

Cinema and Cultural Memory in The Bahamas in the 1950s

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Declaration

I declare that I have composed this thesis myself and that it embodies the results of my own research. Where appropriate, I have acknowledged the nature and extent of work carried out in collaboration with others included in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis is a cultural, social and historical research of cinemagoing and the memory of cinema audiences in the city of Nassau, Bahamas in the 1950s. Drawing from the methodological toolkits of New Cinema History and Memory Studies, the research situates oral history narratives within the broader contexts and underlying structures of cinemagoing as a social activity in a particular place and time. It is an exploration of everyday life in this small British colony through the recollections of persons who would have been young adults during the 1950s, at a time when the Bahamas was going through a period of social and political challenges to the status quo in this post war era. This history of the cultural effect of cinemagoing is revealed through the locations of cinemas and cinema space; the positioning of cinemagoing in the leisure activities of the Bahamian youth during that epoch; the influence of racial divides; and the impact and significance of the remembered film texts.

The thesis offers a history of the cinema trade in an island nation, documenting the city's main commercial cinemas, as well as their management and film supply structures. It then aims to understand how the cinemas worked as places within the city, and how they fit into the population's leisure practices. This investigation reveals the profound effect of race relations on the distribution and exhibition of films and the practice of cinemagoing during this selected decade. It offers an audience perspective on segregated and mixed cinema spaces, as well as on the different experiences of the city according to gendered and racial divisions. This thesis thus provides not only cinema history for the designated time period, but it also contributes to the social and cultural history of The Bahamas. Accordingly, it is a memory study that reveals how race, space, location and leisure choice evolved around the memory of cinemagoing in the 1950s in Nassau, Bahamas and the contribution of those remembered experiences to the development of their future lives and the evolved history of a nation.

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Chapter I – Introduction

Throughout my academic studies I garnered and maintained a keen interest in the film medium and its effect on people and consequently, developed a desire to learn more about the social and cultural life of my island home through the lens of cinema-going. My project is a social and cultural historical research on the cinema, which is studying the broader dimension of this medium in everyday life in Nassau, Bahamas in the 1950s. Historical research is conducted with a view to understanding the past, and in the case of my research specifically, how persons living in a particular time and place experienced the cinema and the film texts. Historical research does not, however, only inform of the past; it is also a connection to both the present and future. Our memories critically aid in making sense of and putting some perspective on our present circumstances and way of life. This research is a way of accessing information about the past to create a knowledge base that can inform the ongoing process of cultural development in The Bahamas. Having an awareness of the way persons lived in the past and the types of leisure activities they enjoyed, contributes to the notion of nation building; providing current and future generations some insights into the formulation of their identity as a people. It is, therefore, the intent of this study to initiate a discovery of the history of cinema in The Bahamas by accessing and analysing the cinema and cultural memory of the generation of the 1950s in New Providence, and the influence of the cinema on the lifestyle of that generation.

One of the criteria for courses developed for the curriculum at The University of The Bahamas, the primary tertiary education institution in The Bahamas, is that courses must include a Bahamian component. While there are currently sources that are available and utilized for the teaching of media, communication, film and culture generally, and more particularly from an international perspective, there are very limited published sources that refer to these areas of study in the Bahamian context. This paucity of resource and researched material is one of the driving forces behind this thesis which will contribute positively to the growing historical and cultural discourse and awareness of this developing nation; as well as provide a start for the creation and development of original sources of academic work in this area.

This research is centred around in-depth oral history interviews on cinemagoing in The Bahamas in the 1950s. There are a number of different aspects of social and cultural history that are unearthed in the stories of the oral history interview narrators. Indeed, the oral history interview data collected within the project was extremely rich, and diverse; providing data that can be invaluable for the future development of cinema history, leisure studies, race relations and social and cultural history on The Bahamas. This wealth of information will be significant in future research into cinema-going in The Bahamas, the Caribbean, and other smaller countries and communities worldwide.

Bahamian Historical Information

The Bahamas is a Commonwealth Nation, located just 50 miles off the US Florida coast. On the Southern border of the country is the large island of Cuba, and further south is the island of Hispaniola, an island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The social and cultural fabric of The Bahamas has been subjected to the ‘economic and cultural’ Diaspora of the triangular movement of human and agricultural commodities enforced during the slave trade era (Craton & Saunders, 1992; Craton & Saunders, 1998). These Islands were the first landfall of Christopher Columbus in the ‘new world’ in 1492, and because of their opportunistic placement, their waters have been the conduit for the transshipment of slaves during the African slave Diaspora; rum running during the United States Prohibition; a prime drug transshipment corridor in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Initially the property of Spain, these islands eventually became a member of the British Empire in the seventeenth century and a colony of Great Britain until 1973. Today The Bahamas remains a Member of the British Commonwealth of Nations having attained its independence from Britain in July 1973. Possessing very little agricultural significance to the Empire, The Bahamas was never fully explored or developed as a plantation economy like its neighbours of Haiti, Cuba and Jamaica. It did, however, attract persons in search of religious and political freedom: firstly, from Britain in the 17th century, and the English loyalist escaping the United States during the War of Independence (Craton & Saunders, 1992). The last official census conducted in 2000 put the population of the Bahamas at 306,611 inhabitants. The capital city of Nassau is located on the island of New Providence, one of the smaller inhabited islands in the archipelago. A considerable majority of the population of the country lives on the island of New Providence (over 60%). Since the mid 1900’s the Bahamas has evolved into a major tourist destination. The largest sector of the population (approximately 70%) is employed directly or

indirectly by a sustained tourism sector of the national economy. The second largest economic sector is Banking and financial services, with agricultural and fisheries remaining as an underdeveloped natural resource attracting limited employment (Statistics, 2017).

The Bahamas shares, along with Bermuda and Barbados, the distinction of being among the oldest parliamentary democracy form of government, outside of Britain, in the former British Empire and now British Commonwealth. Their system of governance was modeled on that of their colonizers and comprised of a local representative assembly, sharing authority with a Governor (Albury, 1975, p. 268). Evident by the rather inconsistent and instable presence of accountable and trustworthy imperial leadership within The Bahamas, by the late 1800s, these islands were very much dominated by a small group of white families who wielded control economically and politically (Craton & Saunders, 1998; Albury, 1975; Powles, 1888). This perceived and realized inequity within The Bahamas was representative of the British imperial system which was “not differentiated by form of settlement or trade ...but by the race of the settled inhabitants” (Young, 2001, p. 35). Thus, by 1887, Powles in observing the injustice of “The Truck System” which he equated to modern slavery, and which operated on the rule of the “substitution of payment in kind for payment in cash”; along with other inequitable social and political practices stated, “I unhesitatingly assert that even-handed justice between black and whites is all but unknown in the Bahamas” (Powles, pp. 84-119).

The history of the media in The Bahamas begins with newspapers, which can be traced back to just after the American Revolution, when persons loyal to Britain came to the Bahama Islands and introduced newspapers to ‘the colony’ (Pactor, 1985). In 1930, VIBAX, the first Radio station in the Bahama Islands was started, making the Bahamas the first British colony in the region to introduce radio broadcasting to the English speaking Caribbean (Pactor, 1985). The first sound and colour movie that was screened in the Bahamas was shown in 1930. (Reporter, 1930) In a letter to the Editor of the Tribune newspaper of April 29, 1931 the practice of segregation within the cinema was confronted in an article entitled *Segregation at Fotosho Theatre*. (1931). The Bahamas does not have a film production industry, nonetheless, a number of films have been shot on location within the Islands. In 1954, the film *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* was shot on the island of New Providence, and beginning in 1965 with *Thunderball*, the Bahama Islands became a popular site for several of the James Bond Films.

Period

The decade of the 1950s was a time of transition and change on the small island of New Providence. This post World War II decade brought significant political and social challenges to this fledgling British Colony. The tourism industry began to develop in a more structured manner, and with it came a fair degree of economic growth to the local economy; although most of that growth accrued largely to the benefit of the minority ruling white class with far less trickledown effect to the majority black population. Many of the black Bahamians travelled to the United States to work on 'the Contract', as it was popularly called, which was an agricultural project in the United States designed to build up that industry in America with the aid of imported labour from the Caribbean region, particularly their closest island neighbour, the Bahamas. A great number of Bahamian men and women worked on the Contract throughout the United States; some of them returned, while others decided to remain in America, whether legally or otherwise. The contract permitted a scheme which allowed much of the Bahamian workers' wages to be returned directly to their families in The Bahamas, maintaining the home front and providing a solid savings for the workers upon their return to the islands. Consequently, work on the Contract also exposed many young Bahamians to the way of life in the United States; and those states situated along the Eastern seaboard in particular (Craton & Saunders, 1998).

The political climate within The Bahamas was still set by the white minority class, who controlled the organs of Government through the colonial governor appointed by the British Government. Members of Parliament, who were elected from among informal alliances, were invited by the Governor to assume cabinet and other senior government posts. This changed in 1964 when the first direct constitution of The Bahamas was put into effect by Great Britain, giving the colony limited self-government. During the decade of the Fifties, black activism increased as black persons were becoming more educated and exposed. Political organizations, trade unions, and suffrage movements within the United States, Great Britain and the Caribbean were influencing the politics of the islands. The first political party, the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), was formed in 1953 by a group of coloured men who led a membership of predominantly black persons. The White minority professional and merchant class, which directed and controlled political power for many years, followed suit and officially formed the United Bahamian Party (UBP) in 1956. The various trade unions, in this political jockeying for power and improved

minority worker rights, were represented by the Trade Union Congress, under the leadership of Randol Fawkes, a young black attorney who led the country in the most effective and successful labour strike, in its history, in 1958. The General Strike of 1958, which was supported by the Taxi Union, Airline Workers Union, hotel workers, workers from the Public Board of Works, as well as a boycott of the stores on Bay Street, lasted for several weeks and got the attention of trade unionists and the media in the United States, The United Kingdom, Canada, and the Caribbean; attracting the attention and support of the most influential American civil rights leader of the time, Martin Luther King. As a result of the Strike of 1958 labour reforms were instituted in The Bahamas (Fawkes, 2013) (Saunders, 2016).

The Fifties was a time of uprising, but it still took almost a decade before there would be significant political change. Majority representation of the citizenry was finally achieved in 1967, with the election of the PLP Government, led by a 36-year-old black attorney, Lynden Pindling, who later led the country to independence from Great Britain in 1973.

The Importance of Cinemagoing in the 1950s Nassau

This research provides an opportunity to begin to assess the level of influence cinemagoing had on the Bahamian youth during the decade of the 1950s. During the Post World War II era the island of New Providence was caught in the vortex of change as it was experiencing the impact of technological transformation wrought by the film industry in the United States. The capital of The Bahamas, Nassau was also directly experiencing the exported effects of Southern American culture, whether through the direct contact of contract workers, southern tourists and visitors or exposure through the media.

The film medium was one of the principal conduits of change and globalization during the era of the 1950s. Jeffrey A. Smith refers to a motion picture as a product that combines both forces of industry as well as cultural expectations. (2001) With the start of mass consumption of the television in the 1950s, along with post war population shifts within the United States and the United Kingdom especially, cinemagoing began to see a decline (Geraghty, 2000; Doyle, 2003). The American society, in particular, was rebuilding and rebranding, and the film industry was one that was being used in this reshaping process. The McCarthy led House Un-American Activities Committee's (HAUC) attack on Hollywood which purged it of its more radical actors, writers and directors strongly

influenced the type and content of motion pictures of the era. This blacklisting activity led to the production of films which were considered ‘cheap genre films’, and movies that both Hollywood and the viewing public preferred as neither were “open to films that took formal or intellectual risks” (Quart & Auster, 2011, pp. 41 -57) .

The notion of Hollywood films being a source of cultural imperialism was considered a valid theory in analysing the impact of this American media icon on global cultures by the 1950s. This research determines from the remembered films of the participants, those aspects of films such as the genres and themes, that resonate with them some fifty years later; in so doing, they are identifying forces of the cinema text that in some way influenced their individual and collective identities. It has long been determined that the Hollywood movie industry has had an economic, industrial and cultural sway on trends internationally. The American film distribution policies and practices internationally, post-World War II, were seen as one of the major systems through which the American culture was exported globally (Scott, 2004; Cockburn, 1991). Robert Sklar in writing about *America Selling Movies Overseas* cites a member of the British House of Lords as early as the 1920s complaining “that Midlands factories were forced to alter their design patterns because customers in the Middle East demanded shoes and clothes modelled after those worn by American stars.” Sklar further cited that “Japanese tailors were said to be attending American movies to learn how to cut the styles demanded by their Western-minded patrons; [while in] Brazil the sale of a particular American car model was reported to have gone up 35 percent after it was featured in a newly arrived Hollywood film” (1975, p. 216/17). The vast majority of films distributed and exhibited in Nassau originated in Hollywood, thereby creating a gateway for the importation of the American culture into this island community by way of the films viewed which were predominantly of the Hollywood fare.

Positioning and Theoretical Content of the Study

It is only since the 1970s that a noted interest in the cinema audience and their overall engagement with the film text, and the social and cultural implications of the cinema itself began to attract researcher’s attention (Stacey, 1994; Hansen, 2003; Mulvey, 1989). It is within the sphere of the New Cinema History that an increased research interest, in a more grounded approach to the study of the cinema from the perspective of the audience, began to emerge (Maltby, 2011). Similarly there has been a noteworthy surge of interest in

memory studies over the last thirty years, to the extent that memory has become a very popular interdisciplinary research field. (Radstone, 2008, p. 31) Additionally, as previously stated, there is very little published research, academic or otherwise, on the history of cinema neither in The Bahamas nor, for that matter, on the Caribbean region. Likewise, there is no published works devoted specifically to the cinema as a social institution, the cinema-going experience of the Bahamian audience, or the influence of the cinema and the film text in the national cultural history. (Macedo, 2001)

The sources accessed in this research are from multiple disciplines of very exemplary scholarship; nonetheless, the works of three scholars stand out as being particularly critical in the framing of this thesis: Annette Kuhn, Stuart Hall and Ray Oldenburg. Each of them has elevated my understanding of the pillars upon which my work is supported, and stands. Firstly, in order to achieve the goals of my research project, it was necessary to have a solid research design and methodology that would allow me the procurement of reliable data; and secondly, the necessity of having a research design that had been tested and proven to be rigorous, as well as, capable of allowing me to accomplish the research goals, was likewise imperative. Annette Kuhn's is recognized as being "among the most cited works in New Cinema History..." (Biltereyst, 2019, p. 28) The research design used in her outstanding publication, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* provides a framework that, with some adaptation, suited my research well. The overriding intent of her research was that through gathering the ethnographic materials there would be an:

understanding [of] the meanings of cinema for its users and the place of filmgoing in people's everyday lives; to shed light on the ways in which cinema culture figures in history, society and experience; to revitalise and complicate current thinking about the relationship between cinema and its users, past and present; and, above all, to understand how cinema memory works, both in its own right and as a distinctive expression of cultural memory. (Kuhn, 2002, p. 8)

Kuhn accomplished her research objectives by employing a research design comprised of three inquiries, an ethnographic inquiry, an historical inquiry and a film(s) inquiry. (2002, pp. 240-254) After consulting other similar designs, I determined that with some adaptation, Kuhn's design was best suited to my project, and accordingly, with the necessary adjustments, the process of gathering my data was initiated. A more thorough description of my research design and methodology is undertaken in Chapter three.

Another notable scholarly source is that of Stuart Hall, and his work on cultural identity and race from the perspective of the Diaspora. Understanding of the history and the culture of the Caribbean region is essential to any research in cinema and cultural memory in The Bahamas. The identity of the people and their way of life is central to the major theme of racial segregation that emerged and persisted throughout the project's oral history interviews. As a product of the Caribbean, having been born in Jamaica, Stuart Hall was aware of the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of racial issues in the island communities of this region during the 1950s and beyond. His theory on the context of Diaspora and its influence on the creation of a Caribbean identity are extremely insightful and applicable to the explanation for the formation and ever evolving identity of the people, and the economic and everyday ritualistic practices that significantly define race relations in this region of which The Bahamas is a part. (Hall, 1990; Hall, 1995)

This research has positioned the cinema as one of the most important places of leisure pursuit for the 1950s generation. It is my contention that the cinemas of the 1950s represented what Ray Oldenburg describes as the third place. His theory of the Third Place generally purports that:

The examples set by societies that have solved the problem of place and those set by the small towns and vital neighbourhoods of our past suggest that daily life, in order to be relaxed and fulfilling, must find its balance in three realms of experience. One is domestic, a second is gainful or productive, and the third is inclusively sociable, offering both the basis of community and the celebration of it. (1989, p. 14)

These kinds of places were essential to the life of the individuals as well as the community at large, and the local cinemas in particular, provided this much needed anchor for social life. By expanding on the concept of the Third Place, the characteristics and relevance of the cinemas as that all important socializing space is revealed. In the 1950s, there was an extreme shortage of public social establishments where young, black youth especially, could hang out and relax. The cinemas of the Fifties, to a large extent became a kind of third place. Kuhn, Hall and Oldenburg are only three of the many erudite sources that are provided and discussed in the more detailed Literature Review which follows in Chapter two.

Methodological Approach to the Study

This research uses the cinema as a prism through which the culture of the Fifties' generation is observed. The ethnohistoric strategy of inquiry is a qualitative design in which the participants, who will be referred to as narrators, are both male and female who would have been teenagers or young adults in the decade of the 1950s and residing on the island of New Providence, in The Bahamas. The research methodology is in-depth oral history interviews with a remembered film component, and a secondary source of research from the public archives, and other public records.

The narrator's memories, when transcribed, are accounts of their way of life in New Providence of the 1950s. As they are analyzed in the research process, they provide insight into the leisure activity of cinema going in the past; as well as illuminate a path to understanding the experience today. A central feature of this research is the voices of the oral history narrators. Their stories are the richest threads in this symbolic tapestry, as they are narrated in vibrant and captivating prose, adding bursts of colour in their retelling. The tone of the Bahamian dialect is vital to the discourse of the narrators' memories, providing a gateway to the Bahamian culture in a fashion that would have been lost in a more formal linguistic style. Many of the narrators communicated in the Bahamian dialect at some point in their interviews, some more so than others, and did not attempt to "polish up" their speech by making efforts to speak in perfect Standard English, despite their racial, educational or socio economic backgrounds. Susan Wallace, a Bahamian poet who writes in the Bahamian dialect suggests that, particularly post independence in 1973, the dialect could be viewed as a "form of Bahamian speech in the search by Bahamians for language that adequately expresses their national identity..." (Dahl, 1991, p. 67) Indeed, the dialect was one of the elements of the narratives that uniquely connected the individual narrators with their national heritage, but also emphasized the collective bond that they share as Bahamians. Due to my insider status I could understand the dialect, and as such was better able to create the written transcription of what is essentially a spoken as opposed to written language form. Being aware of the nuances in the dialect also made analysis of the oral history interviews an easier task. As an insider I also spoke in the dialect on occasion, thereby aiding in the creation of a more relaxed and relatable interview environment. The third chapter of this thesis focuses entirely on the research methodology of the project.

Overview of Theme Chapters

The research revealed trends in cinemagoing in the Bahama Islands during the 1950s that are presented and analyzed in the four theme chapters of the thesis. The narrators interviews revealed the aspects of ‘going to the show’ that were more pertinent to them and their way of life during the era being researched. Following are brief summaries of the four chapters which constitute the body of the work.

Chapter IV: The Big Four Cinemas – Ownership, Distribution and Exhibition

Four main cinemas operated in Nassau during the decade of the 1950s; the Savoy Theatre, the Nassau Theatre, the Cinema and the Capitol Theatre. A smaller Meers Theatre was also in operation, but it was further south of the big four cinemas, and catered to a smaller and more regional clientele. Chapter Four’s main objective is to provide insight into the exhibition and distribution systems of film in The Bahamas. In order to explain these systems it was necessary to describe the locations of the four cinemas, a single factor that hugely influenced the cinemagoing choice of the narrators and determined, to some extent, the clientele of the various movie houses. The concept of Over-the-hill was hereby introduced into the narrative, and along with it an understanding of the individual histories of these four cinemas. A story of the Capitol Theatre, the newest of the four, and the only one built in the 1950s and owned by a black businessman, is formed from the narratives of the oral history participants, along with newspaper advertisements and short articles. The story of the Capitol is one that elucidates a system of racial inequality, a predominant political environment and the precipitated collapse of a promising black business venture.

Chapter V: Racial Segregation and the Politics of Space in the Cinemas in Little Nassau

The layout of the land and race relations in the place of the cinemas in ‘Little Nassau’ is discussed in Chapter Five. The role that race played in the history of the one segregated cinema, the Savoy, is analysed from the perspectives of both the black and white narrators. How racial demarcation and discrimination were practiced in New Providence is widely drawn on in this chapter as it speaks broadly to the practice of racial segregation in the British Colonial and American societies, and more specifically to racial segregation in the cinemas of the Fifties.

Chapter VI: Cinema, Leisure and Everyday Life

Unequivocally, cinema-going was one of the most well-liked leisure pursuits of the youth in the 1950s Bahamas, as relayed by the project narrators. This popular activity was only rivaled by dancing and sports such as cricket and basketball. Chapter Six sheds light on the different leisure activities of the narrators from both the gender and race perspectives; as well as it considers the notion of the cinemas, as Oldenburg's Third Place, in a society where cinema-going was viewed as an acceptable socializing activity, and the actual cinema a unifying social space whose only limiting feature was a separation by race.

Chapter VII: "What's Playing at the show?" – The Narrators Remember Films

This thesis could not be complete without the contemplation of the film text. After all, the cinema experience is partial without some type review of the images projected on the silver screen. This final theme chapter focuses on what those films remembered by some of the narrators meant to them at this important stage in their lives. At least one third of the narrators remembered the films for reasons that were personal and relevant to them. Whether it was the genre of the film, the theme song, or the issue of race, the film was retained in their memory for that specific reason over a period of time exceeding fifty years. Academy award winning actor Sidney Poitier and his relevance to the Bahamas as a movie star in the 1950's are also covered in this chapter.

These four chapters all focus on different aspects of the cinema and cinema-going on the island of New Providence during this transitional decade. There is, however, in addition to the aforementioned themes, one persistent subject that emerged throughout the research. The issue of race, in some form or another, was a prevalent theme throughout the interviews, demonstrating ways in which race relations shaped the Bahamian culture, and the everyday lives of the narrators. Moreover, it is proposed that despite the Bahamas' British Colonial origins and heritage, which are themselves established on a foundation of racial bias and stratification, the predominant race issues were due primarily to the influence of the segregated practices within the United States. Accordingly, the issue of race has played a definitive role in the cinema-going experiences and the everyday life of the youth of the 1950s on this island of New Providence, and consequently, it is the consistent 'argument' that permeates this thesis.

Anchored on the works of three scholars; Annette Kuhn, Stuart Hall and Ray Oldenburg but couched in an extended exploration of many other scholars, is a tapestry of literature on the emergence of thoughts and research on the influence of cinema in our lives. Developing research on cinema history, cinema audiences and the film text on memory, culture and related studies, helped to inform and illuminate the shaping of this thesis. Following in Chapter II is a literature review of relevant sources, more thoroughly examined and evaluated for the grounding of this study.

Chapter II – The Literature Review

Introduction

There has been very limited research on mass media within the English-speaking Caribbean to date. With respect to The Bahamas, some research attention was given to the print media when in 1986 Howard Pactor completed a dissertation on ‘communication in The Bahamas’ focusing on the available media connecting the islands of The Bahamas to each other and to the world. His work was mainly an historical survey, in which he chronicled the early development of newspapers and radio broadcasting throughout the archipelago. One of Pactor’s notable observations was that even though early Bahamian media resembled the American form and style, as a British colony, they remained loyal to their colonizers with particular respect to its content and predominant newsworthy content. (Pactor, 1986) Bahamian scholars, Juliette Storr and Yvette Stuart both also focused their doctoral dissertations on broadcasting in The Bahamas. Storr’s dissertation investigated the changes and challenges of the development of broadcasting in the Bahamian Commonwealth nation between 1930 and 1980 (Storr, 2000); whereas Stuart’s was a study on the evolution of broadcasting, with considerable emphasis on the laws and policies within The Bahamas (Stuart, 2003). Both works placed a specific spotlight on ZNS, the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas. With regard to additional information on the history of the cinema in The Bahamas, locally printed booklets and newspaper sources within the national archives are the extent of any available published data on the subject (Archives, 1998).

In her doctoral thesis in Caribbean Studies, Lynne Macedo directed some attention to the history of cinema in the English-speaking Caribbean islands of Trinidad and Jamaica. Her work investigated the relationship between the cinema and what she termed Caribbean imagination, focusing on specific Caribbean novels (Macedo L. , 2001). Macedo admitted that she experienced challenges in acquiring both secondary and primary material, because sources were virtually nonexistent, or else “incomplete, contradictory, and simply unavailable and/or inaccessible.” (Macedo L. , 2001, p. 8/9). An important contribution to the study of cinema generally, is James Burns’ book *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, in which he documents the history of the “movies in

the empire from the inception of the medium in the late 19th century until the beginning of the Second World War” (p. 2).

There has been no Ethnographic research into the social and cultural context of the cinema in The Bahamas or the Caribbean, and certainly no enquiry into the cultural memory of cinemagoing. Aside from the shortage of research specific to the region, there is, nonetheless, significant and relevant literature in film and cinema studies; cultural memory studies; and audience research, which could be applied analogously to the Bahamian context. It is from the literature in these fields that the main themes for the research on cinema and cultural memory will be drawn generally and applied specifically to New Providence in the context of the 1950s in an age of change.

History of the Cinema

The history of the cinema is considered a comparatively ‘young’ history associated with modernity, and urbanization, which dates back to the late 1800s and the invention of the moving pictures and its exhibition to the general public. At its inception, the viewing of a film was not an isolated venture, but rather one partaken in conjunction with other social outings, such as a fair or vaudeville show (Slowik, 2012). The cinemagoer, from the start, experienced the consumption of film as a leisure activity. Not only was cinema a part of modern society, but more specifically urban modern society (Sklar, 1975; Branston, 2000). For the first time in history, the working classes had some non-working time to engage in leisure activities due to a reduction in the working hours, and resources that allowed them access to more leisure undertakings (Branston, 2000, p. 21).

Leisure activities within societies varied, and ranged from entertainment such as live theatre, the circus, vaudeville shows, public talks, and religious gatherings. Such leisure enjoyment also included cinemagoing, which by the early 1900s was considered “part of the city landscape, as brief respite for the labourer on his way home, and as release from household drudgery for women, and as cultural touchstones for immigrants” (Charney & Vanessa, 1995, p. 5). Attending the early cinema had, in many instances, become a part of the everyday reality of the cinemagoer: the cinema was a part of the neighbourhood; and a community *possession*, which was experienced collectively. It was a place that persons generally walked to and was a part of the territory that belonged to their community (Kuhn, 2002). Burns notes that within the first two decades of the 20th

century, the cinema had become the dominant form of entertainment in urban areas in parts of the British Empire, including the Caribbean (2013, p. 19). The cinema was, therefore, not just about the viewing of a film, but it also had far more social and cultural ramifications. Similarly, as the medium evolved and its exhibition was displayed at purpose-built locations, the significance of the activity extended beyond the mere experience of consuming the film text; as persons often went to the cinema or the 'show' on special occasions, such as a date with a significant other (Kuhn, 2002).

The popularity of the film medium is well documented, starting out in Europe, and quickly moving to America to become a profitable entertainment and leisure pursuit worldwide. Despite technical challenges and social concerns, the film industry and activity of cinemagoing successfully evolved through two world wars and extreme censorship, emerging as the most popular mass media for the first half of the 20th Century (Geraghty, 2000; Doyle, 2003).

The commencement of the decline of the cinema industry is largely attributed to the invention of the television and its consumption by the populous in the 1950s. It is widely purported that the subsequent ubiquitous nature of the television did great damage to the public cinema viewing of films (Brooks, 2005; Thumim, 2002; Davis, 2008). While the television was indeed a major factor in the decline of cinemagoing, there were other contributing factors to the decline, such as shifts in the population centres from the inner cities to the suburbs, and the closure of the smaller neighbourhood cinemas (Doyle, 2003; Quart & Auster, 2011). The comparative correspondence of these trends to The Bahamas experience is negligible, if at all, since the urban shifts in the small Island was non-existent and my research indicates that the timeline for the eventual decline of cinemagoing in Nassau came with a much later proliferation of televisions in homes. According to the oral history narrators, the 1950s was a decade in which moviegoing was still a very popular leisure activity and form of entertainment, and its decline would appear to have been, as indicated, decades later.

In a study conducted by Barry Doyle on the geography of cinemagoing in Great Britain, which used statistical data gathered by the UK Board of Trade (returns required under the various Cinematographic Acts), along with advertising data, to assess the reasons for the decline in cinema attendance for a period commencing in the 1930s, a number of interesting observations were made. Conclusions from the study were drawn that painted

a broader and more complex picture of the rationale for the decline of cinemagoing in the UK (2003). The predominance of cinemagoing was affected by such things as the size, form and distribution of cinemas throughout Britain. In regions such as Scotland, where cinema attendance was unabated, cinemagoing as a leisure activity actually boomed. Consequently, the study did not support a general view that the 1950s, as a constant experience, was a complete decade of decline in cinema attendance and Doyle concluded that:

Overall, the early 1950s were remarkably stable compared to the years on either side, for whilst the late 1940s saw attendances fall by 250 million (around 15%), between 1950 and 1954 admissions fell by 120 million (8.6%) – though most of this was in 1950/51, the decline in 1952 – 1954 was less than 3% and attendances actually rose in East Anglia. Moreover, the collapse, when it came, was not regionally uniform, leading to a greater equalisation of cinema attendance across the country (2003, p. 61).

The history of cinema for the most part has concentrated more on the production and consumption aspects of film and theories of authorship. Film studies have focused primarily on the textual analysis and aesthetics of the medium; studying the film from a literary perspective (Allen & Gomery, 1985; Branston, 2000; Bowles, 2011). This necessitated the study of film as art, and creators of films as artists. The meaning of the films was therefore *read* from the viewpoint of the ‘*creator*’ of the film art and projected for the viewing spectator. Despite the commercial success of the Hollywood film, many of these were not considered as part of the canon of films to be studied in academic forums and analysed by students within the academies of learning. For the first half of the 20th Century, film was viewed primarily from that viewpoint. There were studies that looked at films from the perspective of the audience, but they too kept the actual film at the center of enquiries and looked at the audience from the standpoint of the film that they viewed at the cinema.

In their introduction to the book entitled *Hollywood Abroad*, Maltby and Stokes describe it as a book that “explores the reception of Hollywood films by audiences outside the United States” (2004, p. Preface). In this compilation of essays, various authors write on the ways in which audiences in European, Africa, Asia, Australia and Middle Eastern countries receive and consume Hollywood films. The essays are all similar in that they contribute to a history of Hollywood and the significant part it played in ‘the Americanisation of the world’ (Stokes & Maltby, 2004, p. 1). They demonstrate in these

essays how, through the consumption and reception of Hollywood films “Americanisation became both a material reality and a discursive practice” (Stokes & Maltby, 2004, p. 16). This theme is investigated from varied perspectives, such as the sociological analysis of French audiences; British audience reception to the film *Civilization*; the theatre structure and organization, and the value and use of actual programmes to the cinema patrons of Adelaide, South Australia, and the ways in which Indian film and Hollywood films both collaborated and competed with each other for the cinema audiences in India.

Research on the distribution and exhibition of film into the Caribbean region is negligible if at all, with no found record of any research undertaken in The Bahamas for the time period under this consideration. Post World War II saw a tremendous growth in the production of Hollywood films, and the thrust of the distribution of this cultural commodity into the rest of the world. As early as 1944, the US Assistant Secretary of State, A. A. Berle, stated in an official “Circular to All Diplomatic Officers” that “The Department desires to cooperate fully in the protection of the American motion picture industry abroad. It expects in return that the industry will cooperate wholeheartedly with this government with a view to insuring that the pictures distributed abroad will reflect credit on the good name and reputation of this country and institution” (Lee, 2008, p. 379). In fact, the US government strongly advocated the exportation of films into Europe, in particular, to “help bring American ideals into destabilized areas...to fight the spread of communism...” (Lee, 2008, p. 379). There has been considerable debate on the cultural and economic impact of American film distribution and its globalizing effects. More specifically, scholars have assiduously examined the theory of cultural imperialism as it applies to the distribution and exhibition of film worldwide. As a theory, cultural imperialism was first proffered in the 1960’s by scholars such as, Antonio Pasquali, Luis Ramiro Beltran, Fernando Reyes Matta and Mario Kaplun, Herbert Schiller and Dallas Smythe (Roach, 1997, pp. 47-8) in researching the US media influence in Latin America. Schiller articulated a definition for cultural imperialism which he says “is the sum of processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes even bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system” (quoted in Golding and Harris:49; Bi, 2012, p. 44). A major thrust of the cultural imperialism theory is the flow

of information via the media from a dominant culture or country such as the United States or the United Kingdom, into the developing countries of the world. This flow of information and embedded ideology is one-way since the production of the media, both in its software and its hardware, originated in the developed countries and insidiously, culture is negotiated between powerful and subordinate nations. Thereby, it was through the global hegemony of Hollywood, which was a key reason for its continued success, that a subconscious ideology and, a particular form of cinema, emerged in other nations. This subconscious ideology was also interspersed among non-film producing nations affecting the types of film negotiated and viewed in subordinate nations. An example of this was the remit of one American film into the Bahamas, *No Way Out* (starring Bahamian actor Sidney Poitier). This film so engendered the pride of the Bahamian black majority in the 1950s and exposed the bigoted articulated concerns of the ruling white minority at the time that it was exposed to vigorous censoring. This matter is discussed further in chapter VII of this thesis.

The New Cinema History

The mid 1980s saw a new perspective on the study of film which involved an expansion on the way in which the history of film was being recorded. Rather than focusing principally on the film text and the context in which they are seen, this New Cinema History examines the circulation and consumption of the film as well as the social and cultural environment in which the film is viewed (Maltby R. , 2011, p. 3; Velez-Serna, 2012). James Chapman, et. al. suggests three features that should delineate what is called the new 'film' history. They were "a greater level of methodological sophistication which emphasises a more complex relationship between films and social context; research that is source based; and films are cultural artefacts with their own formal properties and aesthetics, including visual style and aural qualities" (Chapman, 2007, pp. 6,7,8). This aspect of the study of film is recent, mainly in the way in which it contrasts with the traditional way that film has been studied. It advocates the significance of understanding that the society and the culture in which these cinemas and their audience reside, become an essential focus; rather than merely being concerned with the production of the film, and the producers of its text, and its aesthetics; or even the study of film as a consumer product and the business associated with the distribution and exhibition of the film. It was determined that there was a need to study the place of the spectator or audience in the cinema experience. The new history of the cinema, therefore, is a history that is

“described as a history from below, which desires to study concrete practices of cinema-going as a way to interrogate the social functions of cinema” (Velez-Serna, 2012, p. 489). New Cinema History concerns itself with the audience from the standpoint of their individual experiences, and the place of the cinema in their everyday existence.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, there have been several notable studies conducted on the reception and consumption of cinema. Some of them are compiled in books such as *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*, and *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*. These texts showcase the work of film and cinema scholars on the activities of cinema audiences around the world. Many of the studies are ethnographic and utilized archival resources. Jancovich, Faire and Stubbings describe their work as “an attempt to move beyond the analysis of how audiences interpret texts and to open up ways of studying film consumption as an activity” (2003, p. 3). They identified what they termed three growing interests in film reception. The first cited interest involved the conception of the audience as a market for the film industry. The second focus they embraced became known as ‘reception studies’, which is concerned with the inter-textual contexts within which the reception of film takes place. The third interest was designated the ethnography of film audiences (Jancovich et al 2003). Their work ranged from studies done on the cultural context and special relationships of the cinema in the United Kingdom: *The Case of Nottingham*, which studied the cultural context of the cinema in that city (Jancovich et al, 2003, pp. 16-33); studies focusing on the closure of cinemas in the 1950s; the impact of television on the cinema; and the effect of modernity on the city community of which the cinema was an essential part (Jancovich et al, 2003, pp. 6-10). The most recent published work in this growing area of research is *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*. This book is comprised of a collection of essays based on research papers presented at two conferences of the History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception (HoMER) held in Glasgow, Scotland and Potsdam, Germany. The sections of the book focus on the challenges and opportunities facing New Cinema History; distribution and trade; exhibition, space and place; programming, popularity and film and audience, reception and cinemagoing experiences (Biltereyst, Maltby & Meers 2019).

This New Cinema History centers on the cultural and social experiences of movie-going as well as the associative components of the audience in film history. The methodologies

involved in the empirical research also allow for a more grounded approach to the research that supports the oral history tradition of data collection. Robert C. Allen suggests a model for the study of cinema history that would involve four key components; the exhibition which 'designates the institutional and economic dimensions of reception'; the audience, which he terms the 'who of reception'; the performance which he describes as the 'immediate social, sensory, performative context of reception, and activation' which he defines as 'denoting how particular audience groups made or do not make sense, relevance, and pleasure out of particular moments of reception' (Allen R. C., 1990). My research with its focus on the bottom up approach to the collection of data in the oral history interviews shines a light on the four key components highlighted by Allen as they relate to the cinema history of the 1950s in The Bahamas.

The Cinema Audience

The varied approaches taken in the study of the cinema audience has differed over time and as Ross suggests, "understanding audience and reception is another area of concern to historians and film scholars alike. On the one hand, it is not enough for scholars simply to deconstruct a film and its meaning and then to assume that audiences at the time of the film's release saw the film in the same way" (2004, p. 131). Research on the reception of film and its subsequent 'effect' on the mass public; have been of interest from the early conception of the medium. In its pioneering era, at the turn of the twentieth century, there was vocal concern over the impact of the cinema on the youth and children, and the necessity to control the potential harmful impact via censorship. In 1914 Emilie Altenloh conducted her seminal research on the film industry in Mannheim, Germany, the aim of which was to "establish the connections between social groupings, entertainment and cultural interests" (2001, p. 249), and by 1929, the Payne Foundation was undertaking extensive research in the United States on the content of movies and the emotional impact of the movies on the behaviour of young people (Blumer, 1933). Censorship regulation and agencies such as the Legion of Decency were making significant inroads into the legislation of censorship practices in the 1930s (Kuhn, 1988; Lamberti, 2012).

The relationship between the cinema audience and the cinema has, historically kept the film and its textual content at the heart of its study, with all other concerns and interests originating and investigated from the viewpoint of the film (Allen & Gomery, 1985). From the 1950s, Paul Lazarsfeld, was calling for a shift in the way cinema audiences were

being analysed. In his article on *The Prognosis for International Communication Research*, he states that “because we were partly influenced by commercial problems, there was a tendency in domestic research, to look at audiences as a rather homogeneous mass and the emphasis, therefore, was on large-scale statistical analysis” (1952, p. 484). Cinema audiences at this time were not considered as individuals who interacted with the film on an individual basis, but rather as a group of spectators viewing or gazing at the film and receiving it from a unified rather than individual perspective. He goes on to make his case for a shift in the existing approach by saying that “we must now explore the sociological characteristics of the audience” (Lazarsfeld P., 1952 p. 485).

In the 1970s a shift in the perspective from which the cinema audience has been studied began to transition when persons such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz began to endorse the study of film from a psychoanalytical perspective (Corrigan & White, 2012, p. 420) (Turner, 2009, p. 147). In his book *The Imaginary Signifier*, Metz elaborates on his rationale behind the theory, highlighting what he termed the “strong perceptual presence” of the film, and its effect on the spectator who in the process of gazing at the screen has “an almost hallucinatory experience” (Corrigan & White, 2012; Metz, 1983).

Spectatorship theory advances the viewing of the film from the standpoint of not just the text, but also provides a place in the analysis of the audiences. Significant researches involving this shift to the audience as spectator were done by feminist scholars in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Laura Mulvey and her ground breaking work in *Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema*; Miriam Hansen’s *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*; and Jackie Stacey’s *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* were all focused on the perspective from which the female was not just projected on the screen, but also how the film was perceived and experienced by their female audiences. Jackie Stacey’s work is an ethnographic study of female spectators in England, and their perceptions of Hollywood stars of the 1940s and 1950s. Stacey’s work on Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship is an engagement of spectatorship, stardom and cultural studies audience reception. In what she terms ‘an historical account of spectatorship’, she uses an ethnographic approach in her methodology (Stacey, 1994). This research allowed for the sharing and historical recording of the memories of her female respondents, by interrogating issues such as the way in which a spectator reads a film is contingent on their historical, cultural and social backgrounds (Stacey, 1994, p.

49). Themes such as nostalgia and identity, as it relates to the female spectator's remembrances of Hollywood stars of their era, are particularly prevalent.

Stacey's research provides an excellent transition into reception studies from a cultural studies viewpoint. Cinema audience reception theory within the field of cultural studies is concerned with actual audiences and their interaction with the cinema experience and the reading of, and response to the actual text. It represents a more complete approach to not just the study of the audience, who are no longer viewed as a passive homogenous group, but rather an individualistic and active group of persons, who energetically participate in the cinema experience (Corrigan & White, 2012, p. 423). What has evolved is a theory that probes the meaning of what the audience derives from the cinema, as well as the meaning they bring to it. It also explores how the cinema impacts on the audiences' behaviour, attitudes and beliefs (Staiger, 2005, p. 2). In reception studies, the cultural identity of the audience is aligned with Stuart Hall's views on how various groups of people will respond to the reading of various texts from their different 'positions of social empowerment'; reviewing the cinema memories of individuals and the influence of the cinema on the culture of a group is an incisive dialogue on cinema, culture and memory.

Memory Studies

In order to properly position any research into cinema and cultural memory, there has to be an understanding of memory and the way in which it factors into the study of the cinema experience and the culture within which the cinema resides. Since the 1980s there has been a surge in memory research across academic disciplines (Radstone S. , 2008, p. 31). Memory studies in the field of film history have become more focal due to a move over the last few years to extend the analysis of film from a textual focus to a more contextual one, as Booker states, "If film history is to engage with ethnographic methods of audience analysis...then memory has to be a central consideration" (Booker & Jermyn, 2003, p. 150). These memories factor significantly in the methodological framework of the research into what Iggers called a "broad, intertextual conception of the interaction between politics, economics and culture..." (Iggers, 1997, p. 16). The research respondent's memories of their cinema experiences shared, recorded and analyzed to give insights into the film text, the cinema experience, and the post cinema experience, are crucial to cinema history (Street, 2000, p. 3).

Robert Stickgold states that "...the construction of meaning...depends critically on the knowledge gained through experience and introspection, such knowledge is stored within the brain as memories" (Nalbantian, 2010, p. 74). It is not essential for the purpose of this research to fully comprehend the brain's complex structure, and the process involved in the encoding, storage and retrieval of information to and in the brain, as this is an extremely detailed and specialized subject, nonetheless, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the basic classifications of memory. There are two types of memory, short-term memory, which is a transitory type memory, and long-term memory, which is said to be more permanent and unchanging (Cermac, 1972; Abrams, 2010). The long term memory is the one with which the research of cinema and cultural memory are most concerned, as it is the memory from which "the retention of facts or events ...can be recalled even though they have not been continually rehearsed since their original presentation" (Cermac, 1972, p. 18). There are various classifications of memory, such as episodic memory, semantic memory, working memory, and non-declarative implicit memory. The episodic memory is long-term memory that is labelled as source memory. The psychologist, Endel Tulvig "defined (it) as the personal memory of events that are consciously and declaratively recollected ...[which] involves the specificity of time and place and is rich in vivid details" (Nalbantian, 2010, p. 11). The long-term autobiographical memories fall under the classification of episodic memories. These types of memories, by the individual, always involve other people. In the field of psychology, autobiographical memory is defined as memory for information related to the self (Brewer, 1983, p. 26). Wang and Brockmeier describe autobiographical memory "as an active construction embedded in a social weave or dialogues that are negotiated not only between an individual and his or her immediate social environment...but also, equally important, between the individual and the larger cultural milieu" (2002, p. 47). These memories are remembered and communicated in narrative accounts which are articulated by the individual and thereby become a part of their social life (2002, p. 34). It is these narratives, Brockmeier suggests, that provide us with the "ability to localize ourselves in time and history..." (2002, p. 28). The portal to memories utilized in the current study is the oral history methodology which is defined as "the act of remembering the past" (Abrams, 2010, p. 3). It is a process whereby an oral product is produced within a safe environment, in which an interviewer becomes the researcher, and an interviewee becomes the narrator. It is through the active process of remembering and the recording

of these memories that a textual narrative is created and subsequently analysed; as Abrams states:

...what starts out as a personal exchange, a private conversation, becomes a public statement or a text ... open to various interpretations and may be transformed into another genre all together such as scholarly article, or a film or theatre performance. (Oral History Theory, 2010, p. 25)

The cinemagoing memories of persons who lived during the 1950s and experienced its culture is the information that underwrites this study, its analysis and an interpretation of cinemagoing in The Bahamas.

The concept of collective memory was first articulated by Maurice Halbwachs in the early 1900s. Considered one of the founding fathers of sociology, Halbwachs' work in the area of collective memory distinguishes him in the field. He believed that memory was not just an individual endeavor, but one that was connected to a group, and "the major appeal of Halbwachs was his clearly sociological understanding of memory against individual psychology and his application of Durkheim's theory of collective representation to the problem of memory at the level of the group..." (Olick, 2008, p. 24). Halbwachs held that it is through the collective memory of the group that the past of a group, society, or nation was reconstructed; and that "every collective memory...requires the support of a group delimited in space and time" (1992, p. 84). The group is necessary for a cultural memory to be conceived, since when people recall their individual memories they do so in accordance with some type of group, such as ones family, social organizations, or institutions. Astrid Erll contends that it is Maurice Halbwachs' study and writing on collective memory which is the foundation of the current memory studies (2008, p. 8). There is a natural and legitimate link between the cultural memory and the collective memory in that the notion of what an individual remembers symbolically becomes the collective and cultural designation, as in the case of the terms "nation's memory" and "a religious community's memory" (Erll, 2008, p. 4).

The flip side of any concept of memory, whether it is individual or collective, is forgetting. Various theories such as Decay, Interference and Gestalt conclude why persons forget. All of these theories suggest that a 'memory trace' is formed whenever an individual learns something, which aids in the retrieval of that information. These memory traces can be blocked for various reasons; and they will fade to some degree, or

completely if it is not reinforced, and brought to the fore of one's memory (Cermac, 1972, pp. 5-10). A vital element in the remembering/forgetting dichotomy is the activity of sharing memories. Stephen Brown states that it is through the 'sharing of memories' that persons remember, and by remembering they connect with their past, and begin to 'form a sense' of who they are, their 'self' (Brown, 2008). The validity of the accuracy of the narrators' memory in the practice of oral history has been contested, albeit, it is not the acquisition of facts that the researcher is intent on securing, but rather it is a quest for meaning. The oral historian is seeking from the narrator where they have been in the past with a view to determine where they are headed (Abrams, 2010). These facts are particularly relevant to the present research as all the oral history narrators were teenagers or young adults during the 1950s, and range in ages from their late 60s to early 90s. Additionally, older persons tend to retrieve their memories of the past in a more tangible manner because of their stage in life, and their willingness to engage with the past. Halbwachs submits that "old people ordinarily are not content to wait passively for memories to revive. They attempt to make them more precise, ask other old people, go through old papers, old letters, above all they tell what they remember..." (1992, p. 48). We remember in the present with diminished details of recalled events, impressions and attached feelings, but what is left is what we call 'memory', and this memory forms part of an enduring legacy of who we are in this present moment.

Cultural Memory

Assmann and Czaplicka define cultural memory as "a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (1995, p. 126). Cultural memory is seen, then, as a way in which people seek to remember their past in order to make sense of it, and in so doing better comprehend who they are in the present; it is a tool in the formation of identity (Erll, 2008, p. 2). Memory, therefore, is a key element in how we identify ourselves as individuals, and also a construct of our collective or communal identity, as Kunow and Raussert observe, "Identity has thus become a key trope for constructions of individual or communal belonging" (2008, p. 8). Stuart Hall in speaking to the notion of identity formation stresses that the search for identity does not end in simply recovering the past. He suggests that one's true identity is discovered in the way in which one locates oneself in the 'narratives' of the past. Hall in considering why the identity of the Caribbean people is so problematic contends that "...

the search for identity always involves a search for origins, [and] it is impossible to locate in the Caribbean an origin for its peoples [since] the indigenous peoples of the area very largely no longer exist, and they ceased to exist very soon after the European encounter...” (Hall, 1995, p. 5). The European colonizers of this ‘new world’ left their indelible mark of their colonial rule and the African slaves, with their particular customs and beliefs. It is therefore, as Hall suggests, that traditions are constantly evolving and the identity of Caribbean people, their cultural practices, how they are represented, indeed their identity is continually being produced...” never complete, always in process...” (Hall, 1990, p. 222; Hall, 1995).

A predominant theme that emerged throughout my project’s oral historical research was race discrimination, and its impact and manifestation in the everyday life of the narrators. In the 1950s race relations in the British colonial empire and the United States was reaching the tipping point, albeit it to varying degrees. Segregated practice disallowed black person’s admittance to some public places, the cinema being one of them. Discriminatory practices based on race were enforced throughout the British Empire, and the United States of America (Njoh, 2008; Melnic, 2015). Research on the practice of racial segregation within cinema spaces in the United States, revealed the institutionalized custom of relegating black persons to balconies and other segregated sections of the theatre that were at a safe distance from the white patrons Gomery (1992; Knight, 2011; Regester, 2005; Stewart, 2005). Whereas, throughout parts of Africa and the Caribbean, there is evidence that in most cases, the entire cinema space would be dedicated to patrons of one particular race, persumably due to the large populations of black and indogeneous persons residing in these places (Burns, 2013). In summarizing what he considered at the heart of Stuart Hall’s contributions to race and culture, Solomons suggests the “notion that race is never purely ideological or cultural but situated in everyday social and economic relations...” (2014, p. 1670) and so did not have some essential general form; it was changing and transformational by historical specificity. In like analysis of Stuart Hall’s version of racism, Razvi implored us not to look at racism as a general form, but rather as ‘racisms’ “...in order to study its particular formations in actual practices in specific sites” (Rizvi, 2015, p. 268). Also inherent in the context of racial segregation is the function of the place and how it is used in conrectizing ones identity and sense of belonging. (Hoelscher, 2003; Oldenburg, 1989). When applied to the routine practice of racial segregation in cinemas, it can be assumed that the decisions to separate the races

transcend the purely ideological and culture notion of race and place, an assumption which I will endeavour to extrapolate in a later chapter.

Assmann and Czaplicka juxtaposed cultural memory to Maurice Halbwach's communicative memory which he "based exclusively on everyday communications..." (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 127). They theorized that cultural memories are not every day memories, but rather they are significant events that occur at specific junctures in one's past that are crystallized over time, and cemented by rituals, observances and textual and material structures, which they call "figures of memory" (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995, p. 129). When collective groups of people engage in the same activity at a regular time and in a specific place, rituals are formed. These 'everyday' activities or rituals can then become traditions, which seal their place in the cultural fabric of a group or nation (Bollmer, 2011, pp. 459-462). Astrid Erll suggested a three-dimensional framework for cultural memory studies in which she described culture as encompassing of social, material and mental aspects of a community (2008, p. 4).

Cinema Memory

Cinema memory facilitates the study of the cinema as a social and cultural institution. It is a way in which a social history of the cinema is accessed via life narratives. Nirmal Puwar suggests that "within cinema studies, there is much work that need to be done on collecting and working with people's accounts of being in and going to the cinema – especially in relation to those periods when it was the key social activity" (Puwar, 2007, p. 258). Cinema memories can inform a social history of the cinema and provide insights into the way in which the cinema influences individuals and the collective community in their everyday lives. David MacDougall states that films, in a rather perplexing way resemble memory as they are able to "register images with lens and emulsion in a process better understood but often no less astonishing than the physiological process of eye and brain" (MacDougall, 1992, p. 29). In so doing, in the re-watching, and repeated watching of film, memories of them and the context in which they are viewed are more readily brought to mind. Through the medium of film, memories of the past are transported into the present. By way of the film text the memory is jogged, and representations of historic and cultural events are shared with the collective (Hedges, 2015). Accordingly, the film text has relevance, but it is not the only element in the cinema experience that requires investigation in order to get a more concise representation of the culture of the cinema.

“Films aside, a cinema culture is in any case shaped by the contexts and the manner in which films are consumed and by the people who consume them” (Kuhn, 2002, p. 2). The film text/context dualism is something that has for some time been overlooked in film studies as well as audience and reception studies. In an introduction to a special issue of the journal *Memory Studies* produced from a selection of articles from two international conferences of the History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception (HoMER), Kuhn, Biltereyest and Meers speak to the role that memory plays in the understanding of the cultural and social contexts of the cinemagoing experience. The authors emphasize the relationship between the historical cinema audience, cinemagoing experiences and how they historically intersect with people’s memories. They also focus on the challenges and opportunities currently relevant to the study of cinema memory placing special emphasis on the methodological issues associated with the conduction of cinema memory studies (Kuhn et al, 2017).

An ethnohistorical approach to the research of the cinema allows for the combined investigation of both the film text and the context of the cinema. A model which incorporates Janet Staiger’s dialectical and ‘context activated approach’ with James Clifford and Clifford Geertz research framework is one proposed by Annette Kuhn. She states that in so doing, the result would be a “nuanced and integrated understanding of how cinema works historically, culturally and experientially...” (2002, p. 7). This is, principally, the model that I have adopted in the current research on cinemagoing in Nassau, Bahamas.

Annette Kuhn has done significant work in the area of cinema memory, and she is the major source from which references to cinema memory in this literature review is drawn. In her journal article *Memory texts and memory work: Performances of memory in and with visual media* she begins by stating that “the ways in which remembering is institutionalized is through cultural means, both by way of objects/material culture; in addition to practices and rituals of commemoration that persons remember from their experiences” (Kuhn, 2010, p. 298). The habitual activity of cinema-going is a way of life of the individual, the family, the community, and ultimately the nation. It is, therefore, through memory work that it is possible to access the experiences of the cinemagoer, and uncover what Kuhn refers to as the ‘themes in their recollections of cinemagoing’ (Kuhn,

2011, p. 86). Paramount in the process of cinema memory work is the memory text which are 'recorded acts of memory'. "The memory text is typically a montage of vignettes, anecdotes, fragments, 'snapshots' and flashes that can generate a feeling of synchrony...In the memory text, events often appear to have been plucked at random from a paradigm of memories and assembled in a mode of narration in which causality is not, if apparent at all, a prominent feature" (Kuhn, 2010, p. 299). Through the act of remembering, the informant is able to share physical, spatial and contextual memories of their past cinemagoing experiences (Kuhn, 2002, p. 17). Kuhn has identified, through her empirical research, three forms or modes of cinema memory which she designated as Type A, Type B and Type C Memories. She explains that these three forms of cinema memory are not distinct, but 'occupy positions along a continuum...' (Kuhn, 2011, p. 87). When persons engage in the *performance of memory*, their memories can be categorized as Type A memories which are Remembered Scenes/Images. Kuhn states that these type of memories, which are described by the informant with "vividness and a visual quality that is almost dreamlike... are obviously still resonant, in all their intensity, in informants' consciousness decades after the event" (Kuhn, 2011, p. 88). The second type of memory identified by Kuhn is the Type B memories which she calls Situated Memories of Films. These are those memories in which "films and scenes or images from films are remembered within a context of events in the subject's own life" (Kuhn, 2011, p. 90). The informant and narrator of the remembered event is the protagonist of their story. The third type of cinema memory identified is the Type C memories, Memories of Cinemagoing. As the name suggests, these are "memories of the activity of going to the cinema" (Kuhn, 2011, p. 93). Whereas, in the previous type of memory, the actual film text, *The Remembered Film*, factored in the memory, in the Type C memory, the informant shares memories of such things as their journey to and from the cinema, the location of the cinema, and the 'social cinema scenes'. Cinema memory is the way in which the cinema and cultural historian can interact with cinemagoers and interrogate their cinema and cultural experiences by way of oral history interview.

Conclusion

There is a clear need to study the cinema's influence as a social institution on the historic development of Bahamian popular culture, from the perspective of the cinemagoing audience of the 1950s. Scholarly research of this nature is rare, and especially so in the Caribbean region where there is no work of note, that can be referred to on cinemagoing,

and certainly no ethnographic inquiry of cinema audiences and cultural memory. A research of this nature involves several areas of inquiry, including: Cinema history; audience reception studies; memory (inclusive of collective memory); cultural memory, and cinema memory. The New Cinema History utilises a grounded research strategy which seeks to interrogate historic participants, and gather data, using qualitative methods to ascertain individual and collective experiences. The study of the cinema audience is also an important component to the research. Over time the significance of the audience has shifted from being minimally consequential to one that factors meaningfully in the consumption, exhibition, cultural and social implications of the cinema and its effect on a national cultural fabric. Memory and the role that oral history theory plays in the accessing and interpretation of memories is central to the topic, and encompasses insights into areas such as autobiographical memory, collective memory, cultural memory, and cinema memory.

A study of the literature reveals that an ethnohistoric research strategy would best suit the work on the topic of *Cinema and Cultural Memory in The Bahamas in the 1950s*. Annette Kuhn's framework which she employed in her research on cinemagoing experiences of persons in the 1930s in the United Kingdom, illuminated the everyday consumption and reception of cinema in the United Kingdom during that decade. Similarly, by using Kuhn's research framework which significantly influenced this current research, and which is detailed in the next chapter; the cinemagoing experiences of the generation of the 1950s in New Providence, Bahamas, can be used to shed light on the significance of the cinema during that epoch; and allow for the culture of the Bahamas to be illuminated through the prism of the cinema in Bahamian history.

Chapter III – Screening Through Their Eyes

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of the methodology for this cultural/oral history research on the cultural memory of cinemagoing of young Bahamians in the 1950s. The project's design is comprised of three inquiries: an oral history inquiry, an archival inquiry and an inquiry of remembered films. The chapter highlights research designs of prior projects as they relate to this current study. The efficacy of the oral history methodology for this project is explained; along with details of the sample population and recruitment strategy. The chapter also provides feedback on the data collection process and analysis of the oral history interviews source data.

While textual interpretation of film is relevant to research on cinema history, more is needed to robustly investigate the social and cultural aspects of the cinema and cinemagoing. A qualitative approach to the research is in keeping with the field of New Cinema History, where people's social and cultural experiences are relayed and analysed (Maltby, 2011; Biltereyst et al, 2012). Where quantitative studies of media focus on the trends and frequencies of consumption, qualitative research focuses on the meaning and description of social and cultural phenomena and is based in the interrogation of individuals who have lived through the events or experiences relevant to the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p8-11). Oral history interviews provide an exemplary method to explore the memories of individuals, combined with those of their contemporaries, to create a collective narrative about the experiences of cinema-goers in The Bahamas during the 1950s.

The data gathering tool used in the oral history inquiry is based on semi-structured interviews with senior members of the Bahamian community; archival research and secondary data based on books, magazines and newspapers published on The Bahamas; and the inquiry of remembered films based on selective analysis of film texts mentioned in the oral history interviews.

The philosophical worldview that informs the research is constructivism, which has a focus on the ‘construction and reconstruction’ of culture (Bryman, 2012; Becker, 1982). There are several reasons why this paradigm is suited to the research. First, ontologically, it is relativist; its epistemology is transactional and subjectivist in that it is “based on assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the research participants and, correspondingly, assumptions about how research should proceed” (Leavy, 2011, p. 4). Constructivist research is qualitative and endeavours to construct the social and historical meaning of life from numerous participants’ viewpoints (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). The research methodology provides a framework for the collection of data in collaboration with the projects research narrators, and the constructive analysis of the backdrop of the historic, cultural and political epicentre of Bahamian society in the 1950s. It also facilitates the development of theory which is generated inductively from the interpreted data.

Overview of Research Projects and their Strategies

Over the past few years several research projects on cinema-going, focusing on the social and cultural dynamic of the cinema, have been undertaken in the field of New Cinema History (Biltereyst et al 2012; Maltby, 2011). These projects employed several research designs that aim to gather data on a participant’s views and experiences using various techniques such as interviews, questionnaires and focus groups.

My research was largely guided by an Ethnohistoric research project on cinema culture in 1930s Britain conducted by Annette Kuhn. This study is one of the most influential historical studies of cinema audiences, and subsequently, all of the research projects mentioned below reference her work. Kuhn’s research was ground-breaking, and rigorous in its design and conduction. In describing her work she defines Ethnohistory as a “distinct field of inquiry” that emerged in the 1940s, for the study of non-literate cultures. She further states that as an area of study, it had “been neglected not only by cultural anthropology, which tends not to concern itself with history, but because of the absence of written records in these cultures, by historians as well.” She continues to explain that two “features of Ethnohistory which are of greatest relevance to an historical study of film reception and consumption are, firstly, the use of oral accounts as a research resource and, secondly, the deployment of sources and research protocols of several different kinds” (Kuhn, 2002, p. 6 & 7).

Kuhn's project's framework utilizes three fields of inquiry, an ethnographic inquiry, an historical inquiry, and a film inquiry. The ethnographic inquiry involved interviews, questionnaires, and other materials generated by her research participants; the historical inquiry was done on primary published and unpublished documents including information on the local cinemas being researched; and, the film inquiry was an analysis of feature films from historical sourced materials and participant generated films (Kuhn, 2002). The study of Bahamian cinema audiences is therefore heavily influenced by Kuhn's research framework. It not only informs the discovery of what the social and cultural memory of cinemagoing is for the Bahamian young adults of the 1950s, but also provides a method to incorporate analysis of the film text into the research. By combining the historical analysis of cinemagoing with the study of the film text, Kuhn achieved what she terms "the precepts of methodological triangulation, whereby more than one method is brought to bear on a single research problem" (Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 2002, p. 7). This flexibility in her research framework enables the historical, social and cultural contexts of both the participants or audiences and the film text to be investigated within a single research study. There are variations, nonetheless, in the two designs. This project's first inquiry is an oral history inquiry, whereas Kuhn's is an ethnographic one. Additionally, the Bahamian study has been expanded to include not only films, but serials viewed by the participants as well.

Particularly influential in developing a methodological approach to New Cinema History is Meers (2010) '*The Enlightened City Project*' which focused on film exhibition and consumption in Flanders, Belgium. Meers research design conjoins the production, text and audience of the cinema in the metropolitan and rural areas in Flanders between 1925 and 1975. The researchers include analysis of the geographical distribution of the cinemas; diachronic institutional analysis on the film exhibition and programming of cinemas; and an oral history project on cinemagoing and leisure. The researchers used semi-structured interviews and case studies on film exhibition and programming to help explain the specific spatial dynamics of cinemagoing in the region (Meers, 2010). The three-part approach is a design layered structural analysis of the exhibition scene, the supply of movies and oral history interviews of different generations of Belgian audience members. Meers research methods blended aspects of political economy and socio-geography, with programming analysis, cultural ethnography studies of Flanders people. The mixed-methods approach to the project using in-depth interviews, focus groups and

questionnaires, analysis of films, genres and stars, box office figures, the popular press, and other historical documents provided a rich tapestry of historical information about the specific nature of Flanders cinema and cinema experiences (Biltereyst, et al 2012).

A similar approach to using mixed-methods to understand the history of cinemagoing in Italy was produced by Treveri-Gennari, et. al in their study '*In search of Italian Cinema Audiences in the 1940s and 1950s: Gender, genre and national identity*'. The authors aim was to "re-evaluate the popular reception of film by engaging with cinemagoing memories through oral history and archival research" (Treveri-Gennari, 2011, p. 541). The video taped oral history interviews are at the core of the project. This research was designed using the model of Barker and Mathijs' 2008 study involving four stages of audience questionnaire: In-depth video-interviews; data analysis; and triangulation of different data sources (Barker & Mathijs, 2008). This study also included a pilot study in which twenty persons from Rome and its environs were interviewed. I seriously considered the mixed method model of this research, and particularly its quantitative questionnaire administered to 1000 persons. While this method of data collection could prove extremely beneficial to my project, even using a smaller sample, I foresaw challenges in locating sufficient persons in my participant target group to undertake this method of inquiry. I did, however, adopt the research component of a pilot study, which was instructive in refining the scope of my interview questions and technique.

Although there has not been any previous study of Bahamian cinema audiences, there do exist some important oral histories of Bahamian society and culture. Tracey Thompson's (2012) interest in the voices and memories of the older generation is a significant oral history project on the experiences of Bahamians who travelled to the United States between 1943 and 1965 to work on a farm labour programme. The oral history project, conducted in the early 1990s, involved interviews with former Contract workers (Thompson T. L, 2012). The Contract oral history research engaged persons who were by the time of the interviews considered elderly. Through oral history interviews these former Contract workers shared their experiences of working and living outside of The Bahamas for their livelihood and that of their families. This project became a national success, and contributed greatly to educating Bahamians on the valuable information available to a wider audience through the sharing of experiences of an older generation garnered from their memories collected in oral history interviews. Thompson's work

validates the importance of oral history interview techniques to capture the memories and experiences of particular generations of Bahamians during the post-war period. This research on cinema-going during the same period further enhances the knowledge and understanding of this generation's social and cultural lives.

The Oral History Inquiry

My father was a movie buff. He would talk endlessly about old films, of every genre from Western to Film Noir and Comedy. He would speak about actors and actresses as though he knew them personally and could with amazing accuracy delineate their accomplishments, awards, achievements and accolades. Doubtless, my father was the muse that inspired my love for movies and the cinema. My father passed away before I could get a recorded dialogue of his cinemagoing experiences of the 1950s, when he was a young adult living in Nassau. I was, however, able to interview persons from his generation, and a few of his friends and acquaintances. Their stories were the ones that I had a chance to hear, to record, and analyze in order to investigate cinemagoing in Nassau, Bahamas in the 1950s. In the process of listening to the narrator's stories, and transcribing them, I realised that this is a record of who they are relived through the sharing of their memories of their cinemagoing experiences as young adults. As I returned their transcripts to them, and saw the look of satisfaction on their faces, and heard the delight in their voices, I understood more the power of these narratives. For the narrators and their families these oral history interviews could be considered unique and valuable. For the collective society and the nation, they shed light on the Bahamian culture, its way of life. These memories shared by the research narrators are as Lynn Abrams states "not an abstract concept but a practical and active process of reconstruction whereby traces of the past are placed in conjunction with one another to tell a story" (Abrams, 2016, p. 8).

As a research method, oral history is first cited in the nineteenth and early twentieth century when social investigators used letters, diaries, photographs and life histories as evidence in their writings (Bornat, 2001, p. 222). The most significant reasons for using an oral history methodology are that it "provides sources beyond the traditional kinds of information found in books, articles, and primary sources [and] ...it illuminates environments, perceptions, and feelings of individuals able to paint verbal pictures of all sorts of experiences..." (Deblasio et al, 2009, p. 21). Furthermore, while writing on the subject of theory, method and technique in Caribbean Social History, B.W. Higman

points out that ...”social history always depends on establishing the links between particular “social” groups, institutions and activities...”; and he suggests that oral history and the study of material culture is one of the most important innovative research techniques that can be used in the region of the Caribbean, of which The Bahamas is a part (Higman, 1985, p. 3). This project and indeed my principal research methods are foundational on the use of oral history interviews to form the principal data base for my thesis.

In his essay *The voice of the past, Oral History*, Paul Thompson states that “oral history is a history built around people” (Thompson, 1998, p. 28). Oral history projects, however, not only benefit the people who are recipients of the stories related in the process, but it can be extremely beneficial to the narrators themselves. In an article appearing in *Geriatric Nursing*, the author stated that through the process of an oral history projects with older persons on World War II and life in the 1940s, the participants reminiscence was stimulated, there was a reduction in depression, their ego integrity was enhanced, and all in all they had greater life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing (Taft et al, 2004). Oral history is the research method used in two of the previously cited researches, and the one that I have determined is best suited to the objects of the project.

How a person remembers ‘his-story’ is cause for speculation, particularly to the traditional or classical historian, many of whom “...assumed, or indeed firmly believed, that documentary sources were the only valid sources of evidence about the past” (Deacon et al, 2007, pp. 294-5). Despite this dubious posture associated with oral history, the methodology, nonetheless, became ‘vogue’ again in the 1960’s in the United States largely, where it has steadily grown in popularity as a research methodology; even though, the validation of data associated with the oral history research technique is potentially problematic with its strong reliance on memory since the process of remembering is “...an activity that for most people is at best patchy and is always interpreted through a particular point of view” (Haynes, 2013, p. 159). This notion of the fallibility of memory is prima facie warranted, since it is known that memories can be discriminating and influenced by post events experiences. The participant in an oral history interview is not, however, called on to produce factual evidence that is better acquired from an empirical and positivistic study. The role of remembering in oral history is that it provides a process by

which the participant can recall and reconstruct their past in order to provide a representation of their 'historical' experiences (Dhoest, 2015, p. 69).

The element of subjectivity in an oral history interview is extremely valuable to the research findings in that it allows one, as Paul Thompson states, to “unpick the layers of memory, dig back into the darkness, hoping to reach the hidden truth” (Thompson, 2000, p. 173). The ability to be subjective within the field of historical research is unique to oral history because the sources are living, and present, and as such can respond to stimuli that helps to generate insights into the issue under study. This can be seen in a positive light when viewed from the perspective of Ben Jones who refers to subjectivity as “how an individual perceives themselves in relation to others” and “the oral history interview [as] one arena in which people may attempt to make sense of their experience and achieve composure” (Jones, 2004, p. 1 & 2). The oral history interview provided an environment in which the narrators talked openly from a position of shared authority with me, and thereby the subjective stance is interpreted as an aid which helped the interview narrators to “remember, recall, restory, and retell their story” (Leavy, 2011, p. 16). As a research interviewer, it is important to be cognizant of the subjectivity of the interview narrator's memory so as not to fall under what is termed ‘the eyewitness's spell’ or regarding “personal testimonies as a sort of ‘truest story’ whose verity rests upon lived experience...” (Bonomo, 2013, p. 12). I also strongly regard a subjective inquiry of the participants input as a more engaging aspect of the researcher's qualitative probe. My research looks closely at the ‘self’ in the research narrator's memory recall of the cinemagoing experience and how individuals saw themselves in the larger social groups and larger institutional environments of the period. As Portelli explains, “Autobiographical discourse,...is always about the construction and expression of one's own subjectivity. To ignore and excise subjectivity, as if it were only a noxious interference in the pure data, is ultimately to distort and falsify the nature of the data themselves’ (Portelli, 1997, p. 80).

Oral history interviews can also be a reflective process during which the interviewer has cause to consider their role as the researcher, and what they bring to the situation as the interviewer. This reflective process can be engaged by maintaining an awareness of ‘self’, and feelings about the information being shared, personal experiences and shared knowledge, while sustaining a respectful, objective and open minded interaction with the

interview participant. The interview, in this way, becomes a genuine exchange of ‘selves’. This is not necessarily an easy process to undertake, but is necessary and characteristic of oral history interviews to be knowledgeable of my research potential and sample population; and the need to avoid making pre-data assumptions (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59). This shared experience adds to the qualitative enquiry and becomes part and parcel of the research outcome in a way that cannot be elucidated in an objective driven quantitative questionnaire.

In exploring the subject of how cinema memory works in the process of oral history, I take into account the very nature of cinema memory, by examining how it “works both as a kind of cultural experience and as a form of discourse” (Kuhn A. 2011, p. 85). Kuhn’s model, which identifies three types of cinema memories, is proffered as a process by which the reminiscence of cinemagoers can be examined and analysed. This cinema memory work provides a method of integrating the private memories of the individual participants into a collective reverie of the larger community and a cultural memory.

Specific details of the actual recruitment and conduction of the oral history interviews, along with their analysis are provided future on in this chapter.

Archival Inquiry

The archival inquiry of the research enhances the veracity and credibility of the study via the analysis and interpretation of records and accounts of the cinematic and cultural activity in The Bahamas in the 1950s. Two newspapers were circulating in New Providence during the 1950s, and remain in circulation today. The Nassau Guardian was established in 1844, and The Nassau Daily Tribune, which later became The Tribune in 1903. Two magazines were also sources in the archival inquiry, The Bahamas Islander Magazine and the Nassau Magazine. Another archival source is the annual Bahama Handbook, which was first published in 1926. Additional reference sources include government agencies, such as the Department of Statistics, Lands and Surveys, the Historical Society, the Record of Members (of the Bahamas House of Assembly), the Company Registry of The Bahamas, and the Special Collections of the University of The Bahamas.

An exhaustive search of the content of both The Bahamas Islander and Nassau Magazine revealed mainly advertisements for local businesses, standard columns on local events,

activities and people, and at least one major feature article in each issue of the magazine. There were no articles or advertisements on any of the local cinemas, but a few articles on films that were shot in The Bahamas during the 1950s, mostly featured the underwater activities and marine life of the islands. Another feature, popular at that time, were stories about the film stars, some of whom visited New Providence.

The search of the two daily newspapers, *The Tribune* and *The Guardian* unearthed a few articles from the 1930s on the Savoy and the Nassau Theatres as relates to their both being burned down and rebuilt, and the practice of racial segregation at a theatre called the Fotosho. Additionally, there was one significant article highlighting the opening of The Capitol Theatre, occasional paragraphs summarizing some of the more popular upcoming films, and several times a week throughout the fifties, the local cinema owners advertised the films that were being screened at their theatres. At the start of 1950, only one cinema, The Rainbow Garden Theatre, was being featured, and when The Capitol opened in August the owner placed large advertisements in the *Tribune* to promote it. By 1952, The Capitol, The Cinema, The Savoy and The Nassau Theatre, and the Meers Theatre were all being advertised in the local newspaper.

Inquiry of Remembered Films

The third inquiry in the research design involves a study of the film text. This section of the research explains the methods employed in viewing and analyzing film texts. The relevance of the film text to this research is that it demonstrates the value and significance of the film text to the research narrators, how it might have informed their norms and values, their perceptions of the world and their own self-worth, and how it resonated with the collective sensitivities of a community of teenagers and young adults in New Providence in the 1950s. In articulating the aim of her research of cinemagoing in 1930s England and Scotland, Annette Kuhn points out that “in the quest to transcend the text-context dualism, it will aim for inclusivity, bringing together issues around film texts and spectatorial engagements with questions relating to the social audience and the context of reception” (Kuhn, 2002, p. 7). The film inquiry seeks to answer the question of why these films, serials, genres and stars were remembered by the participants, and what they found so meaningful about them.

In discussing the New Film History, James Chapman states that it combines both the textual and contextual analysis of film to provide a more complete approach to the study of the film text. Chapman identifies three distinguishing characteristics of the New Film History that are of particular relevance to this section of my methodology. He first suggests that there is a “greater level of methodological sophistication” involved in the study of film, and “recognizes that the production and reception of films are historically specific and seeks out evidence of actual responses rather than assuming a homogeneous audience” (2011, p. 5 & 6). The second characteristic is the acknowledgement of the films themselves as primary sources in addition to non-filmic sources like, personal papers, publicity materials, box-office receipts, and such. The third characteristic is “its cultural competence in reading films through both their narrative content and their visual style” (Chapman, 2011, p. 6). The film text is indeed a pivotal element in my research and those films identified by narrators will be assessed for the purposes of categorizing, interpreting and evaluating them based on their value to the narrator, and their quality as cinematic productions (Johnson, 2007, pp. 59-60).

Considering the socially historic nature of the project, it is essential to bear in mind certain questions asked by historians in their use of film text as a research source. Questions involve the provenance of the text: who made it and who saw it; under what circumstances was it made, and with what intention; how widely it was disseminated; and what effects or consequences might it have had. It is further noted that the answers to these questions can rarely be ascertained from the actual film text (Chapman, 2011, p. 12 & 13). Thus, it is necessary to use supplementary sources to secure this information: The narrators’ responses to the film texts, as well as newspapers and film industry publications and websites; along with governmental and private records of the cinemas under research; as well as reviews of the film text from that era, constitute some of the supplementary sources that assist in the analysis of the film text.

One of the common themes that presented in the oral history interviews was that the film text was a factor in their decision to attend a particular film. To this end, assessing the context of the film text viewed by the research narrators with a view to determining the gratification that they received from the films and series that they remembered is the primary objective of the film text inquiry of the research. Some of the narrators shared their reasons for remembering particular film text viewed in the 1950s; some stated that

the film gave them a feeling of excitement, something that was not experienced in their everyday lives. Others said that the films provided them with insights into biblical and historical texts that they later read and understood more clearly because they had seen the film. The rationale for their recollections of the serials, on the other hand, was based on the cliff hangers which would bring them back to the theatre on a weekly basis to find out what happened next.

The film text analysis is conducted on films and serials identified by narrators during the oral history interviews. Unlike Annette Kuhn's research *Film Inquiry*, this research does not include selected films that were popular in The Bahamas in the 1950s, nonetheless, the method employed to select the respondent films in Kuhn's study is adopted in this project's research of film texts. To this end, only those films and serials that the research narrators attested to seeing at the cinemas in the 1950s, and identified by name, and/or described in some detail are included in the study. Some of the titles of films and serials generated from the narrators during their interviews are: *The Robe*, *Three Coins in the Fountain*, *Gone With the Wind*, *Superman*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Tarzan*. A complete listing of the Narrators films and serials can be viewed in the attached Filmography.

The term textual analysis is defined as 'the systematic activity of breaking a film down into its constituent formal elements, especially those of narrative and style; today the term is commonly used in a looser reference to any more-or-less detailed breakdown or close reading of a film' (Kuhn, 2012). The process of conducting analysis of the film text involves studying the context, themes, narrative and style of each of the texts that the narrator identified. Jeffrey Geiger and Rutsky suggest that analysis start with answering the question "What is the film about?" They further suggest focusing on "the film's latent meanings; the main ideas, and issues or themes with which it is concerned at an implicit level" (Geiger & Rutsky, 2005, p. 34). The films and serials relevant for my study are analysed by assessing the significance of the cultural, social and historical context of the films to the narrators; the major themes mentioned by the narrators from their remembered viewings, and how they emerge from the film texts; the narrative which reveals beliefs and ideas portrayed in the characters and their challenges and conflicts relating them to those of the participants; and the element of style of the film texts to assess how these techniques affected the participants as the cinema audience.

Description of the Project Sample Population and Recruitment Strategy

The research population for the study in The Bahamas is a purposive, non-random sample recruited from a specific group of persons who would have been teenagers or young adults during the specified decade. This type of sample method is "... not determined by chance ... and stress the intentions of those who apply the procedures" (Deacon et al, 2007, p. 52; Gilbert, 2008, pp. 511-2; Bertrand, 2005, p. 142). My sample comprises of a mix of both men and women, black and white participants from varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds. When determining the number of participants for a sample, it is generally suggested that the sample size be decided when the research has attained its point of saturation, or the information being provided becomes duplicitous (Deacon et al, 2007, p. 45). Kvale, however, suggests that fifteen persons, plus or minus 10 would be an acceptable standard number of interviews in a qualitative study (Kvale, 1996, p. 102). Accordingly, the research sample comprises of twenty-seven persons between the ages of seventy-two and ninety-five. These persons represent that group of cinemagoers who would have been teenagers or young adults during the 1950s. Both the mean and median age of the group of participants is eighty-one. The sample is virtually evenly represented by male and female participants. Fourteen men participated in the research and constitute 52% of the sample population; thirteen women participated and constitute 48% of the sample population. Black and white Bahamians of both sexes take part in the research. There are ten black men, 71% of the male research population, and four white men, 29% of the male research population. Eleven black women are participants in the study, representing 85% of the female research population, and two white women amounting to 15% of the female research population. In total, twenty-one black participants, 78%, and six white participants, 22%, constitute the sample population of my research study (inclusive of the two participants of the pilot study). Brief biographical information for each participant is provided in Appendix A. Twenty-three of the research participants interviewed individually, and four interviewed as two couples. The average running time for the interviews was thirty-four minutes. The longest interview ran for an hour and forty-seven minutes, and the shortest running time was nine minutes and twenty-five seconds.

The Recruitment Process

The appropriate approach to accessing narrators, the term that will be used when referring to the oral history interviewees in this research, requires a well thought out plan of discovery, approach and recruitment within the sample population of the study objects. Accordingly, properly accessing potential narrators is a critical element in the research process (Flick, 2009, p. 106). Gubrium and Hoslstein state that “where there are no formal service involvements; the interviewer may approach older persons directly” (2001, p. 262). This direct approach can come in the form of a ‘cold contact’ with a person in the street or supermarket; those made through social or religious activities and organizations; or visiting the home of someone from your sample population in order to solicit an interview (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 273).

The wider population of this research sample is selected from a cohort of persons of a quickly diminishing generation, who are part of a relatively small island community, and who would be suitable recruits because they resided in New Providence during the 1950s. The early identification of suitable participants was made through local contacts that were connected with senior citizens in their professional and private lives, including their relatives and acquaintances. This effort generated an initial list of potential interviewees; however, additional recruitment strategies were needed to meet the sample target. All of the preliminary brainstorming was conducted from outside New Providence, but upon returning to Nassau and meeting with persons face to face, the recruitment exercise became more productive. Talks with friends and family members who were involved in community organizations, churches and other service groups, and whose work involved direct or indirect contact with persons within the potential target group produced additional contacts. This started a network of persons who were interested to learn more about the research, and open a wider avenue of contacts with possible narrators. One friend suggested her father; another recommended a lady from her church, a relative mentioned her neighbours, while another recommended a woman from her senior citizen’s exercise group. This strategy was successful in increasing the list of potential narrators, however, an important subgroup from the intended target sample remained stagnant.

The white Bahamians among the sample generation proved a challenging group to recruit. During the pilot study, a white Bahamian minister initially expressed an interest in

participating in the study. Contacting this minister began the effort to recruit participants from within the white Bahamian community. The minister, however, did not respond to follow-up efforts, thereby necessitating the exploration of other avenues for the recruitment of this subgroup. Remembering a white Bahamian family friend provided a fresh in-road into that target community. After explaining the project to him he agreed to help find white Bahamians who met the sample criteria and would be willing to take part in the study. Within a relatively short time five white Bahamians from those who were contacted, agreed to be interviewed. Due to his insider status, my friend had easier access to this sub-group, and disarmed the potential challenges that were encountered by an outsider (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58).

Another way to access narrators is through a snowball process whereby persons already identified as narrators in the research have and will in all likelihood recommend others who are suitable for the sample population (Deacon et al, 2007, p. 54; Bertrand, 2005, p. 142). The snowball process is in many instances the first one that will be employed along with the researcher's own 'word-of-mouth' in announcing their project "...to nearly everyone [they] meet – conferees, salesclerks, travel acquaintances, and so on..." (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 98). Two narrators were particularly helpful in providing contacts of persons whom they thought would be suitable narrators for my research. One such narrator was a fellow church member who willingly accepted the invitation to be interviewed, seeing it as not just an opportunity to share her memories of cinemagoing, but also a chance for us to spend some quality time. After we had completed her interview, she suggested a friend who loved the movies even more than she did. Following an introduction, her friend also agreed to participate in the project. The second narrator who assisted in the recruitment efforts was a white Bahamian. In recalling the name of the family that owned the cinemas operating in Nassau in the 1950s, he told me about a niece of that family who might agree to an interview. I contacted the referred lady at her family business, and she was delighted to give an interview.

An example of a narrator referral recruitment technique used in the study was demonstrated by a contact involved in a senior citizen's exercise group. One of my friends introduced me to a woman from the group, and she agreed to be interviewed. My friend and the newly recruited interviewee suggested that we attend the exercise group together, and bring my mother along, as a way to meet more persons of the target

population. We attended the group on several occasions, and the strategy yielded a few more interviews, including one of the two couples that interviewed, as a couple in the project.

Most of the narrators were easily convinced to take part in the research after the purpose of the study was explained; however, in the recruitment of the final interview couple a little more persuasion was required. I was determined to interview this couple because of their unique and peculiar qualities as potential research narrators. The husband, a white Bahamian, has extensive experience of working in cinemas in New Providence, and has worked in all four of the cinemas that are specifically studied in this project. Furthermore, his wife, a woman of mixed race, had indicated during the recruitment dialogue that she attended The Savoy when segregation had excluded non-white Bahamians to that cinema. It took an effort to recruit their participation, but after several phone calls, turning up to their home for a scheduled interview that the husband had forgotten, and numerous other follow up efforts, the interview was finally secured, they became the second narrators in the research to be interviewed as a couple.

Other recruitment strategies suggested by Uwe Flick are advertising in newspapers, announcements in radio programs, or to post notices in institutions that your target sample might frequent (Flick, 2009, p. 110). These strategies were not implemented for two basic reasons: Firstly, they would involve financial outlays that are not necessary to meet the recruitment goals of this research project, given the relatively small sample size, and the small community from which the sample is drawn; and secondly, the direct approach is preferred when recruiting narrators for a qualitative research, and encouraged because "...the potential interviewee can see the interviewer and form an impression of him or her...[and]...it is harder to reject someone face-to-face than to decline an invitation by letter or to hang up the telephone" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 265).

Having identified potential narrators using the varied strategies of recruitment, the suggestions of Bonnie Brennen were adapted to some extent to assist in establishing rapport with the narrators (Brennen, 2012, p. 127). The details of the project were given to all the narrators orally, in person, or via the telephone. During that conversation an interview was set up for a date, time and place convenient to them. In the research letter the narrators were all thanked for their willingness to take part in the study, and the letter explained how the interview process contributed to the research. This was generally a

straightforward exercise; however, some narrators required more discussion and clarification about the project and the consent form. Ultimately, all of the narrators signed the forms giving their consent to be interviewed.

Ethical Considerations

Ensuring high standards of ethics within the research project is not only necessary, but an absolute precondition and requirement. Particularly important are such things as the benefits of the study; concerns about the narrators being cognizant of their rights and providing consent based on their knowledge about the project prior to their agreeing to participate; as well as protecting and safeguarding the information shared by ensuring confidentiality; and an awareness of any consequences to the narrators as a result of their taking part in the study (Kvale, 1996, pp. 119-120). The rigorous process involved in acquiring ethical approval for a research project, at the University of Stirling was undertaken prior to my embarking on the pilot study. Ethical approval was granted by the School Research Ethics Committee based on assurances of the approved process of acquiring, storage and retrieval of the collected data, along with the requirement to obtain the informed consent of the narrators.

The University of Strathclyde Oral History Training Manual provided additional guidance in the ethical considerations for the project. The section on *Consent, Copyright & Ethics* was especially useful in recommending that researchers conducting oral history become aware of the legal and ethical framework of oral history interviewing in particular, so as to ensure the integrity of the research project. Following their directives, the informed consent form was produced, and each narrator was required to complete and sign the form before commencing with the interview. A sample of the form is appended in that section of the thesis (Appendix B).

As a result of the privacy clause in the consent form, the identity of the narrators cannot be revealed in the thesis. While this is not a common practice for Oral History Interviews, it is necessary for my research project. Recruiting some narrators was challenging, and in order to conduct interviews, they had to be assured that their identity would not be revealed. To this end, the narrator's real names will not appear in the thesis. They will, instead be assigned first names only when identifying their contributions from the

interviews. *A Dictionary of First Names* was used as the resource from which the narrator's pseudonyms were selected (Hanks et al, 2016).

The Pilot Study

A pilot study is designed to pre-test the data collection process to determine whether the collection process needs adjustments to better or more easily meet the study goals. The pilot study provided the opportunity to actually practice the research methodology in the field, (Denscombe, 2014, p. 165) and solve problems that might not have been apparent prior to conducting a pilot study. As a novice researcher, the pilot study was an educating process, providing guidance into the practicalities of conducting an interview, and testing the range of the interview questions (Kim, 2010, pp. 191-193). It was also effective in the development of themes for the thesis chapters (Rubin, 2005, pp. 52 -62).

The challenges of interviewing were quickly realized, challenges that made me easily relate to Sherna Berger Gluck and Alexander Freund who, when asked to recall their first oral history interviews, stated that “their memories of them are vivid, evoking anxiety, awe, and confusion” (Sheftel, 2013, p. 2). Interview techniques are straightforward in theory but after actually conducting the pilot interviews, I realized that the process of qualitative interviewing is not as simple an exercise as previously imagined. Considerations about the structure of the interview, the wording and scope of the research questions, and the interaction between narrator and interviewer, are some of the variables that were addressed as a result of conducting the pilot study.

The pilot study involved interviews with a man and woman who were young adults in the 1950s. Judy, the woman narrator, and Thomas, the man, are both known to me. Considering their relationship with me, they, nonetheless, provided excellent feedback and interactive stimulation to inform and guide the process of the oral history interviews. The project was explained to both of them and the interviews were conducted in their homes at a time convenient for them. They both lived on the island of New Providence, and attended the cinema regularly during the 1950s. Thomas was born in 1932 and during the 1950's, was a waiter employed in various hotels in New Providence throughout the decade. Judy was born in 1933 and she was a training nurse and subsequently a registered nurse on the island during the 1950s. Both interviewees were eager narrators and

nostalgically recalled the decade and their cinemagoing experiences, providing the research with invaluable data for the upcoming oral history inquiry.

I intended to include a white Bahamian narrator in the pilot study, since my research sample population includes white Bahamians. However, I encountered an interesting challenge regarding the recruitment of white narrators for the sample group which emerged as a significant recruitment challenge in the project. A friend who has a career in the media and is very well known in the white Bahamian community was asked to assist in recruiting a white narrator for the pilot. He attempted to do so, but after failed efforts, informed me that some in that community who were approached and invited to be a part of the research were hesitant to be involved because they did not wish to recollect or talk about certain race-related elements that were prevalent in that period of our shared history. Appreciating this handicap, plans were implemented to address and adjust the recruitment strategy for that segment of the population to disarm the fear of re-stoking a conceptually incendiary past. This adjustment, however, was not made during the pilot interviews.

Four interview sessions were conducted with Thomas and Judy during July and August 2015. The interview environment was very informal and relaxed. There were some interruptions, however from other persons in adjoining rooms, and some technical difficulties with the recording device, which resulted in the latter portion of Thomas' interview not being recorded. These challenges were noted and adjustments were made to ensure that future interviews were conducted in an environment less prone to distractions. Both Judy and Thomas were very cooperative in responding to the questions proffered during their interviews. Nonetheless, upon evaluation of the interviews and the elicited responses, I realized that there were too many closed-ended questions, more suited to a quantitative interview. As a result, it appeared, at times during the questioning, that pressure was placed on both participants to recall specific detailed information which interrupted the narrative flow. Subsequently, the appropriate adjustments were made to the schedule of interview questions used in the project's oral history inquiry.

The pilot interviews were transcribed using an open access programme called *O Transcribe*. Unfortunately, the transcription of the interviews was not completed until sometime after the interviews took place, and therefore, neither narrator had the opportunity to provide any feedback. Nonetheless, the analysis of the pilot study

transcripts provided insight into some themes that are explored in my research such as the topography, exhibition and distribution of films in the cinemas in Nassau; cinema, gender and everyday life; investigating the leisure and cultural dynamics of the cinema; and racial segregation within the cinema.

The Oral History Interview Process

The oral history interviews were nondirective interviews in which I asked my narrators three open questions about their memories of Bahamian culture of the 1950s, leisure activities that they engaged in during that era, their cinema experiences, and movies and serials that they viewed during that time. As the narratives unfolded with each narrator's story, some things were repeated, but each one had something new and unique to share. They all had something to add to the collective history. However, during the interview, which varied the narrative flow depending on whether the interviewer was perceptibly knowledgeable about the background theme of what was being said, or had to be educated about the background necessarily to complete the connection with the narrative. Considering the generational difference, between the interviewer and the narrators, and other notable differences with segments of the sample population, the issue of whether the interviewer is perceived as an insider or an outsider is an important element in this qualitative research into cultural memory.

The 'insider/outsider' debate is an unavoidable contextual consideration in this research, particularly as the research involves oral history interviews. As a foundational factor in the process of this research study, I consider myself both an insider and an outsider; I am a citizen of the country being researched and was born in The Bahamas in the late 1950s. To some degree, I am aware of the four cinemas that are a central part of my research project, as well as the communities in which they operated. As a woman who grew up on New Providence, I am also aware of the day to day cultural life of its inhabitants. On the other hand, from an age perspective, the interview narrators are at least twenty years my senior, with the top end extending to more than thirty years, and their social background and educational status also differs from mine. Additionally, there is a racial difference between me and six of the participants.

Scholars posit that because an insider has the trust and socio-cultural experiences of the research participant, more intimate details and authentic information will be revealed

during the interview (May, 2014, p. 118). Nonetheless, Nance Naples “challenges those of us who ...research in our own “home” country to re-examine our taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes “indigenous” knowledge and how we use both our commonalities and differences...” (Naples, 1996, p. 84). The outsider, due to their position and perspective as an outsider will make minimal assumptions about the narrators and their experiences, and consequently, the narrators tend to explain more because they assume that the researcher is less knowledgeable of their communities and culture. May also notes that in the interview “subjects are given a role as knowledgeable participant when outsiders have to rely upon them for key information” (May, 2014, p. 122).

Another challenge is what Martin Denscombe refers to as the interview effect, which involves the way the person being interviewed perceives the interviewer, and how they respond to that interviewer. He suggests that one’s identity is assessed on personal attributes such as sex, age, ethnic origin, accent, and occupational status. Things that Denscombe notes are unchangeable (Denscombe, 2014, pp. 189-190). To mitigate this, he advises to “...be polite and punctual, receptive and neutral, in order to encourage the right climate for an interviewee to feel comfortable and provide honest answers” (Denscombe, 2014, p. 190).

The interviews were structured into three parts, the pre-interview, the interview, and the post-interview. The primary purpose of the pre-interview session was to share relevant information about the project and give the narrator an opportunity to discuss that information face-to-face. This pre-session was designed to establish rapport with the narrator by allowing them to talk openly and ask questions about my research.

After the initial greetings, the narrators were asked where they wanted to be seated, and I always ensured that my seat was opposite to theirs and on the same level as theirs. This seating arrangement allowed for eye-to-eye contact, and helped to establish a position of shared authority, inherent in oral history interviews. After the official business of discussing the project and completing the consent form, the recording equipment was set up. The participants had varied responses to the recording equipment, especially when the microphone was assembled and placed in front of them. Some became a bit timid, and verbalized their fear of being recorded, while others became more officious and responded in a very confident manner. Whatever the response, they were assured that the

recording would only be heard by me, and purely for the purpose of the research. The setting up time would also be used to engage in general chatter. One narrator, for example, was sitting and reading a book when I arrived. We spent the majority of the setting up session talking about our favourite authors, and books we had recently read. This shared interest helped both of us to relax and set a great environment to conduct an interactive interview. The final thing that would be done in the pre-session was to take a picture of the participant. Some narrators were a bit hesitant at first, but when it was explained that the picture would accompany their typed transcripts to complete the record of the interview, they gladly posed for me.

At the start of the second session of the interview, three questions were asked which I called 'identifying questions'. All of the narrators easily answered the three questions, 'what is your name', 'what is your date of birth', and 'what is your place of birth'. This exercise is standard in many interviews and serves as a way of ensuring that the narrator has no difficulty remembering this basic information about themselves. This exercise was also used to communicate to the narrators that they were the owners of the information that would follow, and observed that this gave them a degree of confidence at the start. One narrator was particularly humorous in giving his details, and his demeanour at the start was amplified throughout the interview. As the narrators shared about their cinemagoing activities and the island of New Providence in the 1950s, I quickly realized that I was not as much an insider as I had previously thought. I required extensive details about the location of certain places and activities that are commonplace to the narrators, but eroded by the passing of time. They would, on occasions, assume that I knew where a certain well known families lived, or who a particular star of a film from the fifties was and absolutely expected me to know. At other times, I would identify places and travel seamlessly with them through their narratives. What became apparent through the interviews was that "holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within the group; likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference" (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60).

As a researcher, who is part of the culture being studied, I employed the practice of bracketing assumptions during the interviews. This exercise called for me to solicit clarification, and specific explanation of places and aspects of their experiences that seem commonplace or ambiguous during the interview (Asselin, p. 55; May, 2014; Best, 2003).

When one narrator, for example, assumed that I knew where a restaurant, that was a popular hangout for her and her friends was located, I took the position of Kanuha who shared that “each time a respondent knowingly implied that I understood what they were talking about, I would ask them to clarify or elaborate just for the record” (Kanuha, 2000, p. 443).

The third section of the interview is the post-interview. The recorder would be stopped immediately after the narrators were thanked for sharing their memories. This action did not, however, stop the conversation. On many occasions the narrators continued to talk about things tangential to the point last discussed in the interview. Sitting and talking with them for a time communicated a sense of satisfaction and a genuine feeling that a connection had been formed with the interview narrators during the process of the exchange and the sharing of their lives.

As previously postulated one challenge that presented itself in the study was the recruitment and interviewing of white Bahamians. Reuben May shared extensively about his Northeast nightlife interviews with both black and white college students in Georgia, USA. As a black college professor and researcher he experienced what he termed ‘the shoe being on the other foot’ when he, as an African American interviewed young white students regarding their nightlife leisure activities and experiences. He noted that much has changed over the years as more non-white researchers undertake qualitative research, but race continues to be a significant feature in the interaction between the narrator and the interviewer. He pointed out that the tension between these two persons apparently intensifies with participants of older generations (May, 2014, p. 132).

Notwithstanding that the recruitment of white participants was not as fluid as that of black participants; the interviews were in no way contentious. Both male and female narrators were courteous, shared willingly, and were extremely hospitable. One gentleman inquired of my preference in hot beverages so that he could ensure that he had it available when I came to his house for the interview. The feeling that ‘the shoe was on the other foot’ did not surface, even when there was an obvious expression of unease when discussing the one segregated cinema in Nassau.

Another potential challenge in the interview process is role confusion. Asselin states that “role confusion exists when the researcher perceives or responds to events or analyses

data from a perspective other than researcher” (Asselin, p. 102). As a researcher who is familiar with and shares relationship roles other than that of the researcher, with some of the participants, this was a conscious concern. This challenge was easily met by ensuring that there are no misconceptions and false expectations on the part of myself and the narrator during the interview exchange.

Role confusion was potentially a concern in the interviews because of the age difference between the parties with the narrators all being the older person in the exchange. Culturally, in The Bahamas, it is natural to be in deference to an elder person who would tacitly assume the authoritative role opposite a perceptively younger person. While this cultural layover is subject to many other social and societal norms, mores and imposed authority, it would be innate to regard a younger interviewer in a less authoritative role without expressly established criteria. None of the narrators articulated this sense of role or authority confusion, albeit, two of the male narrators were noticeably more lofty at times in a subtle display of unyielding authority. A few of the more familiar female narrators were hesitant to share personal details with me, as a younger woman, about their activities that were ancillary to the cinema culture of the era, especially about their interactions with the opposite sex. In every instance, I would maintain a silent mutuality, and allow the narrators to take as long as they wanted, to choose how they wished to articulate their personal experiences, or pontificate strongly held points of view. One narrator did refer to me as being ‘bossy’ as I was explaining an aspect of the consent form to him. In this instance, I worked hard to ensure that he had no misconceptions about my role, as the researcher, to maintain the integrity of the research process.

The relationship between the interviewer and the narrator in the oral history interviews is crucial, and indeed the success of the interviews is strongly reliant on the relationship forged between them in the moment. While conducting the interview, I regularly reminded myself of the importance of the ‘insider/outsider’ debate to the research, keeping in mind that “...the core ingredient is not the insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 59).

Recording and Analysis of Interview Data

Twenty-five oral history interviews were conducted with twenty-seven narrators between July, 2015 and March 2016 in Nassau, Bahamas. The interviews took place in the residences of the narrators, at my home, and two of the narrator's workplaces. Each interview was recorded with the use of the Marantz audio recording equipment, and a table top microphone. Concurring with Creswell that data analysis "is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 184) ; upon completing each interview, the process of transcribing and analysing the data began. The Scottish Oral History Society recommends that interviewers maintain a research diary of their interviews. Having adopted this practice, a written record was kept of self-reflections on the dynamics of the interview; the context of the interviews; additional remarks made off tape; the demeanour of the participant, and what was not spoken about. This activity greatly aids in the critical reflection of the role and status of the interviewer (Brennen, 2012, p. 169). This information also assisted in honing interview skills and enhancing the overall atmosphere in subsequent interviews. Through the process of the interviews, not only was information being exchanged, but the ability to ask better follow-up questions and guide the narrators back on track was steadily refined. Another variable that emerged from the consultation of the diary notes was that the time required for the pre-interview session needed to be extended in order to allow more time for setting up and checking the equipment and talking with the narrators prior to the start of the interview.

The tradition of the oral history methodology which provides that the narrator be given an opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher after the interview was adopted and adhered to in each case. The transcripts of each interview were returned to the narrators within two weeks of the interviews. Rigid adherence to this timeframe was essential due to the time constraints of the fieldwork period, as well as the promise made in the interview letter to return the transcripts at least two weeks after the interview.

Each of the interview transcripts were printed and delivered, accompanied with a picture of the narrators on the front cover of the interview package. The narrator's responses were highlighted for easy reading. A letter was attached to each transcript expressing gratitude for their participation in my project, and details of any follow-up to the interview. As a

gesture of appreciation, each narrator was given a very small gift. This gesture was warmly acknowledged by the participants.

In answering the question ‘to transcribe or not to transcribe?’, Donna DeBlasio points out that some researchers prefer to listen to the original recordings while doing analysis, but others find it more convenient to transcribe the recordings and refer to the written documents of the interviews (Deblasio et al, 2009, p. 104/5). I determined that my preference would be to transcribe the interviews. To this end, the interviews were transcribed using the online programme *OTranscribe*, which proved very accessible and user friendly while conducting the transcription of the pilot interviews. The transcriptions were made verbatim and typed with accompanying cover sheets containing the title of the project; name(s) of the narrator(s); name of the interviewer, reference number of the interview; and, participant and interviewer identification system of initials. The transcriptions also include indications of giggles, chuckles and laughter of both the participants and the interviewer. A system of referents was created comprising mainly of a series of full stops and pauses.

Most of the follow-up calls were made within two weeks of returning the transcripts. The narrators for the most part were in agreement with the transcripts with a few exceptions who were concerned with their grammar and use of the vernacular. Seeing their words written on paper verbatim was slightly alarming to some of the narrators. One narrator did not fully understand why the transcript had to include the vernacular, and thought it should have been edited. She felt unable to articulate this sentiment clearly, so she had her sister who is an academic, telephone to talk about her response to the transcript, explaining her concerns. Following a conversation with the narrator’s sister, who better understood the methodology, she then explained the transcription process to her sister, putting her at ease.

The research sample size is a relatively small one; nonetheless, some of the narrator’s interviews are quite lengthy. The process of coding the transcripts was started manually; nonetheless, coding was also conducted using the *NVivo 10* software programme. Following the transcription of the interviews, which was the first step in the coding process, photocopies of each of the interviews were made. After this initial organization of the data, a preliminary read through of the interviews took place which initiated reflection on the content of them; writing words and ideas, and the generation of themes.

The *NVivo* software provided an electronic method of creating a thematic structure for the organization and storage of the raw interview data.

Conclusion

This chapter is about documenting the research methodology used in this project, and demonstrating that it was both suitable and robust in its design and implementation. The three parts of the framework, the oral history inquiry, the archival inquiry and the inquiry of remembered films intersected harmoniously to provide the source data that has made this research evolve. Nonetheless, the oral history inquiry was by far the most crucial to the research.

The narrators in the research are between seventy-two and ninety-five years old, and are considered an older generation of oral history narrators. There are perceived benefits to having elder participants volunteer their involvement for oral history research projects. One such benefit is that these interviews serve as a tangible emblem of the narrators heritage that can be preserved by their families and loved ones for generations to come.

Furthermore, it is not always the accuracy of the participants memory, or the veracity of the details contained in the information that garners a more intrinsic value of the oral history interview; but rather the impact of the recalled information and how it informs their lives today; or what that memory validates, more than the precision of the detailed memory content. In this regard, the point of oral history is how the memory interconnects with existing values, as a living legacy of their story, removed from the details of its exacting formation moulded decades ago. The real data is what survives not what was forgotten in the details, and the real living interaction of that legacy with the interviewer is his-story or her-story.

Moreover, as a methodology, oral history respects the participant or narrator, and places them in the position of the principal authority in terms of the information that is being shared. Through their involvement in this project the narrators, who represent an older generation of Bahamians, were encouraged to share a part of their story and legacy which made this research a reality, and a scholarly work that I strongly hope will benefit generations to come.

Chapter IV – The Big Four Cinemas – Ownership, Distribution and Exhibition

Introduction

During the 1950s the cinemas in New Providence were located within a half a mile radius of one another; nonetheless, from a political, social and economic perspective they occupied a much wider space. A female narrator, Winnie, recalls her impression of the connectivity of the various locations of the theatres in this way: “Well, I live on East Street. If I go to the Cinema, I walk; if I go to the Capitol, it wasn’t far; if I go to the Nassau Theatre, it wasn’t far, ‘cause, you know, it was more or less centrally located.” The four principal cinemas, the Savoy, the Nassau Theatre, the Cinema and the Capitol, were all located on Bay Street, Union Street, East Street, and Market Street (Farm Road), respectively. Two of them were located in the section of the island called Over-the-hill, while the other two were situated north of the hill on or just off the street running parallel to the harbour, Bay Street. The Savoy and the Nassau were a quarter mile from each other; the Cinema and the Capitol were just under a quarter mile apart, one on Market Street, and the other on the corner of East Street and Lewis Street. The furthest distance between two cinemas was between the Capitol and the Nassau theatres which was just over a half mile apart; closely followed by the traverse between the Savoy and the Cinema of approximately half a mile. Similarly, the clientele of the cinemas was a reflection of the space, and the location of the theatres. Despite the proximity of these movie houses to each other, their individual histories placed them, figuratively, miles apart. This chapter focuses on the four primary cinemas operating in Nassau during the 1950s, the Savoy Theatre, the Nassau Theatre, the Cinema Theatre and the Capitol Theatre. It illuminates the ownership, distribution, and exhibition practices of the cinemas through the memories of the oral history narrators, along with news and display advertisements from the local daily newspapers, and trade journals.

The capital city, Nassau, in which all four cinemas were located, was geographically compacted in a small confined area, in and around the down-town area, on the island of New Providence. Doran and Landis provided an overview of the geographical development of the city of Nassau in the seventeenth century as “a straggling little village

Theatre from Mr. Pinder (Reporter, Transfer of Theatres, 1951), and for the remainder of the decade, and indeed into the 1970s, Mr. Bethell monopolized and dominated the cinema business in The Bahamas.

The Savoy Theatre was the oldest of the four main cinemas. Its opening date is unknown, but it was prior to 1937. The Savoy was one of three theatres that were owned and operated by Mr. C.W.F. Bethell, a white minority elite, Government Member of the House of Assembly, and cinema tycoon, in the country. Mr. Bethell represented the Island of Grand Bahama, and was one of the 21 founding member of the United Bahamian Party (UBP), the ruling white majority representatives in the House of Assembly, who were collectively known as the “Bay Street Boys”(Sturup, 2008). His ownership of theatres in Nassau dates back to the 1930s when he owned and operated three cinemas, the Montagu Theatre, the Nassau Theatre and the Savoy Theatre. Both the Nassau Theatre and the Montagu were burned down in September and October, 1937, respectively (Reporter, Here and There Fire Destroys Nassau Theatre, 1937) (Reporter, Fire Destroys Montagu Theatre, 1937). Shortly after the fires, Mr. Bethell announced on the 6th October, 1937, that he would renovate the Savoy by enlarging the lobby and increasing the accommodations to make the facility more comfortable (Reporter, Savoy To Be Improved, 1937). Bethell also revealed his plans to rebuild the Nassau Theatre, relocating its entrance to Bay Street instead of the former Union Street entrance. The plans to renovate and rebuild the Savoy and the Nassau Theatres were realized by the late Thirties and by the 1950s both of these cinemas were identified as the two movie establishments operating on Bay Street, registered under the company name of Theatrical Enterprises Limited; still owned and operated by Mr. C.W.F. Bethell. After its renovation, the Savoy was described in an article in June, 1940 as being “modern in its appointments, the walls of the auditorium decorated with panelled monotone mural paintings of picturesque street scenes from the British Isles” (Staff, 1940). The article reported that there were 645 seats in total in the theatre, 510 of which were orchestra and 125 were in the balcony (Staff, 1940).

The Savoy was the only cinema that embraced the practice of racial segregation, allowing only a white clientele to patronise the establishment. An interview participant, Oscar, states, “Well I recall, ah, going to the Savoy Theatre, and I must point out in those days it was known as a white theatre”. The cinema’s location, in the centre of the premier

shopping district on Bay Street, made it convenient for this select clientele to access the premises with minimum resistance.

The Capitol was the newest of the four theatres, which was opened in the late summer of 1950. The initial owner of the Capitol, Mr. Percy Pinder, was an enterprising black businessman, who aggressively promoted this new theatre with display advertisements in both the Guardian and Tribune daily newspapers; up to the opening of his state of the art cinema that was heralded as ‘a new theatre for the Southern District’ (Reporter, New Theatre for Southern District, 1950). Carmel, a narrator who had lived in New York for a time compared the Capitol Theatre to Radio City Music Hall, which was a premier facility built by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in the 1930s, and referred to as an American’s Peoples Palace. She considered the Capitol a remarkable structure and an ambitious enterprise:

The Capitol, um, at that time would have been like the Radio City, ‘cause you see, they had a stage, and you know, the curtains down, and what not ...because if they were to have a concert or something which need stages and curtains drawing and different kinda thing, they would have it there, you know what I mean?

Mr. Pinder also owned a small cinema called the Rainbow Theatre which was situated on the southern base of the East Street Hill. Very few of the narrators even mentioned this theatre in their interviews, and that might be due to the focus of attention on the newly build Capitol Theatre which was owned by the same person. One of the Narrators, Alan, actually thought that the Rainbow became the Capitol because of their shared ownership:

The Capitol started ...um on East Street, the foot of ...the top of East Street by Mason’s Addition. It was owned by a man named Percy Pinder, black fella ... and then he moved into the Capitol where he had ...he owned the Capitol Theatre.

Mr. Bethell’s Nassau Theatre catered to a mixed clientele, both racially and socially. Indeed, black, coloured or mixed, and white participants remembered watching films at the Nassau Theatre. It was seen as a place which attracted a variety of persons. Nonetheless, Harold, a black narrator, and Oscar, a white narrator, were both of the opinions that this theatre was built primarily for the black and coloured population to provide a venue where they could see a film in the city, on Bay Street:

Harold: The Nassau Theatre was more, that was there at the time to satisfy the black Bahamians, 'cause at that time the black Bahamians had trouble, they couldn't, not had trouble, they couldn't go to the Savoy.

Oscar: ...they had one up couple a blocks east of that called the Nassau Theatre, and that was generally for what we would call the coloured people, yeah.

Mr Bethell also owned and operated the Cinema Theatre which was located Over-the-Hill, in the centre of the black community; situated on East and Louis Streets. This theatre appealed to persons residing mainly in the black communities off East Street. There was no found public record of when Mr. Bethel acquired the Cinema and/or when it commenced operations in Over-the-Hill Nassau, but it was one of the four major cinemas in operation in Nassau city during the 1950s. Winnie, whose residence was on East Street Hill, states that despite the Capitol being her favourite theatre, she still went to The Cinema:

The Cinema, yeah, I enjoyed going to the Cinema, too... I could have rolled out of bed and go to the Cinema (laughter) very close.

The Meers Theatre was a unique smaller theatre that was on the same premises as a famous night club, and located further south on Market street, somewhat removed from the epicentre of the other four cinemas. Harold recalls the Paul Meers Theatre in this way:

Paul Meers had a place, and ah, a movie was added onto that, what you call Paul Meers Theatre. That was over on Market Street, as you come out of, ah, Our Ladies corner...Paul Meers ... and they used to do these night time shows and all that. They used to bring in people from away and all dat kinda thing, Paul Meers.

There appears to be no confusion about the ownership of the four theatres operated by Mr. Bethell, as perceived by the narrators, nonetheless, the 1950 edition of the Yearbook of Motion Pictures records the Wometco Theatres out of Miami, Florida as owning four theatres in the Bahamas, the Savoy, Nassau, Cinema and Meers. According to the Yearbook, this theatre company, under the co-ownership of Mitchell Wolfson and Sidney Meyer owned a total of 29 theatres in Florida and the Bahamas (Alicoate, 1950). By 1958, the ownership of the four theatres, along with the Capital, were all referred to as the Wometco Bethell Brothers Theatres, in an article highlighting the closing of all of the

theatres in Nassau due to a general strike (Staff, General Strike Closes Theatres in Nassau, 1958).



Figure 2: The former location of the Nassau Theatre on Bay Street and Elizabeth Avenue



Figure 3: The former Capitol Theatre building which is currently the business location of Purity Bakery.

The Capitol Theatre

The Capitol Theatre was clearly the most remarkable of the four major theatres. It was the one that the generation of the Fifties witnessed being built, and was able to experience brand new. The Nassau Daily Tribune Newspaper published display advertisements

announcing its opening, which promoted the facilities as first class and modern, months in advance of its opening. According to Alan, a male narrator, Mr. Percy Pinder had built a modern and quite handsome edifice for his new theatre, which was not the first one that he operated, because, as mentioned earlier, he owned and operated the smaller Rainbow Theatre.

In the month running up to the opening of the Capitol, the classified advertisements section of The Nassau Daily Tribune published advertisements for the films shown at the Rainbow Theatre, and promoting the opening of the new Capitol Theatre. The actual opening date of the Capitol Theatre would have been between the last week in July, 1950, and the first week in August of the same year. On Saturday, 29th July, 1950, a display advertisement was placed in the Nassau Daily Tribune announcing that the Capitol Theatre was opening soon under the ‘Distinguished Patronage of H.E. Sir George Sanford and Lady Sanford, the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Bahamas, and his wife’. The programme for the grand opening of the theatre included: a welcome address by Mr. G. C. Cash, MHA, organ selections by Mr. Bert Cambridge; a solo by Miss Persis Roberts Rodgers; a solo by Mr. Freddie Munnings; and a solo by Miss. Barbara Williams. All of the attractions on the programme were persons of prestige in the black and coloured communities, starting with Mr. G.C. Cash, a black Member of the House of Assembly, and along with Cambridge (a musician and former black parliamentarian), Roberts, Munnings and Williams all influential musicians and singers who were well known among the Bahamians on the island.

The feature film presentation for the evening was the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s *Stars in My Crown* starring Joel McCrea and Ellen Drew and directed by Jacques Tourneur. The movie is set in a small town during the era of Re-construction in the Southern United States. The film is a western with themes centring on race relations and the religious convictions of a white bible quoting, no-nonsense preacher. In a 2010 review of the film Michael J. Anderson states that Tourneur, the director of the film “reminds his viewer of the region’s segregated past and present, thereby securing the film’s continued, tragic contemporaneity” (2010, p. 421). By selecting the film *Stars in My Crown* for the opening screening at The Capitol, Mr. Pinder would appear to have made a dramatic and hugely political statement in The Bahamas of the early 1950s.



Figure 4: Nassau Daily Tribune, 29th July, 1950

The brand new Capitol Theatre boasted of a cooler and more comfortable environment. It was built with a stage and curtains in front of the screen. The 164 x 46 feet auditorium was the largest theatre in the Colony, featuring a large balcony with seating capacity for 750 patrons. The chairs were modern, and the projectors and sound equipment were to be the most 'up-to-date' even in the United States (Reporter, New Theatre for Southern District, 1950). One of the significant arrangements highlighted in the announcement of the Capitol Theatre by its owner, Mr. Pinder, was the working relationship that he had established with both United Artists and RKO for the distribution of first run movies to his theatre (Reporter, New Theatre for Southern District, 1950). Therefore, it appeared that Mr. Pinder had structured his new cinema venture in such a way that it would become a very successful business enterprise.

The architectural design of the building allowed for live performances to be conducted at the theatre. One Saturday in early February, 1951, the Bahama Playhouse Players performed a play at the Capitol. The paper reported that this play "*Springtime for Henry*" was presented at the Theatre to a "large and enthusiastic audience" (Reporter, Bahama Playhouse Players At Capitol, 1951). Two of the male narrators, Alan and Robert, both recall events taking place within the theatre. Alan remembers a group called friends of the Bahamas performing plays at The Capitol:

They were mixed foreigners, nationalists, and they used to come and bring plays, Broadway plays, and they used to have their plays down town somewhere by the Sheraton, from Monday to Friday. Of course, the fare

was 'lil high, but on Saturday nights it came to The Capitol, and everybody used to go to these, dress and go to The Capitol Theatre.

The location and the flexibility of the venue of the Capitol provided an opportunity for this group to perform their plays before a more diverse audience, and at a price that was more affordable for the less economically privileged Bahamians. Alan saw it as a time when he and his contemporaries could wear their suits and nice dresses and go out to see a play Over-the-Hill. Robert also remembered the Capitol Theatre being used for live entertainment in the form of concerts:

There used to be some public functions there. I remember going there for some concerts. I remember Bert Cambridge giving Hammond organ concerts there. I remember Sheila Pemberton, ah, white Bahamian who came Over-the-Hill and participated in a concert there.

The Capitol Theatre was considered, not just a place where persons from all races and economic and social classes could go to view a film in a relaxed and modern environment; it was also a venue in which anyone who could afford a ticket could be exposed to 'high culture'. Paramount to all this, however, particularly for black Bahamians, was the fact that a black Bahamian owned and operated this spectacular theatre. For a black person to aspire to own a business of this magnitude in The Bahamas in the 1950s was out of the norm, and indeed, for Mr. Pinder it was a very ambitious endeavour. He was obviously a visionary in building his theatre using the design and facilities that he utilized, as well as the location which was Over-the-Hill, just opposite a government public parade ground, yet still within walking distance to Bay Street, East Street, and a pleasant walk from Union Street (Elizabeth Avenue) and Dowdeswell Street. Mr. Pinder was also a seasoned theatre operator, evidenced by his operating of the Rainbow Theatre prior to his investment into the Capitol, and he screened first run movies at his new Capitol. The vision for a successful business was clear and attainable, but for one caveat, the distribution of the films.

New Providence is an island, and in the 1950s, as today, most products were imported into the island from the mainland USA, generally from South Florida which was the nearest port in the United States to The Bahamas. There was no film production industry in The Bahamas, and the vast majority of films screened within the theatres were Hollywood Films. This being the case, the films had to be transported from the mainland USA into New Providence on a regular basis. Nothing is known about the means of

transport that Mr. Pinder used to deliver his films into Nassau; however, it is known that he had a business relationship with two film production organizations in the United States, United Artist and RKO film distribution companies.

Sometime between 1950 when the theatre was opened, and 1951 when Mr. Pinder relinquished ownership, he experienced some challenges in securing films for viewing in the Capitol. In a newspaper article dated 7th February, 1951, it was noted that challenges were being experienced with the delivery of films: “Owing to the non-arrival of the film “Eye-Witness”, which was to have been shown at the Capitol Theatre tonight and Thursday, “The Story of G.I. Joe” will be substituted...” (Reporter, Capitol Theatre, 1951). Mr. Pinder was still operating the Rainbow Theatre at this time, but both Alan and Robert remember that there were issues regarding the distribution of first run films being experienced by Mr. Pinder in the time he owned the Capitol:

Alan: ...but the Capitol Theatre, what was owned by Percy Pinder, got first rated movies, showing for the first time ... that where the competition started with he and the Bethell Brothers who owned the Savoy and the Nassau Theatre, and they was tryin’ to stop the movies, the people from letting him have first run ... But, it didn’t survive.

Monique: So, what kind of things would they have done to try and stop him?

Alan: Well, they had the power, they know the people who to deal with in the States or wherever they was getting their movies from. And if they had the money and being that colour they were ... they had the say.

There was a sense that Mr. Pinder’s race was a factor in his ability to import the first run Hollywood films into the country. There was also the sentiment that Mr. Bethell, the white Bahamian owner of the other main theatres was in some way responsible for this blockade to the inward flow of the films to Mr. Pinder and the Capitol. Robert recalls Wometco, a film distribution company in Miami, and cited it as the one from which the films originated:

...the Bethell Brothers ... I think their company, or the company they dealt with was Wometco ... and they had the lock on all the first run movies ... and I think that’s really what ruined Mr. Pinder when he opened the Capitol theatre which was, which was nicer than all of them ... the Capitol ... in terms of its physical ... but he couldn’t get first run movies ... he couldn’t compete ... he couldn’t get first run movies...

Business within The Bahamas during this epoch was run in a very rigid manner. The acquisition and distribution of goods imported into the islands was controlled by, and under the purview of a few white businessmen. Films were a commodity that had to be imported, as such; the import agent would have the power to distribute that commodity to whomever he decided he would do business with. In order to run a theatre of the calibre of the Capitol, that Mr. Pinder had created, built and promoted, he had to have first run films to make it a profitable venture. Robert believed that Mr. Bethell was somehow able to get the first run films, “but Mr. Pinder couldn’t get it ... he simply could not get it, because he was not included in the distribution.” Nathaniel, a male participant who later worked in the cinemas in Nassau, remembers that “Percy Pinder had owned the Capitol, and the Bethell Brothers, or Mr. Charlie, specifically, bought it from him...” He recalls that “Percy Pinder had to sell out to ‘Mr. Charlie’ because he wasn’t able to get up to date films. He also suggested that the overhead expenses became too great for Mr. Pinder to continue the profitable running of his Capitol theatre.

Whatever the reason for the demise of Mr. Percy Pinder’s dreams to own and run a first-class theatre in the Over-the-Hill section of Nassau, Mr. C.W.F. Bethell was able to acquire the Capitol Theatre from Mr. Pinder, and commence operation of it in May, 1951. Consolidation of all of the theatres is evidenced by the advertisement of the films being exhibited at the Capitol, the Cinema, the Savoy, the Nassau Theatre, and the Meers Theatre all grouped together in one large spread.

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FOX NEWS
NOVELTY
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UNIVERSAL INTERNATIONAL presents
BUD ABBOTT and LOU COSTELLO
MEET THE INVISIBLE MAN

with **NANCY GUILD · ADELE JERGENS**

Screenplay by ROBERT LEE, FREDERICK L. RINALDO and JOHN GRANE
Suggested by H. G. Wells "THE INVISIBLE MAN"
Directed by CHARLES LAMONT - Produced by HOWARD CHRISTIE

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If you have pains around the heart.

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CARTOON
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Beauty veils her lust for blood!

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BRENDA JOYCE
JOHNNY SHEFFIELD
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Starring
**MARIO LANZA
KATHRYN GRAYSON
JOSE ITURBI**

Figure 6: The Nassau Guardian, Monday May 21, 1951

Film Distribution

The Bahamas was no different from the rest of the world in its reliance on America, and in particular Hollywood, for the supply of their films. It was an established fact that “overseas, American film companies dominate[d] the screen...They distribute[d] the biggest box office attractions and capture[d] the lion’s share of the gross” (Balio, 2014, p. 408; Scott, 2004, p. 53; Birstein, 1947). In her article that describes three modes of film diffusion, Aida Hozic points out that the distribution of film cannot be separated from Hollywood; an advantage she contends was gained due to the rigid institutionalization of the studio system (2014, p. 231). The studio system followed the model of a mass production assembly line, and was one in which the major studio “teams were charged with making as many as 30 films per team per year” (Christopherson & Storper, 1989, p. 333). The vertical market of film production, distribution and exhibition came to an end in the United States in 1948, when the studios were forced to divest themselves of their theatre chains; resulting in decades of “vertical disintegration” in the motion picture industry in the United States (Christopherson, 1989, p. 334; Staiger, 2012).

The distribution system of films from outside of the mainland USA into Nassau, Bahamas evolved over time from one in which Mr. Bethell personally flew into Miami to collect and return his films on a regular basis, to one that was more formalised with the Wometco group involving an agent and other technical experts providing regular inspections of the cinemas to ensure and maintain international standards for the screening of first run films. This distribution practice aligns to some extent with those enforced in other countries. Distribution systems the world over relied on their connection within the United States. As early as the 1920s, “India’s distribution network was primarily established by importers of Hollywood films” (Barnouw & Krishnaswamy, 1980, p. 145). In post-war Japan, America used Hollywood films as a means to introduce cultural reform into the newly occupied country. Richard Maltby stated that it was through the operations of the Central Motion Picture Exchange (CMPE), which was a distribution subsidiary of the major US studios that Hollywood “...disseminated over 500 Hollywood features nationwide. These films reached large metropolitan centres as well as the local cities ... and smaller towns...” (Maltby & Stokes., 2004, p. 99). The MPEA (Motion Picture Export Association) was instituted in 1946 to serve as a “legal cartel under the provision of the Webb-Pomerene Export Trade Act” which was adopted in the US Congress in 1918... (Valenti, 1980, p. 27). This Act provides protectionism for the United States to

trade films with foreign nations; a transaction that is thought to be both culturally enriching to the foreign nations, and economically beneficial to the United States (Aguinaga, 2009). Notwithstanding the seemingly complimentary arrangement in the transference of this valuable commodity for the entertainment of the willing and waiting audiences worldwide, there was nevertheless, a reaction to the influence that such a commodity would have on the culture of these nations. Allen Scott puts it succinctly by comparing the product of wheat or coal to that of motion pictures when he contends that “[T]his line, however, overlooks the circumstance that unlike wheat or coal, cultural products are also intimately bound up with matters of selfhood, identity and consciousness” (Scott, 2004, p. 57).

There is little doubt that the business of selling motion pictures was a successful one in Nassau in the 1950s. The four main theatres and the smaller Paul Meers and Rainbow Theatres were hot spots of entertainment, and evidenced from the acquisition of the Capitol Theatre by Bethell to add to his other four theatres: Business was thriving. The daily newspapers are proof that the American films were being imported, and the turnover was regular and consistent with many of the films being viewed in the United States over a similar time period. The filmography in the Appendix lists some of the films screened in the Nassau theatres throughout the 1950s (Appendix C).

The promotion of the motion-pictures shown at the various theatres was by word of mouth, posters displays in front of the theatres, and newspaper display advertisements; with the exception of the Savoy which, one of the narrators remembers, also issued promotional booklets of upcoming films to their patrons. Thomas, a black narrator who was a waiter in the 1950s recalls the motion-picture posters that promoted the upcoming films, and Nancy, recalls the promotional booklets:

Thomas: ...Just by the posters, because we were down town, and we see the posters, and we know what's showing ... or word of mouth, somebody would tell us... You know such and such a thing is showing? How you know? Man, we saw it ah, ah, on the poster, it's coming on Wednesday. Okay we gone ta see that...They had it outside on the wall, you know they would ... maybe six, six of them on the wall, they have on the wall of the theatre ...they have the posers. And you could pass by and see them. And then they have what days they showing, and also, they ah, you plan what you doing to see, and sometime they show the same movie twice, so you wouldn't go the second time to see it because you know it is showing. You go to another one, ... that's how we know, by seeing it on the wall, you

never looked in the papers, as a matter of fact, I don't think we bought newspapers at that time (Laughs).

Nancy: ...It was interesting because they gave out little booklets that told you what was coming at the movies, because they know when one, one film, um, two films, and they'd tell you what two were coming next, and on through the week. So we'd know that on Thursday evening you could go see some shoot em up cowboy, or something.

The two daily Newspapers regularly advertised the films playing at the theatres owned in Nassau. In canvassing the films that the theatres promoted in the daily newspaper, note was taken of the distributors and the production release dates as they compared to the dates that they were screened at the local cinemas. The Rainbow Theatre, which was a smaller cinema located at the bottom of the East Street Hill, the Meers Theatre which was further south on Market Street, and the Cinema Theatre located in the heart of East Street all screened B-films and double features.

Historically, the concept of the double bill, double feature or dual bill is traced back to the late 1920s and into the 1930s in New England, USA, when independent theatres "hoped to draw depression-era consumers with a "two for the price of one" value proposition." And, it is reported that by the mid 1930s, these double bills became a common feature even in many first run theatres around the country (Edwards, 2011, p. 386). B-films were initially produced and distributed by smaller independent picture companies who would rent the films to independent theatres that had no affiliation with the major studios. Film rental arrangements with exhibitors were done using a flat fee system, as opposed to the percentage basis employed in the rental of A-films. Characteristically, B-films were short for industry standards (55 to 75 minutes) did not feature major stars, and produced on a low budget (Rogers, 2017, p. 141; Taves, 1993). The Rainbow Theatre advertised its double bill features throughout 1950, and only appeared to shift to a single feature after the opening of the Capitol Theatre. One of the first feature films screened at the Rainbow Theatre in January, 1950 was a B-film, *Flame of the West* which was distributed by Monogram Pictures, a pioneer B-film production and distribution company who led in the double feature exhibition in the Classic Hollywood era (Edwards, 2011, p. 387).

In the absence of company records that would illustrate the distribution practices and companies with which the theatre owners in the Bahamas conducted business in the

1950s, the newspaper advertisements for the featured films have been used to shed light on the various distribution companies associated with the films. Mr. Percy Pinder, operator and owner of the Rainbow and Capitol Theatres announced prior to the opening of the Capitol that he would be working along with both RKO and United Artist to procure films for his new enterprise. From a random selection of newspaper advertisements promoting films to be screened in both of the theatres, Mr. Pinder did indeed show pictures that were distributed by not only RKO and United Artist, but MGM, Universal and Paramount, as well as smaller independent distributors such as Argosy Pictures, London Films Productions, Eagle Lion Films, and the previously mentioned Monogram Pictures. How exactly Mr. Pinder would have landed his films on the island is unknown, but he must have had some type of arrangement with the distribution companies to get the films to and from the island. After the opening of the Capitol, more of the major studio productions were advertised for screening at Mr. Pinder's cinemas. Notably, the film that opened the theatre was an MGM production *Stars in My Crown; Wagon Master*, an RKO Radio Pictures Distributor; *If This Be Sin*, distributed by United Artist; *The Fugitive*, RKO Pictures Distributors; *All Quiet on the Western Front*, distributed by Universal Pictures and *Sunset Boulevard*, a Paramount Pictures production. Subsequent to Mr. Bethell acquiring the Capitol, the main four theatres continued to screen pictures that were produced by a variety of studios, and distributed by some kind of arrangement with Mr. Bethell.

As previously mentioned, some of the narrators firmly believed that the ownership of the Capitol Theatre changed in under a year strongly due to financial challenges of the original owner, and his inability to continue to secure first run films for screening in his theatre. An assessment of the time lag between the release dates of some of the films shown at the Capitol, and their screening dates provides some insight into Mr. Pinder's cinema business affairs. When the theatre opened in late July, 1950, the feature film screened had been released in April, just three months prior. This three month gap between release date and screening date persisted until October, when films that had been released as far back as 1934, *Imitation of Life*, were shown at the theatre. This trend continued for the remainder of 1950 and into 1951, when in May, 1951, just days before divesting himself of the Capitol Theatre, the film *Sunset Boulevard*, which was released by Paramount Pictures in August, 1950, brought down the curtain to Pinder's big cinema dream.

By 1952 C.W.F Bethell's Theatrical Enterprises Limited owned the four main movie theatres in Nassau, Bahamas. Mr. Bethell had the monopoly over this sector of the leisure and entertainment business on the island. Charles was one of four brothers who were all involved in business of some kind within the Islands, and members of the white ruling class referred to as the 'Bay Street Boys'. These white businessmen comprised the "business and professional class of New Providence". They were the heads of the families that owned and operated prime location real estate, shops and offices along the main street on the island: Bay Street (Albury, 1975, p. 273/274). They were also the more "seasoned group of politicians" in the country, maintaining their position, they welded almost complete power and control over the economic and political affairs of the country until 1967 when the majority Black Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) won the government (Sturup, 2008). One of the narrators, Alan, recalls that the Bethell brothers also owned bars throughout New Providence identifying them as "merchants, [who] built ...bars Over-the-Hill, just about on every corner" The major cinemas, however, appear to have been exclusively owned by Mr. Charlie Bethell, and their headquarters was situated at The Savoy Theatre on Bay Street during the 1950s.

A male narrator, Nathaniel, was hired in 1959 to oversee the projection maintenance and general maintenance of the theatres in the Bethell chain, which were the only major cinemas operating on the Island at the time of his hire. In his capacity, he had knowledge of the business practices and operations, and in his oral history interview provided significant insights into how the theatres were run. It seems that Mr. Bethell had a business relationship in Miami, Florida who supplied him with his films. According to an acquaintance of Mr. Bethell, he would fly into Miami in his private airplane on a regular basis to collect his films from his agent there. He would screen them at his local theatres, and return them in the same manner. This seemed a probable arrangement which became more formalized by the late Fifties when Nathaniel worked with the Bethell cinema enterprise. He remembers the operation being one which involved a liaison officer:

You had to have what they call the liaison officer, and in the States like Florida or Atlanta, and they bid on the films against other theatres that needed them first, while they was hot on the market. ... Yes, so that was their first release, but otherwise than that, you had to have a liaison officer that would also inspect your theatre to see the condition of your theatre for first runs.

Nathaniel explained that the liaison officer would have been a man working out of the United States with the Wometco Enterprise, a group which owned a movie theatre chain in Miami, Florida, as well as the Seafloor Aquarium and shares in Coca Cola. Nathaniel explained the significance of this middle man in this way:

Monique: Now, this liaison officer was here in Nassau?

Nathaniel: Oh no, no, he had to be there to bargain... Wometco, ah huh, Wometco. So he would be able to gather more than one print for opening...

It is not certain when Mr. Bethell formulated an official business relationship with the Wometco group; however, this relationship would have been established before Nathaniel began working for the Bethell cinema chain in New Providence (Alicoate, 1950). Nonetheless, according to Nathaniel, the liaison officer was, by 1959, responsible for ensuring that the facilities and management of the movie theatres in the Bethell theatres were up to standard for the screening of first run films. The interior of the theatres and the technical equipment had to be well maintained, an obligation which necessitated regular maintenance checks by the air condition technician and the RCA representative from the United States. Nathaniel recalls these responsibilities being carried out as follows:

But then his liaison and his, um, air condition man, and RCA man for inspection equipment had to come over every say eleven to thirteen weeks to see how the theatres was kept, and look at the books to see if the finances was going right, wasn't no, you know, wishy, wishy things in between ... He was like a auditor for Wometco, to see everything was running right. And all our supplies, to make sure we get supplies that's needed.

This relationship with the Wometco group for the distribution of films into Nassau continued throughout the 1950s (Staff, 1958).

Film Exhibition

The exhibition management responsibilities of the local theatre owners in Nassau during the 1950s were not dissimilar to other independent cinemas and smaller theatre chains worldwide. Eliashberg, Elberse and Leenders refer to theatre exhibition as “activities performed by theatre chains and individual theatre sites” (2006, p. 639). They go on to list what they define as a variety of tasks involved in the management of theatre exhibition

sites, among which are selecting, acquiring and developing sites; advertising and promoting theatres and films; setting prices for tickets and concessions and procuring and scheduling films (Eliashberg et al, 2006, p. 655). Despite the contemporaneity of the article, the fundamental nature of film exhibition has not changed over time, and these criteria still characterize the industry of the 1950s.

The exhibition practices of all four of the main cinemas would have been regulated by Mr. Bethell's enterprises by 1951. In all likelihood, the first run films would originate at the Savoy, and would rotate in a particular order to the other theatres. As early as 1940, Mr. Bethell commented on the challenges of booking a film for the Savoy and its limited patronage of approximately nine hundred regular moviegoers, because of the shortage of prints. He stated that “(A) print is out of the exchange almost ten days to accommodate a Nassau two or three day booking, thus major companies are reluctant to tie up a new print until it has completed the more remunerative first runs in southern key cities” (Staff, *Strange Customs For Nassau Theatregoers*, 1940). While this did not affect all of the pictures released in the Bahamas, it did have some impact on the time that Bahamian theatre audiences would actually view first run movies.

The Nassau Guardian newspaper was regularly used by the operators of the cinemas to promote their feature films. They ran display advertisements, in addition to columns in which short write ups about the upcoming and current films would appear. The more frequently run features would be highlighted under the captions of the names of the cinemas or the names of the actual films that were being promoted. For example, it was announced that the film *Samson and Delilah* was going to be held over by popular request, and would be shown at the Nassau Theatre for an additional two days, Thursday and Friday; after which it would be shown at the Cinema Theatre on the Saturday (Reporter, *Samson and Delilah*, 1951). Hartley, a narrator and a resident of Mason Addition, a community bordering the Cinema theatre, remembers the exhibition rotation of the films following this order:

What used to happen was, they had a sort of a routine where the same movie might be in for, might be in for a week, and you'd have it ... it probably would start at the Savoy. So the Savoy would have, perhaps choice movies, and, and even when it, even if it's circulated, it starts at the Savoy for two days, and then it goes, it moves on to the Nassau Theatre, which was further up Bay Street, and then it comes across to the Cinema Theatre, and then the Capitol. So there was different grades of

movies...the Capitol was one that ... and that probably was in the 50s ...we all were very proud of it because it, it gave, it gave the better pictures to even start at the Capitol.

Considering the social and political order within New Providence during this era, Hartley's memory of the film rotations accord with known custom. Both narrators, Nathaniel and Oscar remembered the same films being shown at the four main cinemas at different times during a designated period. Oscar stated that "it was the same, owned by the same people ... and so it was just takin' one movie from the Savoy and bring it over to the Nassau Theatre and instead of being all white, it was all black, yeah". Similarly, in referring to the Western films in particular, Nathaniel talks about them rotating to the various cinemas in this way:

Monique: So, where would you go to see your Westerns?

Nathaniel: At the Nassau. Say, they'd come from the Savoy first, like this Saturday, and then by Sunday, Monday at another theatre. Tuesday, Wednesday, at a next theatre, Thursday, Friday at the next theatre, so each, each group could go at their favourite theatre, you see, at certain dates, 'cause that's when the movie will change, you see.

Robert has another perspective on the rotation system of the films to the theatres within Nassau. He worked as a young projectionist in several of the theatres, including the Meers Theatre, and he recollects that the popularity of the film and the money that its screening was generating also had an impact on its rotation:

Robert: Well, when *The Robe* came out, yer know, it make the round once, and it gone back ...see, it make the rounds from the Capitol, right, to the Cinema, to Paul Meers, you understand? Then sometimes it came out and it went only, when it was dead expensive, to The Savoy! And when it make it the second round, after it finish making the big money, the initial money, then it come to the Capitol.

Monique: So, would it stay at the Savoy the whole time while it's making the big money, or when you say it come back around, would it be a number of months?

Robert: No, the Savoy couldn't afford to keep the picture ... for more than two, three days maximum, and the reason for that is the movie was expensive to rent.

One practical consideration regarding the length of time that a film might be exhibited at a particular cinema is the size and configuration of the population of New Providence. The official Bahamas Census of 1953 show the population of New Providence being comprised of 6,742 European (White), 31,144 African (Blacks), and 6,784 Mixed, bringing the total size of the population to 44,670. Between 1953 and 1963, the population in New Providence grew to 80,907 (Craton & Saunders, 1998, p. 180 & 196). Using 1953 as a sample year, the Savoy, which catered only to the whites, would have had to provide this leisure activity for only fifteen percent of the entire population. The other three cinemas, and the Meers Theatre, on the other hand, were open to the rest of the population, even though the mixed race persons were more likely to attend the Nassau Theatre. It seems likely that the four cinemas would have adequately accommodated all those persons interested in viewing a film, albeit, they would have to view them at one of the other four theatres available to them.

The only two theatres for which statistical data is available pertaining to size and other physical dimensions were the Savoy and the Capital, and they have previously been provided. As for the operation and management of the theatres, two of the male narrators, Leon and William commented on the condition and general running of the theatres in these ways. Leon shares as follows:

Leon: The Capitol was run strict ...Nassau Theatre was slack (chuckles)
...You never knew what was gonna happen in there ...Poor management
in that theatre, poor management.

Monique: When you said you never knew what was gonna happen, like
what kind a things?

Leon: Oh, fight dis break out, or rats would run across the front, white rats.
They had some white rats in there (giggles).

William commented on the extreme lack of security patrol within the cinema space of the Nassau Theatre:

William: ...Like on a Saturday, a couple of us, we would buy a bottle of
Red Hackle Whiskey, which was the cheapest whiskey on the market
(chuckles) at the time that we could afford, and we would go to the Nassau
Theatre and sit in the back and drink whiskey and just laugh our heads off
at the foolishness that we were watching on screen.

A female narrator, Nancy, related her experience at the Savoy during an evening outing which communicated a sense of family, even though, it was unsafe for the viewing audience who were required to view the film under compromised conditions. She also recalled that their consumption of the concessions was somewhat monitored:

...The theatre was so full, they sold so many tickets that we sat in the aisle, on the steps, and ... it would be terrible if there was a fire or anything. They probably wouldn't allow us to do that these days, but un, we sat in the aisle. Mr. Roberts used to run the candy store ... pop corn, coke and a chocolate bar, and he knew most of us by name, and he would make sure we didn't use too many candy bars, or anything.

Another important element in the exhibition tier of the film industry is the fixing of cinema ticket prices. The admission prices for the Capitol when it opened in 1950 were advertised at the top of the price range, and the price corresponded to the time of the screening as well as the category of seat. The day was divided in two sections, 2:30pm to 6pm, and after 6pm; and the ticket prices for the first half of the day were Auditorium 2 shillings and Balcony 3 shillings; After 6pm Auditorium 3 shillings and Balcony 4 shillings (Advertisements, 1950). The price for a special children's show, however, was reduced to One shilling at both the Rainbow and the Capitol (Advertisement, 1950). By 1953, most of the cinemas advertised continued shows daily, beginning at 3pm in the afternoon and running until 11pm, with the exception of Sunday, which would start the showing at 5pm. The Savoy's schedule was different from the other theatres in that they advertised continuous showings, Sunday to Friday, 3 to 7pm, and Saturday 2:15 and Regular Evening Shows at 8:30pm. The ticket prices for both the Cinema and the Meers Theatres were listed at Matinee 2 shillings and 2/6 shillings and Evening 2/6 shillings and 3 shillings (Display, 1953).

The theatres in New Providence were well dispersed within communities that made them accessible to persons residing within those communities, but also convenient for those who travelled from as far as Fox Hill in the East and Chippingham in the West. Many of the movies rotated from one theatre to the other, and persons were able to see the selected film at a theatre of their choice. Even so, it is evident that some of the theatres exhibited a particular type of film more than others. The first run films were screened at the Savoy and the Capitol, and the B-Film double features were shown at the Rainbow Theatre, the Meers Theatre, and the Cinema Theatre. It seems evident that the exhibitors knew their audiences, and catered to their tastes in movies. The Savoy, for example screened the very

popular and successful film *Samson and Delilah*. The Rainbow, Meers and the Cinema, however, featured motion-pictures which were shown on double bills, many of which were of the Western genre and serials, with titles such as *The Cisco Kid*, *Silver on the Sage*, *Rio Grande Patrol* and *Roughshod* (see Filmography in Appendix C).

Another remembered element in the exhibition of the films captured in the oral history interviews is the job of the projectionist. One of the interview narrators recalls his work as a projectionist in four of the cinemas during the 1950s. Robert was a young man when he first took an interest in the work of a skilled white projectionist at the Savoy theatre. His mother owned a store on the wharf which was adjacent to the back entrance of the Savoy, and as a boy he would go up the back stairs and spend time in the projection booth learning the trade. His fond recollections of this time of discovery follow:

...And then a fella ... who was there responsible for the projection, he told me this will be a good job ... you want to learn this? I said yeah ... he said, well you have to learn to read properly, you have to learn to figure, and you have to understand if the projector is turning the film at a certain speed, you know it's written on the reel how many feet of film on it. So, you need to figure out how long, approximately, that reel would take before you need to change this next reel. You know you would have, sometimes four projectors in that room, and you set up the second reel, yer third reel, and yer fourth reel. And you had a way of makin' sure when you get a blip when it was almost time to change that reel ... so you know to get ready to switch the next reel on. And the reel that was going off was always directly next to the next projector. So you know, it worked. So people sittin' in the theatre just see a new scene on the screen, they don't understand, but it never missed, you see.

This casual apprenticeship at The Savoy merely stimulated Robert's appetite for the work of a film projectionist, and so when he had the opportunity as a young teenager to learn the trade, he grasped it:

The fella who really taught me to operate the projector was a fella from Fox Hill. ..., and if you saw him you'd figure, this fella don't know nothing, but he was very, very smart fella, and he was efficient. So, he taught me how to operate the projector at the Paul Meers Theatre. ... So I start getting really trained, but ... he could fix the machine when it go bad. And then I start getting' paid for five matinee, and, fifteen shillings, three shillings a matinee. And, fifteen shillings was two dollars...

Under his mentor's tutelage, Robert became proficient as a projectionist, and could be trusted to conduct technical repairs on the equipment as well as doing the work of a

projectionist. It was the practice that the projectionists would work in rotation at the various theatres. In this way, Robert became known to the other projectionists working in the Capitol, the Cinema and The Paul Meers theatres specifically:

So, they got to know me as I was a member of the staff. And I knew the projectionists, because they used to shift around, and so on... When necessary, say for vacation purposes, and if a fella is sick, or whatever ... You had to keep the ...the show must go on, you see.

And, indeed, as Robert said, the show did go on, despite the competition from other leisure activities within the island, the projectionist along with the other persons employed within the cinema industry within Nassau continued to perform and do their parts to ensure that the films continued to roll.

Conclusion

The Cinema business in The Bahamas was, from all indications, a thriving enterprise in the Fifties. The small, but vibrant capital city, Nassau, had three major established cinemas, and at least two smaller ones at the close of the 1940s. By the middle of 1950, the new Capitol Theatre was opened, adding to the selection of theatres the latest in technology and design for the pleasure of its viewing audience. This theatre was a symbol of resistance to the segregated Savoy Theatre, and the substandard Nassau and Cinema Theatres that were all owned by the same established white businessman, Mr. C.W.F. Bethell. Mr. Percy Pinder, black, visionary and owner of the Capitol opened the doors of his new venture to all persons on the island, regardless of their race. He also utilized his space for the promotion of functions such as theatrical plays and concerts, and by so doing providing an opportunity for persons from all socio-economic backgrounds exposure to a variety of cultural experiences. Despite the short time that Mr. Pinder owned and operated the Capitol, just under a year, his courageous business endeavour is applauded by several of the oral history narrators, who respected him for taking the initiative to make such a bold statement and change in cinemagoing in Nassau.

The films distributed to the Nassau theatres were imported into the island, and in many cases exhibited in the theatres within a very similar time to their American counterparts. Not only were they screened within a timely manner, but they were current feature films, produced by both major and independent production companies. From all appearances,

the motion-picture business in The Bahamas was in no way lacking, and the eager moviegoer had access to the same cinema fare as their counterparts the world over.

Chapter V – Racial Segregation and the Politics of Space

Introduction

This chapter discusses the influence of race, racial demarcation and race discrimination and its impact on the cinema during the 1950s in Nassau, Bahamas. It examines the politics of space in the cinemagoing experience of young adults living in Nassau during the fifty's generation. The main aim of this chapter is to peer through the lens of the interviewed narrators and to deconstruct the memories of their experiences and observations in the context of race within the place of the cinemas in Nassau. It also looks at their attendance of other public places that encompassed the geographical area and socially allied 'space', which permeates the collective impression of their cinema experience during that period. The chapter highlights ways in which the racial divides influenced the daily life and attitudes of the narrators during that epoch and evaluates the racial impressions left on the contrasting memories of the racially mixed narrators. The chapter also assesses the cinema experience in the 1950's as a social structure to determine the ways in which it functioned as a 'third place', a place that is different from home or work, and a "social anchor of community life" (Harris, 2007, p. 147), especially for young Bahamians residing in Nassau in this post war colonial era.

Considering the unwritten code of segregation within the city of Nassau prior to and during the period under research, it is not particularly surprising that the cinemas would have instituted some form of racial demarcation to appease social nuances of that time. Indeed, the concept of a white only cinema is by no means an anathema to the social order of things within The Bahamas during the Fifties. The thought of racial integration was uncommon in "Nassau's society [which] was segregated in almost every respect with colour separating the races in housing, education, occupation and social intercourse" (Saunders D. G., 2003, p. 2). As a matter of fact, Saunders further clarifies that racial difference was far more important than variance of class within the Bahamian society at that time (2003, p. 2).

The racial structure in The Bahamas was grounded within the British colonial practice of segregating the races. Historically racial segregating was distinguished by a divide generally into whites and blacks, especially within the context of the Bahamian diaspora; nonetheless, there were divisions within these two groupings. In his recollections of life in The Bahamas in the late 1800s, Louis Diston Powles provides significant insights into the racial divides of pre-liberalised New Providence. Powles uses the context of socializing at Government House to illustrate the separate racial clusters that existed in the country. He explains that the Bahamian Whites, whom he also refers to as Conchs, comprise[d] the “Upper Upper ten”, the “lower Upper ten” and the respectable middle class of the society; the lower class he classifies as “including everybody who is admittedly coloured” (Powles, 1888, p. 120). Craton describes the Bahamian white population as a minority group with a complex history and composition, due to the variant socio-economic phases in the history of the islands, and the archipelagic geography of The Bahamas. The racial composition of some Bahamian whites or ‘Conchy Joes’ is also complex since over the course of time they “meld[ed] genetically with their slaves to form poor but vigorous communities of near-whites” (Craton & Saunders, 1998, p. 74).

Gail Saunders further demarcates and defines an intermediate coloured middle class which was evident by the late 1800s in Nassau and could be placed between the elite white and the black labouring class (Saunders D.G, 1987, p. 448). Dupuch elaborated on the breakdown within this group stating that “they ranged from black or off-black at the bottom, to ‘light-brown’ and ‘high-yaller’ and near white at the top” (1967, p. 37).

An ethnic minority comprised of Greeks, Chinese, Lebanese and Jews migrated into the Bahamas between 1870 -1925. The Greeks, who were fishermen from the Mediterranean, were attracted to The Bahamas by the sponge fishing business; a small group of Chinese began arriving in the Bahama islands in the late 1870s, and by the 1920s, had become the predominant grocery and dry goods traders in the Colony; the Syrian/Lebanese moved into the Bahamas in search of political respite from the Ottoman Empire in the 1890s, and made their living and mark in the society as retailers of clothes and household goods; the Jews first made their way into the Bahamas as early as the 1860s, as wealthy businessmen who by the early 1900s were civil servants and members of the House of Assembly. Without doubt these minority ethnic groups contributed significantly to the economy of

the Bahamas; there is, however, no perceptible impact of their cultures on the Bahamian society (Williams, 1996).

Two Sides of the Hill

The planning use and management of space within the Colony was also organized along racial lines. Ambe Njoh describes the urban planning policies of the British colonizers, who were determined to make colonial spaces segregated, in this way:

The framework of the racial thinking of the time dictated a pecking order for the races rooted in European racial discourse, wherein Whites occupied the highest rung, Blacks occupied the lowest, and the rest fell in between. Planning legislation ensured that this order remained unaltered in space (2008, p. 591).

George, a black participant, explains the layout of Nassau, and the impact of the planning policies of the time in this way:

The portion of the town which was known as Over-the-hill, the Governor lived on a high hill on top, which we call Government Hill, and people ... beyond that was called Over-the-hill, so in the area called Over-the-hill, which is where the blacks lived, the whites didn't come over there. They may come to the night club once and a while, but they didn't come over there to go to the movies and all that kinda ...they didn't want to walk in the streets...they didn't want to be molested ...they don't want to be begged and all that kinda stuff. They just didn't want to associate. And we had areas of the country where we had that happen, not only in Nassau, but take an island like Abaco, an island like Long Island where the whites of those islands sort of stayed to themselves, and they treated the blacks the same way they treated in Nassau. But this is all brought about by, actually by the British. Their pomp and pageantry and all of their practices of doing things according to the way they want um done, and people had to respect certain areas...certain, um, um positions and all that. You couldn't speak to the Governor, well we have a Governor General today, but you couldn't speak to the Governor...you couldn't speak to the Governor Secretary, they were big people, and all that, and you had to damn near bow when you see them. If you in the street and they happen to be in the street, and you bow 'good afternoon sir' and all that kinda stuff. You know these are the things that eventually we got away from because we learned afterwards that all men are equal, as they say, but some more equal ...

The area of Over-the-hill did not begin to evolve until the late 1700s, after an influx of Loyalists arrived from the southern United States to take up residence in Nassau, bringing their slaves along with them and increasing the ratio of blacks, living in Nassau, to five times that of the white population (McWeeney, 2002). This necessitated a place for the

slaves to be accommodated as there were some concern, and a degree of trepidation, about the slaves living among the white population. They were, accordingly, relegated into two areas just on the other side of the hill known as Mount Fitzwilliam. These two areas became known, individually, as Headquarters and Delancey Town. Coincidentally, a significant number of blacks that came to The Bahamas did so as Free Negroes (Albury, 1975, p. 129). Separating the blacks from the white population, and placing them in communities with other black persons, was seen as the most effective way to help them make the transition to life in this new world. This set up a pattern of separating the racial groups on the Island; between 1820 and 1829, under the instructions of the then governor of the islands Governor Lewis Grant, the Surveyor-General of the islands, Mr. John Burnside, laid out Grant's Town, Bain Town and a part of Delancey Street. These areas were designed specifically as settlements for liberated Africans and former slaves (Saunders G. &, 2001, p. 10 &11).

In his recollections of Over-the-hill from the mid-1930s into the 1950s, Sir Orville Turnquest recalls this area from not just a geographical perspective, but rather "also a culture, a concept, an identity, a heritage, and a way of life" (2010, pp. 19-20). Seemingly, not much had changed since the divide had been established with the first massive influx of the slave population during the 1700s, as the white population still maintained their communities on the northern side of the hill and the blacks remained within the boundaries of their communities on the southern side of the hill. The idea of high ground denoting power was one that was actively embraced in the British colonies (Njoh, 2008, p. 596): and certainly one that was utilized to demonstrate authority in Nassau where the Governors official Residence, Government House, is situated at the top of the major dividing hill, Mt. Fitzwilliam. Which itself represents a delimiting physical marker. And so it was that the white minority ruling class had their businesses and some of their residences north of the hill where the economic and governmental power resided. Indeed, this segregated practice within the Bahama Islands were very much fueled by the economic structure within the colony. In describing the hegemonic imperative of the Bahamian economy during the late 1800's and early 1900s, Craton and Saunders refers to it in this way:

Bahamian society was divided on racial and ethnic grounds, but the divisions were enforced, or reinforced, not so much by legal enactments, police actions, or educational opportunity as by economics: the economic

leverage Nassau and its white elite always exerted over the Out Island and the black majority and the peripheral effects of the Bahamas of the capitalist intensification of the world economy (Craton & Saunders, 1998, p. 32).

A 1953 census shows that there were approximately 46 thousand persons residing in New Providence in 1953. Descendants of Black African who came to the islands either as slaves or freemen represented 71%, which was clearly most of the population. European white is recorded as representing approximately 15%; and those of Mixed Race were approximately 15% of the population (Craton & Saunders, 1998, p. 196). Despite the black Bahamians obvious outnumbering of the white minority, the white Bahamians were able to achieve and maintain their position of power, principally because of “the prevailing imperial policies of *laisse faire*, free trade and fiscal self-sufficiency which almost entirely favoured the white ruling class” (Craton & Saunders, 1998, p. 75).

The geographic location of the theatres as well as the atmosphere in and around the cinemas in Nassau communicated a sense of identity to the Bahamian generation of the 1950s. The selection of a cinema was not an unrestricted decision on the part of the cinemagoer, but rather one that was imposed on them from a discriminatory practice, as well as a matter of convenience and practicality related to the location of the theatre. The place of the cinema that a person attended sent a clear and definitive message to both the cinemagoer, and the cinema establishment, referencing the type of customer who would patronize it. This was largely determined by the location of the cinema, far more than the film that was being screened inside. The decision to watch a film at the Cinema Theatre on East Street, Over-the-hill would, for example, be determined on the basis of the theatre’s close proximity to home and work in most instances. Whereas, a decision to watch a film in the White only Savoy, might have been based on its exclusive patron restrictions. Despite the location being a strong determinant of the selected cinema, Nathaniel, a mixed-race narrator, felt that there was a certain type of clientele that naturally frequented certain cinemas:

Well, as you know ...the Over-the-hill theatres was like for the casual people, more or less come as you are. I wouldn’t say they, they dirty or stink, but at least you know...And then they use like a double attraction which, which encourage that type of person to come, and they like, like the mechanic and the masons and the average person, and they probably fall half to sleep or somethin’ ‘cause they’ll come little under the influence, you know (giggles).

In addition to the internal forces which influenced racial relations within the Bahamas, many of the country's racially discriminatory practices resulted from its strong connection with the United States. Bahamian Historian Paul Albury describes the relationship that the Bahamas had with North America while they were both still British colonies:

All the Lords Proprietors of the Bahamas were also Proprietors of Carolina and that colony became something of a second motherland to our own. We looked there for advise, assistance and trade. In fact, trade with the mainland colonies was the lifeblood of the Bahamas. Our enemies were traditionally the same as their enemies, and an attack on one colony was considered a threat to the others. The privateers of all the colonies heard the same call to action, and Nassau became as familiar to many American captains as their own home ports (1975, p. 90).

As White American investors became interested in The Bahamas, and began to move into the islands, they brought along with them their established attitudes towards racial segregation, namely their "Jim Crow" attitudes (Saunders D. G., 2003, p. 6). Race relations within the United States, and the south in particular, were defined by the post-Reconstruction era known as "Jim Crow"; a time when discriminatory racial laws and practices were passed and enacted, in the southern states of America in particular, against the black minority in all aspects of their civil life (Hoelscher, 2003; Editor, 2008/2009). Even so, there were no formal laws that regulated the practice of racial segregation in The Bahamas, as was the case in the United States. Many of the "exclusionary practices are [were] codified by custom and taken-for-granted norms" (Hoelscher, 2003, p. 659). Among the places that adhered to these exclusionary practices both in the United States and The Bahamas were: hotels/lodging houses, cinemas/theatres, restaurants, saloons and barber shops, schools and banks (Hoelscher, 2003, p. 659; Saunders D. G., 2003, p. 6).

During the Forties and into the Fifties, the tourist industry within The Bahamas was developing into a more focused economic sector. Hotels, restaurants, and other tourism support businesses were increasing. Accommodation and leisure provisions for the tourists, who were predominantly white Americans, were separate from facilities of the local black and mixed-race population. Black Bahamians were employed within these establishments to provide the necessary service-oriented jobs in the sector but were not allowed to use the services or reside in the hotels as guests, nor to participate in the leisure and entertainment experiences offered by the tourist establishment generally (Craton &

Saunders, 1998; Albury, 1975). The black and mixed-race entertainers were very popular in the hotels and nightclubs throughout the island; nonetheless, blacks were not generally welcomed in hotel entertainment areas nor nightclubs in the city. Thema, one of the black female narrators shares this experience:

Oh Yeah! We used to like to go to Zion Baptist Church on New Year's Eve, and you know, and invariably we'd go over to the Royal Victoria Hotel ... and the band, soon as we got there, the group of us, the band would start playing 'Bye, Bye Black Birds' (laughs) I never forgot that ... Now I don't know whether they did it because they were friends of ours, but I think (laughs) they knew we were not welcomed, and I guess that was just a 'lil signal to let us know.

Over-the-hill was normally considered out of bounds for white tourists and white residents alike, but these segregated lines became blurred as the night emerged, and the desire for entertainment surpassed colour lines as the black musicians and entertainers, with their white clientele, would often travel Over-the-hill, as a continuation of their gigs, after they completed entertaining in the white only hotels and nightclubs on the island (Justilien C. , 2004). Over-the-hill was transformed from a black's only segregated space, to one in which persons could abandon and disregard differences for the sake of entertainment. In a talk at the Bahamas Historical Society in November, 1990, E. Dawson Roberts, a white Bahamian, who admitted that "Over-the-hill was out of bounds" for him, talked about what Saturday evenings in Nassau were like for him and his friends:

On Saturday evening we went to our club for two quickies 1/6 each. Then on to the B.C. for dancing until midnight – drinks were 3/. The Band stopped playing at 12:00 and we wandered across the street to the Imperial Hotel which was run by the Maillis family. We had a conch salad and another drink while we listened to George Symonette knock out Calypsos on a beat up piano...and 1 o'clock we drove over the hill to Paul Meeres 3 Dices Club to catch the late show. In a low ceiling room Paul danced "Babaloo!... (1991, pp. 20,21).

This is not dissimilar to what Sharon Zukin refers to as a time in certain parts of the United States when there was an occurrence of "the 'cultural flowering' of the 1920s in when, despite the impoverished living conditions, the African American community spawned a plethora of sites of jazz, dance, nightlife, preaching, and politics" (Zukin, 2011). Some of the narrators talked of how they frequented the various night spots where blacks and whites alike danced the night away. Peter, a white narrator said that he visited the Silver

Slipper on East Street “out of curiosity”; while both Winnie and William, black narrators, had more vivid memories of the nightclubs:

Winnie: The Silver Slipper...it was open, it was open... you heard the music and what not, but the seats and everything, you could see right in the Silver Slipper, who was there and who was not.

William: The Conch Shell was on Blue Hill Road South, and of course the Cat and Fiddle ... the Cat and Fiddle became the thing, because the Cat and Fiddle...moved from East Street ... that was really the Silver Slipper, Freddie Munnings was the owner, operator, proprietor of the Silver Slippers on East Street, just below the hill there...but Freddie moved the...operation from the Silver Slipper to the Cat and Fiddle. The thing back then was big floor, floor shows, a big open ... these were all ... open night clubs, not enclosed. They had coverings around the perimeter where you sat, but the big floor was open, where the floor show took place, and where dancing took place ... the action was on the floor.

Aside from the apparent equal access to the night clubs of Over-the-hill, most of the opportunities available to whites in Nassau were different from those open to the mixed-race and Black Bahamians. Government sponsored schools were provided for the masses throughout the lower grades, but receiving a high-quality secondary education became very competitive and, in many cases, too expensive a venture for many black persons. The more prestigious Secondary/high schools were; the Government High; and private church ran Secondary schools, such as St. Augustine’s College, St. Johns College, and Queen’s College. Getting a place at the esteemed ‘Government High School’ was a quest and privilege, not easily acquired. Marina, a participant who attended this institution spoke of it in this way:

And it was the top; the smartest children in the other Government schools that went to Government High. You had to get 96% to 100% on your exams, whatever exams you took, to get into Government High. I think each ... there was Western Senior, Eastern Senior, Southern Senior, so they would take in like thirty children at a time. So, there were like ten top children from each school got in. Now, if you didn’t make that grade, you didn’t get in. I was lucky, I was one of those who made the grade and went in.

But, even after proving her intellectual superiority, Marina still experienced racial discrimination within the classroom:

...there were children who came from the Family Islands, Conkey Joes as well as the others, and they seemed to get all the preference because, we

had a few Bahamian teachers, but most of them were English, most of our teachers at that time were English. We had about ... four Bahamian teachers during my time, and all the other teachers were English or Canadian teachers, and the prejudice was so strong at that time. I never could understand why it was that they would just focus on those people. They sat at the front of the class, we sat in the back of the class.

All the white oral history interview narrators, and one of the mixed-race narrators attended the Methodist school, Queen's College, which was a private educational institution. While Queen's College had a predominant white student body, there were some blacks and mixed- race children who matriculated there. Fiona recalls as a young Prefect at Queen's College being asked by an American tourist how she 'felt' about having coloured children come to her school. Fiona's response was "don't make no difference to me, they deserve an education same as me". Despite the doors of Queen's College being 'open' to all, it was a private school, and as such, a major bar to entering the school, apart from race, was economic; only pupils whose families could afford the school fees attended the school, and very few blacks and coloured families met that criteria.

Racial segregation and discrimination have an insidious way of dividing people, and the generation of the 1950s experienced this divided lifestyle first-hand. The layout of the city of Nassau, with the predominant dividing marker of the hill, ensured that the boundaries and divides were apparent and understood by all races; thereby assuring a predetermined way of life through racial spatial segregation (Njoh, 2008). The location of the four cinemas, the Savoy, the Nassau Theatre, the Capitol and the Cinema, not only demonstrates their spatial narrative as determined by their location throughout the city, but also the significance of the actual venues and what these places meant to the narrators and the residents of that time.

The Place of the cinemas

Most people invariably structure and organize their lives around places as conceptualized by the social, economic and political delimits of space, in their inherited experiences: The house in which you are born, the school you attended as a child, the church in which you were married, and in the case of the current research, the movie theatre in which you saw your favourite films, all hold a distinct place in a person's present setting or situational space as hued by memory. Similarly, in the process of remembering, many persons

situate their memories within the context of places. Edward Casey contends that “it is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability” (Casey, 2000, p. 186). He further describes memory as a place in and of itself, by emphasizing what he termed the ‘reservative’ role of place; stressing that a place is by design to be re-entered, and places are re-entered by the physical body, or by memory. Place is, therefore, a strong memory cue in the sense that human beings naturally return to a place. As the narrators shared their memories of the four cinemas, many of them navigated their recollections of the place of the cinema. These reminiscences, referred to as Place Memories or topographical memory talk (Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic*, 2002), are ones in which the narrators express their memories of the cinemas as concrete buildings, situated in communities, residential or business, populated with persons engaging in their daily lives. As they shared their memories, they talked about the physical environs of the theatres, comparing them to the distances traversed to and from the show, as well as the inherent distinctiveness of the individual cinemas. This is the process which Kuhn describes as a “corpus of discursive strategies that offer clues to some of the ways in which cinema memory operates as a specific form of cultural memory” (Kuhn A. , 2002, p. 17). Alan, a black narrator told of routes that persons would take to the cinemas, and ways in which person got to their destinations. Peter, a white narrator shares similarly about his travels back home from watching a movie on a Saturday evening.

Alan: You had various forms, various roads. Up Grant’s Town, up Bay Street, on the corner of Elizabeth Avenue, that’s where the movie house was, and you had to walk there. You had those who lived on the Fort Hill come down the steps, and came right straight on down to Bay Street; but us who live Over-the-hill, we had various ways to take, East Street, or we take Blue Hill Road, or we take all of that to get to Bay Street, and mostly, them early years it was by bicycle and walk ...lot of us walk.

Peter: Whatever theatre we went to...the group of us, well it wasn’t a group formed, but teenagers ...that was what they did on a Saturday afternoon... It was somewhat dictated by the movie that was on, you know, whether you wanted to see...I don’t want to see Roy Rogers now; I want to see another one, somewhere else. So that would dictate the theatre that we went to. And they were all within walking distance of downtown, which is where we were, and I don’t remember at this point how, how we got home afterwards ...whether we walked home, we could easily do that, and it was safe, and you know, even if it extended over into after dark ...we were all right with coming home.

When a black narrator, William, described the new Capitol Theatre, for instance, the sense of pride in such a structure, built by a black Bahamian in the 1950s in a location Over-the-hill, resonates in his description of the place of the cinema. Whereas, Judy described the entrance and interior of the Nassau Theatre as she remembered it looking in the 1950s:

William: Well, in the fifties, we couldn't go to the Savoy...The Nassau Theatre was quite nice as a theatre, the Cinema wasn't bad either, and then you know, the Capitol Theatre ...we were so happy when a black Bahamian opened [it], because all the theatres at that time were owned by the Bethell Brothers, and I think they had a lock on the first run movies. I think that's really what ruined Mr. Pinder when he opened the Capitol Theatre which was nicer than all of them. The Capitol in terms of its physical, but he couldn't get first run movies, he couldn't compete...

Judy: They would have pictures of what was showing on the two walls. They would have them in caves, it wasn't just on the wall, they would have them so you couldn't just bother it. It was framed, framed in; you saw it and then so you could see what showing next week or after this one you see ...They call it a poster, the poster, and at the end of the area there was the counter that you bought your peanuts, your popcorn, you soda ...nothing much else 'cause they didn't sell ice cream. So, big open, no petitions just a full big room and it slope down like, like you gern down, not a hill, but it slope. Those closer to the screen were down there, and then there's an upstairs balcony, but downstairs was where you go with the children especially, and most adults. I din bother to go upstairs...There were strong wooden chairs connected, not no one you move ...wooden chairs with yer cushion, I mean not fatty cushion ... you didn't sit on wood.

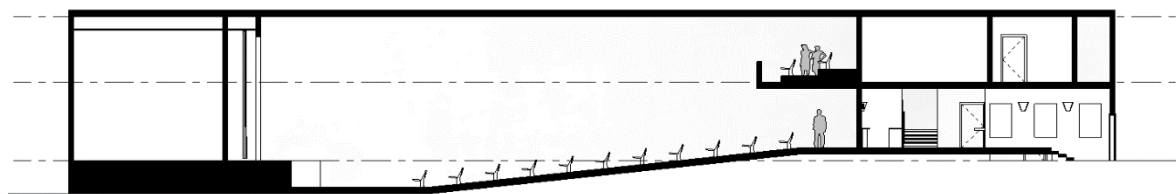
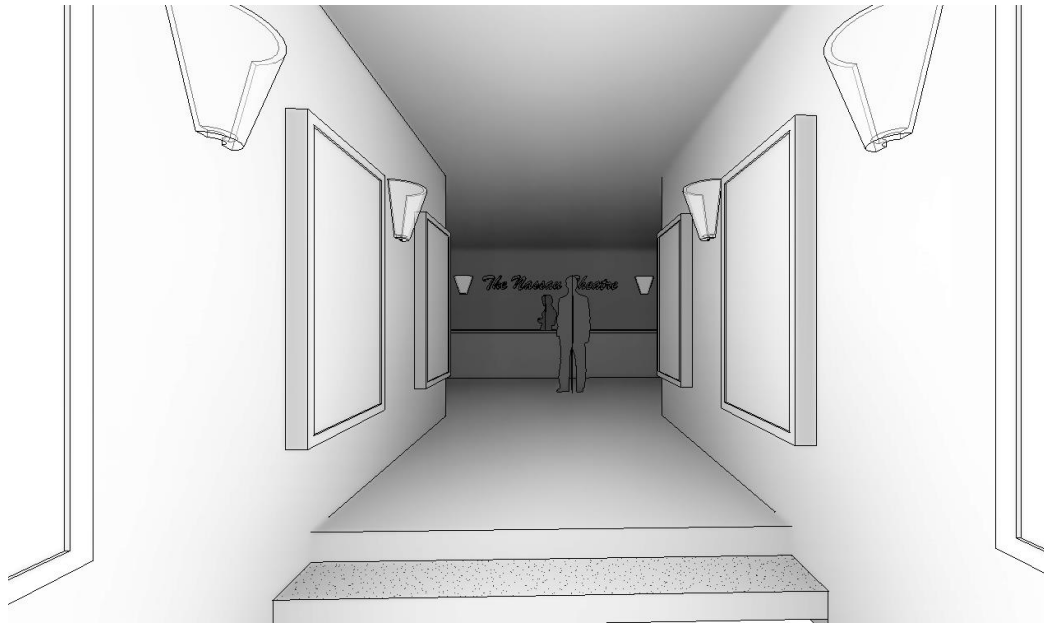


Figure 7: Drawings of the Nassau Theatre from the recollections of Judy, a female narrator, by Mr. Conway Smith

The rooted nature of the cinema's structure serves as an aide in the memory of what that theatre represented. The Capitol Theatre, for example, was not an ideal, nor an abstraction, it was a real and concrete building that was a tangible representation of dreams and aspirations; while, the memories of the Nassau Theatre existing in the memories of a narrator provides a visual representation that can serve as a pictorial depiction of a cinema space now lost in the pages of time.

The locations of the four theatres represented sites of social and economic capital in The Bahamas. Bay Street was the main street for government services and commerce, and as such it was the centre of power. The Whites only Savoy Theatre, and the Nassau Theatre were both located on Bay Street. The Savoy was positioned in the centre of the most prestigious shops and eateries, and just a block from the harbour where the tourist ships

docked, and the tourist trade was most evident and vibrant. About four blocks east of the Savoy, on Bay Street and Union Street (later renamed Elizabeth Avenue) was the Nassau Theatre, not in the heart of the city, but certainly still in a prime commercial and business area of the island's main high street and one block east of Dowdeswell Street. The persons who resided in and around Dowdeswell Street were principally a mixture of coloured and white Bahamians. The other two cinemas were located in the section of the island called Over-the-hill. The Cinema and the Capitol theatres were both built in that part of the island inhabited by the black Bahamian population. The Cinema was on East Street very near to the communities of Mason's Addition and the Fort Hill, while the Capitol, just one main street to the west, was situated on a street called Market Street which bordered the black community of Grants Town on the west. Despite the location of the various theatres, the only cinema with a restricted clientele was the Savoy. The other three cinemas were open to all persons regardless of race, nonetheless, white Bahamians generally patronised The Savoy, solely. Oscar, a white narrator, talked about an experience he had when he and a group of friends decided to visit the integrated Nassau Theatre:

Oscar: ...Just to see what it was all about, and I tell you, we were on our toes, (chuckles) 'cause we were afraid of something gonna happen ... whether they gonna beat us up, or whatever ...

Monique: Which one did you go to?

Oscar: The Nassau one .

Monique: The Nassau ... and so, what was the experience like?

Oscar: Yeah, yeah, I would say maybe three or four [young men], and we were always on our toes, ... but we came outta there untouched, and we said 'what's it all about, you know (laughs). Why can't these go down to there, and why can't they come up to here?

Another factor that influenced a cinema and its clientele was that of territoriality. One theatre in particular was off limits to a specific group depending on the area of the island in which they resided. Generally speaking, the divide was between the East and the West, as well as the two sides of the hill, which separated the economically privileged whites, the coloured middle class and the blacks. These lines of demarcation were established and marked off by major streets, and the infamous hill. The persons residing within these

boundaries were aware of them, and for all intents and purposes, respected them. In the case of the theatres, the Cinema and the smaller Meers Theatre, were the two theatres most affected by this territorial stigma. A strong sense of these two theatres 'belonging' to the community is expressed by participants who were both insiders and outsiders of the territories in which these theatres were situated. The Cinema was located on East Street, and as such was considered an area off bounds to George, a participant who himself resided in the area called Chippingham, an area situated to the West of Nassau Street:

... coming from West Nassau, which is the Chippingham area, we didn't venture too far into the, beyond, ah, Market Street, because East Street, there were (chuckles)... They had gang, gang wars so to speak, and, um, turf territory, so if you come into my turf territory, you lookin' fer problems, so we didn't venture too far, and the fellas from that area didn't venture into our territory. We, we would seldom go ... The Cinema, which was on, both on East Street, and we'd go to The Capitol which was on Market Street ...closer to where we lived.

The Meers Theatre catered primarily to those persons living further south of the city centre. Garnet remembers that the theatres location strongly influenced its community feel and patronage since "most of the people from that area, Farm Road, Blue Hill Road South, East Street ... they used to go to theatre there, but if you ain livin' wey down in the South, they probably go to the Capitol Theatre ...". To further emphasize this sense of community generated by the Meers Theatre, Garnet shares an incident that occurred when he was a young boy:

Sometimes I would go to the movies, ah, as a matter of fact, we used to live near Paul Meers Theatre ... it was on Farm Road and Fleming Streets, and my mother, she used to work then at the Colonial Secretary ... and one day after school she told me to go straight home from school, 'cause I was off from work ... and I disobey her ... I was coaxed by a dear friend of mine ... and I went to the theatre with him, and my mother came, and she was waiting outside for me, and she beat me from the theatre straight home.

The oral history interviews were enlivened with stories about the significance of the cinemas to their sense of belonging to the local communities, as well as their sense of identity as both black and white citizens of The Bahamas in this era.

The ‘Whites’ Only Savoy Theatre

One prevailing thread that ran through the interviews was the fact that black persons were not allowed in The Savoy Theatre. Practically all of the black narrators mentioned this at some point in their interview, with fewer of the white narrators overtly referring to the practice. As previously recognized, New Providence was an island that was divided along distinct racial lines, and as it pertained to socializing, cinemagoing was one of those activities that openly practiced segregation. The Savoy Theatre was undeniably a cinema that mainly catered to an exclusively white clientele; both white and black narrators acknowledged this practice. Garnet, a young black waiter and barman during the Fifties states that “the Savoy Theatre on Bay Street was off limit. It was fer white and white only.” Hartley, another black narrator placed the practice of the cinema’s white only policy into an historical context saying that “of course you know of the history of the Savoy, where it was discriminated to a point. It wasn’t until the very late that the black people could have gone to the Savoy.”

Likewise, both Marina and Rachel, two black female narrators expressed their recollections of the racially prejudiced policies of the Savoy Theatre:

Marina: Well, there was a movie house that we were not allowed to go to, because it was, they practiced racial prejudice, and it was only open on the main street of downtown Nassau. It was only open to whites! We, we were not able to attend that.

Rachel: In Bay Street, and you pass by that, but because you was black, you were not allowed to go there, so you could only pass by and maybe see a headline of what the movie was gonna be, but that wasn’t for me. I couldn’t go there.

Oscar, a white narrator was cognizant of the discriminatory practice of the Savoy and reasoned that it was not justified in so far as the same films were exhibited at all of the cinemas because they were all owned by Mr. Charlie Bethel. “Well it was the same, owned by the same people, and so it was just takin’ one movie from the Savoy and bring it over to the Nassau Theatre, and instead of being all white, it was all black...”

One of the white female narrators, Fiona, was not as aware of the discriminatory practices of the Savoy during her youthful patronage of the theatre:

...But at the time I didn't realize that, it was just, we went to the Savoy because that was where we usually went...But, I didn't realize, and I didn't realize, I may have been young, well I was young, and I guess it just blew over my head that they weren't allowed. But, I didn't realize that they weren't allowed to go into the theatre. And I didn't realize they weren't allowed to go into hotels, 'cause that was never right.

Velma, a black narrator, had no doubt about the segregated, 'White Only' policy of the Savoy Theatre which she experienced first-hand when she attempted to accompany a young white child for whom she had oversight, to see a movie at that cinema:

Velma: I went to Savoy ... I was takin' care a 'lil baby, and they let the baby in and din' wan let me in... 'Cause she was white and I was black, you know black people couldn't go in the Savoy... 'Cause her mother wanted her to go see, um, Mickey Mouse, so I jes, I say well I'll go see too. But he say I couldn' go in, I say then, she can' go 'cause I say, well, I dis take care of her, and ... if I can' go, she can' go, and so he let me in. I don' know if he got rough for that, but, he let me in, you know ... Her mother wasn't Bahamian ... I feel like a ... fool, sittin' in there ... I wasn't comfortable yer know, I want to get in yer know, but I wanted to find out how, what was in there, why they didn' want black people in dere, yer know, but I went in, and I am, sat down, and dey had air condition, like the rest of um, and it wasn' no different, but dey din' wan' no black people in dere. And all the whites used to go in.

Monique: ... How did people in there respond to you?

Velma: Some a dem looked, and some er dem ... some again, they wasn' lookin', dey jes was watchin' der movie, and some a dem jes keep lookin' at yer, lookin' at yer up and down. And I sat right down, I look right back at dem, like, like what you look at me for, huh! ... I didn even wanna to go back inside dere.. I didn' wanna go back in dere...

Velma's experience correlates with those of blacks who were relegated to the balconies of movie theatres in the United States during an era which legitimized segregation, predominantly in the southern United States. African American cinemagoers were separated from their white counterparts and allowed to view the film from specified areas such as the balconies and galleries of the theatre building (Gomery, 1992, pp. 155-170; Knight, , 2011; Regester, 2005). These segregated spaces came to be known as the 'Buzzard's Roost', which were not simply occupied by blacks only, but also accessed by a 'blacks only' entrance (Regester C. , 2005). The black Bahamian audience was spared the compromised viewing experience of the Buzzard's Roost in that it was afforded separate theatres in which they could enjoy the viewing of the film in an egalitarian

environment. Indeed, some of the narrators indicated that the Savoy Theatre was not the superior of the four cinemas, and they had no desire to subject themselves to viewing a film in an environment in which they were not accepted. Both Rachel and Shirley, black narrators responded to the Savoy's practice of segregation as a product of the time, and expressed an attitude of acceptance of the order of things:

Rachel: Well, at that time it didn't matter 'cause, you know, at that time of my life that's how it was. But I was wise enough to know it shouldn't be that way, but it was something that it took time to change. Black people knew that wasn't for them, and you didn't, you didn't worry about it. You passed by, and you didn't even want to, I personally didn't want to go there, 'cause they didn't even want me there, you know.

Shirley: Well, I guess we all felt, 'cause in those days you had ta...what they call it, they call it, the Bay Street Boys, then, you know. I think, well, I'm tryin' to remember whether you could 'a go after that. I can't remember that, but I've never been there, I know that fer sure. I pass there, right there on Bay Street, but I've never been there. Maybe some people went there, but I have never been there...It didn't bother me because you know you weren't used to goin' this place and that place no way, so just satisfy with what you had, you know, that's about it (giggles).

When William, a black male narrator, got the opportunity to see and enter the Savoy, after the segregated practice was discontinued, this is how he expressed his feelings upon entering the theatre to 'take a peek':

Well, in the Fifties, we couldn't go to the Savoy, and I remember when the Savoy was finally opened I went to take a peek in there and I said well (chuckles) we weren't missin' anything (laughs), cause it was a bit of a dump, really...

The Bahamians of mixed race were a group who considered themselves not quite white, but definitely not black. This unique position deemed their social status somewhat indefinite, nonetheless, for the most part, they too were excluded from membership in the White's only club, and therefore, generally not allowed into the Savoy Theatre. Iris, a 'fair skin' mixed-race narrator shared a personal example of this vague manifestation of the segregated cinema practice and the 'ambiguous' nature of the mixed-race person in the Bahamian society:

Iris: It's so funny, my, my cousin ..., she was quite a bit darker than me, but she went to The Savoy. It, it's funny, they had a funny policy, they didn't let in so-called black people, or people who were of a, you know, brown, but, um, they, I guess because of (her father) they, they let her in.

Monique: What was he...?

Iris: He was a businessman, real estate. But, um, it's funny, they let in some and didn't, it was ambiguous. ...You know, people, if they know your family and so forth, they might let you in, even though they discriminate against others.

The fantasy of a pure 'white' space is embedded in the racialized Savoy Theatre. The notion that this segregated space was reserved for a select group is at the heart of the history of this cinema. Nonetheless, this ideal becomes a travesty when juxtaposed against the reality of the actual cinema space; which from several of the narrator's recollections was indeed inferior when compared to at least one of the other cinemas that catered to and welcomed all persons without regard to race, social or economic class.

The Atmosphere of the Other Three Theatres

The other three theatres, The Capitol, The Nassau and The Cinema did not impose any racial restrictions on its clientele. Peter, a white narrator remembers that he and his friends would go to the Savoy, the Capitol or the Nassau Theatres; he did not recall ever visiting the Cinema. The location of the theatre to a large degree dictated the patronage of the theatre. Marina explained that the persons who patronized the Cinema and the Capitol were mostly black people because you were not likely to see many white people coming to a theatre that was located on Market Street or East Street. Kingsley and Thelma, a black couple, described the clientele of the theatres in this way:

Monique: So, why did you go to the Nassau Theatre so frequently?

Thelma: Because I think that was the theatre to go to in those days, hey?

Kingsley: Yeah, that, that, Nassau Theatre was, before the Capitol, right. Capitol was, Percy Pinder built the Capitol, hey, and that was more like...

Thelma: You see, and it was like

Kingsley: Black people, you know, our folk

Thelma: Right, Savoy was white, and the Nassau Theatre was black

Kingsley: Well, the Nassau Theatre was mixed, you know.

Thelma: Well, it was mixed, yeah, it was no segregation ...

Kingsley: The Capitol was built in the black, you know, Over-the-hill, so I mean, blacks were more than welcome, you know.

The Nassau Theatre, however, appeared to attract blacks, whites and the mixed-race persons. Alan remembers the Nassau Theatre as being a cinema that everyone went to. He particularly recalled that “all blacks went there, from all different stations of life, ‘cause, if you wanted to see a movie, that’s where you go, to the Nassau Theatre, you couldn’t go to the Savoy”. Again, this might have been largely due to its location which was on Bay Street, and within easy walking distance of white, coloured and black communities.

The abhorrent discriminatory practices along racial lines within both The Bahamas and the United States were earnestly challenged during the 1950s. Black American activists were actively rebelling against the inequities within their country and were more aggressively demanding what they saw as their right to equal access to public places. Ultimately, largely due to the force of the Civil Rights Movement, racial segregation laws in the United States were amended, and blacks and whites were allowed to watch films in the same theatre with no exclusionary restrictions (Quart & Auster, pp. 43-45; Register C, 2005).

Likewise, in The Bahamas, it took a civil upheaval to finally affect the change to the practice of segregation in public places. The status quo of the social order was being challenged both from within The Bahamas and from outside. When black foreigners visiting the Bahamas were discriminated against, especially in their access to hotel accommodations, a mixed-race Bahamian Barrister and newspaper tycoon, and Member of the House of Assembly, Mr. Etienne Dupuch, became actively involved in the move to eliminate the discriminatory racial practices in public places within the Bahamas. Dupuch publicly addressed the problem in his newspaper, the *Tribune*. Added pressure from the Progressive Liberal Party, the unofficial main opposition to the white ruling government, led to Etienne Dupuch giving notice of his intention to move an Anti-Discrimination Resolution in the House of Assembly. At the appointed meeting of the House, Dupuch made a speech, the gist of which follows:

He asked for a public declaration whether Bahamians were one or two groups of people. He recalled meeting a young Bahamian in London

recently who was ashamed to admit he was from The Bahamas because of its blatant colour-bar discrimination. Comparing The Bahamas with other West Indian tourist resorts and the United States, he deplored The Bahamas' notorious reputation for its callous treatment of coloured visitors and the humiliation suffered by Bahamians, and dared the House to discuss a subject that it had always avoided (Saunders G. , 1996, pp.180).

The Resolution was ultimately passed in February of 1956 which “condemned discrimination in “public” places on grounds of race and colour. The doors to the Savoy and hotels and restaurants that practiced discrimination were eventually opened to all persons. Nonetheless, there was still a long way to go before all Bahamians could exercise their civic right to socialize publicly indiscriminately and with parity. The political struggle for equality among all persons regardless of their race was a continued uphill struggle which led to majority rule in 1967 and Independence in 1973.

The cinema as a Third Place in 1950s Nassau

The cinema in Nassau in the 1950s functioned as a social hub. The activity of moviegoing played a part in uniting the generation of that time, and the theatre provided a venue for them to congregate and be at ease outside of their home environments. In the introduction to his book *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg talks about the significance of public gathering places to various cities in this way:

“Great civilizations, like great cities, share a common feature. Evolving within them and crucial to their growth and refinement are distinctive informal public gather places. These become as much a part of the urban landscape as of the citizen's daily life and, invariably, they come to dominate the image of the city” (1989, p. xv).

Oldenburg presents three places which he acknowledges to be essential domains in the life of an individual. The first place is identified as the home; the second place is the work setting; and the third places are “a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (1989, p. 16). The concept of the third place is one of ‘pure sociability’; a place to engage in a great deal of chatter, eating and drinking. Georg Simmel defines this level of sociability as “the pleasure of the individual is always contingent upon the joy of others; so one cannot have his satisfaction at the cost of contrary experiences on the part of others” (1949, p. 257). Some of the functions of third places are their serving as locales that unify neighbourhoods; introduce newcomers to the

neighbourhood; encourage friendships; and provide sites for meeting of support groups (Oldenburg, 2003) (Mair, 2009). It is my contention that, in lieu of the traditional types of third places identified by Oldenburg, for the black population specifically, the cinemas in Nassau were obliged to become this sort of gathering ground for persons in the 1950s Nassau. One black narrator, Marina, aptly articulated the significance of the cinema as a place where she and her contemporaries gathered:

Well, once you go to the movies, I mean it was a fun place to go then cause there was nowhere else to go, not for young people. We didn't have places like Arawak Cay, and all that fast food places they could hang out and whatever, we just could go to the movies, go to a party, go to church, go to church functions, that sort of thing. It wasn't that much we could do.

Arawak Cay is a very popular recreational locale populated with individually owned and operated restaurants and bars designed in an open plan, which was developed in Nassau in the early 1990s. The atmosphere of the small restaurants and bars at Arawak Cay resemble that of the cafes in many European cities, qualifying them to constitute contemporary Bahamian third places. Some of the white narrators spoke of a place where they gathered as young persons in the Fifties that would absolutely qualify as a third place for them at that time. As mentioned earlier, Black's Candy Kitchen was an ice cream parlour that was located north of the hill, and near to Bay Street and the town centre.

Rightly so, the cinema does not fully meet all of the requirements of a third place when considering the five things Oldenburg uses to characterise them: they exist on neutral ground; guests are placed on equal levels of sociability; conversation is the main activity; accessible and accommodating to patrons; regular clientele; a non-pretentious physical structure; the atmosphere is playful and fun; and it is a home away from home (1989). Nonetheless, there are many similarities in the atmosphere and function of Oldenburg's third places and the cinemas in the memories of the Bahamian Fifties generation.

Some of the narrators describe the atmosphere in the cinemas of the Fifties in Nassau as being rather informal places where people talked and interacted with each other. Thelma admitted in her interview that "I never really got hooked on movies. I'd be going to the movies more as an outing to go out, than going to see the movie itself..." For Peter, the cinemas were a familiar and safe gathering spot that he and his friends frequented regularly:

Right, it was the Savoy which in our older teenage years we may go to after school if there was something appropriate to see there, and we were allowed to do that. My parents were pretty relaxed.... I mean you were just found in either the Savoy or the Capitol, or the Nassau Theatre.

Leon stated that his favourite cinema was also the Savoy because all the girls that he knew went to that theatre, and so he also went. This would give him the opportunity to see and meet young women in a public and social setting. He also recalled how he and his friends would regularly go to the late night movies on Wednesdays at the Savoy:

... The midnight movie... We all wanted to go, because we wanted to be up late at night with all of our friends. Um, yeah, they had midnight movie every Wednesday night, like I said, and then Christmas and New Years they had midnight movies, especially New Years ...They always had good music commin' from up top...by a guy named Louie Cancino, 'cause he ran the movie, and he chose the records to put on, and everything else.

The cinema was accordingly also a place to listen to music and stay out late. This was especially important during the holidays. The yearly festival of Junkanoo is the foremost display of Bahamian visual art and music, and it takes place on Bay Street during the early morning hours of Boxing Day and New Year's Day. Being able to stay in the cinema until the start of the Junkanoo festival demonstrates the issues of accessibility and accommodations that Audunson considered central characteristics to the viability of third places (2005). The location of the Savoy, in the middle of Bay Street, made it a perfect venue from which the young persons could gain access to the Junkanoo parade; together with the fact that the management of the theatre allowed it to remain open late into the night making it a comfortable and inviting place for these young persons to relax before taking part in the Junkanoo festivities.

Nathaniel describes the type of persons who would generally go to the Over-the-hill theatres as being casual people, who in his estimation would "come as they are". The double features would appeal to workers like mechanics and masons, who would seek the cinema for its comfortable atmosphere. Nathaniel remembers that some of them would be drunk and would probably fall 'half asleep'. While alcoholic beverages were not served within the actual theatre, the venues' relaxed expectations enabled them to visit the cinema after drinking.

The atmosphere within the cinema during the screening of the film was also a very social and interactive one, even though it was a darkened auditorium with restrictive seating.

Some of the narrators talked about how they would buy their concessionary items such as popcorn, chocolate bars and drinks, and settle down to a lively time of not just watching the film, but verbally reacting to it as well. Kingsley and Thelma recall the scene within the Nassau Theatre like this:

Thelma: Yeah, you know they have this, this song (Hums song) (laughs) I remember this song they used to be playin' and we'd know, and we'd be struttin' in going to the movies, and ...

Kingsley: And you know when they would have the fights, when they'd have the fights.

Thelma: Oh,

Monique: Fights in the movies?

Kingsley: Not in the theatre, I mean people in the scenes.

Monique: Oh, you mean on the screen, okay.

Thelma: But then the activity...the, the reaction in the, in the audience. Everybody be lickin' him (Laughter) ...and behavin' so bad, and you know, but with all of that, nobody was killin' anybody, you know.

Thelma expressed reassurance that even though there might have been some shooting and fighting on the screen, inside the theatre people felt very safe, and comfortable; able to express themselves without fear or embarrassment. In making the rationale for a South Australian public library as a third places, Cathryn Harris indicates how many of the libraries users characterizes it as “a peaceful and relaxing place to spend time... a meeting place and a safe haven, welcoming and open to all who wish to visit” (2007, p. 148). This sense of community ownership, and the cinema being viewed as a neutral social ground was also expressed by narrators about the theatre spaces, which because of their location served their local community more exclusively.

Despite Oldenburg not including family gatherings as an element in traditional third places, at least one narrator indicated that the cinema would function as a place where families would gather after watching a sporting event. Bentley remembers that a group from his neighbourhood would get together and go out to see a cricket game at Windsor Park, and afterwards they would go as a group to the Cinema Theatre on East Street. He recalled that “when the parents get together and go, we all in one group, we sit down, tell jokes or something like that”. This aspect of the cinema as a haven that was considered a

safe place for not just single men and women and couples to meet, but also for mixed groups and families to eat, conversate and watch a movie made the cinemas in Nassau during the Fifties a non-traditional third place.

Conclusion

The issue of racism and the practice of racial segregation in The Bahamas during the 1950s was grounded in a colonial heritage built on its inherited diasporic legacy. The sense of belonging and identity of the Bahamian people is influenced by the European and African peoples who were brought into the region labelled the Caribbean, endowing it with a melding of customs and traditions; thereby creating a unique and constantly evolving way of life. Racial demarcation and racial discrimination were manifested in everyday activities in: the residential and commercial sections of the city; the classrooms of the most progressive and intelligent young minds; and the places of entertainment and leisure such as cinemas and restaurants. These customs and practices were instituted in order to maintain and retain a certain type of society that would be secure for the colonial power's base, and acceptable and advantageous for the tourist and investors from aboard.

Stuart Hall's concept of racial segregation being about 'everyday social and economic relations' is apparent in the way in which the narrators talk about their perceptions of race and its implications on the uses and narratives of spaces and places. The racially exclusive Savoy Theatre was situated in the most economically vibrant business street, in a location that was convenient for both locals and tourist alike. Whereas, its counterparts Over-the-hill catered to a black local, less economically viable clientele. The choices to separate the races were not made indiscriminately. The system of demarcation came with a mix of evolved custom and practice, along with a deliberate top down design instituted and implemented by a Colonial base system that was rooted in history and played out in the simple and mundane activities of everyday life.

In addressing the dichotomy between the impact of space on people, Setha Low states that "...when critically examined, space and spatial relations yield insight into unacknowledged biases, prejudices, and inequalities that frequently go unexamined... physical space and spatial relations subjugate or liberate groups and individuals from the state and other sources of power and knowledge" (Low, 2011, p. 391). The acceptance of spatial power imposed onto the black majority by their white minority

leaders was seemingly uncontested as it was inherent in the pattern established from generations past. Upon arrival into this 'new world', the various groups and races were relegated to established places in which they resided, and this was where they remained, civilly and socially. The privileged spaces of the minority whites were off limits to the majority black population, who accepted it because it was the way things were. However, for some of the narrators, feelings of resistance were surfacing. One of the female narrators, Rachel, shared that the Savoy was a segregated place, but that, she as a black person was wise enough to know that it shouldn't be that way, and stated that it was something that took some time to change. Tackling the problem of race relations in the Bahamas during the 1950s presented a tremendous challenge for both the black and white narrators, many of whom expressed, individually, their displeasure in varying degrees to the collective practices of separation and privilege along racial lines in the city of Nassau in the 1950s.

From a more positive perspective, this research reveals that in some very essential ways, the cinemas of the 1950s served as a kind of third place that provided a public environment in which the narrators remember experiencing a level of 'pure' sociability. They served as neutral social ground for the narrators, many of whom expressed a sense of ownership and belonging to their most frequented cinemas, as in the case of Garnet who explained that the Meers Theatre was for persons who lived in the area of the theatre which was further south, nearer to Wulff Road: and Hartley who fondly remembered his easy walk with his young wife to their neighbourhood movie theatre, the Cinema to watch a film on a weekly basis. A positive attribute of third places is their ability to improve the social interaction and by extension, the quality of life within the communities in which they function. From the most isolated of the theatres mentioned, the Meers Theatre, to the segregated Savoy, the core notion of a third place is evident in several of the characteristics and the role that the cinemas played in the everyday lives of the generation of the Fifties.

Chapter VI – Cinema, Leisure and Everyday Life

Introduction

In the 1950s cinemagoing was one of the primary and generally popular leisure time activities for young adults in the city of Nassau, as it was in many Western societies in that era. In the sparsely populated little island town of Nassau in The Bahamas, the choice of entertainment was limited and for most of the locals, race limited the scope even further. Accordingly, for many, going to the movies was one of the premier options for entertainment. The leisure activity of cinemagoing was often the choice escape from the routine of everyday life for a generation in the crosshairs of the social awakening of that time. It was rivalled only by dance matinees, although a few less popular leisure pursuits were also available to engage their discretionary time. When discussing the popular leisure activities of their generation during the 1950s, the narrators focused on cinemagoing and the way in which that free time activity fitted into the routine of their daily lives.

The aim of this chapter is to show how the Bahamian youth of the 1950s spent their leisure time by exposing how the narrators unveiled their preferred leisure activities, highlighting the significance of leisure time in their everyday lives. The chapter looks at how cinemagoing fitted into the leisure time of the narrators and how it compared and related to the other past time fun activities of this fifty's generation; focusing on the persons with whom they engaged in their leisure pursuits as well as specific days and unrestricted times utilized for these kinds of pursuits. The various types of leisure activities are factored in and demonstrates how sports, such as basketball and cricket, as well as the more socially interactive, matinee dances and house parties, intervened into their daily lives. The significance of these activities along gender lines is also revealed by way of their popularity among the men and women interviewed. The chapter documents aspects of cinemagoing such as the persons with whom they attended the show and their shared dynamics; the days and time periods spent in the cinemas; the journeys to and from the theatres, and the importance of the theatres to their neighbourhoods and localities.

Rapoport and Rapoport contend that individuals develop their lives along what they term the life spheres of work, family and leisure, and in combining the three of these, they create their whole life-style patterns (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975, p. 19). As such, it is implausible to consider leisure outside of the concept of work and some type of family structure. As regards the family structure and its relationship with leisure, there are unique considerations regarding the types of leisure activities and the leisure time available to different family members.

Post-World War II was a crucial period of the twentieth century regarding the growth of leisure activities. The everyday lifestyle of many persons was in transition, with fewer working hours, and more leisure time available to the ordinary worker. Jobs were plentiful, and working hours were more regulated, thus leisure became an expected part of the lifestyle of not just the elite, but the proletariat as well (Abrams, 2002; Addison, 1985; Roberts, 2012). Subsequently, there was a need for some type of stimulus that would inject excitement into the routine existence of the average person. Paul Addison states that at this time in England's social history, leisure "had to compensate for many other things, and fortunately leisure activities were more widely available than ever" (1985, p. 114). In the US, there was also a growth in leisure consumption with a steady progression in leisure time available due to a decrease in the number of hours worked, and a gradual increase in the amount of disposable money available for the average worker to spend on leisure. American statistics show that by 1950, the workday's hours amounted to eight with a five-day workweek (Surdam, 2015). This reduction in working hours allowed for the American worker an increase in the time available to the average worker to be spent in leisure activities. In The Bahamas of the 1950s, however, the workweek varied, and it was not until 2002 that the Bahamas Parliament passed legislation which actually instituted and regulated the working week to 44 hours (Pryce, 2002, p. 14). Despite the discrepancy in the number of hours available to the generation of the Fifties for their leisure, the choice of leisure activities available to Bahamians was comparable to those of the United Kingdom and United States (Craton & Saunders, 1998).

Notwithstanding the 'uncritical and descriptive' pioneering hypothesis of Max Kaplan in his Leisure Society thesis in 1960, he, nonetheless provided a framework which was

applicable to an era when the “associated variables of family, social class, subculture, community and religion [were influential] in providing variations in the perception and experience of leisure forms and practice” (Rojek, 2010, p. 29). Clark and Critcher later maintain that “class, race, age and gender are not tangential and incidental but central and fundamental influences on leisure ‘choice’ (Clarke & Critcher, 1985, p. 145). Additionally, research conducted by K. K. Sillitoe in 1968 revealed that young single persons in England who were between ages 15 – 22 were far more interested in physical recreation (Sillitoe, 1969, p. 17). Another research conducted in England around the same time revealed that single persons tended to engage in far more recreational activities outside of the home than their married counterparts. An additional important finding was that there was a greater degree of similarities and equity of leisure practices and choices of male and female singles in this life cycle (Parry & Johnson, 1973). No comparable data on leisure activities within the Bahamas has been produced; as such I will rely on the choices and experiences of the oral history narrators in my research in order to create a ‘picture’ of their sense of leisure in the 1950s.

Christine Geraghty noted that cinema in the United Kingdom by the end of the 1950s was being thought of, and presented itself as “a medium that was old fashioned, uncomfortable and associated with past pleasures” (2000, p.20); a phenomenon that she attributes principally to the ubiquitous presence of the television. In The Bahamas, however, the television was not a predominant medium in the lives of the Fifties generation, since so few of them had access to television sets in their homes. Lee Garrison refers to the leisure activity of going to see a motion picture in post-World War II America as a “potent communication force in our society” (1972, p. 147). She strongly emphasized that movie going was an activity that ‘satisfied a social need’, pointing out that the young persons, average age of 19, were the predominant cinemagoer; that they saw the activity as being reasonably priced, and attended the cinema with other persons; and were not particularly concerned about the film, but rather the social act of going to “the movies” (1972, p. 149). Likewise, cinemagoing was a leisure pursuit common to young adults in the 1950s Nassau. All of the oral history narrators, when asked what activities they engaged in for leisure responded that they went to the movies, or the show.

In his book, on cinema and society in the British Empire, James Burns states that the leisure endeavour of cinemagoing “enjoyed particular significance in the colonies

because [it] had a monopoly on public leisure” (Burns J. , 2013, p. 8). One of the female narrators, Fiona, in talking about her leisure activity of cinemagoing said, “I couldn’t go anywhere, near anything...I didn’t have anything else to do”. Only two of the female narrators indicated that they patronized the cinema quite infrequently and generally only when strongly encouraged by a significant other. Interestingly, these women were both married, and had young children in the 1950s, and might possibly confirm the position held by Gregory (1982) in which she suggests that home-based leisure for the mothers of young children, may involve work and leisure going on simultaneously. This position is strengthened by Helen, a narrator who was in the 1950s a young wife and mother who loved going to the show and visited on the weekends when her husband could accompany her along with their children, thus making her cinemagoing a family leisure experience. All the other narrators said that they regularly and often attended the cinemas.

Leisure Activities of the Bahamian Fifties Generation

When asked what they did for leisure and to ‘have fun’ in the 1950s, the narrators were prolific in their recall. The matinee dance was the only single leisure activity that competed with cinemagoing among both sexes but was a particular favourite of women. Some of the female narrators also expressed that they enjoyed watching sporting games such as basketball and cricket, as well as attending church and school functions. Some of the male narrators said that they would go fishing, boating, or swimming, and play basketball, softball and cricket; and of course dancing. A much smaller percentage of narrators engaged in horseback riding and enjoyed reading. This gendered preference in leisure activities is mirrored in post war England where “sports was largely a male affair, while dance halls and cinemas allowed women much more control” (Geraghty, 2000, p. 5).

Hartley was a devout Roman Catholic young man in the 1950s, and he talked about the impact that the church had on the development of several leisure sporting activities in New Providence. The church encouraged these sports by creating facilities on the grounds adjacent to the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Nassau, and the parish church of Our Lady’s on Deveau Street. These locations were convenient for persons living in many of the communities Over-the-Hill such as Grants Town, and in the case of Hartley, Mason’s Addition, and further south on East Street. It is not at all unusual that the church would have been involved in the development of sports in The Bahamas, considering the

influence of 'Muscular Christianity' throughout England, the United States and Europe during this time. As a cause invented in England in the mid 1800s, it was seen as the fulfilment of a moral and religious obligation for the churches to encourage and facilitate the playing of "good sports" like cricket and football as well as "provide an arena in which men of different classes could meet on friendly terms" (2017, p. 197). The concept was quickly adapted in the United States where the YMCAs were very popular and in fact are credited with the invention of basketball (McLeod, 2017). This conception extended throughout the United Kingdom and was propagated as a way in which sports could be used to improve the races and classes, and by so doing create a more superior nation by developing healthy and morally fit young men (Sprackley, 2011). Craton and Saunders in speaking of basketball note that it was "first promoted in the Bahamas by the American Roman Catholic clergy [and the sport] took off with incredible rapidity from the 1950s" (1998, p. 473). Hartley remembers that the Priory Grounds (ran by the Catholic Church) was a place where a lot of games and sporting activity took place:

Hartley: The Priory Grounds...the Priory Recreation Centre was something, you know, that I personally had a lot to do with it, because I was asked by the Church at that timemwhat participation I could give to creating the avenue for youngsters to have a place to go to take up some time, and keep them busy. So, so, there was volleyball, there was basketball, and there was, ah, other areas of track and field...all that took place in the Priory Grounds...from... for the whole day. You had the regular school, then, and then this particular area that I'm talking about now would all begin to take place after three o'clock in the afternoon...And, am, there was always activity going on...always...

Monique: And this was attached to the Church...connected with the Church?

Hartley: It was connected with the Church, yes...the answer to that is yes. It was something that I personally led, really, on behalf of the Church, and, it was not a Christian, am...oh, what's the word I want to use...it was not teaching the bible, and that sort of thing...It was doing all of the other...all the other necessities of life, and we tried to make it work, and it did work. I know we, on two occasions, we were instrumental in bringing one or two teams from Florida to compete here in Nassau...So, what I think I'm saying is, the Priory which was just on top of the hill, sort of...you know it was the Priory, and then there was Government House, and there was the Fort where Randolph Fawkes and that crew lived and you come right down to Mason's Addition, so it was like a circle...

Other popular sports during the Fifties were softball and cricket. One of the male narrators, George talked about the venues where these sporting games would be played, and the organization of the various teams that would play:

George: We played on a place called Clifford Park which was, um, just off the coast line on West Bay Street ... Actually the whole area is called Fort Charlotte, it's a fortress, and a part of this fortress is a park, a matter of fact two parks, we played softball on one, and we play cricket on the other. Cricket was played on the section called Haynes Oval; softball was played on the park called Clifford Park. All named after British people, you know, British governors.

Monique: And so...who would you play against?

George: We played...they had little leagues, they had leagues and, ah, different teams, um, from different areas. There was a Farm Road team, there was a East Street team, there was the out East team, there was the Chippenham team, there was a Western team. So teams would play together in leagues, and, am, we would have a whole series of games, um during a period, like a game from January to March, or something like that, we would play softball. From then on you'd play basketball or somethin' like that. But all these, all these areas had their different teams, and they would converge together and, and um, play their sports.

Monique: So your, your East Street team would come to ... everyone would play at the same location...

George: Yeah, everyone would play at the same park...yeah they'd , would all come to play at the same park. We'd all play at the Priory Grounds. There were only two basketball courts in Nassau. One was at Our Lady's, which was south, over the south, and one was at St Francis which was near the city. So there were only two places to play.

Harold also enthusiastically remembered the cricket games that would be played at the Windsor Park on East Street and Wulff Road being a favourite weekend sporting activity:

Well, um, we'd go down East Street by Windsor Park, they used to have the cricket game down there, every Friday and Sunday...ah, like when yer favourite team playin', well they used to have full house...St. Bernard, St Agnes, St. Georges, all them, the Westerns. And they were good players...they used to be playin' fer a trophy at the time, trophies.

Whereas the young men generally played these different sports, the women were the spectators for the most part. Kingsley fondly remembered his girlfriend Thelma coming

to watch him play basketball at the Priory courts. George recalled that the Priory Grounds was a neutral sporting place where the girls could come to watch the boys play sports:

...the girls would come to the games then, you see, and there would be a short hello and goodbye, but you couldn't, you couldn't walk her home, because walking and bicycle were the means of transportation. You wouldn't walk her home, because you couldn't go in that area. They couldn't walk our girls home because they couldn't come in our area. And it was like that for a long time until, um, of course education changed all kinds of things, and they begin to see the wisdom or the foolishness in this type of action.

Other leisure activities engaged in by the male interview narrators on a smaller scale were water based sports. The narrators who lived in communities nearer to the water mentioned taking part in these activities. Kingsley, who was the only black man who mentioned any type of water sports, lived on Augusta Street, and he remembered spending a lot of his free time swimming at the Long Wharf on the Western Esplanade, which was just a block from where he lived. Nathaniel also lived nearer to the harbor, on Dowdeswell Street, and he shared that he “used to like mak[ing] boats, and go in the harbor and row; go swimmin’, and divin’”. Oscar said that he was an avid fisherman, and he and his father and brother would catch fish and keep it in a ‘well’ which was in the middle of their small fishing boat. And Leon remembered the camping trips that he and his friends would have on Hogg Island:

... during that time, ah, a lot of us used to go to, from where we lived, right across to Hogg Island, which is now Paradise Island, and we used to camp out there for a week, two weeks, or whatever...And we ran out of food, one of us would come back, two of us would come back and get some, and bring it over...

As previously noted, three of these male narrators who engaged in water sports were white, and resided quite close to the harbor and beaches on the northern side of the island. With this ease of access to the water, it was understandably more convenient for them to engage in those leisure activities such as swimming and boating. They had access to, or were in possession of the water crafts necessary to partake in water based sports, and in the case of Leon, the transportation that was necessary to transport them back and forth from the neighbouring smaller island near to New Providence.

Only three of the women interviewed indicated that they actually played any organized sports. Both Iris and Winnie were tennis players, and Iris was also an accomplished track

athlete who competed for The Bahamas internationally. Nancy, a white female narrator recalled that she and her cousins and friends enjoyed horseback riding: She remembered how they "...used to ride horses. A lot of us went out to the race track, it was in operation then, and spent the afternoon ranging about the track with the horses." The history of the Bahamas is by no means without mention of the significant contribution of women in the social change of gender equality and the development of the country's political progress; and their struggle for Women's Suffrage is well documented (Saunders, 1997) (Bethel, 2012). Nonetheless, there is no literature solely devoted to the leisure pursuits of women during the period under research. The general principle "that sport is a predominantly male sphere of activity" (Cricher, 1986, p. 338) is strongly supported in the current research in which only three of the female narrators actually took part in the playing of any sports. Additionally, Cricher further points out that "[women] are underrepresented in most leisure activities except those seen as uniquely appropriate to their gender" (1986, p. 340). I will follow Cricher's lead and not attempt to delineate what sports are 'uniquely appropriate to the female gender', and especially during the 1950s. On this point I will simply settle for accepting the conservative position that sports in the Bahamas of the 1950s was very much a "bastion of male supremacy" (1986, p. 41).

An inherent characteristic of the youth is their capacity for socializing. It is through social interaction that young people generally engage with those who are like-minded, sharing similar social, economic and cultural backgrounds (Argyle, 1987; Simmel, 1949). In addition to the more structured community leisure endeavors, like sporting events and commercially driven activities, such as cinemagoing and the matinee dances, the young generation in the fifties held house parties. Such private neighbourhood socials created additional opportunities to interact with friends and family members. Parties would be held in neighbourhood homes, and revolve around the activities of eating, music, dancing and chitchat, all in a very informal and relaxed atmosphere. Agnes describes the typical house party that she and her friends would attend in this way:

....we had a little group with the neighbours you know... like my girlfriends. They were Conkey Joes, all of them, and we used to go to private, 'lil house parties, it was no going out to clubs ...it was nothing like that, and um, we used to have parties to different houses...parents, everything... We were just down Dowdeswell Street. And, um, we used to go to different houses, and we used to have, um, like, because I ...(giggles) we used to have parties, and we dressed according...We used to dress like cow girls and cow boys, and we, you know, did things like that and had

western music, because in my day that was mostly what we did, in that particular era, we played the Country Western, okay...

Similarly, Garnet talked about the kinds of parties that he and his friends would have that often moved from house to house:

... and you play radio, and we have 'lil parties, records, spin records, dance to records, it was no, like DJs and stuff, we go from house to house. House then wasn't big, you have 'lil party on the porch and everybody will take their favourite song, couple records what they want to hear, and you dance on the porch, or dance in the 'lil living room, and that's it, have yer beers, and eat yer fried chicken and stuff, or bake chicken, yeah!

Some of the white narrators indicated that they would frequently patronize a place called Black's Candy Kitchen. Located in the down town area, it was renown as a place where the young white persons would hang out. Despite the establishment allowing blacks and persons of mixed-race to patronize their business, they precluded them from sitting down and being served in the back section of the eatery (North, 1984). Fiona, a white narrator, reminisced that she and her friends would go to Black's after school:

...When we get outta school we'd head for one place, Black's Candy Kitchen ...Play the juke box; get hamburgers, ice cream ...until we had to meet up our parents to go home. Daddy used to get off at five, so we get outta school maybe one thirty, two o'clock. So we'd go there ... head straight to Black's'...

Not only was Black's' an after school hang out, it seemed to be predominantly popular as a place where the patrons of the Savoy and the Nassau theatre would go after watching a film to treat themselves to ice cream. Both Dawson Roberts in his memories of life in Nassau in the 1940s and 1950s, and Nancy, a white narrator, talked about this aspect of Black's Candy Kitchen:

Dawson Roberts states: "I went to the Savoy or Nassau Theaters on Saturday afternoons ... After the movie I went to Black's Candy Kitchen and had a chocolate milk shake or a marshmallow sundae with a maraschino cherry on top" (1991, p. 18).

Nancy: And after being at the movies, Aunt Adel would drive us ... a whole car load of us ... down to Black's Candy Kitchen, and we would have one cone each, and I used to be very dull and have a vanilla cone, and, um, then we'd go drive home.

Dancing was a very popular leisure activity remembered by the narrators. During the 1950s there were several night clubs in the Over-the-hill area that would be frequented by local Bahamians and tourists alike. Night clubs such as the Silver Slipper, the Zanzibar and the Cat and Fiddle were mentioned by some of the narrators who remembered them as very lively and entertaining establishments where people could go to dance to the music of live bands and watch floor shows. A detailed history of these clubs and the entertainment they provided is presented in Chris Justilien's work on Musicians and Entertainers of The Bahamas (Justilien, 2004). In addition to the night clubs, the participants had vivid memories of the matinee dances. These dances were described as afternoon and early evening events that attracted persons from varied life stages, and both gender groups, but were only mentioned by the black narrators. Here is how Carmel describes the matinee dance sensation:

On holidays you'd always have, dance, you know, the dances, and you had the Silver Slipper on East Street, you had the um, Cat and Fiddle, there was another place we called the Elks Hall, the Elks on, certain aged persons went to the matinee dance, because, after you had matinee dance, you have the night dance, which was for the adults, big adults, so you'd go to the matinee dance three o'clock in the afternoon...they met from three until six-thirty, or something like that...then there was a rest, and then you'd have the, then they'd have on the night dance where you would have the adults, and then they would sell alcoholic beverages and whatnot, whereas with the matinee dance you would have people buy sodas.

Monique: So alcohol wasn't allowed at the matinee.

Carmel: No, you see...the bar was there, but then you were, usually it used to be the younger people, if you had some adults there, 'cause the adults used to come and bring the children, and you know, they'd be in there, because the children gat ta dance, and you'd have, have all types of music, you know what I mean, you have, um, you have swing, and jitterbug, and waltz, and rumba, and everything, and everybody had nice time. Usually, usually, that was always, um, no fights or anything, no ... like that, and as you progressed from matinee dance, before you get to big dance...the night dance, at the Elks they used to have a dance in between, you know, like for the younger children could, the younger one and the young adults could go to the matinee, but then after that dance, the young adults cannot go to the big dance, but they could go to this in between dance/music that they have up at the Elk's Hall, and you go up there, and you'd find a partner, sometimes you go and if you have a boyfriend, and if you don't have a boyfriend, you go up there, and if you was like me, I like to dance, still like to dance, and I'd get up there and choose your partner, fella come to dance, and it was not a matter of, um, well the dances then were, you had a partner, therefore, when you went to the floor, you went to the floor with

a partner, and stayed with a partner, and you came off. You don't get there and then when you look you gotta look around for, you know, or nothing like that.

Carmel's memories of the matinee dances paint a picture of a fun time dancing for the whole family. Her recollections are tinged with longing for a time when dance partners escorted their partners onto the dance floor and danced with them for the duration of the dance. Robert, likewise remembered a time when dances were more organized, and in his mind first class respectable events:

The Vikings were a sports club...a sporting club...then you would get the middle class and upper middle class blacks coming to an event like that, and that was quite classy, huh....And at the, at the Silver Slipper another classy event was...Government High School used to have an event. I don't remember whether that was annual or not, and that was very elegant...you had, you had the young ladies had their printed programmes with the various numbers that were going to be played by the band, and you would go in, and a gentleman would go and ask her would you dance this one with me, and she would write your name down in the book...on her programme, and when your turn came you would go and you'd ask her. So, we had those kinds of events, and the night clubs...but they were special events.

Similar to the United Kingdom, where the dance halls were an essential part of the leisure menu of many persons (Nott, 2015); dancing was also of vital significance to the cultural memory of the 1950s generation of Nassau. They saw the dances with their ritualistic practices of male devotion to a single dance partner, and formal invitations to a dance as reminders of an era that was lost in time, but still very much alive in their memories.

As the narrators remembered and talked about their cinemagoing experiences in the 1950s, they inevitably spoke about the other leisure activities that they experienced in their everyday lives. Just as going to the movies to see a film was considered a normal fun and non-work-related practice, so too were the varied sporting and other social pastimes in which they engaged. The sporting activities such as basketball and cricket and the matinee dances and house parties did not take the place of cinemagoing, but, rather, were all done in tandem with the one leisure activity that was common to all of the project's narrators.

Cinemagoing as Leisure

This Bahamian generation engaged in a range of leisure pursuits, some of which were distinctly different from both race and gender perspectives. The leisure activity of cinemagoing, however was one that appealed to the youth equally during the 1950s. For some of the narrators who were young waiters during the 1950s, movie attendance was a part of the work day experience. The work shifts for domestic workers during this time period would involve a morning shift during which breakfast would be served; a lunch shift, followed by a break before the dinner service. The average work day would, therefore, begin very early, and end after dinner service in the night. These male workers would, in effect, have very long days during which they would be away from their homes. Because of the convenient locations of the cinemas, their operating hours, and suitable physical environments, these young men would often find themselves in the theatres between shifts during the day. Thomas, who was a young waiter in the Fifties talks about a primary function of the cinema during his leisure time in the middle of his work day:

Well, working at a hotel you used to have like, first you serve breakfast, and then after breakfast, ah there's lunch, you wait, hang around for lunch, and then after lunch, then there's another...dinner start until maybe five o'clock. So we have from three o'clock to five o'clock so you usually, it's usually two to three o'clock in the afternoon we go to the movies. Always, that's the time we go...[A]nd then now sometime we go up in the balcony because...it's more quiet, yer know, not that much noise, so you go there so you could go to sleep. Not really to see the movie, but to go to sleep, like I was telling you. We go to the movie for two things, one is to see Westerns, and the next, the most important one is to go to sleep. Because, working at a hotel we used to go out late and stay out late at nights, then you have to go to work in the morning, you have to be to work at six o'clock. So we don't have that much rest, we'd go home around four o'clock in the morning, and then we had ta be to work at six, so we never got much rest. So we would be praying for lunch to stop so we could go to the movie and sleep. Okay (chuckles) so, that's one of our main reasons for going to the movie to sleep. (Laughs).

Harold was also a young waiter working at hotels on Bay Street, and he too took advantage of the cinema to fill the hours between shifts with a bit of leisurely movie watching, primarily of his favourite genre of film:

Harold: Well, the movie going in those days was going to see the Western movies. They were the thing of the day then...and I used to enjoy...I used to walk from the Windsor... I start working at Prince George Hotel, too,

right...shortly afterwards...it was, ah, it was my best days in hotels. And, ah, um, I had a lot of friends.

Monique: So what would it be like going to the movies...You said you would go to the movies from the hotel?

Harold: We'd walk to the movies...well in those days they had a lot of Westerns...Western movie ... the movies used to start at three o'clock, two thirty they open up fer sellin' tickets to go in, and the movie start at three. So well, I, I used to get off like shortly after three, or sometime before three, 'cause I was a bus boy, all I had to do was clean up the table, and make sure all the dirty dishes was off the tables and all that, which was good then, because, ah, the good part about it is you, you, you used to make 'lil tips, and that was good (laughs)...yes, so, I enjoy that.

Both the men and women narrators of this study indicated that they enjoyed attending the movies. Clearly they went to the cinema to see a film, but there were other reasons why this generation chose to spend their leisure time in a cinema. A very important component that was fundamental to the memories of cinemagoing was the person or persons who would accompany them on their movie outings. None of the narrators specifically stated that they went to see a film alone. A few of the narrators talked about their attending a cinema with a significant other, their girlfriend, boyfriend, or spouse. The majority of narrators, however, remembered going to the cinema with a group of same gender friends.

Annette Kuhn devoted an entire chapter in her book on cinemagoing in the 1930s UK to the experiences of couples. Her chapter entitled *This Loving Darkness* is written on the memories of her informants and the three sets of themes of romance, sex and courtship, which emerged from their interviews (Kuhn A., 2002, p. 139). Like Kuhn's couples, the Bahamian couples' memories of going to the movies with their significant others were inherently about the romance and courtship elements of the activities, as well as the hint of sexual activity. The Bahamian narrators talked about the journey to and from the theatre and the act of going to the show. None of them recollected any films that they and their accompanying partner would have seen at the movies. Hartley, for example, remembered how he and his wife would walk from their home in Mason's Addition to the Cinema Theatre on East Street. "I remember going back a little bit, it was shortly after we got married, my wife and I went to the movies at least once a week...to the Cinema...we weren't too far away, just a few minutes away...we were in Mason's Addition, and so we used to go there regularly...". Thomas recalled the young men

collecting their girlfriend for a movie date and riding them on their bicycles to the theatre...”our girlfriends used to sit on the crossbar of the bike, the bike had a bar, so the cross bar, and that’s how we take them, also two person on the bike (chuckles)”. Harold, on the other hand, remembers that his girlfriend would meet him at the Cinema to watch a film during his break between work shifts; “well we was not married then, my wife, she used to come up, she was livin’ down East Street and she come up and meet me there and we go in, sit down and watch the movie.” (laugh).

Cinemagoing for these couples was a relaxed and routine occurrence that both of them anticipated. Nonetheless, Judy recalls that there could be an element of tension within the relationship on the part of the woman regarding her expectations of cinemagoing with her boyfriend; “ ...well you know the fella ain only have one girlfriend, ... but dat was it, cause you wonderin, who he ger ask to take dis week to the movies (laughs), so you could get yer ‘lil barrel skirt and yer ‘lil gown...”. Attending a cinema with her boyfriend was a highly anticipated event; however, there was a degree of uncertainty about who he would select to share the outing with him on any given week. This kind of mistrust was also expressed by Velma, who actually encountered her husband in a compromising situation related to a movie date:

...I used to live Kemp Road, and I ask my husband one time, I say come take me to the movies, to The Capitol... ‘I can’t go, ‘cause I have two Christmas trees to dress’. I say, okay, so me and my sister-in-law walk from Kemp Road to, ta the, um, The Capitol Theatre, and when we got to The Capitol Theatre we went and we saw the movie ‘cause it was, everybody was in there, and then when I come out, we had to walk back home, it was like eleven o’clock, and we used to walk home, we used to walk back home. But when I was comin’ out I saw him with des two girls, so I tell him if dis the two Christmas trees you had to dress, hey (laughter) ... and, ah um, you know, we went out and, um, um, we went home ... Das the night he came home early.

Things were not always skewed on the side of the men narrators; however, as some of them recall that getting a girl to go on a date back in the Fifties could be a somewhat unnerving endeavour. Garnet talked about how the young men of the day would try to impress the young ladies, “you put on your Sunday best, to impress the girls, you want to look better than anybody, you know. When I start making money I go to W.H. Sands, I buy my doeskin, teraline, mohair, or tropical...”. Following, William compares the concept of dating in the 1950s to contemporary dating:

William: Well, if you were lucky enough um, 'cause we spent most of our time with each other, but if you were lucky enough to get a young lady to go with you (laugh) on a date, that would be quite something ... and dating back then wasn't as easy, you know...

Monique: Why was that?

William: Well, the young ladies had to be...they were more discerning...it wasn't like 'go to the movies with me' 'yeah I'll go' ...cause you know, you have to take me out...it was more ah, how to put it, more disciplined, more restrictive, I guess, yeah! But, occasionally, we um, on occasion, but don't forget back then women, and especially young girls were not allowed the same liberties as young boys...we could go anywhere...

Monique: And, so, so as a young man, tell me what you would go through to get a woman to go to the movies...

William: Like I say, it was, it was not easy, you know, the parents would want to know, where you takin' my daughter, and that sort of thing, you know. So it wasn't...you'll have to...and what you going to see...they would want to make sure you're going to see a decent movie (chuckles).

This vigilance on the part of parents may not have been unwarranted considering some of the things that two young person's together in a darkened cinema can get up to. Robert sheds light on some of the things that couples could do in the Nassau cinemas of the Fifties. In his recall, he is careful to distinguish his respectful behavior towards his date from that of other fellas who had less respectful intentions towards the young ladies that they took to the cinema:

Robert: ... I could talk about when I got old enough to take young ladies out...when you coulda take a young lady out to the movies... When you coulda' take a young lady out, and you be a gentleman to her, and she sit upstairs, right...and during the movie you put your arm around her shoulder...but you're very careful how far you go with that because two things...you don't want anybody else see you fondling her, and thinking nothing of her...that was important. See you can't go to people house and take their daughter out and go mess up their reputation ...You see my point ... Now, some fellas used to come to the Capitol just to do that up in the back, yer know ... You ever been to the Capitol Theatre?

Monique: Oh yes I did...

Robert: Ah...you see upstairs yer gat a set...and you gat on both sides above the stairs, yer go way up in the back there...Das where the fellas used to sit ta make love and thing during the movie...They'n come to see

no movie...But to get back to the point, the clean point...when you sit up there you could watch that movie...and you gatta be there on time, and yer better be there on time, 'cause you have to have that girl back home on time. You know,...and when her father or her mother tell you, have her back in this house by so and so...And you know what remind me of ...every time I hear the song...Yer ever hear the song 'Gee its great after staying out late, walkin' my baby back home'...

Robert's memories of taking a young lady to the cinema are of those outings that took place in the night. Oscar would get up to the same kind of activities that the couples in Robert's recollections did, but his dating would take place primarily during the day, because he recalls that his parents discouraged him from taking his girlfriend out to see a film during the night:

Ah, you know like you want to sit in the back in the dark where nobody could see you so you could smooch, you know (Laughter)...I guess we'd take her mainly in the day...well, we couldn't drive at the time, so we would have get somebody to take us, and the parents would say, 'what you want to go down there for at night', yeah, (chuckles). So, basically it was in the afternoons, after work, we all worked down town, and we got off at five o'clock, so they planned it where the movies would start at around five thirty, so we would just go from work right there...

An interesting dynamic existed between one of the narrators and her brother's fiancée. Fiona was disallowed going to the cinema on her own, and as a result, her future sister-in-law often accompanied her to The Savoy. She recalls that most of the time her brother would drop them both off at the cinema, and pick them up afterwards. This arrangement was instituted so that she was never "anywhere on her own". Another restriction that was placed on one of the female narrators was that of taking her younger sibling along to the cinema with her. Marina recalls that her mother would say "you're not going to the movies unless you take your baby sister with you...". Going to the cinema was viewed by the parents of these two young ladies as one that required some degree of chaperoning.

Not many of the narrators have memories of cinemagoing with a person of the opposite sex in a romantic setting of a darkened cinema; or in the company of a family member. Many of them have memories of going to the movies with like gender, and in small groups. The norm of this generation was to participate in leisure activities in small groups. Carmel describes what the normal group of moviegoers would look like:

Monique: ... who did you normally go to the, the movies with?

Carmel: Just yer friends.

Monique: Okay, would it be normally, like you say, you might go on a date...Normally it would be with who?

Carmel: ...With, with yer cousins, or your own family...

Monique: Would it be more girls together, or?

Carmel: No, no, girls...you would have girls together with the girls, boys will be with boys, and you, mind you, in school and around, you would have girls mixin' with boys, 'cause the fellas I used to hang out with the boys more than anything else... But, um, by and large, boys hang with boys, girls hang with girls...And sometimes you would go, you say, well, three or four will go together...not only your family, but you and your sister or brother or cousin would go to the movie, or then yer friend up the road, like Hortense...people think you is family...we say we're going to the movies, then we would have all of us going together in the movie together, as a group, and then ...because afterwards you would be able to sit down and talk 'bout the movie and all that kinda thing.

Several of the men narrators confirmed Carmel's recall, sharing that they often went to the cinema with other men. Even though Kingsley had a girlfriend in the 1950s, he remembered that he would generally go to see a film with his close friends, "...my friends, you know ...we used to go sit in the front row." Another male narrator, George, was adamant that the young men in his generation did not take girls to the cinema, and he explains why:

You go with your buddies, you know, fellas...we' ein had no time to carry gals to the movie and all that kind a stuff. If a chick came to the movie, she came to the movie on her own to see, but you know...you...dating, you didn' have that type a thing. You would see a girl and talk to her at a distance, or you might get close and 'lil talk, but talk 'bout takin' to the movies, that was out! First of all you hadda go to the house to ask her parents if you could walk down the street with the young lady, and all dem...Things were very strict, so to speak, you know, but, um, you didn't ... you go ta... couple a fellas, four, five a us get together and go to the movies, you know. But you din' have no girls with you, nuttin' like that, that was out. Couple a girls would come by themselves or somethin' like that, you know.

Both the men and women narrators' recollections of social interactions between young men and women in the Fifties were furtive and controlled. Unless a young man and woman was in some type of committed relationship; or there was a serious interest in the

woman on the part of the man, they refrained from going to see a movie together. Their cinema outings would most often be in small groups comprised of males or females.

Let's Go to the Show

A noted prerequisite to the actual cinema experience for the Bahamian movie-goers of the 1950s was the time permitted to indulge in the activity, and the journey taken to and from the theatre. Cinemagoing was a popular leisure activity that the generation of the Fifties could afford to engage in. George remembers that the movie theatres were always full:

Well, movie attending was, was, they always had a full house, because entertainment and things to do was sort of limited, so, people that had the means, which wasn't much. Today it would have been a palsy sum, but people that had the means would go to the movies on a ...it was an outing.

As stated earlier, the only activity that rivalled the movies was the Matinee Dance, which was an activity especially enjoyable to the women narrators. One narrator emphasized the point that there was no other competing visual medium for the majority of persons living in New Providence in the 1950s, since there were very few televisions available in the country to either the average white, or the black populace. Peter, a white narrator recalls that he would go around to a friend's parents' house to watch one of the only televisions in the neighbourhood when "the stars aligned so to speak, to get good reception, and they would call...we would walk around, and it was a big deal if, ah, if he called and said, you know, almost on the spur of the moment thing, um, the reception looks good tonight if you want to come around." So, not only was the television set a rare luxury, the guarantee of good reception was a matter of chance.

For most of the narrators, Saturday was the day consigned to routine cinemagoing. This day was especially popular with the younger adults, and high school students. Both black and white young person's engaged in the activity of watching a film on a Saturday afternoon after they would have completed their chores or their part-time jobs. Peter gives an account of what his Saturday routine would have been while he was a schoolboy in the early Fifties:

For a while I had a part time job at my uncle's florist shop which was Market Street and King Street. I got this job to work from 9:00 until 2:00 I think, mainly because my uncle was one of the co-owners of it. And, I

used to con my mother into, I can remember four shillings in those days that was supposed to be lunch money and the entrance to get into the theatre, whichever one we chose on a Saturday afternoon. Well, he in turn...I don't know whether it was coincidence, he paid me four shillings for the work, whatever I did, and it was miscellaneous work, whatever needed doing sort of thing in the store or running errands or whatever ... and of course, she financed the four shillings for my expenses, and I had the four that he paid me too, to blow on whatever...buying miscellaneous items or you know, hot dogs, refreshments in the, in the theatre. So that was a Saturday ritual, and the main thing of a Saturday afternoon, ...in, in movies and that was pretty much Saturday ... That was a ritual for me normally.

Marina, a black woman who was a student at the Government High School in New Providence remembers being allowed to go to the cinema on a Saturday because attendance during the week would interfere with school:

Marina: Well, once you go to the movies, I mean it was a fun place to go then 'cause there was nowhere else to go, not for young people, but we looked forward to it, especially on a Saturday.

Monique: ... Why especially Saturday?

Marina: There's no school (laughs). You could go three o'clock, or five. School days you would have to go later ... mostly Saturdays.

While Saturdays might have been the most popular day to attend the cinema for this age group, Sundays seemed to be a day on which cinema attendance was restricted. During the 1950s, The Bahamas did not have a shortage of Christian churches; in fact, Craton and Saunders indicate that "statistics of religious affiliation given in 1953 demonstrate dynamic patterns when compared with those for 1943 and 1963" (1998, p. 194). A strong commitment to the exclusivity of church attendance on Sundays was demonstrated by the exclusion of Sunday cinemagoing by some of the narrators. Judy, a retired nurse was one of those persons interviewed who was disallowed from going to the show on a Sunday, because it was not an activity that her family engaged in on that day.

Monique: And the day you would normally go?

Judy: It was normally the weekend, like Friday evening or Saturday, Not Sunday ...

Monique: Why would you not go on Sunday? ...

Judy: That was strictly church, most definitely! But most families would not have taken children to the movies on Sunday.

Monique: But even as an adult ... when you were in training?

Judy: Oh yes, as an adult I still would not have gone Sunday, unless it was a special movie. We didn't deal with going ... people went, mind you, but we didn't.

Monique: Okay, why was that?

Judy: You were adjusted then to the family dealing with church, and seven p.m. was church time. You didn't let you go into the movies at five ... come out and go to church. You dealt with church specifically on Sunday...

Nonetheless, despite this allegiance to the inviolability of Sunday church worship, one narrator recalls that she attended the cinema on Sundays with her husband and young children. Her reasons for choosing this day, however, were more pragmatic. Helen was a young married woman whose husband worked during the week, and Saturday and Sunday were the two days that he could engage in leisure activities with his family, "because you know, he used to work through the week, but on Saturday he be off, and Sunday. That used to be good them time, going to the movies".

Getting to and from the cinema in the 1950s for most patrons of the four theatres would have been by what one participant, Carmel called the "the cornball local, which was your heel walkin' ... that was the standard"; for those who owned bicycles, cycling; or for the predominant minority, vehicular transportation. Most of the routes to the theatre would originate from one's home, or the home of an accompanying friend or relative, to one of the cinemas. The routes would, therefore, vary depending on which part of the island the journey originated, and which of the theatres was the destination. The island of New Providence measures seven miles long from North to South, and twenty-one miles wide from East to West. The oral history interview narrators travelled to the cinemas from various parts of the island of New Providence. They would journey from as far east as Fox Hill, from Chippingham in the West, and from the south of East Street, and as far north as Bay Street. The mode of transportation would often correlate to the distance travelled. Thomas, who travelled from Fort Montague where he was a waiter in the Fort Montague Beach Hotel, states that he would ride his bicycle to the Nassau Theatre.

Harold, another waiter working in a hotel on Bay Street says that he would walk from his job on Bay Street, Over-the-hill to the Cinema. Iris recalls that she would be dropped and collected from one of her Aunts who lived near both the Capitol and the Nassau Theatres, by her parents, and walk to the theatre with her cousins. Fiona would often be accompanied by her brother and his girlfriend when she attended the movies, in which case her brother would drive; and after she turned seventeen, she got her license, and drove herself to the movies.

No matter the mode of travel to the cinemas in Nassau, the routes were fairly standard. Anyone traveling from the eastern part of the island would travel down Bay Street to visit the Savoy or the Nassau Theatre. If they patronized the Cinema, the Capitol, or the Meers, they would likely go Over-the-hill to these theatres via either East Street or Market Street. The other routes to the theatres from either the West, or the neighborhoods closer to the theatres would vary depending on the exact location of the journey's origin. Winnie, a narrator who lived on East Street described the routes she would take when travelling to the different theatre in this way: "...cut right through the corner by the hospital and walk straight down, movie here; Goal Alley, go through Lewis Street, Capitol; walk down East Street, the Cinema."

The reminiscences articulated in this chapter are what Annette Kuhn refers to as place memories. (Kuhn A. 2002, p. 16 & 17) The narrators express their memories of the cinemas as concrete buildings, situated in communities, residential or business, populated with people engaging in their daily lives. As they shared their memories, they talked about the physical environs of the theatres, comparing them to the distances traversed to and from the show, as well as the inherent distinctiveness of the individual cinemas. This is the process which Kuhn describes as a "corpus of discursive strategies that offer clues to some of the ways in which cinema memory operates as a specific form of cultural memory" (Kuhn A. , 2002, p. 17). When narrators described the new Capitol Theatre, for instance, the sense of pride in such a structure, built by a black Bahamian in the 1950s in a location Over-the-hill, resonates in their description of the place of the cinema. The rooted nature of the cinema's structure serves as an aide in the memory of what that theatre represented. The Capitol Theatre was not an ideal, nor an abstraction; it was a real and concrete building that was a tangible representation of dreams and aspirations. The oral history interviews were enlivened with stories about the significance of the cinemas

to their sense of belonging to the local communities, as well as their sense of identity as both black and white citizens of The Bahamas in this era.

Kuhn identified five types of topographical memory talk that she states ‘emerged with regularity in interviews’ conducted with informants. They are: memory maps; the guided tour; discursive distance/immersion in the past; shared remembering; and associations and detours. The narrators in this research, to some extent, all engaged in these five types of topographical memory talk, with a prevalence of the memory map. Kuhn describes the memory map in this way:

These maps vary in style and detail, but their function is always to lay out a *mise en scene* for the recollections which follow. They are ‘establishing shots’, in a sense; and like establishing shots in films, they work at the service of a story or stories. In mapping out the location of their memory stories, informants will either insert themselves fully into the past, or speak from the standpoint of the present, or they may ‘shuttle’ discursively between past and present (Kuhn, 2002, p. 18).

As in the case of Kuhn’s informant interviews, the memory maps of the Bahamian narrators were generally in the beginning segments of the interview. Thomas, who was a young waiter working at a hotel in the far eastern part of the island, locates the various theatres in relation to their adjoining communities, and streets, and he also provides a description of his journey to the Nassau Theatre:

Monique: Where were the movies located?

Thomas: They were located, one was located, the Capitol Theatre is Grants Town, that’s Grants Town by St. Agnes Church, and ah, East Shirley Street.

Monique: Okay, how did you get to the cinemas?

Thomas: Ride a bicycle, most of da time, ride a bicycle.

Monique: Tell me a little more about that, what route would you take?

Thomas: We would ride from Fort Montague Beach Hotel, down, ah, Shirley Street; we’d park our bikes outside, and we’d go into the theatre. And there’s a lot of times you go inside when you come back your bike is not there. So then everybody is wondering, you know, what happen and sometimes somebody might have just borrowed it and bring it back, and sometimes it’s gone, somebody took it. And that was one of the things we

were afraid of, is our bike, and so we always used to have, put a lock on it some place, you know, start puttin' a lock on our bikes. But we always ride, we always ride bicycles to the theatre.

Thomas not only shares how he cycled, and the route he took to get to the cinema, he also, like Kuhn's informants, tells an interesting anecdote about his concerns over the security of his bicycle while he was in the show. In relaying his story, Thomas, as in the case of Kuhn's informants, speaks in both the present and past tenses. Similarly, in recounting her memories of how she would negotiate her travels around the Island, Fiona traversed back and forth in time, from the 1950s Nassau to the present-day Nassau:

Monique: What were the matinees like?

Fiona: They, they were pretty good, from what I can remember, which not much, but we, we never went straight from school, 'cause that wasn't allowed, because when we got outta school we had to go up to Daddy, and then Daddy would carry us home, but we were kept close in those days, although we didn't need to be kept close, because Nassau in those days is nothing like what it is now. I used to, when I got my license, if I saw someone, if anyone wanted a lift, all they had to do was come, and I would stop no matter who, if it was a man or woman, or man and woman, children, you'd stop and ask them where they were goin' and you'd drop um there. And if I broke down over on Wulff Road at any time, I wasn't afraid. People would come out and offer to help you if you had, if your car needed pushin', or if they could help in any other way. Now, you'd be terrified! I wouldn't want to do it now. Like I say, I grew up in a different world. Not so today, it's not the Nassau I grew up in, and why it changed, I don't know, but it has definitely changed.

The journeys taken by the oral history narrators were discursive memory tropes that covered distances between the various cinemas in Nassau during the 1950s. What is evidenced by the oral history interviews undertaken with the Bahamian cinemagoing generation of the Fifties is their recall of the actual cinemas and their locations. Boundary lines were re-established in the recall of the locations of each of the theatres; bringing the host communities of that generation back to life.

One of the theatres, the Cinema, was a place where young men gathered outside and at times made themselves a nuisance to both passers-by and patrons alike. The Cinema was located on East Street, and was considered the neighbourhood movie theatre for the communities in the Over-the-hill area on East Street in particular. According to a female narrator, she was not very comfortable walking by this cinema because of the type of

young men who would 'hang around' in front of the building. Velma regarded the Cinema in this way:

Der Cinema to me was the worst! ... Because of livin' in East Street and all dem different 'lil areas, you have a lot of boys, and dey used to say all kinds of things to you and all dat. But dey never used to touch you, you know, but dey used to say tings ...

Garnet talked about some young men, brothers, who would hang out around the Cinema theatre and ask young patrons for money as they were attempting to go into the theatre. In their defence, Garnet states that "if they get to know you, they all right, and if they don't know you, and they ask you for sixpence or shilling, you better have it." Nonetheless, the youth of the area were not deterred from going to see a film at the Cinema Theatre. Despite territorial affiliations and sometimes lengthy travel distances, the generation of the Fifties found a way to go to the show in order to experience the accompanying pleasures of cinemagoing. They would walk, cycle or drive to that place where they could partake of the unique activity of watching a film, while sharing a sense of belonging with other patrons.

Conclusion

It is apparent that leisure time was significantly important to the young generation of the Fifties in Nassau, Bahamas. A noticeable portion of their discretionary time was spent engaging in sports and more socially interactive pastimes. Nonetheless, cinemagoing as a leisure activity ranked very high with the narrators. Some of the leisure endeavors such as sporting activities were more popular among the men, who would enthusiastically participate in them, while the women were generally spectators at sporting games. On the other hand, the women talked a lot more about their great enjoyment of the matinee dances and the sheer pleasure of socializing and dancing.

For one group of men, going to the cinema provided a time for them to get some much-needed rest. They saw the movie theatres as darkened air-conditioned setting that were a convenient respite from their workplace. For this group of men who were young waiters during the Fifties, sleeping in the various theatres was a part of their afternoon routine, and a haven for them between their work shifts. Another noteworthy reference to the way in which these narrators utilized their time is their observance of Sundays as a day when

persons would refrain from going to the movies. This was largely due to the important and established practice of church attendance on Sundays that was observed by many persons at that time.

Cinemagoing was something experienced and predominantly enjoyed by all of the oral history narrators. It was, for them, a remembered way to fill their leisure time and something which they enjoyed experiencing with friends and family alike. Some shared about going to the movies with a girlfriend or a spouse, while others shared that they went with their single same sex groups, and still others would go in the company of family and friends from their neighbourhoods. The routines of going to the show provided opportunities to meet and spend valuable time with the groups of persons who constituted community and created cultural memories in their individual and national development.

Chapter VII – “What’s Playing at the Show?” The Narrators Remember Films

Introduction

Hollywood was reigning supreme in the production and distribution of movies in the 1950s. The films produced in this ‘Tinsel Town’ were being exhibited in metropolis and remote towns the world over. From Manhattan, New York to the Copperbelt of Rhodesia, people were paying money to experience the latest dream on screen. They were lining up to gaze on their larger than life stars as they captivated them with their dazzling beauty and cinematic charm. The supremacy of the Hollywood Factory was also being felt in Nassau, and the four prominent cinemas in that city continued to exhibit the various genres of film most popular during that decade. The 1950s was viewed very much as a conformist, post-war period. It is considered a time when people were adjusting both socially and economically. Nonetheless, what is apparent from the films remembered by the narrators, was the aggressive push to suppress free expression at that time; there was a surface calm at the forefront of a giant wave of challenges and discontent that was ultimately unleashed into the public sphere and on the silver screen (Palmer, 2010).

This final theme chapter explores the ways in which stardom, film genres and the censorship of films were remembered and affected the lives of some of the narrators. Frank Kessler and Sabine Lenk addressed the question of “to what extent New Cinema History can benefit from looking at individual films. They also considered how a more film-centered approach can be enriched by integrating a perspective that takes into account its particular contexts of distribution, exhibition, and reception” (2019, p. 319). Kessler and Lenk ultimately determined that the individual film can function to illuminate larger historical processes; for these purposes, looking at individual films does not mean conducting a formal or textual analysis as the issue of the relevance of individual films for cinema history reaches far beyond the filmic text. They further pointed out that by studying a *print* from a particular period, information can be revealed about several things including decisions concerning distribution practices, the cultural appropriation of a given film in a specific national, or even local context or censorship practices (Kessler & Lenk, 2019, p. 321).

The oral history narrators' memories of the actual film text are beneficial to this research. By sharing their personal testimonies of their experience of the film, they make a contribution to our understanding of the actual audience reception of the film. At least one third of the narrators indicated that they remembered specific films from their cinema going years in the 1950s. When asked why they remembered the films, some of their responses were: the genre of the film and the Stars; the popularity of the theme song of the film; the high quality of the production; the thrill of seeing the remembered film; and the racial and religious issues and content of the film. These responses are indicators that these aspects of the films somehow influenced the narrator's memory retention of certain films. These aspects seem to especially pertain to the production texts and quality of the films, inclusive of their themes and genres; and the context of the film texts which assimilated a fantastical reality with concurrent cultural, economic and political events, occurring in the local national community of Nassau and the wider world.

This chapter is concerned with what the narrators' 'remembered films' impressed upon them at the time they were first experienced during the 1950s, and exploring the reasons why remembering a particular film was personal and relevant to them, during that period in their adult life. The memories that the narrators retain of the films viewed, have some of the characteristics of Annette Kuhn's Type A memories, remembered scenes/images. She describes these memories as being "individual, isolated shots, scenes and images, from films..." (Kuhn, 2011, p. 87). Kuhn further states that "...memory ... in the sense of both the substance or content of what is remembered and also, more significantly, the process of remembering seems to sit well with filmic modes of expression" (Kuhn, 2007, p. 302/3). The ways in which the narrators articulated their memories of the films were sometimes quite vivid and accurate accounts of the film texts.

The viewing of a film is mostly a leisure activity, and certainly for all the narrators who remembered films, their viewing of the remembered films was strictly for their entertainment. Films like most texts created for entertainment purposes by their very nature engage the emotions of the viewer and have a tendency to "...make some mark on our minds, even prompting imitative behaviour, especially when the images are cumulative... Pure entertainment may not mean to teach us, but it does inevitably through the myths produced by repeated example" (Valenti, 2000, p. 11). The physical environment in which the film is viewed, and one which focuses the attention of the

audience on the singular activity of watching a film is an important factor when considering why people remember films. The large screen and the engulfing sound of the projected visuals engage the audience collectively. The “basic psychological machinery through which most people relate to film involves some combination of identification and projection ... with ‘distraction’ minimised, the audience is almost compelled to enter the world of the film” (Tudor & Allen, 1974, p. 76). The films viewed and remembered by the narrators from the 1950s also represented for them important exemplifications of the popular culture that they were prepared to pay money to experience, because, as Nick Lacey articulates “media texts are not simply commodities, they are also cultural artefacts” (Lacey, 2002, p. 65).

Thirteen narrators shared reasons for remembering the films and provided memory cues or triggers that aided in their memory. These memory triggers are generated from the social, cultural and textual conditions of the film viewing experience of the narrators. To this end, this chapter focuses on the respondent’s memories of selected films in order to shed light on how and why they remembered these films after first viewing them more than fifty years prior to their interviews.

A list of fifty-one films in total was provided by the narrators during their oral history interviews. Thirty of the films were produced and first screened in the 1950s; twelve were produced and screened before the 1950s; and, ten of the films remembered by the narrators were produced and screened post the 1950s, during the 1960s. Despite fifty-one films being mentioned by some of the narrators, only sixteen of the remembered films qualified for inclusion in the film inquiry. Only those films for which the participants provided a specific reason for remembering the actual film were selected. Nearly fifty percent of the participants, ten men and three women, were able to provide the names or descriptions of the films that they remembered from their cinema-going days in the 1950s.

James Chapman suggests that when using film as a data source, certain questions should be asked regarding the provenance of the text (Chapman J. , 2011, p. 12). To this end, a short filmography of the remembered films has been compiled, and is placed in Appendix C. The films identified and cited in the filmography are: *No Way Out* (1950), *The Defiant Ones* (1958), *Imitation of Life* (1959), *Island in the Sun* (1957), *The Robe* (1953), *The Ten Commandments* (1956), *Ben Hur* (1959), *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954), *The Joker is Wild* (1957), *The Thing from Another World* (1951), *The*

Day the Earth Stood Still(1951), *Gone with the Wind*(1939), *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954), and *A Street Car Named Desire* (1951). In addition to naming films, several the narrators, men in particular, mentioned the Western genre as the type of film that they most often went to the cinema to watch. A sufficient number of narrators also mentioned the weekly serials that were shown in the theatres.

Evident from the list of films is the fact that Hollywood produced movies were the ones most remembered by the narrators. Despite the Bahamas being a British colony, the narrators remembered few British and European films being show in the cinemas in Nassau. Two narrators, George and William share:

George: Oh, the movies you watched were American movies, you know ... They were all released by Hollywood.

William: *The Upturn Glass*, *Wuthering Heights* ... the old classics were few and far between.

A concern for the types of films that were being exhibited in the British colonies was expressed by the British Colonial office in pointing out that,

“...while audiences were considering their places in their broader communities, there is evidence that they were also appropriating the styles, slang, and attitudes of characters from America. Thus, instead of inculcating a shared set of ‘British values’ among colonial peoples, the movies were equally likely to connect them to imagined communities that Britain ultimately could not shape or control. In the post-war era the links forged by the medium would strengthen as the empire dissolved” (Burns J. , 2013, p. 8).

This observation of the Americanization of the British colonies via the film medium, expressed by Burns, is evidenced by the films remembered by the narrators which are mostly Hollywood productions.

The context in which the films were viewed; the broader context of the narrators’ daily lives; the political and national undercurrents of life in The Bahamas; and, indeed, in the world of the 1950s, had some effect on why the narrators remembered the cited films. Six

themes have been identified as the triggers that aided in the narrators recall of the remembered films: Firstly, narrators recalled film themes associated directly or indirectly with race relations and national issues. Narrators commented on films that heightened their awareness of race intolerance and the portrayal of black persons in the movies, as well as, the roles of Sidney Poitier and his hereditary relationship with the black Bahamian population; a second memory theme emerging from the memories of films, was the religious impact of the popular Biblical Epics, shown in the 1950s, and which resonated with narrators for both their biblical content, as well as their epical production excellence; a third memory cue was the songs and music themes that made the films captivating, and that highlighted the film texts; fourthly, films that invoked sensory response and stirred the participants emotional interactions and feelings caused by the film text, during and after the viewing created lasting impressions; a fifth trigger that encapsulated the memory of some narrators was the film genre. The Western genre was one that several narrators said was their favourite type that created lasting memories and was most often referred to among male narrators; and finally, the regular showing of the serials, and the inherent technique of the 'cliff-hanger' which was common to the serials, was remembered by several.

Race, National Issues and the force of Censorship

Concern and disdain over the portrayal of black people in Hollywood movies, and racial intolerance in the 1950s was stringently expressed by some of the narrators who identified them as reasons why they remembered four of the films: *Imitation of life*, *No Way Out*, *the Defiant Ones*, and *Island in the Sun*. To one black male narrator, Robert, these types of films were a reflection of life in the Southern United States:

So, what I'm saying to you, is certain things stay with you in the movies, and the things that stay with me remind me what it was like in the South of the United States, especially. And fellas in the North was prejudice, but they wasn't out ...See, I rather deal with the, the, the, cracker, you know ...'cause he telling you how he feel about you...

William, a black narrator who was a novice journalist in the 1950s expanded more on both the portrayal of blacks in the movies at that time, as well as a type of movie that was being produced for and by black persons in the United States. William talks about how he and his like-minded friends remembered these types of movies:

We became acutely aware of the way black people were represented in the movies. And I remembered one of them, Mantan Moreland. They made these very cheap movies, and it didn't portray ... none of them portrayed black people ... as ordinary human beings. It was always in a degrading way, either servants or they were entertainers, but we saw nothing of black people as ordinary people, as a family or the rest of that. The inevitable black maid, in some of the better movies, the famous ones, the classics, you see them, and the only black person there is the black maid, housekeeper.

This criticism of Moreland was actually articulated in an article highlighting some of his achievements. In his Commentary, Mike Price pointed out that these stereotypic roles enacted by Mantan were, in his words, transformed from the "limited palette of chauffeur-valet-porter roles into a strategic means of upstaging one top billed player after another, with gumption and antic wit". According to Price, this was only possible because of what he termed, Moreland's comic 'scene-stealing abilities' (Price, 2006). In addition to the mention of Mantan Moreland, William also talked about a type of films that portrayed black persons in a less than complimentary fashion. In order to further emphasize his point, and confirm his memory of this type of movie, William talked about a specific film that he remembered seeing: *'Imitation of Life'*, a film that was first released in 1934 and remade in 1959. In her thesis on The Fifties and the Feminine Mystery, Ellen Westby, commented on the later version of the film, describing it as one which touches on "aspects of consumerism, materialism, prosperity, ambition, racial discrimination and ... motherhood and women's limited choices" (Westby, INC, p. 35). The movie did, indeed encompass all of these themes. However, the theme that was most prevalent to William was that of racial discrimination and intolerance; exemplified in the practice of Black persons 'passing' for white, predominantly in the United States, because of their indistinguishable white physical features.

William: I remember one movie we saw, I forget which one this was, what year this was, ah, oh dear, I can't remember, but it was a white girl who had a black mother ...

Monique: *Imitation of Life*?

William: *Imitation of Life* ... I can't remember which year that was.

Despite William's inability to remember the name of the film, he was able to describe it, placing it within the context of his narrative, and effectively communicating his intended

position on the role of this film in his memory. A comparable recollection of a film by George, occurred when he was able to remember parts of a movie, but called it by a different title.

Sidney Poitier, who is a Bahamian, um was beginning to rise to fame, he made a movie called *No Way Out* (1950) in which he starred with Tony Curtis ... which I think Sidney was in the army or something like that, and un, that, that was filled up every night.

Initially, I assumed that George was talking about *No Way Out*, because it was such a popular film among the narrators, but when he said that Tony Curtis was in the film, I thought it necessary to research the other films that Sidney Poitier had acted in during the 1950s. Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier had indeed acted in a Symbolic Melodrama called *The Defiant Ones* (1958), in which they escaped from a chain gang, handcuffed together, a situation which guaranteed that they “get along with each other in spite of racial tensions” (Lambert, 1958). The film resonated with George because of its racial content, and the popularity of the film:

And they showed that for about a month straight every night, and that was filled, all three showings... That was a black man starring with a white man. We had the, the prejudices of the deep south America.

Not only did William remember movies with compelling racial content, and what they represented at that time, he also shared how he recalled he and his friends’ response to this kind of filmic representation of Blacks:

We looked at it with great ...sometimes amusement; sometimes with anger ...I’m talking about my close friends. We used to laugh at it, you know, but we never bought that position, that’s the point ... we never assimilated what was obviously intended by the movie makers, that this is your place, and all that...

This response would have augured well with the political and social context of The Bahamas during the 1950s. The Bahamas, like many of the former British colonies, was experiencing a time of political challenge to their current system of governance, and influence from the growing civil rights movement in the United States. Thereby, films of this nature were viewed as a force that only heightened racial tensions and aided in illuminating the inequities within the Bahamian society. The film *No Way Out* received a great deal of resistance when it was first scheduled to be screened in Nassau. The white

minority political establishment known as ‘the Bay Street Boys’ sort to ban the movie when it was first released in 1950, citing it as being “a dangerously inflammatory movie” (Foulkes, 2006). Indeed, as early as 1911 when the first movies were shown in Nassau, there was concern about the content of films. As such, the Governor was given authority to censor any film that was believed to have socially dangerous contents (Craton & Saunders, 1998, p. 214).

Sidney Poitier’s first major motion picture, *No Way Out*, was about a black doctor working in a hospital in New York in the early 1950s who treated a white man who died under his care. The film also included scenes of racial tension, and a race riot (De Rosa, 2015). The possibility of this movie being shown in the Bahamas was unthinkable for the then white minority rule government. The Citizens’ Committee was a group that was actually formed in 1950 and comprised of middle-class non-whites whose primary concern was the confrontation and address of racial issues in the colony (Craton & Saunders, 1998, p. 307; Foulkes, 2006). In an open letter in *The Citizen’s Torch* to the Governor of the Islands, the matters of race and censorship were addressed:

The United States, during most of its existence has been faced with the problem of race discrimination and injustices. In very recent years the problem has played on the conscience of this great country, and so impelled by its doctrines of democracy, it has been making valiant efforts to eliminate this blot from its fair history. One, among many methods it chooses to do this is through that great medium of education, the moving picture screen, and consequently the film companies have been producing pictures which show the foolishness of this business of hatred and discrimination. One such picture was ‘No Way Out;’ a film starring a young Bahamian actor playing a stellar role and preaching a strong doctrine against the evils, injustice and demoralizing effects of race hatreds. The censor committee has over and repeatedly refused to allow these pictures to be shown here in Nassau, and true to their irrational custom refused permission for “No Way Out” (Eneas, 1951).

There was also opposition to the film in the United States where films were often censored at the state level “on the grounds of miscegenation, social equality, and racial strife” (Scot, 2014, p. 68). The movie was banned in Chicago on the basis that it would disturb the peace, and was only released after the deletion of a scene in which ‘Negroes’ were shown preparing and arming themselves for a riot (De Rosa, 2015, p. 32). One of the narrators’, Alan, a young black engineer in the 1950s remembers tensions surrounding bigotry both on the screen and with the white owner of the four major cinemas:

The Bethel Brothers fought the movie; Sidney Poitier's first movie; they fought it, said it was too racial; and they allowed, but did some cutting out of it before it showed; I don't think it ever went to the Savoy.

The film was, as Alan recalls, ultimately shown in at least one cinema in Nassau, but this was only after the Citizens' Committee applied pressure on the government to allow its screening.

Belinda Edmondson, in writing on black leading men in American films pondered on why it was that the two black leading men of the 1950s were both Afro-Caribbean men. She continued to expand on this reality by revealing that "their iconic images suggest, one is the essence of dignified black rectitude, the other of simmering black sexuality" (2015, p. 62). It is the very representation of the latter that characterizes Harry Belafonte, another black actor whose film was remembered for its racial content and reception.

Harry Belafonte acted in the movie *Island in the Sun* which had the distinction of being the first film in which a romantic relationship between a black man and a white woman was screened (Bergan, 2011, p. 33). Nathaniel remembered the name of the actor, and the name of the film and its controversial theme, but he did not give the correct date of the film's viewing.

One of the main movies at that time I went there in '49, they was re-screenin', ah, *Island in the Sun* with Harry Belafonte, but it had like a racial overtone ... There' a couple of them ...

Indeed, this film which was shot on location in the Caribbean islands of Grenada and Barbados, was controversial in the United States as well. The film is focused around life on an island where the British colonial rule is being challenged by the majority black citizenry. It is, however, the interracial love affairs featured in the film that provided fodder for racial tension. From the early days of film exhibition in the United States there was concern regarding the issue of miscegenation. Despite the amending of the Motion Picture Production Code which banned films on the basis of miscegenation in 1954, there was opposition to the screening of the film in Virginia, Tennessee and South Carolina. The director of the film, Darryl Zanuck, in an effort to diminish the impact of race and white supremacy strongly intimated that the issues of race that were prevalent in the United States during that era, were more extreme than those in the West Indies. Whatever the degree of resistance within the Caribbean, Belafonte saw the film as a very important

opportunity to expose audiences to what he saw as a new kind of Negro who was living and working in the Caribbean and having to address issues of race and actively pursue political independence for the islands within that region (Smith J. , 2014; Ross, 2011).

It is evident that there were restrictions placed on the viewing of films in Nassau during the Fifties. One of the narrators, Fiona, personally attested to the adherence of the regulatory code for the viewing of films in Nassau. Judging from the previous discussion on the banning of the film *No Way Out*, the cinemas in Nassau very much followed the regulatory practices of the United States and enforced the Production Code with Hollywood's self-regulation and internal censorship practices. When confronted with the opportunity to view the Film *A Street Car Named Desire* (1951), which Fiona admits she should not have been allowed to view seemingly because of its sexual, violent and mature subject content; she nonetheless recalls that she was able to gain admittance to the show despite the applied viewing regulations.

Fiona: I shouldn't have seen that one, but we did ... 'Cause it was a, ... it was a movie that was like too old fer fifteen and sixteen year old...

Monique: You remember who you went to see it with?

Fiona: Probably *my brother and his girlfriend*...they were my chaperones.

The code was clearly regulated, nonetheless, it was contravened for the underaged young lady in this instance, as she was able to view a film that was clearly considered inappropriate for her age group.

Sydney Poitier: A National Star

R. Barton Palmer, in writing about Stardom in the 1950s, states that Stars "were absolutely essential to the very notion of Hollywood" (Palmer, 2010, p. 1). They perpetrated the life of the movie personalities, and embodied their celluloid, awe-inspiring forms in the real world off screen. Due to several changes in the post-war United States, and within the film industry overall in the late Forties and early Fifties, the importance of the movie star to the promotion and success of films intensified. Some of these changes included the shift of the population to the suburbs; the consumption of television on a larger public scale, and the dismantling of the three-tier system of film production, distribution and exhibition. Largely due, however, to the radical change to

the system through which movies were produced along with the contract system for the actors, the position of the Hollywood star was “actually strengthened...as they became in general more important than in decades past to the promotion of each film’s unique, special appeal” (Palmer, 2010, p. 11).

Sidney Poitier was a young Black actor in the early 1950s, who had shown great promise in a leading role in the film *No Way Out*. Some of the Black narrators recalled the social climate in which Sidney Poitier’s films first entered into the cinemas in Nassau, and their impact on the black viewing audience. Black narrators Judy and George recall:

Judy: We would only see a few black actors or actresses in the movies, but later, as time changed, and especially when Sidney Poitier came on the scene that did it...

George: People would go to see their homeboy perform, and Sidney, Sidney ...Poitier was a good actor. He was just coming along then, and he was making his mark, and, and being recognized.

These narrators saw Poitier as playing a very important role in The Bahamas, especially for Black Bahamians experiencing a fair degree of marginalization within a British colony in which they represented the majority.

Sidney Poitier emerged as an actor in the early 1950s. Although born in the United States in 1927 to native Bahamian parents visiting Florida, he spent the formative years of his life in the Bahama Islands, and maintained his Bahamian lineage and legacy. He returned to the US as a teenager in 1943 and worked his way to Hollywood (Craton & Saunders, 1998). The impact of Sidney Poitier and his movies on The Bahamas was felt very early in his career. He is internationally recognized as the first Black Star and was the first Black man to receive the prestigious Academy Award for best actor, for his role in *Lilies of the Field* in 1964. It is suggested that his success as an actor and ultimate rise to ‘stardom’ was influenced by his ‘transnational background’. This background benefited Poitier in his outlook, but also in the way he was ‘viewed’ by Hollywood producers and audiences alike. In his delivery, for example, he had “attained his distinctive vocal articulation as a result of years adapting his British-tinged Bahamian English to the United States” (Meeuf & Raphael, 2013, p. 1), a unique and attractive feature in and of itself. Poitier was casted in roles that were somewhat different to those in which Black Americans, prior to his arrival on the big screen, had been casted. He was not an

‘authentic’ ‘negro’, interestingly; he did not represent the values or portray the image of the stereotypical Black American of his time in film. He was on screen portrayed as the ‘other’ type of Black American, not the ‘Tom’, ‘Coon’ or ‘Buck’. Donald Bogle labelled him “Hero for an Integrationist Age”, considering him the poster-boy for both white and black America:

Poitier’s ascension to stardom in the mid-1950s was no accident...In all his films he was educated and intelligent. He spoke proper English, dressed conservatively, and had the best of table manners. For the mass white audience, Sidney Poitier was a black man who had met their standards. His characters was tame; never did they act impulsively, nor were they threats to the system ... Poitier was acceptable to black audiences. He was the paragon of black middle-class values and virtues ... Black Americans were still trying to meet white standards and ape white manners, and he became a hero for their cause. He was neither crude nor loud, and, most important, he did not carry any ghetto cultural baggage with him. No dialect. No shuffling. No African cultural past (Bogle, 1973, p. 175).

The roles that Sidney Poitier played in the two films remembered by the narrators certainly help to prove the model described by Bogle in the proceeding excerpt. In *No Way Out* he represented the kind of black man who could easily assimilate into the America of the 1950s for all of the reasons articulated above; and, ironically, even in *The Defiant Ones*, where he was actually shackled to another prisoner, he proved his responsible and reliable character in remaining loyal and faithful in his undying allegiance to his ‘white friend’, preferring to return to his aid rather than fleeing to possible safety. His characters, however, have been criticized, and he has been regarded as being defensive about the kind of roles he took (Strachan, 2015, p. 164).

In an interview with Sir Sidney Poitier published in the Spring 2007 issue of the journal *Callaloo*, Poitier shares some of his thoughts on The Bahamas, his home, and how his upbringing helped him to frame his life in the United States:

(Poitier) “When I went to Florida for the first time, I was being introduced to an entirely new culture. It was so different from Cat Island and Nassau. Though there was segregation in Nassau – for instance, I could not go to the Nassau Theatre – but the impact of race was not as intense or impressive because there was a majority population of black people. British colonialism required that you train a native constituency to administer rules: the subjects of the British Empire far outnumbered the English themselves. Colonial administration meant that they had to have black policemen” (Campbell, 2007, p. 483).

Sidney Poitier and his role as actor, indeed ‘Star’ has had an impact on The Bahamas as a country, and individual Bahamians. One of his relatives, Daniel, was one of the narrators who remember the movie *No Way Out*, and the night that it opened in a theatre in Nassau:

We went there...[his] mother was the recipient, she was the big one ... everyone wanted to know Mrs. Poitier... everyone wanted to meet Mrs. Poitier, ... Sidney’s mother. And we went in, and when Sidney picture came out, man, that place, people, and ... we were so proud, (chuckles) you know, we went and they presented her with a big bouquet. They had a car for us, back and forth, oh yeah, they took care of us. Sidney’s first movie, ah man, he was the king (chuckles). Everybody, Sidney Poitier, Sidney Poitier, when that over, maybe another couple of months another Sidney Poitier movie out.

Sidney Poitier’s film career developed over the years and expanded to incorporate directing and producing into his resume. The narrators share memories of the characters portrayed on screen by Poitier and the man himself that is mirrored by Ian Gregory Strachan as he commented on the first twenty years of Sidney’s acting career: “In a span of 20 years he had gone from being homeless to residing in a penthouse, through a combination of talent, hard work, determination, shrewd choices and luck” (2015, p. 164).

Even though Poitier’s Bahamian status was well known among the Black narrators; Fiona, a White narrator in commenting on her watching the motion picture *Lilies of the Field* (1964) at the Savoy Theatre, stated that she was not aware of Poitiers’ Bahamian connection, until some years later, at which time she got his autograph.

So far, four of the films that the narrators remembered have been addressed; *No Way Out*, *The Defiant Ones*; *Imitation of Life*; and *Island in the Sun*. The major focus of the discussion of these films has centered on their racial inequality and intolerance which was portrayed on the screen, and also experienced in some of their daily lives. All of these films have been of the Drama film genre, which represents only one type of film identified in this chapter.

Film Genres Remembered by The Narrators

Cinemagoers will rate a film’s genre as the most important, and probably the first, factor to be considered when making a decision to see a film. Film genres follow a certain convention that engage specific “semantic” components. Essentially, “the meanings

carried by semantic elements are usually borrowed from pre-existing social codes; syntactic features on the other hand more fully express the specific meaning of a particular genre” (Altman, 1996, pp. 45-46). The narrators remembered a selection of film genres that were popular in the Fifties. As previously stated, the Western was the most frequently cited. The other genres that were recalled and ascribed a specific reason for being remembered were the Drama, the Costume Drama, the War Drama, the Romance Drama, the Biblical Epic, the Science Fiction, and the Musical.

The Western

The Western genre of film was the most mentioned by the narrators, and much preferred by the male participants in particular. Only one of the remembered films is a Western, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, which is also a Musical, and ironically, was not remembered for its genre. Nonetheless, a significant percentage of narrators cited the Western as being the most popular type of film that they would enjoy at the show. So popular was this genre that two male narrators, Daniel and Thomas, a young waiter in the Fifties recalled:

Daniel: If they’re showing a Western movie with the cowboys, they could look for us to come, because we comin’ (laughs)

Thomas: I can’ remember the names, but cowboy movies were the ones the men would have been more interested in.

The popularity of the Western was not only relegated to Nassau, Bahamas, but was indeed a worldwide phenomenon in the decade of the 1950s. One-hundred and fifty Westerns were produced by Hollywood in the 1950s alone, before its popularity as a genre began to wane in the 1960s (Bergan, 2011, p. 125). When asked why this genre was so very popular among the male narrators, responses were varied. Harold, a young waiter who used to go to the Cinema theatre during his break between shifts, remembered the Westerns as being the predominant genre of movies back in the 1950s shown in Nassau, and his favourite movies to watch:

Most of the movies then was all Westerns. Well they used to have, um the cowboys. They would always have horses, ride horses...they were good riders too. They want to rob a stagecoach, stagecoach was like a taxi now ...taxi ...and ah, I used to like I, I used to like it.

Another waiter, Garnet also remembered the Westerns being very popular at the time noting “that was the only set of pictures they would bring to the theatres...And they had plenty action, from start to finish, plenty action”. During the 1950s, the Western genre was also very popular in the United States where it holds the distinction of being the oldest of all film genres, and the only one that is indigenous to America. Ronald Bergan also credits the Western’s popularity as having “consolidated Hollywood’s dominance in the global film market” (Bergan, 2011, p.122). The setting of this genre was another feature remembered by a narrator Kingsley, a young surveyor during the 1950s:

You know, I um, always liked the outdoors. When you was away ...outdoors all the time, sun, the rain, I just got, got to like it there. Those guys always outdoors, riding horses. We didn’t have any horses to ride, but I guess you used to have a rough life as a surveyor you know. You know you gotta go in the bush. That was sort of a rugged life. So I enjoyed the cowboys. I used to be out in the grass, be out in the plains, you know, with the cows. (Laughs)

Charles Ambler revealed the extreme popularity of the Western genre in the copper-mining cities of colonial Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), during the 1950s. He labelled the tremendous impact of this type of movie on the young boys as the phenomenon of ‘Copperbelt cowboys’:

In the vast company compounds that housed African miners and their families on the Copperbelt, groups of African boys, ‘dressed in home-made paper “chaps” and cowboy hats, and carrying crudely carved wooden pistols’, were a ubiquitous presence running through the streets and alleys in endless games of cowboys and Indians (Ambler, 2004, p. 133).

The setting of the Western was said to be the film’s “chief glory” with many of the scenes taking place in the great outdoors with horses featuring as a very important tool in the arsenal of the cowboy. These, along with the precise clothes worn in the films were signature elements of the Western. The typical clothes were ‘wide-brimmed hats, open-neck shirts with scarves, and tight jeans (Buscombe, 1970, p. 36). Two of the narrators, a couple, celebrated the tradition of the Western outside of the cinema when they engaged in parties with friends. Nathaniel and Agnes, one of the couples interviewed, recall how they and their friends would have theme parties; a major theme was the Western. Agnes especially remembers how they would dress for the Western theme parties:

And, um, we used to go to different houses, and we used to have, um, like, because I ...(giggles) we used to have parties, and we dressed according...We used to dress like cowgirls and cowboys, and we, you know, did things like that and had Western music, because in my day that was mostly what we did, in that particular era, we played the Country Western, okay, and we used to dress ...the plaid shirts and the skirts, and the boys with the Khaki pants and you know, and um, (laughs).

The Western films were a common fare, and many of the narrators immensely enjoyed seeing them, even to the point that they incorporated the Western dress style into their leisure and ‘fancy’ dress for entertainment. This type of activity was also popular in the United States where “films became a major force of socialization, providing role models and instruction in dress and fashion, in courtship and love, and in marriage and career” (Kellner, 2000, p. 128).

Despite this fondness for the genre there was one narrator who was not enamoured by the Western, and in fact recalls how he and his friends found it puerile. Here’s how William felt about the Cowboy movies:

Some of them were so silly, and we had already achieved a certain...or attained a certain amount of sophistication, and we were a little discriminating in our taste...and we would go to the Nassau Theatre ... and just laugh our heads off at the foolishness that we were watching on screen.

William and his friends appear to have had a minority view as the popularity of this genre among most of the male narrators and their huge enjoyment of the Western were not surprising, nor coincidental. This was a genre produced to elicit masculine sensibilities. The central focus of Hollywood Western movies was on nature, civilization and the westernized masculine figure (Belton, 2005, pp. 255-259). This type of character seemingly appealed to the male narrators and is evident in their recollections of the 1950s cowboy pictures.

The Biblical Epics

Christianity has always been at the core of the Bahamian culture. The people are church going, and during the 1950s, attending church and being respectful of ‘the Word of God’ was elemental for the average Bahamian (Craton M. , 1986). In observing the relationship between the people of The Bahamas’ religion and national identity, Craton and Saunders state that “to a people who are at least as religious as they are political, the churches have

been almost as important as the government in defining and defending Bahamian national identity and traditional cultural values” (1998, p. 444). This propensity towards religion, coupled with the production of several Epic Biblical blockbusters during the 1950s provide some insight into why narrators remembered *Samson and Delilah* (1949), *The Robe* (1953), *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben Hur* (1959). The 1950s was also the final decade during which Hollywood produced the Epic Biblical films because their audiences were still prepared to buy into the ‘belief’ of religious morality. In his book *Hollywood Theology: The Commodification of Religion in Twentieth-Century Films, Religion and American Culture*, Jeffrey Smith states that “respect for religion was a tenet of the film industry’s self-regulatory codes in effect from the 1920s to the 1960s....People have a natural interest in what God and God’s opponents might be doing, and the entertainment industry can embrace and exploit nearly any subject of interest to paying customers” (2001, p. 194 & 224).

One narrator, Robert, was a young man in the 1950s working as a projectionist in some of the cinemas in Nassau. He remembers *The Robe*, which was about a Christian conversion of Marcellus, a Roman soldier and his Greek slave Demetrius. The movie is quoted as being one that had an “emphasis on religious conversion, featuring a love story that linked earthly passion with Christian belief, played against the background of epochal historical events” (Anderson, 2017). Robert recalls that the first time he saw the film he was actually working in the projection room, and because of the length of the film, he had to use a lot of igniters because he had to change the reels often. Robert recalls that “*The Robe* was a movie that was worth seeing. You go to see *The Robe*, and you tell somebody ...boy, I went to see *The Robe* last night, and that was wonderful”.

This type of awe-inspiring reception of Biblical Epics was inherent in the very nature of this type of film. By description, “Epic films typically feature vast panoramas, with hundreds of extras, and are likely to be historical or Biblical stories containing spectacular scenes” (Bergan, 2011, p. 36). One of the female narrators, Velma, remembered all four of the Biblical films, three of which were box office hits of the 1950s, *The Ten Commandments*, *Ben-Hur* and *The Robe* (Bergan, 2011, p. 36). She was able to describe an aspect of one of these films quite clearly. Her memories of *The Ten Commandments* were of Yul Brenner and his character’s relationships in the film:

Yul Brenner ...he was the head of the movie then, ...I forget what he was in that movie, but Moses was then his grandson, ...cause his daughter found him in the bulrushes ... and then they found out he was a, a Jew? Found that out ... that when hell broke loose then (Laughter)

Hollywood motion pictures primary function is to entertain. Nonetheless, Velma recollects the lessons she learned from the Biblical epics extending beyond simple entertainment to include instruction. For her the telling of Biblical stories emphasized the idea that “a motion picture is a product formed by the intricate interplay of film industry forces and cultural expectations (Smith J. A., 2001, p. 191).

Like even der, der sacred ones, they used to teach you more about der Bible...das how I got to know a lot of tings. Tell you about when Moses was a baby, and it shows you how Moses mother put him in der ...and der sister was dere minin' him, and um, dey showed you a lot a dat. And afterwards you read it in der Bible, you know, after you got grown, grown, you read it in the Bible.

Velma's memories of these films remained with her into adulthood and became a foundation for her interpretation and understanding of the scriptures when she later read them in the written text. These Biblical films had an impact on Velma which she expressed as she reminisced of a time when this type movie was screened. “They don' have good movies like that over here now. But those days they used to have good movies, intelligent movies.”

The Costume Drama

While not strictly an Epic, the film *Gone with the Wind* shares some of the qualities of an Epic. The movie is considered a Costume Drama because it is a period piece and is derived from a literary source; the production has lavish costumes and designs that are precise in the details of the time period (Bergan, 2011, p. 91). Two narrators, Oscar, a young government employee in the Fifties, and Robert remembered seeing the film during the 1950s.

Monique: Why do you remember seeing *Gone with the Wind*?

Oscar: Boy, I guess the publicity it got, and we were dying to see it... And what the fella name, Clark Gable? I don't know ...I don' remember the name of the lady that starred in it ...Yeah, well he made like a sarcastic 'mark to her ... and that sorta boost everyone wanting to see the picture, yeah...So I guess, even in those days they knew how to get you to come

and see the movie. ... I remember it was too long (Laughter). It was too long, you know it wasn't a, a action, it was more like a lovers movie.

Robert remembers *Gone with the Wind* as being “another movie that really, really, really stayed with me for a long time”. He remembers the film for its excellent production quality, but what he also remembered about the film was the unbiased nature of injustice that he perceived from the film:

And really and truly, yer know, you see the injustices, and it makes you realize all black people ein poor, and all poor people ein black, okay. Plenty white people got taken advantage of in that if you understand what I mean. And plenty black people, ‘cause they was humble, were spared ... they didn't see them as a important enough entity to kill ... you see my point? And that gave me the zeal I needed to see to it that we have change in this country.

The 1950s was a decade that was renowned for Epics of several genres, the biblical and costume drama were two that the narrators remembered. These were very successful productions for Hollywood, and popular among the narrators due to these films attention to detail in terms of their dramatic portrayals of biblical events, and their grand and lavish technical cinematographic elements. The narrators who remembered these films stressed that they had significant impacts on their future lives.

The Science Fiction

The Science-fiction films of the Fifties were a response to the Cold War, and the fear of communism and nuclear weapons. John Belton characterises post-war Americas fears as being “strikingly similar to that found in 1950s science-fiction films, which dramatized the darker side of scientific development in the form of alien invasions, mutations produced by atomic explosions, and apocalyptic visions at the end of the world triggered by a rampant technology that had run amuck” (Belton, 2005, p. 272). One of the remembered films is *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) which is described as “an anti-war sci-fi classic [which] features an alien who warns that unless nuclear weapons are destroyed, his race will annihilate Earth” (Bergan, 2011, p. 113). Fiona, who was a teenager and student during the 1950s, shares how she remembers what she felt about the sci-fi films that she saw:

Fiona: I used to see a lot of...in those days they used to show a lot of Science Fiction. *Them, The Thing, The Day The Earth Stood Still*, that

was Michael Rennie ... Have you ever seen *The Day The Earth Stood Still*?

Monique: I think I've seen it, yeah...I will definitely watch it....What did you like about the Science Fiction ones...why did you watch that type?

Fiona: They used to scare the life outta me (giggles). I remember going to see *The Thing*, and everyone was so tense, cause the Thing was about to appear, and everything was so quiet, and all a sudden this door open and it all came out, and we all sort of went down under the seats (Laughter)...Scared the...out of us...(Laughter)...

Monique: And you liked that?

Fiona: I liked that at that time, I won't like it too much now.

Fiona's reaction to the *Thing* is similar to those defined in the third distinctive aspect of Annette Kuhn's Type A memories, which she describes as "scenes or images [which] characteristically re-evoked strong emotions or bodily sensations on the narrator's part" (Kuhn, 2011, p. 89). Fiona's reaction to the remembered scene bears some similarities to those of Kuhn's narrators when they had "recollections of hiding or covering one's face or of cowering under the seat" (Kuhn, 2011, p. 90).

Despite the inherent goal of the Science-Fiction being that of increasing an awareness of the political issues of America in the 1950s, Fiona did not appear to remember the Sci-fi films that she saw for any of those reasons. She merely remembers the sensation of fear at what she was seeing on the screen in the theatre, and her manifestation of that fear.

Other film genres are highlighted in the following sections of this chapter as they relate to other contexts in which the narrators remembered the films.

The Serials

Some of the narrators indicated that they remembered the serials. These film texts featured heavily into the memories of their cinema-going. The Serials were a part of the cinema package years prior to the 1950s, and even though the feature film was the item promoted, the narrators remember the serials being the film text that got them to return consistently to the cinema. "The serial is defined as a multi-episode, usually action-adventure film. It was shown in cinemas in weekly instalments and each chapter ended on a cliff-hanger" (Bergan, 2011, p. 115). The first serials remembered by the narrators

started being produced in the 1930s. Those serials remembered are: *Flash Gordon*, *The Lone Ranger*, *The Adventures of Captain Marvel and Shazam*, *Tarzan*, *Nyoka the Jungle Girl*, *Superman*, and *Batman and Robin*. The serials that the narrators remembered are a part of the Filmography in Appendix C.

The Serials were remembered by both male and female narrators who returned to the cinemas on a regular basis, on Saturdays, to get their weekly instalment of the adventures of their serial characters. George remembers the serials in this way:

And they would have a series that would run for six, eight, ten weeks where they would show you parts of something like *Captain Marvel or Superman*. And they would show you parts of it where ... 'bout fifteen, twenty minutes of it where something would happen. They'd cut, cut it off and say we'll see you next week, you know, that was to entice you to come back to see, to see the rest of it.

Judy and Fiona both recall the serials as a guaranteed way to get persons to come to the cinema on a Saturday in particular, even if they were not interested in seeing the feature film:

Judy: They the side thing ... That was serial...even if you wasn't gern for the movie, you gern to see the serial.

Fiona: Saturdays was the day you went to see serials. You'd have to go, it take you so far, then you'd have to go to the next week to get up with the next chapter...and usually there were about twelve chapters.

Oscar recalls not just the regularity of the serial, and it's leaving you wanting more, but he also referred to the monetary commitment required of the viewing audience:

...When you get home you say, what you think is gonna happen to *Superman* next week, you know, that sort of thing. And we look forward every Saturday morning we go ... That's right ... would carry on the next week, it would end in the spot where you say 'what's what's gonna (chuckle). Well if you wanta find out what's gonna happen come back next week and pay another ...

Branded in the memory of Velma are the closing words spoken by the narrator of her favourite Serial, which also illustrates the premiere attraction of the serials "Don't forget the exciting chapter of *Nyoka the Jungle Girl* at this theatre next week". The repetitive nature of the serial undoubtedly influenced the narrator's memories of this film text. They never commented on any particular episode of the serial, but referred to the ongoing thrill

of watching these productions. The serial is no longer a part of the cinema textual experience, and serials are no longer produced. It is one genre of film that television was able to permanently eliminate from the big screen.

The Power of Music, Love and Imperial Pride

The genre of some of the previously remembered films have factored into the reason why the narrators indicated that they remembered the film. Those films that were remembered for their race issues were all dramas; the ones remembered for their biblical content were all Epics; the Science-fiction brought back to mind a bodily response to the film stimuli; and the Western were remembered simply and predominantly because they were of the Western genre. The genres of the next films are not, however, the reason that the narrators remembered them. Garnet and Judy both talked about how they remember their films, *The Joker is Wild* (1957) and *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954), because of the theme songs from the films. Judy, who was a young training nurse, recalls:

Judy: Three Coins in a Fountain!

Monique: What do you remember about that?

Judy: I know they had a song for it, it was a song as well as the movie, and I can't remember basically what it was, but I know das a movie ... I know that was the first time we heard we heard that song, and it was to do with progress, like a bit of gambling was in it, ta get that name, three coins, and I don' know, all I know is the song in it got everybody singing. But the three coins was three different girls love affair, and um, they had the song, we all sang it. Which one will the fountain bless? Das what I think it was about.

Similarly, Garnet recalls several things about his remembered movie, but the theme song was obviously an important one:

And the first movie I remember seeing is with Frank Sinatra and Roderick Crawford, and the film was *The Joker is Wild*. The theme song for the film was *All the Way*, and that bring back a lot a memories ...Yeah, at the Capitol Theatre. That was in '59, 1959.

Garnet had a package of memory cues for the film from it being the first one he remembered seeing at the Capitol Theatre to the year in which he remembers seeing the film. For both of these narrators, however, these songs are still connections with the films that remain with them after more than fifty years. As Judy indicated, they began to sing

the song after seeing the movie, thus linking the popularity of the song to the movie, the site that she first associates with the song. Coincidentally, the remembered songs from both of the films were written by the same lyricist, Sammy Cahn, both songs for which he also won Academy Awards (Small, 2016).

The production quality and a simple love for a film are the reasons that Leon gives for his remembering *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954) and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). His obvious fondness for both of these movies is evident in how he shared about not just remembering the films, but the degree of pride in their quality and what they represented to him as a young man who was a member of the British Empire in the 1950s:

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers ... was a musical, and it's action, it was love, it was ...it's everything ... it's very well put together I think.

Bridge on the River Kwai, I love that movie ... it showed discipline, which we lack in this world today. It makes me feel proud that I was a British subject, and it was a prisoner of war camp with the Japanese. Yes, I associated with that ...

Ironically, the two reasons for which the film was retained in Leon's memories were what made the motion pictures a success. The movie *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* was a musical that featured dance routines and was about romance and a degree of mayhem in the mountains of Oregon. When released it proved to be a greater success at the box office than its producers, who had put more money into the production of the film *Brigadoon*, had anticipated. Additionally, technologically, the film also made history in being the first to use the process of CinemaScope along with Ansco Color (Rector, 2017).

Leon's second remembered film, *Bridge on the River Kwai*, was adapted from a book of the same name written by Pierre Boulle. The movie is about the struggles and triumphs of British and American POWs in a Japanese War Camp during World War II, in which the prisoners are charged with the overwhelming task of building a bridge. Leon's pride as a member of the British Empire during the 1950s is evident as he talked about the film and described the ragged and sickly British regiment that arrived at "the camp and line[d] up in the stereotyped stiff upper-lip British style" (Joyaux, 74, p. 177).

Whether the song, the love for the production quality or pride in the Empire, these films stood out in the memories of the narrators over a span of many decades.

Conclusion

The film text factored significantly into the cinema experiences of some of the narrators, to the extent that more than one third of them remembered specific films that they first viewed in the 1950s. When prompted to recall something about their remembered films that triggered their memory, they readily articulated a number of reasons why the memory of their mentioned films remained with them so many years later. It is obvious from the selection of films remembered by the narrators that the Bahama Islands were by no means denied access to the same films and technology flowing out of Hollywood into the rest of the world during the 1950s. By extension, the cinemagoers of that time were also being exposed to the ideas, trends, preferences and social issues being perpetrated via the outward flow of films from the United States into the cinemas worldwide. The narrators demonstrated that they were experiencing the films in ways that were very much aligned with those of cinemagoers in other countries. Their responses of discontent and disdain for the issue of racial discrimination, as portrayed in the four remembered films, *Imitation of Life*, *No Way Out*, *The Defiant Ones* and *Island in the Sun*, were very much in sync with those expressed outside of the islands of the Bahamas. In the same way, the respect for Biblical standards, and the awe and fascination of the Biblical Epics and Costume Dramas by the American audiences were replicated by the Bahamian narrators who expressed their love for films such as *The Robe* and *Gone with the Wind*. In terms of the Western genre of film, which was designed to appeal to masculine tastes; the male narrators were emphatic about their devotion to any type of cowboy film text that was screened at their local cinemas. From emotional responses to Imperial pride, the Science Fiction films and the War Drama reached its intended target, and affectively communicated their messages to the narrators who recalled films such as *The Thing from Another World* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. And finally, for at least two of the narrators, the lyrics and music of the songs *Three Coins in the Fountain* and *All the Way* certainly reminded them of the films by the same names.

Concerns about the censorship of films also emerged from memories surrounding the film texts mentioned by some of the narrators. The determined and focused efforts to deny access to films because of the presumed negative impact that they might have on their audience, was exposed and discussed within the context of censorship policies within the United States and the Bahamas during the 1950s. Whether it was miscegenation or plain

racial intolerance, the regulative mechanism of outright banning of films, or at the very least the cutting of certain scenes from films, was practiced.

This chapter also touched on Stardom in the remembered films of both Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte. The impact of these two black Hollywood stars of the 1950s, and their genuine connection with the Caribbean was emphasized. But, the most compelling reminder was Sidney Poitier's link to this small group of islands in the British Empire that could lay claim to a Hollywood actor. A claim that might not have been acknowledged the world over but was without doubt a matter of pride for those on the island who were aware of his Bahamian heritage during the Fifties.

In her research on the cinema going memories of persons in Bridgend, South Wales, Helen Richards found that in their recollections there was no mention of "the film's story line, stars, characters, costumes, or music, but they all remembered queuing to get into the cinemas to see it" (2003, p. 352). Similarly, more than half of the narrators of this study had no recollection of specific films that they had seen in the 1950s, either by name or plot description. Nonetheless, those who remembered the film text, for whatever reason, by so doing added another crucial dimension to this research. Because, despite the undisputable status of the social experiences in the memories of the generation of the Fifties, at the heart of the activity of going to the show, is the process of viewing an actual film on the silver screen, the foundation of the industry, and the most obvious reason for attending a cinema.

Chapter VIII – The Thesis Conclusion

As the varied portions of my research began to fall into place, what evolved was a picture that I had not initially envisaged about cinemagoing on the small island of New Providence. My original intent in conducting this study was to examine the cinemagoing practices of young adults living in Nassau, Bahamas during the 1950s, and to extrapolate from the findings their enduring perceptions of how the cinema, and cinemagoing impacted who they were in the formative years of their young lives; and to derive conclusions on the broader cultural and social influence, that cinemagoing might have had on their social ordering in later adulthood. I anticipated that the oral history narrators, that I interviewed, would provide some indelible impressions about the movies they saw in the 1950's; the foods they consumed within the cinema; the clothing and fashion trends they wore to attend cinema; and the persons with whom they engaged in the social intercourse of cinemagoing.

As my research proceeded, however, I realized that the narratives of 'going to the movies' in this island community were far more complex and intro-reflective than I had initially anticipated. By its very nature, the qualitative methodology, an approach frequently used in New Cinema History projects, is one that is not directed from the top, but evolves from the bottom up (Rossman, 2012; Maltby, 2011). Accordingly, my research is the construction of everyday life and meaning derived from the perspective of the individual narrators and relayed in their oral history interviews. The three types of memory, Types A, B and C, conceptualized by Kuhn were evident among my narrators' modes of recall. The Type A memory which Kuhn labels Remembered Scenes/Images, was observed as my narrators expressed their past events and experiences in a transformational manner. They seemed to travel back in time and spoke to me, vibrantly, from that place and situation. The second, Type B memories, Situated Memories of Films, were certainly apparent as the narrators recalled the films that they had seen in the Fifties. My narrators would, through the retelling of the situations, characters, and genres of the film, allow them to resonate with their everyday lives at that time. The Type C memory, Memories of Cinemagoing, was the most prevalent of the three memories 'performed' by the narrators in my study. In these memory recalls, the narrators shared about the social act

of going to the movies, as well as the place of the cinema in Nassau in the 1950s. Additionally, similar to the narrator's in Annette Kuhn's research, who engaged in characteristic tropes of memory (Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*, 2002, p. 9), the narrators in my project retold their memories, placing themselves within these various tropes. Throughout their narrative they presented examples of repetitive, anecdotal, impersonal and past/present discursive registers, indicating an alignment with Kuhn's narrator's memory processes.

The oral history is driven by the narrators, whose stories provide the research source, and as such determined the direction that the research project took (Bryman, 2012; Abrams, 2010). This research guided me where it wanted to go, revealing that the narrators remembered the cinema as a place that was generally accessible and welcoming, despite the one segregated theatre which, because of its contested nature, inherently placed it out of reach to a substantial majority that accepted its segregated space as another cultural norm. Nonetheless, for the white narrators, the Savoy was also a welcoming and accessible place. What was also noteworthy about the results of this project was the insight it offered into the business of the cinema; its universal rules of distribution and exhibition that were mainly created and administered by the Hollywood system, and imported into the small and commercially viable community of New Providence; and the research revealed also the composition and content of the film texts that were most vividly remembered by the narrators, and the perceived influences that those texts had on the persons viewing them. This research, will, however, not only provide a record of the experiential context of moviegoing, it will also constitute a reference source for other leisure activities during the decade of the Fifties.

The three-pronged research design model used by Annette Kuhn for her work in *An Everyday Magic*, comprising of an ethnographic inquiry, an historical inquiry and films, was by far the most fitting model for my research project. Her research design is a flexible one which provides an excellent frame in which my project was able to follow a proven and successful research design. Despite the need to scale back in the ethnographic inquiry and conduct an oral history component instead, my methodological adaptation in this aspect of my research design was not crucial to the results of my work. The information gathered from the oral history interviews was vigorous and overarching. The interrogation of the oral history narrators anchored my research as I had to rely more on

their memories of their every day lives in the 1950s and how cinemagoing factored into that. Both the historical inquiry and the film parts of Kuhn's research design were well suited to my research and provided a direction in the assessment and analysis of the information gathered. Albeit, unlike Kuhn, I realized a scarcity of documented sources about the cinema business of distribution and exhibition in The Bahamas in the Fifties, I was still able to apply the insights provided in her model to this aspect of my research. The film component of Annette Kuhn's work was, as with the previous components, an ideal final element to my research. Having guidelines and suggestions on how to incorporate the film text into this research was a necessity for the successful completion of this project, and that is exactly what the film inquiry in Kuhn's design provided. All in all, this model served my purposes well, and assisted me in acquiring a strong and structured research design for my thesis.

This thesis illustrates the value of cultural memory of cinemagoing in media research by illuminating the way of life of a generation of persons living in New Providence by means of their moviegoing experiences. The narrators put their everyday life activities to the context of the cinemas on the island. Their collective narratives provide insight into an important form of popular culture, film and the cinema, which has been overlooked in terms of its relevance to the cultural memory of this evolving nation. By sharing their stories, the narrators inform the national consciousness of the country about the routine of cinemagoing in the 1950s Bahamas, thereby allowing that knowledge base to expand the narrative of an important and notable period of history. Realizing that these cinema memories are more than just remembrances of going to the show and watching a film, is a way of revealing the political, social and economic framework of their lives during that era. In particular, the cultural memory of the narrators provided a strong intersection between cinemagoing and race issues, something that impacted on every aspect of the moviegoing experience in Nassau, from the place of the cinema to the cinema text. The theme of race was introduced into every aspect of this thesis, from the discriminatory locations of the cinema structures to the apparent unfair acquisition of the Capitol theatre; the overt practice of racial segregation in the Savoy theatre; as well as the exhibition and reception of the remembered films. Race relations between blacks and whites were at the fore in the daily interactions of many of the narrators of this study.

Gender was a second theme that became apparent in the research. This was especially revealed in the types of leisure activities that the different sexes engaged in. Both genders were on the whole avid cinemagoers in the Fifties. The men, however, were more inclined to take part in more organized and structured sporting activities, whether on land or water based. The women on the other hand, were predominantly excited about the matinee dances, and would be the spectators at the sporting games that the men played. Another very prominent gender difference was apparent in the genre of film watched by the narrators. The Western genre was a particular favourite among the men who were enthusiastic in their obvious preference for this type of film.

The project's oral history narratives shed light on the diverse leisure activities of a generation; the education and religious systems and structures operating in the country; as well as the political and governmental hierarchy and its links to the Colonial and North American cultures. Ultimately, the ways in which the narrators remembered their cinemagoing escapades, and how they related them to their daily lives, opened the scope of this research allowing it to further aid in the creation of a broader social history of The Bahamas. This thesis also makes a contribution to the New Cinema History by expanding its reach into the cultural and social history of cinemagoing in the Caribbean region. While there have been a variety of studies in New Cinema History conducted in Europe, Africa, Australia and the Americas, the Caribbean region until now has not been targeted.

An understanding of the history and the culture of the Caribbean region is essential to any research in cinema and cultural memory in The Bahamas. The identity of the people and their way of life emerged and persisted throughout the narratives of the oral history narrators. Stuart Hall was aware of the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of race issues in these island communities during the 1950s and beyond, and his insightful commentaries on the concept of Diaspora, its influence on the creation of a Caribbean identity and the formation of these relations within the context of politics, economics and everyday activities and rituals are relevant to this thesis. Identity formation is something that Stuart Hall speaks about in his treatise about the impact of the Diaspora on the creation of the West Indian and Caribbean identity. This blend of the African and European heritage strongly determines the construct of the Caribbean people (Hall, 1995, p. 5). Evidence of this blend is apparent in the attitudes and behaviours of the Bahamian narrators; their responses and approach to, and acceptance of their place in the colony, individually and

collectively. The British colonial structure, one in which Hall contends “racism reveals itself in everyday practices” along with the American segregated ‘Jim Crow’ practices, meant that the identities of the citizenry evolved within the framework of a system that was strongly based on inequality and a racial hierarchy that favoured whites.

The oral history methodology demands that its research is driven by narrators whose stories provide the source data, and as such determine the direction that the research project takes. Despite the overwhelming reliance on the narrators’ stories, and concerns about the ‘fragility of memory’ the subjective stance of the narrators and their memories have allowed in this thesis for a richer history of cinemagoing in The Bahamas during the 1950s: not just a recall of factual events and dates and times, but rather an account of human emotions and responses (Abrams, 2010).

My research has, nonetheless, been made robust with the triangulation of the narrator’s stories, by the historical written sources, and the newspaper advertisements and articles which strengthened the credibility of the research. The narrative contribution of this Bahamian generation of the fifties is by far the predominant strength of this project. Lynn Abrams stresses the significance of the collaborative aspect of oral history and the bearing it has on the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (2010, p. 10). This certainly bore out in my project’s oral history interviews during which I felt a bond was formed between me and my interview narrators. Despite our relatively brief encounters during the actual recital and recordation of the interviews, and the short follow-up time in which I delivered the transcripts, a natural rapport was established. I have not had the opportunity to interact with many of them since the interview sessions, nonetheless, there is still a connection, at least on my part, whenever I read over their transcripts or listen to the audio recordings of their journeys back to a transformative time in their young adulthood.

All of the oral history narrators represent a generation that is rapidly diminishing by the onset of time and natural attrition, and also the inevitable inception of physical and mental constraints; sadly, three of the narrators have passed away since they shared their memories with me for this project. This is, a sobering testimony to the resulting infirmity of that aging generation. Their oral history testimonies provided the predominant source that was necessary to uncover a cinema history of Nassau, Bahamas in the 1950s. The narrator’s ability to construct narratives that shed tremendous light on an activity that only

now exists in the landscape of their memories was uniquely opportunistic and remarkable. Their memories are roadmaps that serve as guides into their lives and cinemagoing experiences of the Fifties which are recalled by way of their engagement in the oral history interview. Without these memories, there would be a limited sense of the past, and therefore consequently a diminished connection to the present (Abrams, 2010, p. 82). The oral history narrators' memories centered on the ritualistic leisure activities of cinemagoing in the Fifties in New Providence. The ritual of going to the show was an "embodied performance of history as memory" which aided in the remembering process of this activity for both the individual narrator, and the collective group (Bollmer, 2011, p. 459). Peter, one of the male narrators described the ritualistic significance of cinemagoing for him during the Fifties:

...So that was a Saturday ritual, and the main thing of a Saturday afternoon, probably the only thing was Westerns, in, in movies. And there was ... Gene Autrey, Roy Rogers, Tom Hix, and, what kept us going back every Saturday was a serial ... and so you had to go back the next Saturday to find out whether they survived the stage coach massacre, or whatever, you know, so that kept the momentum. And that was pretty much Saturday...That was a ritual for me normally.

It is noted, however, that when a ritual no longer exists, societies would often enshrine the activity in some way to ensure that it remains current; otherwise, when the performance of this ritual no longer exists, or changes in some manner, the memory of it is no longer contemporary or practical. This change in the ritualistic performance of the activity creates memories that comprise the domain of the society's collective memory (Bollmer, 2011, p. 462). Through the process of sharing their narratives about cinemagoing in the era of the Fifties, the narrators somehow brought those rituals back to life in the course of their retelling and in some cases reconstructing. By so doing, their oral history interviews have been documented, and are permanent records and reference sources, along with this thesis, for further generations.

The role of the television as it related to cinemagoing in the Bahama Islands during the 1950s was brought to light in this thesis. Some of the narrators confirmed that the television did not have the same impact on moviegoing in Little Nassau, as it had in the more developed countries, such as the United Kingdom and America. This was largely due to, according to some of the narrators, the fact that very few persons in The Bahamas were in possession of television sets in the 1950s. This meant that the cinemas retained

their place as the premier access site for the consumption of the visual mass medium of film in the country throughout the decade. Cinemagoing, subsequently, persisted in being a very popular leisure activity throughout the decade of the Fifties.

Race and Cinemagoing

A noteworthy percentage of the narrators remembered acts of segregation and racial intolerance within the cinema space, and those expressed about the remembered films demonstrated a strong emotional attachment to their memories. Thelma, a black female narrator, shared that when her niece, who had a white father, told her that she only went to the Savoy theatre as a little girl, she was somewhat surprised and said to her husband Kingslely:

...remember, she had a white daddy, that's how come that happened, because, you, we couldn't go to the Savoy ... not hardly, I mean, that just did not happen ... Nassau wasn't ready for that. ...I don't recall any time when I was, was welcome, I don't remember any of my friends going to the Savoy Theatre....

Shirley, another black female narrator, in remembering the Capitol, contrasted it with the Savoy by establishing the fact that for her, as a black person, the Savoy was off limits:

...'cause in those days you couldn't go to the movie in Bay Street, you know it was a white ... only certain people could'a go there. You know I've never been to a movie that they had on Bay Street. But I know I went to the Capitol ... the other one....

Helen, a black narrator who was married and a mother during the Fifties, was emotive in her response to the segregated racial practices of that time and expressed her feelings in this way:

Durin' dem time it was sad ... everybody was sayin' because we coloured, we black, dey don' want us come there, but after years go by, um, Milo Butler and Pindling, dey change it. Dey make dem people change it, and then black people start goin' there, yer know. One time ago you couldn' go there, but thank God it change.

Likewise, Williams' memory of the representation of black persons in some of the films of the 1950s appeared to stir rather strong emotions in his recall of them:

...So, blacks were rarely portrayed in, in, ... and it wasn't until with Sidney Poitier, and some other actors, that blacks started to be portrayed

in what we would call decent roles in the movies. So, most of that period was showing black people in demeaning roles, which I think had an effect on the way a lot of us looked at ourselves.

Cinemagoing on the island of New Providence, the only island in The Bahamas on which a film could be viewed in a public theatre setting in the 1950s, clearly demonstrated the agency of the white minority ruling class over the majority black citizenry. This economic and social dominance was manifested in the location of the cinemas which simply reflected the over-arching colonial structure of this British colony. The abhorrent practice of racial segregation was allowed to flourish within a one mile radius which was clearly demarcated by the locations of the four theatres, their clientele as well as the selection and rotation of the films that were screened in these venues. Unlike the United States and Australia where the separation of races and ethnic groups was organized within a single theatre space (Knight, 2011; Regester C. , 2005; Nugent, 2013), the segregated space of one cinema in New Providence was solely and completely dedicated to a particular race of people. The segregated Savoy theatre existed so that the black and white moviegoer would not engage in the activity of moviegoing in the same place, thus providing white patrons the opportunity to view films publicly within a space that was exclusively functioning for their leisure enjoyment, should they wish to do so. The location and the clientele of these cinemas were a true demonstration of the social order of the times in the Islands of the Bahamas, clearly indicative of the boundaries that were set, and the strict allegiance to them.

Similarly, it has long been debated that the Bahamian culture, similar to many others, has been influenced by the American culture via the medium of film; whether it be the actual film text, or the practices involved in the distribution and exhibition of the medium itself. This research has shown that the latter certainly impacted the cinema industry in Nassau, Bahamas. Evidenced by the Savoy theatre, the one racially segregated cinema operating during the fifties, is the fact that the Jim Crow laws of the United States found their way into this British colony and seeped into social practices that disallowed blacks and whites from interacting communally in various public places, the Savoy cinema being a noted one.

While the black narrators firmly acknowledged the existence of the segregated Savoy theatre, only one admitted to actually crossing the line and entering the cinema to watch a film, partly out of obligation to her responsibility for her minor ward; but also

admittedly because of a genuine curiosity for what could possibly be in this 'sacred' place from which black persons were excluded. Most of the black narrators, however, expressed that they knew that they were not welcome in the Savoy, and had no intention of subjugating themselves to engaging in a leisure activity in such a segregated and unwelcoming environment. Expressions that suggest an attitude of requisite resignation to the social constructs of that time and place.

The white narrators, on the other hand, expressed either ignorance, ambiguity, or a measured acknowledgement and concern over this inveterate and unfair racial division. One white female narrator, Fiona, admitted that she was unaware that the Savoy was a segregated theatre; whereas Oscar, a white male narrator, stated that it was an unnecessary practice since the same persons owned the cinemas, and the same pictures were exhibited in the various theatres. Nonetheless, the separation of the races was entrenched in the society. Generally, blacks and whites socialized separately, for the most part.

Film Texts and Cultural Memory

The place of the film text in this project became more apparent during the analysis of the oral history narratives. In researching the cultural memory of cinemagoing it became clear that the social and experiential aspect of moviegoing was more dominant in the memories of interview participants. Despite the adoption and adaptation of Annette Kuhn's research framework for her work on 1930s cinemagoing in the UK, and the inclusion of a film component into my research, I was not clear about the way that the role of the film text would evolve. I also realized that the film text was essential to any study of cinemagoing, as such, the question of the relevance and necessity of some type of analysis and commentary on the actual motion pictures was certain. What was, however, uncertain, was how this aspect of the study would naturally generate. Since the narrators were aware that the interview was based on cinemagoing prior to the actual interviews, some of them automatically talked about films that they had seen during the 1950s. The majority of them, however, had to be prompted to talk about films when asked specifically if they remembered any films that they had seen in the Fifties. Those who were able to provide names or descriptions of films were further interrogated to determine why they remembered the specific film. Granted, they could have, seen the film at a later time, but placing the film text and their viewing within the context of the time and places being researched, suggests that it was more likely that they were actually remembering the films

from the time that they first interacted with them more plausible. Oral history interviews do not seek to ascertain facts, nonetheless, in the case of the validation of the memory of the selected films, the triangulation of the exhibition time, the reason for remembering the film, and events that were occurring locally, and internationally aided in the credibility of the narrators genuine memory of their original viewing of film text.

Another specific aspect of cinemagoing within The Bahamas pertains to the distribution of the films. Film is a commodity, and during the 1950s, as is still the case today, many commercial products were imported into the country, primarily from the mainland USA. Due to the systematic control of the importation of such products, there were stringent regulations placed on the ways in which items could be transported into the islands, and distributed within. As one of the black narrators, Willian, in explaining how the distribution system within The Bahamas worked during the Fifties, stated:

...When the movies came out, unless you are connected with the agents in America, and you know back then we had this commission agency thing, I think extended even in ...everything in the movies. You couldn't import a tin of Carnation ice cream on your own. Asa Pritchard was the agent ... Milo Butler had to go to Asa Pritchard to buy Carnation Cream, he couldn't buy a case of Carnation Cream from Miami or anywhere else, because they had the agency for all the main products, Carnation cream being a really prominent familiar one. And the movies was the same way. When a movie came out the Bethel Brother's theatres, they got it first, but Mr. Pinder couldn't get it, he simply could not get it, because he was not included in the distribution....

His sentiments provided insight into that uneven and biased business practice which was part of a system which, to a large extent regulated the flow of films into the theatres and is ultimately cited as the major reason why the black owned Capitol theatre changed ownership so soon after it had been opened.

The censorship of the film *No Way Out* was a demonstration of the patriarchal regime of the minority ruling class of the Islands of the Bahamas at the start of the 1950s. Black Bahamians had a unique connection to Sidney Poitier, which was not imagined since many of them knew him personally as a young boy living among them in Nassau. One of the narrators, George, articulated the degree of pride and acknowledgement of Poitier's Bahamian status when he shared that "People would go to see their homeboy perform, and ... Sidney Poitier was a good actor. He was just coming along then, and he was making his mark and being recognized". The minority power base, in realizing this

connection that a majority black population had to an actor who was performing in a film that had strong racial content, became concerned about the impact that the viewing of this film might have on them, and took the necessary action that they envisaged might curtail any possible incitement from the screening of the film, in this island community. They initially banned the screening of the film, however, after strong public opposition, *No Way Out* was exhibited in at least one cinema in Nassau to the pleasure of an orderly albeit excited viewing audience.

Cinemagoing in Leisure Lifestyles

From a leisure perspective, there was a scarcity of places where the young persons in the 1950s could go to socialize and hang out on a regular basis. The white narrators talked about frequenting Blacks Candy Kitchen which was an eatery located in the downtown area and which had a section in which persons could sit and eat and socialize. This space, however, was not open to black clients, and was the only place of its type mentioned by any of the narrators. Because of a lack of this kind of venue that would be dedicated to the socializing function of young persons, the cinemas in many ways and for that reason filled the gap. By the accounts of the various narrators, the cinemas became places where they could go and spend time with friends and family, uninhibited and free to enjoy themselves outside of their home and work environments. Theoretically, a contribution that this research has made is in the proposition of the cinema as a Third Place. According to Ray Oldenburg, this is a social place within a community where persons gather outside of their work place and their homes, to socialize (1989). The cinemas served this purpose for the narrators who flocked to them to be entertained, but also to hang out with their peers and significant others. The atmosphere was non-threatening, and they felt welcomed and free to talk, eat, drink, cuddle and for some they saw it as a place to get some much needed rest. While the cinema does not typically classify as a third place, in lieu of traditional gathering places such as cafes, local family oriented pubs and diners, the cinema served as a 'third place' for the purpose of this generation of young adults in Nassau during the fifties, who had few places where they could socialize and interact with limited apparent social restrictions.

The leisure activities of the white narrators were primarily water based with sports such as boating and fishing being popular among them. The more privileged whites also engaged in the equestrian sport and often rode horses at the Hobby Horse Race Track.

Whereas the blacks engaged more in specific sporting activities such as baseball, cricket and basketball along with other community sponsored events.

Innovative Solutions to challenges to the Study

Challenges will be encountered in any project of this magnitude and are worthy tests of the fortitude of the researcher. In the case of my study, some challenges were presented. Nonetheless, they were addressed, and resolved in a manner that, in my view, enhanced the ultimate outcome.

Cultural and oral history research, by their very nature, require time for the researcher to immerse themselves into the community and familiarize themselves with the culture and the potential narrators. Despite my insider status, it was still necessary to relocate to Nassau and prepare the narrators, even before conducting the oral history interviews, for the interview process, a very time-consuming endeavour. An unavoidable but real challenge of this study was access to the oral history narrators, and resources such as newspapers and other local publications that were physically located in New Providence, and only accessible there. Both financial and temporal restrictions presented challenges to accessing these resources which translated into a somewhat extended data collection phase of the project, as the fieldwork had to be conducted in a country outside that of the site of matriculation.

The second set of challenges pertain to the sample size and racial composite of the narrators. While the number of persons interviewed is methodologically justified, an increased number of persons could have only enhanced the outcome of the study. Nonetheless, there were twenty-seven research narrators whose life stories and experiences of cinemagoing in the 1950s Bahamas were all individual and unique. Closely related to the number of participants is the representation of the two racial groups within the sample population. The generation from which the interviews were selected was also confined to a defined time period, the 1950s, which meant that the pool of available and healthy candidates from which to choose required immediate and creative networking in order to access them. Hearing the stories of cinemagoing in the Bahama Islands during the 1950s from both sides of the racial divide gave more credibility to the narratives and ensured a more complete history of cinemagoing during that era.

Another challenge of this study is the smaller number of white narrators in contrast to the black narrators. The ratio of black narrators as compared to white narrators in the study, however, was proportional to the population ratio of the period. Even though an increased number of white narrators would have created a more equitable climate of understanding about both racial groups within the Bahama Islands during the 1950s, the actual number of participants provided a tremendous amount of insight into the cinemagoing experiences of all the racial groups represented in Nassau during the Fifties.

The interviews were identified as oral history interviews; albeit, there was one anomaly in the transcription and ultimate write up that was unavoidable and a necessary precaution. As was previously mentioned in Chapter Three on the methodology of the project, recruiting white narrators to be interviewed was not without complications. In fact, most of the white narrators only agreed when they were guaranteed anonymity. In order to protect their privacy, and their identity, it was determined that all the participants would be given pseudonyms. This was thought to be the most advantageous way in which the identity of the interview participant remains private but allow for their voices and their stories to be heard. This compromise, while necessary, challenges the nature of the oral history methodology which provides the narrators with a forum for their individual identities to be directly connected to their narratives by their true names as markers.

Future Research Recommendations:

This thesis has established a foundation for continued research in the field of New Cinema History within the Bahamas. Generally, the prospects for future research that would ensure the continuance of the work align with those proffered by Kuhn, Biltereyst and Meers as challenges and opportunities to the ongoing study of cinemagoing and memory (2017, pp. 10-12). Firstly, the scope of the research period can be expanded to include cinemagoing in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, which were times when the political and social composition of The Bahamas changed with the attainment of majority rule and independence, alongside technological innovations in various media to which the average Bahamian had access. Consequently, a longitudinal study that encompasses several decades of cinemagoing in the entire country is recommended.

There is also the opportunity, and the necessity to conduct future comparative research of cinemagoing within the Caribbean region, and the rest of the world, with specific focus

on smaller countries and communities that have been under researched, or not researched at all. The Island nations of the Caribbean share similarities in terms of their colonized history and the origin of their peoples; however, there is a great deal of diversity among them. Their colonial cultures and heritage, their location in the region and their connection to both North and South America make them unique to each other. Likewise, there is much to garner from comparative work with island communities the world over, such as the Pacific region and Scotland.

This thesis provides the groundwork for a boarder research of the popular media of radio, television and to a lesser degree, books alongside that of the cinema and film. My research does not allow for the generalization of the effect of the other media on the cinema as they have not been assessed in conjunction with each other. Research of the popular media in The Bahamas to this point had been uncharted territory. A study of all of the aforementioned media and their influence individually and collectively warrants investigation. This kind of research would provide the foundation for a more complete and inclusive account of the media in The Bahamas. Consequently, university students will benefit from this research as it is made available for study within academic institutions, particularly in The Bahamas where there is a dearth of published work within this field.

This interdisciplinary research has brought together several fields of study to create an account of cinema and cultural memory in the Bahama Islands during the decade of the 1950s. The influence of the New Cinema History which focuses not only on the circulation and consumption of the cinema text, but also the social and cultural environment in which the film is viewed, was at the core of this scholarly investigation (Maltby R. , 2011, p. 3; Velez-Serna, 2012). The cinema history of the Bahamas that has been unearthed reveals ways in which the cinema audience experienced, not just a motion picture, but the occurrence of going to the movies and how the activity fit into their every day lives. The operational practices of the distribution and exhibition of the cinemas on the island also provided significant insight into the business side of the cinema industry during this important post World War II period of Hollywood's domination worldwide.

This project indeed presents compelling evidence that Memory Studies are an essential field of study for the success of research into cinema and cultural memory. Acquisition of the source data that was necessary for the discovery of the cinema history of the 1950s

was strongly reliant on the memories of persons who lived and experienced cinemagoing during that time. I contend that, without the rich oral history narratives shared in the research, it would have been impossible to gain any significant insight into how persons living in New Providence in the 1950s engaged in the activity of cinemagoing. The oral history interviews provided the context in which these memories were relayed, illuminating the social life of a generation from the viewpoint of both black and white narrators, thereby sharing this perspective of cinema history with similar projects in the United States, Africa and Australia.

This research addresses a deficit which exists within the Bahamian society, not only in terms of New Cinema History, but also the wider national and social history. In an endeavour to expose the society to the work undertaken in this project, I created an exhibition comprised of five posters. The first of the posters is an introduction to the work which speaks to the island of New Providence of the 1950s, and the four main cinemas of the study (Appendix D). The subsequent four posters focus on the individual cinemas: The Savoy (Appendix E); the Nassau Theatre (Appendix F); The Cinema (Appendix G); and The Capitol (Appendix H). This exhibition was launched at the History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception (HoMER) Conference, held in Nassau, Bahamas in June 2019. The Exhibition was on display in the Library Foyer of The University of The Bahamas for the conference primarily, however, it was open to the general public. It is intended that this exhibition will become a traveling one which will be mounted in the schools and other public venues throughout the Bahamas, the goal being to provide an opportunity for persons throughout the country to become more knowledgeable of this important decade of cinema history in the country.

The four main cinemas in Nassau that were the subject of this research were all within a one-mile radius of each other. The Savoy, the Nassau Theatre, the Cinema and the Capitol all had distinctly different characteristics that were influenced by their locations. Indeed, the locations of the cinemas were a reflection of the social and economic power base in the country, which was established along racial lines. The uneven distribution of power and wealth were clearly reflected in the central and prominent location of the one completely segregated, white only, Savoy theatre which was situated and operating in the heart of the business district on the most important and influential street in the country. The Nassau theatre, which was a mere five to seven minutes' walk east of the Savoy was

a cinema that, along with the other two, the Capitol and the Cinema, which were also within an easy walk from the Savoy to the south, all allowed, and welcomed the patronage of all persons. These cinema spaces all served as third places for the oral history narrators during the 1950s when they sought venues in which they would be free to socialize with their peers in a hospitable environment. Cinemagoing was a popular leisure activity for the young Bahamian men and women in the Fifties, who like their counterparts around the world, not only recalled the film text, but more significantly remembered the ways in which the experience of going to the cinema intertwined into and created meaning in their daily lives.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Male and Female Narrators – Brief Bios

MALE NARRATORS



Name: Alan

DOB: 12TH July, 1929

Age: 87 yrs.



Name: William

DOB: 11th May, 1928

Age: 86 yrs.



Name: Daniel

DOB: 25th April, 1920

Age: 95 yrs.



Name: Garnet

DOB: 19th June, 1938

Age: 78 yrs.



Name: Hartley

DOB: 2nd December, 1929

Age: 86 yrs.



Name: Robert

DOB: 23rd August, 1940

Age: 75 yrs.



Name: Peter

DOB: 20th July, 1938

Age: 76 yrs.



Name: Oscar

DOB: 8th November, 1930

Age: 85 yrs.



Name: Leon

DOB: 30th December, 1943

Age: 73 yrs.



Name: Kingsley DOB: 1st February, 1931 Age: 85 yrs.



Name: Nathaniel DOB: 3rd August, 1933 Age: 82 yrs,



Name: George DOB: 17th September, 1934 Age: 81 yrs.



Name: Harold DOB: 19th August, 1934 Age: 81 yrs.



Name: Thomas DOB: 12th September, 1932 Age: 83 yrs.

FEMALE NARRATORS



Name: Winnie DOB: 13th April, 1929 Age: 86 yrs.



Name: Marina DOB: 2nd December, 1936 Age: 79 yrs.



Name: Carmel DOB: 8th June, 1934 Age: 81 yrs.



Name: Rachel DOB: 16th June, 1929 Age: 87 yrs.



Name: Fiona DOB: 28th November, 1939 Age: 76 yrs.



Name: Nancy DOB: 6th May, 1940 Age: 75 yrs.



Name: Shirley DOB: 29th February, 1929 Age: 87 yrs.



Name: Helen DOB: 10th July, 1941 Age: 75 yrs.



Name: Velma DOB: 7th April, 1937 Age: 79 yrs.



Name: Iris DOB: 10th March, 1944 Age: 72 yrs.



Name: Thelma DOB: 1st February, 1933 Age: 83 yrs.



Name: Agnes DOB: 16th November, 1936 Age: 79 yrs.



Name: Judy DOB: 6th December, 1933 Age: 82 yrs.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Topic: “*Cinema and Cultural Memory in Nassau, Bahamas in the 1950s*”

Researcher: Monique E. Toppin (University of Stirling)

Please read this form **carefully** and do not hesitate to ask Monique if you have any questions. It is important that you understand the conditions of this study outlined here so that you can make an informed decision to participate. Should you wish to withdraw from this study at any time, you are free to do so without personal consequence. Should this become an option, let Monique know, and you can withdraw. If you are comfortable with the conditions of this research, please place a tick in the boxes on the right of each statement below.

	Tick
I confirm that I have read, discussed and understand the information supplied for the above study, and have had the opportunity to ask for more information.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving an explanation.	
I understand that Monique will do everything to ensure confidentiality. This includes the following:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My identifying details will be anonymised in any written or verbal data collected from me.	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews will be conducted in a comfortable location that minimises the likelihood of someone outside of the interview overhearing.	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I will be allowed to see raw transcription of this interview	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any data held about me will be stored in a secure location	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data held on me is subject to the Data Protection Act 1998	•
I accept that the final theses, which may include my anonymised data, may be published.	
I understand that Monique will use a recording device during the interviews.	

Please print and sign your name along with the date below. Please note that this consent form will be stored separately from any data held on you so that it will not be possible to match your identity details with what you have said or done.

Name of participant (print).....

Signed:

Date:

Name of researcher (print): Monique E. Toppin

Signed:

Date:

Appendix C: Comprehensive List of Films Viewed by Participants

1. Ben Hur	1959
2. The Robe	1953
3. Island in the Sun	1957
4. No Way Out	1950
5. Three Coins in the Fountain	1954
6. Them	1954
7. The Thing (from Another World)	1951
8. The Day the Earth Stood Still	1951
9. Singing in the Rain	1952
10. Tea and Sympathy	1956
11. Magnificent Obsession	1954
12. The Quiet Man (described/did not remember the name)	1952
13. Vertigo	1958
14. Bell, Book and Candle	1958
15. Darby O’Gill and the Little People	1959
16. A Street Car named Desire	1951
17. Seven Brides for Seven Brothers	1954
18. Demetrius and the Gladiators	1954
19. King and I	1956
20. Bridge on the River Kwai	1957
21. Moses (The Ten Commandments)	1956
22. Affair to Remember	1957
23. Imitation of Life	1959
24. The Joker is Wild	1957
25. Peyton Place	1957
26. Blackboard Jungle	1955
27. China Gate	1957
28. Carousel	1956
29. Oklahoma	1955
30. Bridge on the River Kwai	1957
31. Pillow Talk	1959

Participant Films before 1950s

1. Gone with the Wind	1939
2. Billy the Kid	1941
3. Mutiny on the Bounty	1935/1962
4. The Man in Grey, James Mason	1943
5. Leave it to Heaven/ Leave Her to Heaven	1945
6. They were Sisters	1945
7. The Upturn Glass	1947
8. Wuthering Heights	1939

9. Samson and Delilah)	1949
10. They were Sisters	1945
11. The Upturn Glass	1947
12. Wuthering Heights	1939

Participant Films Post 1950s

1. Where the Boys Are	1960
2. Sound of Music	1965
3. The Greatest Story Ever Told	1965

THE SERIALS AND GENRES

	<u>Start Date</u>
1. Flash Gordon	1936
2. Nyoka the Jungle Girl	1941
3. The Lone Ranger	1938
4. Batman and Robin	1949
5. Superman	1948
6. Captain Marvel (Adventures of Captain Marvel)	1941
7. The Three Stooges	1934
8. Tarzan (The Adventures of Tarzan)	1935
9. Shazam – The Adventures of Captain Marvel	1941

Genres

1. Western
2. Cow-boy movies / Indians
3. Love stories/Romantic
4. Cop and robbers
5. Musicals
6. MGM
7. Al Capone (Gangster)
8. Science Fiction
9. Horror Films
10. Musical Comedy
11. Religious
12. Hollywood movies
13. All C
14. olored cast – Cheap movies made for black people by black people

Remembered Films with reason for remembering

No Way Out

Director: Joseph L. Mankiewicz
Writers: Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Lesser Samuels
Stars: Richard Widmark, Linda Darnell, Stephen McNally, Sidney Poitier
Genre: Crime, Drama, Film Noir
Country: USA
Release Date: 9 October, 1950 (UK)

The Defiant Ones

Director: Stanley Kramer
Writers: Nedrick Young, Harold Jacob Smith
Stars: Tony Curtis, Sidney Poitier, Theodore Bikel
Genre: Crime, Drama
Country: USA
Release Date: 12 October, 1958

Imitation of Life

Director: Douglas Sirk
Writers: Eleanor Griffin (screenplay), Allan Scott (screenplay)
Stars: Lana Turner, John Gavin, Sandra Dee
Genre: Drama
Country: USA
Release Date: 10 May, 1959 (UK)

Island in the Sun

Director: Robert Rossen
Writers: Alfred Hayes, Alec Waugh (novel)
Stars: James Mason, Joan Fontaine, Dorothy Dandridge
Genre: Drama, Romance
Country: USA
Release Date: 2 August, 1957

The Joker Is Wild

Director: Charles Vidor
Writers: Oscar Saul (screenplay) Art Cohn (book)
Stars: Frank Sinatra, Mitzi Gaynor, Jeanne Crain
Genre: Drama, Musical
Country: USA
Release Date: October, 1957 (USA)

Three Coins in the Fountain

Director: Jean Negulesco
Writers: John Patrick (screenplay), John H. Secondari (novel)
Stars: Clifton Webb, Dorothy McGuire, Jean Peters
Genre: Drama
Country: USA Filmed on location in Dolomite Mountains, Italy
Release Date: May, 1954

The Ten Commandments

Director: Cecil B. DeMille
Writers: Dorothy Clarke Wilson
Stars: Charleston Heston, Yul Brynner, Anne Baxter
Genre: Adventure, Biography, Drama
Country: USA
Release Date: 5 October 1956 (USA)

The Robe

Director: Henry Koster
Writers: Philip Dunne (screenplay), Gina Kaus (adaptation)
Stars: Richard Burton, Jean Simmons, Victor Mature
Genre: Drama, History
Country: USA
Release Date: 4 December, 1953

Ben Hur

Director: William Wyler
Writers: Lew Wallace (novel), Karl Tunberg (screenplay)
Stars: Charleston Heston, Jack Hawkins, Stephen Boyd
Genre: Adventure, Drama, War
Country: USA
Release Date: 26 December 1959 (UK)

Samson and Delilah

Director: Cecil B. DeMille
Writers: Jesse Lasky Jr. (screenplay), Fredric M. Frank (screenplay)
Stars: Hedy Lamarr, Victor Mature, George Sanders
Genre: Adventure, Drama, History
Country: USA
Release Date: January 1950

Gone with the Wind

Director: Victor Fleming, George Cukor (uncredited)
Writers: Margaret Mitchell (story), Sidney Howard (screenplay)
Stars: Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Thomas Mitchell
Genre: Drama, History, Romance
Country: USA
Release Date: 17 January, 1940 (USA)

Seven Brides for Seven Brothers

Director: Stanley Donen
Writers: Albert Hackett (screenplay), Frances Goodrich (screenplay)
Stars: Jane Powell, Howard Keel, Jeff Richards
Genre: Comedy, Drama, Musical
Country: USA
Release Date: 15 September, 1954

The Bridge on the River Kwai

Director: David Lean
Writers: Pierre Boulle (novel), Carl Foreman (screenplay)
Stars: William Holden, Alec Guinness, Jack Hawkins
Genre: Adventure, Drama, War
Country: UK/USA Film location: Kalugamuwa, Gelioya, Kandy, Sri Lanka
Release Date: 11 October, 1957

The Thing from Another World

Director: Christian Nyby, Howard Hawks (undcredited)
Writers: Charles Lederer (screenplay, John W. Campbell Jr.
Stars: Kenneth Tobey, Margaret Sheridan, James Arness
Genre: Horror, Si-Fi
Country: USA
Release Date: 27 April 1951

The Day the Earth Stood Still

Director: Robert Wise
Writers: Edmund H. North (screenplay), Harry Bates (based on a story by)
Stars: Michael Rennie, Patricia Neal, Hugh Marlowe
Genre: Drama, Si-Fi
Country: USA
Release Date: 1951 (UK)

The Quiet Man

Director: John Ford
Writers: Frank S. Nugent (screenplay), Maurice Walsh (from the story by)
Stars: John Wayne, Maureen O'Hara, Barry Fitzgerald
Genre: Comedy, Drama, Romance
Country: USA
Release Date: 21 July 1952 (UK)

A Streetcar Named Desire

Director: Elia Kazan

Writers: Tennessee Williams (screenplay), Oscar Saul (adaptation)

Stars: Vivien Leigh, Marlon Brando, Kim Hunter

Genre: Drama

Country: USA

Release Date: 1 December, 1951 (West Germany)

(Velez-Serna, 2012) (Velez-Serna, 2012)

BIG SCREENS IN LITTLE NASSAU

1950s Nassau Cinema Tour Exhibition

A ride through the history of cinemagoing in Little Nassau during the decade of the Fifties.
- Monique E. Toppin

Narrative




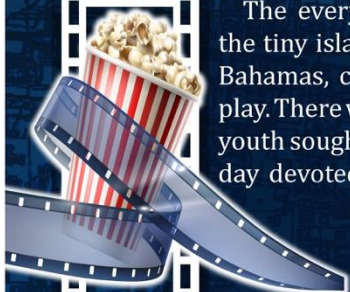
The everyday life of young people on the tiny island of New Providence in The Bahamas, consisted of school, work and play. There were various ways in which the youth sought to make that portion of their day devoted to play more exciting. They engaged in such pastimes as sporting activities, matinee dances, church functions, and of course THE SHOW!

The Cinema business in New Providence was, from all indications, a thriving enterprise in the Fifties. The small, but vibrant capital city, Nassau, had four major established cinemas at the start of the decade. These cinemas were the Savoy, the Nassau, the Cinema and the Capitol theatres.

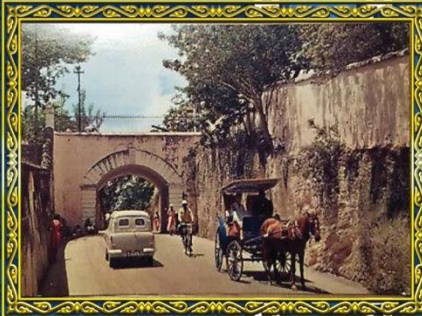
All four were located on Bay Street, East Street, and Market Street (Farm Road), respectively. Two of them were located in the section of the island called 'Over-the-hill', while the other two were situated north of the hill on the street running parallel to the harbour, Bay Street. Despite the closeness of these movie houses to each other, each of them had contrasting histories that placed them, symbolically, miles apart.

Narrator's Comments


"Well, I live on East Street. If I go to the Cinema, I walk; if I go to the Capitol, it wasn't far; if I go to the Nassau Theatre, it wasn't far, 'cause, you know, it was more or less centrally located." - Winnie



1950s Bay Street



Gregory's Arch going "Over-the-hill"



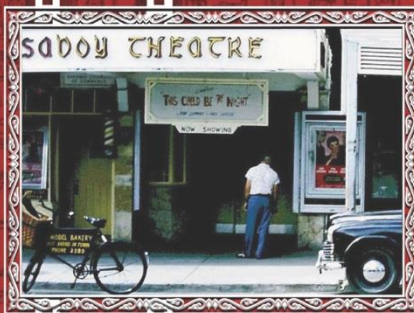
Government House

Appendix E: The Savoy Theatre

SAVOY THEATRE



C. W. F. Bethell



The Savoy Theatre was the oldest of the four main cinemas. Its opening date is unknown, but it was prior to 1937. At the start of the decade of the Fifties, the Savoy was one of three theatres that were owned and operated by Mr. C.W.F. Bethell, a Member of Parliament representing the Island of Grand Bahama. The Savoy was the only cinema that embraced the practice of racial segregation within their cinema space.

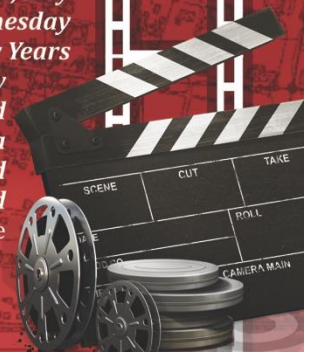
The cinema's location, in the centre of the premier shopping district on Bay Street, made it convenient for this select clientele to access the premises with minimum resistance.

Narrator's Comments

"Well I recall, ah, going to the Savoy Theatre, and I must point out in those days it was known as a white theatre". Oscar, (A White Narrator).

"...in Bay Street, and you pass by that, but because you was black, you were not allowed to go there, so you could only pass by and maybe see a headline of what the movie was gonna be, but that wasn't for me. I couldn't go there!" Rachel, (A Black Narrator).

"... The midnight movie... We all wanted to go, because we wanted to be up late at night with all of our friends. Um, yeah, they had midnight movie every Wednesday night, and then Christmas and New Years they had midnight movies, especially New Years ...They always had good music commin' from up top...by a guy, 'cause he ran the movie, and he chose the records to put on, and everything else." Leon (A White Narrator).



Appendix F: The Nassau Theatre

THE NASSAU THEATRE

Entrance

The Nassau Theatre was the second cinema located on Bay and Union Street (Union Street was later renamed Elizabeth Avenue). Also owned by C.W.F. Bethell. This theatre was rebuilt after a fire destroyed the original building in 1937. Unlike its counterpart, the Savoy, the Nassau Theatre catered to persons from all races, ethnic and social groups. Visual representations of the building were produced by Mr. Conway Smith from descriptions provided by two of the narrators who were able to recall aspects of the exterior and interior design of the building.

Interior (Side View)

Sidney Poitier and 'No Way Out'

"...through that great medium of education, the moving picture screen, and consequently the film companies have been producing pictures which show the foolishness of this business of hatred and discrimination. One such picture was "No Way Out," a film starring a young Bahamian actor playing a stellar role and preaching a strong doctrine against the evils, injustice and demoralizing effects of race hatreds. The censor committee has over and repeatedly refused to allow these pictures to be shown here in Nassau, and true to their irrational custom refused permission for "No Way Out." Source: Excerpts from The Citizen Torch, VOL. I, NO.1

In the February, 1951 issue of The Citizen's Torch, the subject of the censorship of Sidney Poitier's movie 'No Way Out' was addressed. The Citizen's Committee, the group responsible for the publication was compelled to confront the Censor Board on the banning of this movie. After the intervention of the acting governor, the picture was ultimately screened at the local cinemas.

Sir Sidney Poitier

TICKET CINEMA

Appendix G: The Cinema Theatre

THE CINEMA THEATRE



The Cinema Theatre is the first of the 'Big Four' movie houses established Over-the-hill on East Street, and was also owned by C.W. F. Bethell. Located on corner of East and Lewis Streets, the Cinema could truly be considered a community theatre, and functioned as a social hub. It was a gathering spot for young working men, and those who just hung around its entrance for fair game. Because it was within walking distance to several communities, this 'Show' attracted young couples and families alike.



Narrator's Comments

"... The Cinema was one of the favourite movie at that time. You go there, especially when a good Western is on, you know, you make sure you get there, because sometime they used to have full house (chuckles) Yes, they, they...open up like maybe two-thirty, start sellin' tickets until three the movie start, and they used to have a lot of Western then... Now...well we was not married then, my wife...she used to come up, she was livin' down East Street and she come up and meet me there and we go in, sit down and watch the movie (laughs)." **Harold**

Der Cinema to me was the worst!...Because of livin' in East Street and all dem different 'lil areas, you have a lot of boys, and dey used to say all kinds of things to you and all dat. But dey never used to touch you, you know, but dey used to say tings ... **Velma**

"... [neighbours] who would go down to The Windsor Park, they watch the Cricket and then after that they'd get together and go at the Cinema, watch a movie...because they knew, like the group of us knew... when the parents get together and go, we all in one group, we sit down, tell, tell jokes or something like that..." **Nathaniel**

"I remember going back a little bit, it was shortly after we got married, my wife and I went to the movies at least once a week...to the Cinema...we weren't too far away, just a few minutes away...we were in Mason's Addition, and so we used to go there regularly...It was very nice... It was very casual...it was not a formal thing, as far as dress is concerned. There was what we call the upstairs, and the downstairs... of course you, you probably get a better...you enjoy the picture better if you, if you sat in the upstairs seating." **Hartley**






"SAMSON AND DELILAH"

It was announced this afternoon that by popular request the film "Samson and Delilah" will be shown again at the Nassau Theatre on Thursday and Friday, together with the film "Cause for Alarm." There will also be a double feature at the Cinema Theatre on Saturday, when "Samson and Delilah" will be screened with "Tougher They Come."

Appendix H: The Capitol Theatre

THE CAPITOL THEATRE




Percy Pinder

The Capitol Theatre was the newest of the Big Four cinemas. This state of the art movie theatre was built in 1949/50 on Market Street, just down the hill from Government House and Gregory's Arch, and a block to the east of St. Agnes Church, by Mr. Percy Pinder, a black businessman who also owned the Rainbow Theatre which was located on the slope of East Street Hill.

The Capitol Theatre was clearly the most remarkable of the four major theatres. It was the one that the generation of the Fifties witnessed being built, and was able to experience brand new. This new theatre was aggressively promoted with display advertisements in both the Guardian and Tribune daily newspapers.

The Capitol Theatre boasted of a cooler and more comfortable environment. It was built with a stage and curtains in front of the screen. The 164 x 46 feet auditorium was the largest theatre in the Colony, featuring a large balcony with seating capacity for 750 patrons. The chairs were modern, and the projectors and sound equipment were to be the most 'up-to-date' even in the United States. (Reporter, New Theatre for Southern District, 1950) One of the significant arrangements highlighted in the announcement of the Capitol Theatre by its owner, Mr. Pinder, was the working relationship that he had established with both United Artists and RKO for the distribution of first run movies to his theatre. (Reporter, New Theatre for Southern District, 1950)

In May 1951 Mr. C.W. Bethell acquired the Capitol Theatre from Mr. Percy Pinder, (Reporter, Transfer of Theatres, 1951) and for the remainder of the decade, and indeed into the 1970s, C.W. Bethell monopolized and dominated the cinema business in The Bahamas.



Narrator's Comments

"The Capitol, um, at that time would have been like the Radio City, 'cause you see, they had a stage, and you know, the curtains down, and what not... because if they were to have a concert or something which need stages and curtains drawing and different kinda thing, they would have it there, you know what I mean?"
Carmel

