host of well-known international practitioners and theorists, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Osonye Tess Onwueme, Dennis Scott, Honor Ford-Smith, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Caryl Churchill, Augusto Boal and others, I view theatre practice as pedagogy through which human beings can construct visions of social justice.

WRITING/PRODUCING/DIRECTING**AFIBA AND HER DAUGHTERS – A Play in Two Acts**

Rites and Reason Theatre, Providence RI, May 25 to 28, 2016. World Premiere.

Afiba and Her Daughters is my first full-length play. It had its beginnings as a treatment for a screenplay that I submitted as part of my application to the MA Program in Scriptwriting at Goldsmith College, University of London in 2009. I was accepted by the Program, but could not pursue it because of financial reasons. However, four years later in 2013, I began developing the story into a play in Elmo Terry Morgan's Research to Performance Method Playwriting Class at Brown University. *Afiba and Her Daughters* is an intergenerational play that represents how the women in a Jamaican family negotiate racial, gender and class oppression in the country. Afiba is an enslaved woman who suffers dearly after performing a single act of liberation in 1818. The protagonist, Dana Carnegie, Afiba's descendant, belongs to the group of feminist intellectuals that came to voice in the 1970s in Jamaica. She serves as the playwright's surrogate as she writes and tries to publish her family's story with Afiba at the centre. From slavery to colonialism, to the early post-colonial era, to Jamaica's experiment with democratic socialism in the 1970s, the play offers snapshots as well as details about the context in which these women try to live fulfilling lives. Rites and Reason Theatre produced the play under the direction of John Emigh, Professor Emeritus of Theatre and Performance Studies, Brown University. It opened on African Liberation Day, May 25, 2016 and had a successful four-day run that closed on May 28, 2016. *Afiba and Her Daughters* features original songs, and original music by the playwright and Providence-based, musician, Lon-E. Plynton.



Top left to bottom right: Angela Nash Wade (Amy Spencer) and Becky Bass (Miss Watson), Shenyse Leanna Harris (Afiba/Christine Carnegie), Sylvia Ann-Soares (Besi) and Cleveish Bogle (Cubah), Angela Lynsey Ford (Dana Carnegie) and Ezekiel Olukoya (Jonathon Griffiths) in scenes from *Afiba and Her Daughters*. Photos by Nicosia Shakes.

Premiere Run: May 25 to 28, 2016, Rites and Reason Theatre, 155 Angell Street, Providence RI 02912.

Production Team/Cast (Abridged):

Director- John Emigh, Producer- Karen Allen Baxter, Dramaturg- Elmo Terry-Morgan, Production Assistant: Kathy Moyer, Technical Director: Alonzo T. Jones, Musical Director: Lon E. Plynton, Costume Designer: Lisa Batt-Parente.

Actors: Becky Bass, Cleveish Bogle, Angela Lynsey Ford, Viraj Gandhi, Warren Harding, Shenyse Harris, Angela Nash, Ezekiel Olukoya, Tom Paolino, Sylvia-Ann Soares.

Band: The Mystic Jammers

Watch a video clip at <https://vimeo.com/178081936>, More on the play at: <https://nicosiashakes.com/2016/05/18/staging-jamaican-herstory-with-afiba-and-her-daughters/>

TWO STORIES – A Play in One Act, Tallawah Drama Festival, November 1999.

Two Stories, a one-act play with three characters is about a conversation that accidentally happens between two women connected to the same man. One is married to the man; the other is engaged in an illicit relationship with him. In a series of flashbacks, the women talk about their experiences, from the beginning of each relationship to the problems that eventually result. It was written as an entry to the Tallawah Drama Festival, a national theatre festival held at the Phillip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts, University of the West Indies, Mona. The play received the awards for Best New Script and Best Actress.

Premiere performance: November 18, 1999, Phillip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica.

Production Team/Cast: Producer, Director and Costume and Set Designer: Nicosia Shakes, Actors: Tonni-Ann Brodber, Shelly-Ann Wittock and Shaun Thomas

Awards: Best New Script, Best Actress (Tonni-Ann Brodber), High Commendation in Directing (Nicosia Shakes).

LOST SON – A Play in One Act, Tallawah Drama Festival, November 1999.

The late 1990s was an unfortunate turning point in Jamaica's history of gang-related violence. Murders were at a record high and many Jamaicans, including myself, felt that the tone of the violence was becoming more and more indiscriminate. People who may have previously been considered "off limits" as possible victims, including babies and women, were being targeted mostly for retaliation. *Lost Son* tells the tragic story of a young couple from one of Jamaica's volatile inner-city communities, who become enmeshed in the violence. The main protagonists are Stacey, a newly pregnant young woman, Tony her partner and Paula, Stacey's inquisitive and supportive friend. It was as an entry to the Tallawah Drama Festival. The director received High Commendation.

Premiere performance: November 19, 1999, Tallawah Drama Festival, PSSCA

Production Team/Cast: Producer and Costume and Set Designer: Nicosia Shakes, Director: Andrea Grant. Actors: Nicosia Shakes, Martin Thame and Dionne Thompson

Award: High Commendation, Directing: Andrea Grant.

BLACK PEARL – A Performance Poem, Tallawah Drama Festival 2000.

Part dub¹, and part pentametric, this poem is a meditation on anti-Black racism and Diasporic Africans' connection to the continent.

Premiere performance: November 19, 2000, Tallawah Drama Festival, PSSCA

Performer: Clive Forrester

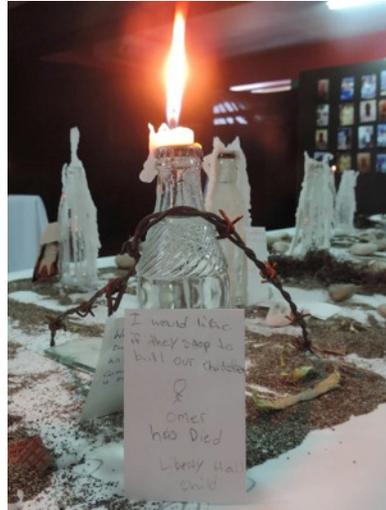
Award: Best Poem.

DIRECTING/PRODUCTION COORDINATION**SONG FOR THE BELOVED: MEMORY AND RENEWAL AT THE MARGINS OF JUSTICE,**

May 2015

An Interactive Exhibition and Performance by The Memory, Urban Violence and Performance Project, The Garvey Great Hall, Liberty Hall: The Legacy of Marcus Garvey, Kingston, Jamaica, May 2015.

Song for the Beloved: Memory and Renewal at the Margins of Justice was an interactive exhibition and performance mounted in Kingston, Jamaica in 2015. It was one in the series of performances from the Letters from the Dead Project, the performance arm of the [Memory, Urban Violence and Performance Project](#), initiated by Honor Ford-Smith who is also Principal Researcher. Ford-Smith is a Jamaican scholar, actor, playwright and former Artistic Director of Sistren Theatre Collective. She teaches in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. The Project began in 2007 as a Jamaican-centered transnational exploration of the ways in which people who reside in volatile urban communities remember and forget the lives lost as a result of violence. It blends visual arts, public performances, theatre, multimedia and art installations/exhibitions, and has been enacted in Kingston, Jamaica; Toronto, Canada; Bogotá, Colombia; New York and New Jersey, United States. The exhibition/performance consisted of memorial tables influenced by Jamaican Revival; images of Jamaican persons who died violently, and a multimedia slide show of memorial street art in urban Jamaica. The exhibition opened with a staged reading of the monodrama, *A Vigil for Roxie*, co-created based on ethnographic research, by Honor Ford-Smith, Amba Chevannes, Carol Lawes, the actor and Eugene Williams, the director. My duties included managing the finances of the project, liaising with people from volatile communities in Kingston to attend and participate in the project, reserving and preparing the venue and overseeing public relations. This exhibition/performance was dedicated to the lives lost during the 2010 West Kingston Incursion in which seventy people were killed (49 unarmed), mainly by the Jamaican police and army. May 25, 2015 was the fifth anniversary of the incursion. The exhibition was curated by Honor Ford-Smith and Anique Jordan and designed by Honor Ford-Smith, Anique Jordan and Kara Springer.



From top left to bottom right: the audience, two sections of the interactive exhibition and Carol Lawes reading *A Vigil for Roxie*. Photos by Nicosia Shakes.

Production: May 25 to 28, 2015.

Features: An interactive exhibition, a staged reading of *A Vigil for Roxie*

Production Team:

Principal Researcher- Honor Ford-Smith, Curators- Honor Ford-Smith and Anique Jordan, Exhibition Design- Honor Ford-Smith, Anique Jordan, Kara Springer
 Creators of *A Vigil for Roxie*: Amba Chevannes, Carol Lawes, Honor Ford-Smith, Eugene Williams; Actor: Carol Lawes

A READING OF SLAVE NARRATIVES FROM THE CARIBBEAN AND THE UNITED STATES

SANKOFA: A Symposium on Slavery and its Impact on Contemporary Jamaica, organized by Liberty Hall: The Legacy of Marcus Garvey at The Institute of Jamaica auditorium, Kingston, Jamaica. February 2004.

SANKOFA: Slavery and its Impact on Contemporary Jamaica was the first in an annual symposium that I organized while working as Research Officer at Liberty Hall: The Legacy of Marcus Garvey, a cultural and educational institution dedicated to Marcus Garvey, the important Jamaican Pan-African philosopher and leader. As part of the symposium, I collated and directed a performance of five slave narratives from Jamaica, Bermuda, Cuba and The United States. The narratives were woven throughout the symposium and performed at different points in the program with the readers/ actors approaching from various sections of the auditorium. I directed the narratives as well as performed an excerpt from The History of Mary Prince, a woman enslaved in Bermuda during the early 19th century.



From left to right: Jasmine Everett reading the narrative of Akeiso [sic] enslaved in Jamaica, 1700s, Abbebe Payne reading the narrative of James Fisher, U.S.A. 1800s and Nicosia Shakes reading the History of Mary Prince, enslaved in Bermuda in the 1700s to 1800s. Photo Copyright Liberty Hall, 2004.

Production: February 27, 2004

Features: Staged reading of slave narratives interspersed throughout an all-day symposium, produced for Liberty Hall: The Legacy of Marcus Garvey.

Production Team/Cast:

Producer: Liberty Hall: The Legacy of Marcus Garvey, Director/Costume Designer: Nicosia Shakes

Performers: Jasmine Everett, Cleon "Ras Ja Ja" Golding, Donna MacFarlane, Abbebe Payne, Nicosia Shakes, and Wayne Modest.

PERFORMING

SONG FOR THE BELOVED, Tenth Encuentro of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, University of Chile, Santiago, Chile, July, 2016

Song for the Beloved is the most recent performance in the [Memory, Urban Violence and Performance Project](#), which is directed by Honor Ford-Smith who is also Principal Researcher. *Song for the Beloved* was an interactive performance installation done as part of [Encuentro eXcéntrico: "Cuerpos, soberanías y disidencias"](#), the Tenth Encuentro of the [Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics](#) in Santiago, Chile. Influenced by Jamaican Revival, an Afro-Christian religion and philosophy, the installation consisted of a large memorial table bearing stones with names of persons who had died violently in Jamaica and other countries in the Americas, a multimedia slideshow of performances of the MUVAP project in Jamaica and Canada, and three tables featuring one performer who interacted in different ways with visitors/participants. I was positioned at the Justice Table where I invited visitors to talk about loved ones they had lost to violence and their vision of reparations. The other performers were Camille Turner and Honor Ford-Smith. Ford-Smith, media performance artist, Camille Turner and visual artists, Kara Springer and Anique Jordan, created the performance. The performance was dedicated to Black Lives Matter.



Nicosia Shakes at the Justice Table, visitors/participants at the central memorial table, *Song for the Beloved*. Photos by Kara Springer, copyright Nicosia Shakes.

PERFORMANCES WITH THE UNIVERSITY PLAYERS

2005 to 2010

From 2005 to 2010, I acted with the University Players, a group of professional actors based at the Phillip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts, University of the West Indies, Mona in Jamaica. I acted in four productions, all directed by Brian Heap, the Artistic Director of the University Players and Staff Tutor/Coordinator at the PSCCA.

Appropriate Behavior, by Barbara Gloudon, May 6-16, 2010.

Appropriate Behavior (1995) is a comedy by Jamaican playwright, Barbara Gloudon. It tells the story of the conflicts that arise when a company hires a firm to teach its employees business etiquette. It is a farce on the classism and other problems inherent in Jamaica's corporate world. I played Sheila, one of the secretaries.

Hurricane Stories, by Olive Senior, June 2009 (world premiere).

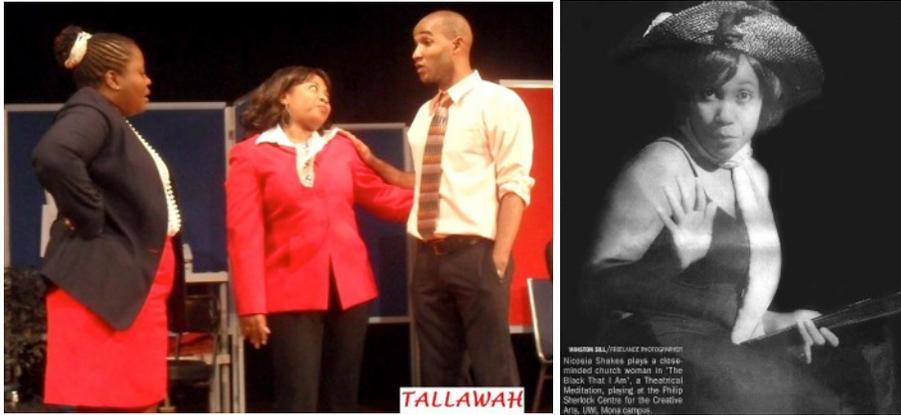
Hurricane Stories is an anthologized play composed of poetry, singing, movement, ritual and storytelling. It was adapted from the collection of poems, *Gardening in the Tropics* (2009) by Olive Senior. I played various roles including the role of Margaret ("Hurricane Story 1951"), a mother who loses everything when she goes to England seeking a better life in the 1950s. The play was performed for the Commonwealth Book Awards, held in Jamaica that year. It was in honor of Olive Senior, a past recipient.

Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India, by Verene Shepherd, May 2007 (world premiere).

This play was adapted from Verene Shepherd's history text of the same name, published in 2002. The text and the play focus on the alleged rape and murder of an Indian indentured laborer aboard the *Allanshaw*, a ship bound for Guyana in 1885. Shepherd's aim in the text is to make more visible the experiences of Indian indentured laborers -- especially Indian women -- in Caribbean history. The University Players told the story through actual testimonies collected by the colonial Commission of Enquiry, which were published in the text. I played an unnamed Indian woman who was on the ship when Maharani was raped and murdered. The play won seven Actor Boy Awards from the International Theatre Institute, Jamaica, including Best Drama and Best Director.

The Black that I Am: A Theatrical Meditation, by Karl Williams, May 2005, November 2005 (world premiere).

Written by Jamaican playwright, Karl Williams, *The Black That I Am* uses monologues, dialogues, dance, music and poetry to explore what it means to be Black and Jamaican. Various issues are represented including gender and sexuality, what it means to be patriotic, "Brownness" or light skinned Blackness, and classism. It won six Actor Boy Awards from the International Theatre Institute, Jamaica, including Best Drama, Best Director and Best Supporting Actress. There were no named parts in the play. I played multiple roles, including performing "Church Lady," one of the monologues.



With Althea Gordon-Clennon and Kashka Hemans in *Appropriate Behavior*, 2010. Photo copyright Tallawah Magazine (from a review by Tyrone Reid); and as Church Lady in *The Black That I Am*, 2010, Photo by Winston Sill (from a review by Tanya Batson-Savage).

OTHER NOTABLE PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE

BAR JONAH: THE FLIGHT OF ALEXANDER BEDWARD by Stafford Ashani, directed by Henk Tjohn. April 1998 (world premiere).

Bar Jonah was my first professional production, i.e. a production for which I was paid and worked with mostly experienced actors. It is a musical written by the late Stafford Ashani, one of Jamaica's iconic playwrights. *Bar Jonah* covers two decades in the life of Alexander Bedward, an important Revival preacher, healer and anti-colonial activist whose work spanned the 1920s to 1930s while Jamaica was a colony of Britain. It begins with Bedward receiving his spiritual calling to become a Revival prophet, his arrest on charges of sedition by the British, his struggles with mental illness and his death and legacy. The title, Bar Jonah is taken from Bedward's moniker, a spiritual name given to him by his followers. As a member of the chorus I played four unnamed characters including a member of Bedward's congregation and Dancehall Girl. It was directed by the late famous Surinamese director, Henk Tjohn and played at the Phillip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts, University of the West Indies, Mona. The performance was part of a series of events to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the University of the West Indies.

STUDENT PERFORMANCES WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES DRAMATIC ARTS SOCIETY - UDAS (ABRIDGED), 1997-2000

UDAS dates back to the University's founding in 1948, with some esteemed alumni like St. Lucian playwright/poet Derek Walcott who was the first president. All of the annual major productions I acted in were directed by Brian Heap, then Staff Tutor in Drama at the Phillip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts, where UDAS is based.

Moon on a Rainbow Shawl, by Errol John, March 2000

Set in Trinidad after the Second World War, Errol John's classic play tells the story of how the residents in a Trinidadian barracks yard² negotiate various challenges, including the socio-economic effects of the war, racial, class and gender hierarchies within the context of British colonialism and growing United States imperialism. I depicted the sex worker, Mavis, a role played by Cicely Tyson at the United States premiere in New York in 1962 and originated by Barbara Basoon in the 1958 world premiere in London.

All's Well that Ends Well, by William Shakespeare, March 1999

In this production, UDAS adhered to Shakespeare's original dialogue, while modernizing the structure, set, costuming and musical components of the play. In some ways, it is a comedy about how women negotiate patriarchy in 16th century England. I played the role of Diana, a young woman who instead of becoming the mistress of a newly married man, conspires with his rejected wife to trick him into consummating the marriage.

The White Witch of Rose Hall, by Sol B. Rivers, March 1998 (world premiere).

This play is based on the popular stories surrounding Annie Palmer, a notorious plantation owner/ enslaver who was the proprietor of Rose Hall Estate, Jamaica during the 1700s. Palmer was widely rumored to be a sorceress, who murdered two husbands and sexually exploited enslaved men. It is widely believed that the ghost of Annie Palmer haunts Rose Hall Estate. This is the main reason for its status as a major tourist attraction. The play focused on the cruelty of slavery, the true evil obscured by the salacious stories about Annie Palmer's personal life. I played several unnamed characters and understudied Millicent, a biracial woman who is allegedly murdered by Annie Palmer.



As Diana in *All's Well that Ends Well*, March 1999. Photo by E. Shakes, copyright Nicosia Shakes.

Notes:

1. Dub is a genre of Jamaican performance poetry that originated during the 1970s. It was named by pioneer dub poet, Oku Onuora, because it was inspired by toasting, a musical performance in which a disc jockey chants over the dub (instrumental) side of a vinyl record. Dub is distinguished by its onomatopoeic drum resonances. Usually dub poets perform social commentaries. Toasting was a main influence on the development of hip hop through the work of Jamaican and other Caribbean immigrants to the U.S in the 1970s.
2. A barracks yard consists of several small houses at the same urban address and is usually occupied by working class people. The barracks yard in *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* is located in Port of Spain, Trinidad.