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### Dubbin' the Literary Canon: Writin' and Soundin' A Transnational Caribbean Experience

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Spring 2013

# **Dubbin' the Literary Canon: Writin' and Soundin' A Transnational Caribbean Experience**

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## ABSTRACT

In the mid-1970s, a collective of Jamaican poets from Kingston to London began to use reggae as a foundational aesthetic to their poetry. Inspired by the rise of reggae music and the work of the Caribbean Artists Movement based London from 1966 to 1972, these artists took it upon themselves to continue the dialogue on Caribbean cultural production. This research will explore the ways in which dub poetry created an expressive space for Jamaican artists to complicate discussions of migration and colonialism in the transnational Caribbean experience.

In order to do so, this research engages historical, ethnomusicological, and literary theories to develop a framework to analyze dub poetry. It will primarily pose the question, how did these dub poets expand the archives of Caribbean national production? This paper will suggest that by facilitating a dialogue among Jamaicans located between London and Kingston, dub poetry expanded the archives for Caribbean cultural production. In this expansion, dub poetry's simultaneous combination of literary and sound genius not only repositioned geographical boundaries of Jamaican identity but also grounded the intersecting spaces of the written, spoken, recorded, and performed word.

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London is the place for me, London that lovely city  
 You can go to France or America, India, Asia, or Africa.  
 But you must come back to London city.  
 London, that lovely city.  
 Well believe me I am speaking broadmindedly,  
 I am glad to know my 'Mother Country',  
 I've been travelling to countries years ago,  
 But this is the place I wanted to know,  
 London that's the place for me

- Lord Kitchener (1948)<sup>1</sup>

Ingaln' is a bitch  
 Ingran' is a bitch  
 W'en mi jus' come to Landan toun  
 Mi use to work pan di andahgroun'  
 But workin' pan de andahgroun'  
 Y'u don' get fi know your way aroun'  
 Ingran is a bitch  
 Dere's no escapin' it  
 Ingran' is a bitch  
 There's no runnin' whey fram it

- Linton Kwesi Johnson (1982)<sup>2</sup>

As Trinidadian calypsonian Lord Kitchener arrived to London on June 22, 1948 on the *SS Empire Windrush*, a news reporter beckoned him to perform a song.<sup>3</sup> He sang "London is the Place for Me," the first epigraph from above. His lyrical praise of London as the epicenter of beauty, hope, and success uniquely matches the cadence, rhythm, and beat of his native calypso. These sentiments about London came to signify the many voices of Caribbean people, for the time period, as they disembarked on the London docks, carrying their hopes for jobs, adventure, security, and *home* to the metropole. Fast-forward to 1980, Jamaican-British dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson recorded and released his seminal work, "Ingran' is a Bitch." Here, Johnson sounds a new reality and chant for

<sup>1</sup> Lord Kitchener, "London is the Place for Me (1948)," in *Writing Black Britain, 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. James Procter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Ingran' is a Bitch," in *Mi revalueshanary fren* (Ausable Press, 2006), 37-39.

<sup>3</sup> "Lord Kitchener — London is Good Place For Me (Itw, Live Acapella)," YouTube, accessed December 17, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AprO\\_Z13LM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AprO_Z13LM).

Caribbean immigrants in London. Touching on themes of nativism, labor exploitation and isolation, “Inglan’ is a Bitch” offers a sonic and lyrical testimony to the disillusionment, anger, and dehumanizing of the Caribbean immigrant experience in London. Rooted in the reggae and dub music movement, Johnson’s piece ultimately ruptures Kitchener’s sonic and lyrical imagery of the idyllic London for Caribbean immigrants. Gone were the possibilities of a progressive and stable “motherland”; here were the realities of protest, buffering England’s white supremacist, classist, and anti-immigrant Babylonian environment.

My paternal grandparents were part of that post-1945 Caribbean migration to London. My grandmother, Olive Pearl Raglan, embarked on her voyage on March 31, 1958 to help her pregnant Aunt Vie with her new baby, my cousin Jasmine. Coming from the summit hills of the Blue Mountains of St. Andrew, just north of Kingston, my grandmother’s sights were set upon the bountiful opportunities that lay in her future at the seat of empire. Her British passport picture from the voyage epitomizes her respectability -- her tightly curled short, jet-black hair, her shimmering earrings, her V-Neck blouse, and that “proper” look in her eyes. My grandfather, Hugh Henry Harding, came to London in 1955, three years before my grandmother. Having achieved an elementary school education and working on his father’s farm in the village of Oshkanish, in the hills of Lucea, west of Montego Bay, he decided to migrate to explore “explore and make money.”<sup>4</sup> The British Nationality Act of 1948, which extended British citizenship to colonial subjects in an effort to diffuse anticolonial nationalist movements and to lessen the anti-imperialist position of the United States, facilitated this new impetus for

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Hugh Harding (March 24, 2013) via phone.

migration to London.<sup>5</sup> The post-war period was a time of economic expansion in Britain, providing many Caribbean people opportunities to move into better-paying and higher-status jobs.<sup>6</sup> Thus, many companies recruited Caribbean folk, as a replacement population to bolster the British economy.<sup>7</sup> My grandmother found temporary work in a dressmaking factory and my grandfather found employment as a train conductor for the railway system. What made their particular immigration to London significant, however, was the presence of independence movements in the Caribbean, which ventured to create a national identity outside of British colonial thought and power. My grandmother, grandfather, and other Caribbean immigrants (re)imagined their identities both inside and outside their geographical locations as they brought their luggage, their bodies, and their intellect to transform the seat of empire.

By 1972, however, the lonely days and the long nights of working, the homesickness from family in Jamaica, and the on-going prevalence of racism were enough to propel my grandparents return to their land of birth. So, on July 7, 1972, they, along with their two children, my Aunt Pamrie and my dad, left the docks London on the S.S. Pentelikon for the seaports of Kingston. They were *island* bound, *home* bound, *nation* bound. As I look at the ship ticket, 41 years later, I cannot help but think, about their thoughts. Did they reflect together on their London experience? Were they worried about returning home? Did they miss their friends in London? Did they have the language to talk, sound, and unearth their experience? How does one make sense/can one make sense of belonging in

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<sup>5</sup> Ashley Dawson, *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Foner, *Jamaica Farewell: Jamaican Migrants in London*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

this back-and-forth migratory experience? How does history and literature acknowledge and account for these experiences?

Some of these questions unknowingly engulfed my mind as I enrolled in Meredith Gadsby's "Literature of Atlantic Slavery" course during my first semester at Oberlin. This course not only introduced me to Africana studies as a critical space of intellectual engagement but also allowed me to interrogate my own identity as a Jamaican immigrant to the United States. Moreover, this course introduced me to the work of Barbadian scholar, historian, and poet, Edward K. Brathwaite. As we read Brathwaite's trilogy of poetry, *The Arrivants* (1973), which explored the multiple migratory experiences of African people from the continent, to the Caribbean to London, to the United States and back to the continent, his language, rhythm, and truth resonated through my mind. Here were my grandparents' stories; here were my parents' stories; here were my stories. From this moment on, I took an interest in Caribbean cultural production, specifically looking at the development of Caribbean music and literature following World War II, a period which not only saw large-scale Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada but also witnessed the rise of independence, Black power, and artists movements throughout the Atlantic world.

Central to these movements was an effort to push the boundaries of Caribbean identity to confront and redress the epistemic violence caused by British colonialism. It was a colonialism that sought, at its very core, to dehumanize, exploit, and erase any sense of place and space from the bodies and minds of people of African descent. This (re)visioning of the Caribbean nation not only required the work and labor of political elites but also and most importantly the work and labor of Caribbean cultural producers -



- the writers, the musicians, the folklorists, and the visual artists -- who were located both within and outside of the geographical space of the Caribbean. These cultural producers were intently focused on interrogating and expanding the “Caribbean aesthetic,” finding new, innovative, and provocative mediums to represent and tell the complex stories within a transnational Caribbean experience.

In the 1970s, a group of cultural producers emerged to continue this interrogation of the Caribbean aesthetic. Tapping into the emergence of reggae and dub music between the soundscapes of London, England and Kingston, Jamaica and the Caribbean literary movement(s) of the time, these producers created the medium of dub poetry. This research will explore the ways in which dub poetry created an expressive space for Jamaican artists to complicate discussions of migration, colonialism, and gender in the transnational. In order to do so, it engages historical, ethnomusicological, and literary theories to develop a framework to analyze dub poetry. It will primarily pose the question, how did these dub poets expand the archives of Caribbean national production? This paper will suggest that by facilitating a dialogue among Jamaicans located between London and Kingston, dub poetry expanded the archives for Caribbean cultural production. In this expansion, dub poetry’s simultaneous combination of literary and sound genius not only repositioned geographical boundaries of Jamaican identity but also grounded the intersecting spaces of the written, spoken, recorded, and performed word.

This essay’s focus on dub poetry between London and Kingston is not an attempt to limit the dub poetry movement between these spaces. Dub poetry has made a significant impact in places such as Toronto, Canada and Miami, Florida and to other places in Europe. Furthermore, dub poets have been and continue to be in a transnational dialogue

across diasporas. Nonetheless, this essay focuses on the poets between London and Kingston in order to highlight the discursive relationship between metropolitan and former colonial identities between these two geographical locations.

The first section of this essay will provide an overview of the movements across and within the transnational experience during the 1960s and early 1970s. It will particularly focus on the Black Power Movement(s), the Caribbean Artist Movement, and the Dub Music movement. The next section will provide an overview of the dub poetry movement, referencing a full biography of its main artists, the formation of a dub poetry movement, and the formation of the dub poetic aesthetic. The third section of this paper will focus on the seminal works of Linton Kwesi Johnson, highlighting themes around migration, colonialism, and police brutality and their contribution to the dub poetry movement.

### **Theory, Terms, and Definitions**

The extant scholarship on the dub poetry movement is quite limited between the fields of history and literature. To date, white German Dr. Christian Habekost's *Verbal Riddim: The Politics and Aesthetics of African-Caribbean Dub Poetry* remains the only full-length book that explores the formation of dub poetry. While his work is laudable for its detailed account of the rise, style, and close-readings of dub poetry, Habekost's omission of a theoretical framework for dub poetry further places the art form at the fringes of the academy. Consequently, this paper attempts to invite theory within a discussion of the dub poetry movement not only to situate the movement's connection to the history of Caribbean people but also interrogate a broader discussion of Caribbean

identity. Psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon's theory "on national culture," sociologist Harry Goulbourne's theory on *transnationalism*, and literary scholar Carole Boyce Davies's theory on "migratory subjectivity" are foundational to this endeavor.

Fanon's essay, "On National Culture," appears in his seminal work *Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In this essay, Fanon attempts to analyze the idea and formation of nationhood for countries that have achieved independence from their colonial structures.<sup>8</sup> He first attests that colonialism distorts, disfigures, and destroys a people's history, inhibiting any possibility of nationhood.<sup>9</sup> Next, he defines "national culture" as the whole body of efforts made by native peoples to describe, justify, and praise the action through which the people have created.<sup>10</sup> Within his thesis, Fanon defines the "colonized intellectual" as the forbearers of nationhood. He argues that, at first, the "colonized intellectual" is concerned with liberation by appealing to the colonial powers. However, in the postcolonial state, the "colonized intellectual" is one who addresses his own people, creating a national literature/literature of combat.<sup>11</sup> This literature of combat calls on the people to fight for their existence as a nation, molds national consciousness, opening boundless opportunities, and assumes the responsibility of doing so.

In the context of Fanon's work and activism within the decolonization movement in Africa, this theory has been applied toward the formation of postcolonial nation-states. Fanon's insistence, however, that "national culture" arises out of "collective thought" suggests that his theory is not bounded by geographical location and has the possibility to engage a transnational context. As Goulbourne reminds us, *transnationalism* is a varied

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<sup>8</sup> Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture," In *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 146.

<sup>9</sup> Fanon, "On National Culture," 148-49.

<sup>10</sup> Fanon, "On National Culture," 168.

<sup>11</sup> Fanon, "On National Culture," 158-59.

process that “may involve groups of people who are connected in some significant ways to maintain the close links across the boundaries of nation-states.”<sup>12</sup> Instead of being scattered, lost, and displaced through large-scale migration, Goulbourne adds, Caribbean migratory communities are able to maintain, close links, networks, with their “homeland.”<sup>13</sup> These networks, Davies intervenes, form “migratory subjectivity,” a term she uses to illuminate the works of Black women migrant writers.<sup>14</sup> Within this subjectivity, Davies argues, “migrating subjects are able to negotiate borders in assertive ways, challenging the entrenched meanings of those in intact locations, crossing and re-crossing them, making them sites of transformation.”<sup>15</sup> Consequently, as a macrocosm of Caribbean transnational experience, the African diaspora is a site of transformation, where members reach not only back to the Caribbean but also to North America and to Africa.<sup>16</sup>

Fanon, Goulbourne, and Davies’s theories intersect at the crux of nationalism, transnationalism, and subjectivity and informs this paper’s framework not only in an analysis of the dub poetry movement but also in its connection to the broader social conditions between Caribbean migratory identities. These poets, who were predominantly Jamaican, were deeply involved in and committed to creating combat literature and institutionalizing the narratives of a Jamaicans across literary and music circles. Consequently, it is important to situate their stories and works within the contours of the

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<sup>12</sup> Harry Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *The Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 20

<sup>15</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *The Left of Karl Marx*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience*, 17.

socio-political, literary, and musical realities of the transnational Caribbean experience of the 1960s and 1970s.

Before this paper continues, however, it is equally important to acknowledge this paper's use of the term *Caribbean* instead of *West Indian* to identify people from the Anglophone Caribbean. As British feminist historian Catherine Hall, notes, Caribbean people used the term *West Indian*, during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the formation of the West Indian Federation in 1958, a political organization of Anglophone Caribbean nations that formed as a precursor to achieving full-independence.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the term "West Indian" served as a source of empowerment and coalition among Caribbean people. In the academy, however, this term has been historically linked to the disparaging constructions of Caribbean people as backwards, inferior, and suitable for exploitation. Furthermore, European colonizers coined the term "West Indies" as they ignorantly thought that the Caribbean was India. In spite of this egregious cartographical error, the term remains rampant in scholarship, forever rendering the region, its people, and its networks ignorant. As Caribbean literary scholar Meredith Gadsby implores, we must use terminology "beyond colonial designations."<sup>18</sup> This paper follows in a similar vein. Furthermore, this paper engages the term *African Caribbean* to credit the self-identification of Caribbean folk of African descent, in order to disturb/disrupt notions of the Caribbean as a place of multicultural harmony. This term, formed during the Black Power movements in the Caribbean critiques the false and idyllic mottos of many Caribbean nations in independence "out of many, one people," not only by

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<sup>17</sup> Catherine Hall, "What is A West Indian?" In *West Indian Intellectuals In Britain*, edited by Bill Schwarz, 31-48, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 34.

<sup>18</sup> Meredith Gadsby, *Sucking Salt*, (Columbia: Missouri Press, 2006), 9-10.

acknowledging the structural inequalities, spatial isolation, and psychological violence placed on Black bodies in the Caribbean but also spaces for empowerment, community, and resistance for African descended Caribbean people. Finally, this paper deploys the term *transnational Caribbean experience*, using the transnational Jamaican experience as a case study.

### **Black Power, Caribbean Artists Movement, and Dub Music**

This section will explore the socio-political consciousness, literary mode, and musical landscape that influenced the formation of dub poetry during the late 1960s and 1970s. It will identify three movements -- the Black Power Movement, the Caribbean Artists Movement, and the Dub Music movement -- as foundational to an understanding of the rise of the dub poetry movement. This section will posit two questions: 1) how did these movements manifest themselves within the Caribbean transnational experience between Kingston and London? and 2) what institutions did these movements create for dub poetry? Here, I argue that the Black Power Movement, the Caribbean Artists Movement, and the Dub Music movement formed institutions in the transnational Caribbean experience in order to ground the dub poetry movement within the socio-political, literary, and music trajectories innovations between Kingston and London during the 1960s and 1970s.

#### *Black Power and the Caribbean Transnational*

Although Trinidadian-born Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), officially coined the term “Black Power” at a gathering in Mississippi in 1966 in the United States and the formation of the Black

Panther Party, it is important to underscore that the broad internationalist network that critiqued U.S. imperialism abroad and capitalism in the United States in order to forge black alliances across geographical boundaries.<sup>19</sup> This was especially evident as leaders from national liberation movements such as Amilcar Cabral and Eduardo Mondlane of Mozambique visited the United States but also U.S. leaders such as Carmichael, Malcolm X, Kathleen Cleaver, and Eldridge Cleaver travelled throughout Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia.<sup>20</sup> This movement quickly spread throughout the Caribbean, especially between 1968 and 1972. Nonetheless, it is important to note that “Black Power,” for many in the Caribbean context, lay in the Pan-African philosophy of Marcus Garvey<sup>21</sup> and his Universal Negro International Association (UNIA) of the early 1900s, which endeavored to uplift the Black race through the establishment of educational and industrial opportunities.<sup>22</sup> This organizing between the Caribbean, Central America, the United States, and the United Kingdom, during the 1920s and 1930s corresponded with the numerous labor and anti-colonial movements in the Caribbean.

A major product of the Garvey movement, during this time period in the Caribbean, was the birth of Rastafarianism. Throughout his speeches in the 1920s, Garvey often directed followers to “look to Africa when a Black king shall be crowned.”

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<sup>19</sup> Michael O. West, *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>20</sup> West, *From Toussaint to Tupac*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Marcus Garvey, (b. 1887, Saint Ann, Jamaica) was a Jamaican Pan-Africanist who coordinated the “Back to Africa” movement in the early 1900s as a strategy for achieving the economic advancement and liberation of Black people “at home and abroad.” He was able to galvanize a network from Latin America, the Caribbean, the United States, Canada, and England, into the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey’s newspaper, *The Negro World*, served as a means to not only disseminate information about his ideas but also educate Blacks about their African past. He also founded the Black Star Line in 1919 as a vessel to transport folks to Africa and the Negro Factories Corporation to encourage black economic independence.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Meeks, “The Rise and Fall of the Caribbean Black Power,” in *From Toussaint to Tupac. The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, eds. Michael West, William Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 198.

With the coronation of Prince Tafari Makonnen, the new emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie I, on November 2, 1930, four Jamaicans -- Leonard Howell in West Kingston, Joseph Hibbert and Robert Hinds in St. Andrew, and Archibald Dunkley in Port Antonio -- began to preach.<sup>23</sup> These four raised the question of the identity of God and affirmed his blackness, critiquing the colonial Protestant religious movements for preaching a white God and affirming Selassie as the messiah.<sup>24</sup>

According to Rastafarian scholar Barry Chevannes, the movement had three phases. The first phase during the 1930s and 1940s was characterized by the circulation of pictures of the Black Christ at street meetings, especially as many in Jamaica migrated to urban centers such as Kingston.<sup>25</sup> The second phase began in the late 1940s as second generation of converts established the Youth Black Faith (YBF) Mansion<sup>26</sup> of Rastafari and instituted an imagery of Rastafarians -- dreadlocks, ganja-smoking and Rasta talk.<sup>27</sup> This generation intensified their practical opposition to the colonial state, using repatriation activities, illicit street marches, and disruption of the court and defiance of the police. For example, in 1958, one young leader, Prince Emmanuel Edwards, issued a successful call for an all-Rasta convention.<sup>28</sup> In two weeks, Rastafari from all over the island met in the Back-o-Wall ghetto in West Kingston. At the end of two weeks, they marched to the central square of the city, planted a flag and symbolically captured the city.<sup>29</sup> The third phase, from the 1980s, is characterized by the decline of Rastafari

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Daynes, *Time and Memory in Reggae Music: The Politics of Hope*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010), 24-25.

<sup>25</sup> Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1995), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Barrett, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



ideology by youth, the increased voice of Rasta women, and the secularization of Rastafari.<sup>30</sup>

In 1940, Howell firmly established himself as the main Rastafari leader in Jamaica when he secured Pinnacle -- a vast plot of land -- that became the first Rastafari commune.<sup>31</sup> The Pinnacle community suffered a lot of harassment from the state and was raided several times by the colonial police. In fact, the government imprisoned Howell once again for another two years after the first raid in 1941.<sup>32</sup> These events situated the Rastafari movement in a headlong confrontation with the Jamaican middle class. The fear of a Rastafarian uprising prompted a study by the University College of the West Indies in 1960, resulting in the publication of the *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica*.<sup>33</sup> This seemingly government approval of Rastafarianism quickly dissipated by 1963 with the Coral Gardens Rastafari Massacre. The massacre began near Montego Bay when a group of Rastafarians protested restrictions that prohibited them from walking across the Rose Hall estate to their plot of land.<sup>34</sup> One of the most vocal advocates for the Rastafarian community emerged in the mid-1960s with the popularity of Guyanese scholar Walter Rodney. Scheduled as a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, Mona in 1968, the Jamaican government revoked his visa, sighting his “radical” Black Power and links to communism as a threat to national security while

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<sup>30</sup> Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Barnett, *Rastafari in the New Millennium: A Rastafari Reader*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> The report found that the Rastafarian movement unanimously believed in the divinity of Haile Selassie and favored the repatriation of its members to Africa.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, one primary recommendation of the study was that the Government sponsor a fact-finding mission to Africa to investigate the possibilities of Jamaican nationals there.<sup>33</sup> The premier of Jamaica at the time, Norman Manley, agreed to this mission, sending Rastafari members such as Douglas Mack, Fillmore Alvaranga, and Mortimo Plano, along with 6 other Jamaicans; and orchestrating the first ever meeting between Rastafari adherents and Haile Selassie.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen King, *Reggae, Rastafari, and the Rhetoric of Social Control*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 12-13.

Rodney was attending a Black Power conference in Canada.<sup>35</sup> In response, University students and urban Black youth formed a coalition that rioted throughout the streets of Kingston, asserting their support for Rodney and frustration with the government's inaction to redress the concerns of Black poor Jamaicans.

Black Power in London began in the 1960s as many young African Caribbean folk began to critically and publicly engage "Blackness" within the context of British identity. Following World War II, the British Nationality Act of 1948<sup>36</sup> ushered in a constant flow of post-war Black<sup>37</sup> immigrants into England. Since there were no legal segregation laws in England, white Britons felt threatened by the possibility of British identity transforming to include the identities of former colonial subjects. Due to unaffordable housing and the high costs in London proper, many settled in the suburbs of London, particularly in Brixton (in the south), Notting Hill (in the west-central), and King's Cross (in the north).<sup>38</sup> As Britain began to rebound, economically, in the aftermath of World War II, Black immigrants became the "problem" in British society and were subject to periodic incidences of clashes with white Britons. One such clash began on August 23, 1958 in Nottingham as a pub brawl over a black man and white woman talking escalated into a race riot where, after ninety minutes, more than a thousand whites attacked African Caribbean immigrants and eight people had been hospitalized.<sup>39</sup> These riots quickly spread to London that weekend as many African Caribbean folk recalled the

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<sup>35</sup> Brian Meeks, "The Rise and Fall of the Caribbean Black Power," 197.

<sup>36</sup> Notorious for its creation of United Kingdom and Colonies (UKC) citizenship, which granted British citizenship to colonial subjects, as a means to not only assert equality at the foundation of British citizenship but also to delay calls for independence in the colonies (Kathleen Paul, 17-23).

<sup>37</sup> Between the end of World War II and 1961, about 19,000 blacks migrated to London, which included 12,000 West Africans; 4, 645 Indians and Pakistanis; and 6,949 African Caribbean (Tanisha Ford, 210).

<sup>38</sup> Tanisha Ford, "Soul Generation: Radical Fashion, Beauty, and the Transnational Black Liberation Movement, 1954-1980," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2012), 210-211.

<sup>39</sup> Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 155.

slew of sporadic attacks by white gangs, calling themselves “nigger-baiters.”<sup>40</sup> Over 200 people crowded the streets with iron railing, choppers, and bicycle chains.<sup>41</sup> With the passage of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act<sup>42</sup>, the British government began to restrict to the number of immigrants of color coming into the country, legally relegating the existence of second-generation African Caribbean people to a “social problem.”<sup>43</sup> Although the Act did not specifically mention race, commonwealth countries were implicitly deemed a threat to the British state. Consequently, “immigrant” became synonymous with “black,” and offered racist coded language for discriminatory practices against Black youth.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, Brixton not only became the hub of New Left organizing in London but also became the location of Black youth organizing, starting with the formation of the Black Panther Movement (BPM) in 1968, the first autonomous Black Panther organization to be founded outside of the United States, to combat police brutality and other social inequalities.<sup>45</sup> Trinidadian-born doctor Althea Jones and Nigerian-born writer Obi Egbuna became the movement’s core leadership. Heavily

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<sup>40</sup> Ruth Glass, *London’s Newcomers: The West Indian Migrants*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 135.

<sup>41</sup> Glass, *London’s Newcomers*, 139.

<sup>42</sup> The Act, passed by both Tory and Labour Cabinets divided would-be British subject migrants into three groups eligible for A, B, C vouchers respectively: those with jobs to go to, those with skills or experience deemed advantageous to the United Kingdom, and unskilled laborers in search of work. This voucher system, though not fixed, varied according to political and economic considerations, and reduced primary migration to Britain. The Act, furthermore empowered the Home Secretary to deport British subjects of less than five years’ residence in the United Kingdom upon conviction of a criminal offense carrying liability to imprisonment, and dealt with a “criminal element.” Moreover, it allowed the Home Office to discriminate in favor of subjects whose entry it had no wish to control. Those denied entry were to not have access to appeals and subject to return by carrier’s expense. Finally, the act divided British citizenship into those who “belonged” to the United Kingdom -- born in the United Kingdom or whose passport had been issued on behalf of the United Kingdom. This demarcation excluded Commonwealth citizens resident in the colonies whose passports were issued by and on behalf of colonial governments. (Kathleen Paul, 166-167)

<sup>43</sup> Tanisha Ford, “Soul Generation: Radical Fashion, Beauty, and the Transnational Black Liberation Movement, 1954-1980,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2012), 211.

<sup>44</sup> Tanisha Ford, “Soul Generation,” 211.

<sup>45</sup> Ford, “Soul Generation,” 213.

linked to the happenings in the United States, the organization adopted many symbols including the Panther emblem, a large black panther sewn on red material, the Black power fist, and their own version of the Panthers' military uniform, which consisted of a black beret and a black leather jacket or blazer.<sup>46</sup> Filling the cultural and political vacuum that resulted from many leading Pan-Africanists of the 1950s and 1960s leaving Britain to support nationalist movements in West Africa and the Caribbean, the BPM hoped to offer a space for African Caribbean folk to form a sense of community and belonging.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, BPM sponsored book club meetings, poetry nights, and reggae parties.<sup>48</sup>

BPM extensively recruited Black teenagers to join the Panther Youth League, where they would learn how to arm themselves intellectually and defend themselves physically against racist white Britons.<sup>49</sup> As the main youth recruiter, Althea Jones encouraged young panthers to read Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* and *The Black Reconstruction*, as well as works by Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Eldridge Cleaver.<sup>50</sup> Adopting a more expansive view of *blackness*, the BPM recruited both people of African and South Asian descent; but refused to allow white Britons.<sup>51</sup> A significant portion of the BPM's early activism focused on campaigns and marches against police brutality. In doing so, members aimed to show the British government that they "would not be demoralized in the way their parents' generation had been."<sup>52</sup> Due to strict British gun control laws, members would hold signs that read "HANDS OFF BLACK KIDS,"

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ford "Soul Generation," 214.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ford, "Soul Generation," 215.

<sup>50</sup> Ford, "Soul Generation," 215-16.

<sup>51</sup> Ford, "Soul Generation," 215.

<sup>52</sup> Ford, "Soul Generation," 218.

“FREEDOM from POLICE BRUTALITY,” and “Stop Racist Attacks by Police.”<sup>53</sup>

Given the alienation that the British school system and social clubs reinforced, the BPM created a much-needed space for a sense of pride among Black youth.

### *The Caribbean Artists Movement*

The Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) arrived at a critical moment for Caribbean writers and intellectuals living in London. It was a time when Anglophone Caribbean nations attained political independence from England; it was a time when Caribbean people were publicly defining their nationhood as an affront to colonialism; it was a time when Black people (from Africa to the Caribbean to the United States, and in between) were invested in a transnational political, cultural, and social discourse that demanded an interrogation of white supremacy, class oppression, and gender oppression. As the institutions for their writing became nonexistent in London, many of these Caribbean writers and intellectuals found themselves in an anomaly. While they hoped for a London that was hospitable to them, they quickly found themselves perpetually at odds with and in isolation from white Britons.<sup>54</sup> The superstructures of British imperialism projected knowledge of Caribbean people as “lesser breeds,” “inferior coloured peoples,” savages,” and “the white man’s burden.”<sup>55</sup> As previously discussed, while British nativism spread throughout 1960s, racial discrimination inhibited the ability for Caribbean migrants from finding housing and jobs. Furthermore, the execution of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act limited the number of Caribbean migrants into

<sup>53</sup> Ford, “Soul Generation,” 218-219.

<sup>54</sup> Schwarz, “Crossing the Seas,” 12.

<sup>55</sup> Claudia Jones, “The Caribbean Community,” In *Black British Culture & Society: A Text Reader*, ed. Kwesi Owusu, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 53.

England and issued deportation penalties that targeted non-white immigrants. The Caribbean Artists Movement attempted to change these sentiments, empowering Caribbean writers and intellectuals to critically engage the beauty and complexity within Caribbean identity.

*The First Official Meeting*

The Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) began as Barbadian historian and poet Edward Brathwaite, Jamaican writer Andrew Salkey, and Trinidadian journalist John La Rose came together in early December 1967 in order to talk about their feelings of dislocation from the Caribbean and isolation in London. They all had actively participated in Caribbean organizations in both their respective islands and in London.<sup>56</sup> They wanted to (re)define a collective Caribbean outside of one-dimensional, their own terms, outside of monolith and within complexity. But most importantly, they were focused on having a collective space for all Caribbean cultural producers and critics to have a voice, support, and recognition. These writers and intellectuals yearned to develop the contours of a Caribbean aesthetic, that drew on their folklore, shared history, and language.<sup>57</sup>

After sending out letters to prominent Caribbean writers and artists, Brathwaite organized the first meeting at his home on December 19, 1966.<sup>58</sup> Kamau and Doris Brathwaite, John La Rose, Andrew Salkey, Kenneth Ramchand (Trinidadian literary critic), Gordon Rohlehr (Trinidadian literary critic) and Aubrey Williams (Guyanese

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<sup>56</sup> Francis, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 53.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 47-50.

painter) were all present at this.<sup>59</sup> These writers and artists became the founding members of CAM; later members would include Lucille Mathurin Mair (Jamaican historian and author), Merle Hodge (Trinidadian literary critic and writer), Orlando Patterson (Jamaican sociologist and writer), Wilson Harris (Guyanese writer), Ronald Moody (Jamaican sculptor), Althea McNish (Trinidadian artist), and Donald Hinds, to name a few.<sup>60</sup> This new collective of writers were invested in communal wholeness, communal healing that predecessors such as Derek Walcott refused to be a part of.<sup>61</sup> In his seminal essay, “The Caribbean Artists Movement,” published in the *Caribbean Quarterly* in 1968, Brathwaite gives poignant insight into the catalysts for CAM. He describes his shock at the dearth of “West Indian” writers, painters, and actors on British television. “I was not hearing their voices or their sound on radio. They didn’t seem to be participating in the literary arts pages and the newspapers and magazines that were concerned with these things in this country.”<sup>62</sup> “This situation,” Brathwaite continues, “was something to be deplored. The isolation of West Indian writers from each other and from the society in which they lived could eventually only stultify development and could do nothing to contribute to perhaps the most important problem of our times – the problem of the future of race relations in Britain.”<sup>63</sup> By the second meeting, on January 6, 1967, CAM members outlined the four goals of their Movement as an artists’ cooperative.<sup>64</sup> The first goal of the cooperative was for the writers and artists to “get to know each other and each other’s work and to discuss what they were individually trying to do as frankly as

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<sup>59</sup> Francis, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” 54.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Brathwaite, “Timehri,” *SAVACOU 2* (1970): 42.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Brathwaite, “The Caribbean Artists Movement,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 14.1/2 (1968): 57.

<sup>63</sup> Brathwaite, “The Caribbean Artists Movement,” 57.

<sup>64</sup> Brathwaite, “The Caribbean Artists Movement,” 58.

possible, relating it to West Indian society.”<sup>65</sup> The second goal of the cooperative revolved around breaking the barriers of exile through meeting readers, viewers, and listeners in order to have dialogue. The third goal of the Movement was to provide a forum of discussion and debate among writers, artists and intellectuals from outside the Caribbean.<sup>66</sup>

From the beginning of the collective’s formation, Brathwaite attempted to make London *home* to Caribbean cultural productions by making British cultural institutions aware of their presence.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, between 1966 and 1969, CAM consistently held both public and private meetings were sites of constructive debates around issues pertaining to Caribbean. For example, at CAM’s second meeting, Orlando Patterson’s paper, “Is There A West Indian Aesthetic?” sparked a boisterous debate within the collective.<sup>68</sup> In this piece, Patterson argued that the Caribbean did not have the indigenous cultural resources like Africa or Asia to retaliate against the colonial experience.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, he maintained that given the violent and abortive beginnings that gave rise to the present social context of the Caribbean, artists should play a sociological function, exploring the problems of Caribbean society.<sup>70</sup> Edward Brathwaite responded to this assertion of the non-existence of indigenous culture in the Caribbean at the February 3, 1967 CAM meeting in his article, “Jazz and the West Indian Novel.” In this article, Brathwaite used African American jazz as a template for the black aesthetic.<sup>71</sup> He asserted that with jazz, there was a distinctive cultural grammar for Africans in the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Francis, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” 76.

<sup>68</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 52.

<sup>69</sup> Francis, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” 83.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Francis, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” 85.



New World that predicated on migration, urbanization, and the experience of exclusion or discrimination.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, the jazz novel had four components: 1) it was rooted in an African presence; 2) it had to express protest; 3) it had a redemptive role; and 4) it had to communicate the communality of Caribbean societies.<sup>73</sup> These elements combined to express an individual's relationship to the group, which provided the foundational syntax for the novel's composition. Similar to Brathwaite, Gordon Rohlehr challenged Patterson as he presented his paper, "Sparrow and the Language of the Calypso," at the April 7, 1967 CAM public meeting. In this paper, Rohlehr identified calypso as an indigenous art form, disrupting boundaries between popular music (low art) and literature (high art).<sup>74</sup> Within this construct, he asserted calypso as essentially sublimated protest music.<sup>75</sup> This debate around the approach to the Caribbean aesthetic not only strengthened attempts to counter Patterson's negative approach to Caribbean culture but also created a highly creative critic-writer relationship between Rohlehr and Brathwaite.<sup>76</sup> Through these public meetings and forums, CAM became a site of debate and community within an exploration of Caribbean culture and society.

These activities and debates developed into three major annual conferences. The first conference, held between September 15 and 18 at the University of Kent opened with Elsa Goveia's (UWI's<sup>77</sup> first woman to Chair a department and first Professor of West Indian History) presentation of "The Socio-Cultural Framework of the Caribbean."<sup>78</sup> This opening address identified language as a site of cultural dependency

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<sup>72</sup> Francis, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 86.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Francis, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 89.

<sup>75</sup> Francis, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," 90.

<sup>76</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 70.

<sup>77</sup> UWI refers to The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus in Kingston, Jamaica.

<sup>78</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 94-97.

and opportunity, and suggested that artists had a vested interest in abandoning the current system of classification by race and wealth.<sup>79</sup> Goveia further challenged Caribbean artists and intellectuals to make a choice between “the inferiority/superiority ranking according to race and wealth and the equality which is implied by the slogan one man, one vote.”<sup>80</sup> This challenge spurred many questions around the kinds of art that committed artists should produce. Which art forms were most effective? Who were these artists’ audience and how should the artist communicate with them? How can the masses can be educated and democratized and become articulate through artistic production.<sup>81</sup> The second conference was held at the University of Kent between August 31 and September 2, 1968 and centered on the theme, “Cultural Cross-Currents in the Caribbean.”<sup>82</sup> The sessions were originally planned to reflect a broader context for Caribbean arts focusing on French Caribbean poetry, Caribbean drama, the Caribbean and modernism, and African American poetry.<sup>83</sup> Due to cancellations, the program focused on Caribbean arts in Britain. The program drew more people from the British establishment and arts/media network such as Felicity Bolton (parliamentary lobbyist and secretary of the British Caribbean Association), John Davidson (solicitor), Gillian Shears (Dillons Bookshop), Eric Walter White (the Arts Council), Gerald Moore (University of Sussex) and Clive Wake (Kent University).<sup>84</sup> CAM’s third and final conference was held in August of 1969 at the West Indian Students Center, CAM’s first non-residential conference.<sup>85</sup> This conference engaged more topical issues such as “Africa in the Caribbean,” “The

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<sup>79</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 98

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 157.

<sup>83</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 158.

<sup>84</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 158-59.

<sup>85</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 240-41.

Negritude Movement and Black Awareness,” “The Development of Black Experience and the Nature of Black Society in Britain,” and “The Threat to the Education of the Black Child in Britain and what to do.”<sup>86</sup> CAM’s meetings and conferences served as fertile ground for challenging artists to explore more deeply the Caribbean aesthetic and to claim space within British institutions.

Along with providing a meeting space for Caribbean writers and intellectuals, CAM expanded institutions for publishing the works of CAM members and other artists committed to the interrogation of Caribbean cultural production. One such institution was New Beacon Books. Founded by John La Rose and his partner Sarah White in August 1966. The name New Beacon came from the *Beacon* magazine of Trinidad (1931-1933), which provided a space for up-and-coming writers in Trinidad to have their works published.<sup>87</sup> When asked about their motives for establishing New Beacon, La Rose and White responded,

One of the things that strikes you about a colonial society is that there is not only a lack of information which is quite deliberate...There is discontinuity...in the hands of the colonial authorities. So that each new generation comes to the colonial situation, with its long history of struggles, as though it is something new. Publishing [was] a vehicle, which gave an independent validation of one’s own culture, history, politics...to break down the discontinuity...to transform their lives.<sup>88</sup>

Here, La Rose and White clearly located their vision for New Beacon books within an anti-colonial framework. This framework allowed the readership to value themselves and buffer pervasive narratives of cultural, historical, and political inferiority and erasure.

New Beacon’s first publications were La Rose’s collection of poetry, *Foundations*;

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<sup>86</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 241.

<sup>87</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 36.

<sup>88</sup> Colin Beckles, “‘We Shall Not Be Terrorized Out of Existence’: The Political Legacy of England’s Black Bookshops,” *Journal of Black Studies* 29.1 (1998): 54.

Adolph Edwards's *Marcus Garvey –1887-1940*; Wilson Harris's *Tradition The Writer and Society*; and Ivan Van Sertima's *Caribbean Writers – Critical Essays*.<sup>89</sup> In 1969, New Beacon Books republished two books written by Trinidadian autodidact, John Jacob Thomas – *Fraudacity* (originally published in 1869) and *Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (originally published in 1869).<sup>90</sup> Thomas, a Black rural school-teacher wrote *Froudacity* in response to Oxford's *The English in The West Indies* (1888), which criticized the capacities of the formerly enslaved to govern themselves, defending British Empire and its ideology of white supremacy.<sup>91</sup> He refuted these claims by demonstrating the great advances made by Blacks in the decades following emancipation in 1838, and documented the many obstacles set up by the British colonists in order to prevent Blacks acquiring land and education.<sup>92</sup> New Beacon's republication of this text asserted the publishing house's combating the "discontinuity" of colonialism not only by making early anti-colonialist available to a new readership but also in establishing a tradition of scholarly writing by Black people in the Caribbean.<sup>93</sup> The press house benefited from both the influence of CAM and the heightened discourse on anti-racist and anti-colonial politics, the rise of the new left of the 1960s, anti-war and women's liberation movements of the 1960s.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, it was connected to a wider network of presses tied to the new Black political organizations such as the British Black Panther Movement's *Freedom News*, the Black Liberation Front's *Grassroots*, and the Black Workers Action

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<sup>89</sup> Brian Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race: Black Activism and Cultural Politics*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002), 42.

<sup>90</sup> Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race*, 42.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid

<sup>94</sup> Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race*, 44.

Committee's *Black Liberator*.<sup>95</sup> These institutions functioned as resource for all those seeking knowledge about Black identity, becoming informal community advisors and parents.<sup>96</sup> In fact, New Beacon became involved in initiating the first Black studies courses and supplying separate Black supplementary schools with Black counterhegemonic information.<sup>97</sup>

Another CAM institution was the journal, *Savacou*. As Edward Brathwaite's innovation, *Savacou* took its name from a sculptor of the Carib War Bird created by Ronald Moody.<sup>98</sup> In Carib mythology, savacou was the bird-god of thunder and strong winds that later transmogrified into a star. This transformation in Carib cosmology symbolized their faith in nature and a belief in transcendence, both physical and spiritual, which defied scientific reason.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, from its inception, the journal was invested in a preoccupation with Caribbean ancestral roots and spirituality. Along with Brathwaite, Kenneth Ramchand and Andrew Salkey co-edited the journal. There were three goals of the journal. The first goal was to present the work of creative writers – established, unknown, in exile or at home. *Savacou*'s second goal was to examine and assess the significance of artistic expression through slavery and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with a view to recognizing continuities and submerged or lost tradition. The final goal of *Savacou* was to help promote the recognition of the whole Caribbean area as a meaningful historical and cultural entity.<sup>100</sup> Housed in Mona, Jamaica, *Savacou* served as CAM's intention to break colonial dependency by establishing autonomous

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<sup>95</sup> Beckles, "The Political Legacy of England's Black Bookshops," 34.

<sup>96</sup> Beckles, "The Political Legacy of England's Black Bookshops," 59.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Francis, "Cosmopolitan Patriots: West Indian Intellectuals Between Home and Metropole," 74.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 203.

regional institutions while maintaining strategic alliances.<sup>101</sup> In their proposal, the editors proposed three issues a year with a fourth issue being devoted to the publication of creative work and artistic criticism; a comprehensive listing of current publications by Caribbean writers in each issue; and compensation for all contributions published.<sup>102</sup> Unfortunately, the journal only appeared twice in 1970 and 1971, and once each year until the end of the decade, except for 1976 and 1978.<sup>103</sup> An interdisciplinary framed journal, the first two issues were published in June and September 1970.<sup>104</sup> The first issue opened with the topic of slavery with historian Elsa Goveia identifying the “slave society” as “one of the most fundamental experiences shared by the West Indies.”<sup>105</sup> *Savacou* served as CAM’s academic and scholarly outlet for the publication of scholarship on the Caribbean. Its interdisciplinary focus allowed it to forward a distinct read of aspects of Caribbean history and culture, institutionalizing a regional literature and criticism.

### *Dub Music Movement*

The next generation of Caribbean artists, specifically musicians expanded the conversation on the Caribbean aesthetic to consider the sonic modes of the Caribbean literary renaissance. The dub music scene began as the link between recording studios and sound systems in the evolution of Jamaican music in the late 1960s. During that time, producers owned and operated sound systems as a means of advertising their product at

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<sup>101</sup> Francis, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” 77.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Walmsley, *Caribbean Artists Movement*, 204.

<sup>105</sup> Elsa Goveia, “Savacou – A Journal of the Caribbean Artists Movement – Slavery – Vol. 1, No. 1,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 16.4 (1970): 87.

public dances.<sup>106</sup> The sound system's usage at dances date back to the 1950s as big bands (U.S. jazz bands) became too costly.<sup>107</sup> The sound system started out as someone hooked up speakers to radios and/or record players and amplifiers to play for their own entertainment. Soon, neighbors and friends gathered (especially in downtown Kingston) and parties, which were known as *sessions*, *dance halls*, *lawns*, *gardens*, and *blues dances*, would take place in this outdoor environment.<sup>108</sup> The sound system became a cultural marker for Jamaican music and culture. As ethnomusicologist Michael Veal remarks, "Like the stereotypical village clearing in sub-Saharan Africa or the block party in urban black America, the sound system is a communal space in which many of the nation's most potent myths, tropes, and emotions are dramatized in the act of communal dance."<sup>109</sup> Although Jamaica did not manufacture the equipment, groundbreaking electronic enthusiasts existed who were capable not only in repairing the amplifiers but also in building them.<sup>110</sup> The assemblage of mega-wattage amplifiers, banks of speakers, and record "libraries" in a unit that could move from place to place brought into being a Jamaican institution.<sup>111</sup> In order to keep their sounds fresh, sound-system operators had employees who would seek out new records and attend rival dances in order to undercut the competition.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Song in Jamaican Reggae*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 51.

<sup>107</sup> Paul Kauppila, "From Memphis to Kingston": An Investigation into the Origin of Jamaican Ska, *Social and Economic Studies* 55, no. 1/2 (2006): 79.

<sup>108</sup> Kauppila, "From Memphis to Kingston," 79.

<sup>109</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 43.

<sup>110</sup> Garth White, "The Evolution of Jamaican Music pt. 1" "Proto-ska" to ska. *Social and Economic Studies* 47, no.1, (1998): 13.

<sup>111</sup> White, "The Evolution of Jamaican Music," 13-14.

<sup>112</sup> Christopher Partridge, *Dub in Babylon: Understanding the Evolution and Significance of Dub Reggae in Jamaica and Britain from King Tubby to Post-punk*, (London and Oakville: Equinox, 2010), 55.

A central part of the sound system culture was the deejay/sound system operator. Each soundman's set had its own unique deejay, who would primarily be in charge of playing the songs and hyping up the party with chants and shouts such as "Work it!" "Good God!" "Jump up!" and "Shake a leg!"<sup>113</sup> This would all change after the rise of Count Machuki, a deejay for Coxson. Machuki redefined the role of the deejay as an equal player in the soundscape of the party with his use of jive talk, an African American speech pattern, that he learned from reading *Jive* magazine (a Harlem-based magazine): "The first [jive] I wrote for myself was: 'if you dig my jive/ you're cool and very much alive/ Everybody all round town/ Machuki's the reason why I shake it down/ When it comes to jive/ you can't whip him with no stick.'"<sup>114</sup> This jive talk was also traced to the hipster patter of American r&b radio deejays such as Doctor Daddy-O and Poppa Stoppa in New Orleans.<sup>115</sup>

The recording industry in Jamaica developed at a moment when many wanted to record the sound of Jamaica instead of simply playing American R&B tracks. These early entrepreneurs began creating studios for the processing of and distribution of local Jamaican talent (from singers to musicians). They included Stanley Motta, Ken Khouri, and Dada Tewari. In 1951, Stanley Motta, a Jewish Jamaican, began recording mento at 109 Harbour Street in Kingston. His connections in London greatly helped his manufacturing industry.<sup>116</sup> In 1954, Ken Khouri, a Lebanese/Cuban Jamaican, established Pioneer Company after securing manufacturing and distribution rights from Mercury

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<sup>113</sup> Kauppila, "From Memphis to Kingston," 80.

<sup>114</sup> Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton. *The Rough Guide to Reggae: The Definitive Guide to Jamaican Music from Ska Through Roots to Bashment*, (London, UK: Penguin Group, 2004), 17.

<sup>115</sup> Kauppila, "From Memphis to Kingston," 83.

<sup>116</sup> Barrow and Dalton, 2004, 8.



records in the United States.<sup>117</sup> He also created Federal studios, Jamaica's first fully-fledged recording studio and pressing facility during this year.<sup>118</sup> Following this, in 1956, Dada Tewari, a Jamaican of Indian decent, founded Caribbean Recording Company to release mento and calypso on the Caribou label.<sup>119</sup> Other studios at the time included KG at Crossroads and Wonard's on Church Street.<sup>120</sup> These men searched for local talent by holding auditions and attending Vere Johns "Opportunity Hour in Kingston's Palace Theater." This event was a place for local singers to showcase themselves in the mastery of American r&b and mento.<sup>121</sup> These local recording singers were foundational to the new music sound entering the Jamaican atmosphere, a spin on American r&b uniquely called JA Boogie/Jamaican r&b.

During the 1960s, studios and sound systems benefitted from the increasing sophistication of imported sound processing equipment, especially moving from two-track studios to four-track studios.<sup>122</sup> As sound system selectors began to use the simple equalization capability of their equipment (bass and treble controls) to vary the sound of prerecorded music in the dances, recording studios began to apply creative strategies of song mixing to replicate what the public heard on the sound system.<sup>123</sup> A significant link in this process was the *dub plate*. Traditionally known as "black wax," "soft wax," "slate," or "reference disc," the dub plate was a metal plate with a fine coating of vinyl.<sup>124</sup> Dub plates would gradually be used in competitions between sound systems, which

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<sup>117</sup> Katz, 2003, 14.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Katz, 18.

<sup>121</sup> Witmer, 9-10.

<sup>122</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 51.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Partridge, *Dub in Babylon*, 59.

fought to present the most unique and personalized versions of the popular song.<sup>125</sup> This process eventually resulted in the production of dub plate “specials”/ “versions” on which popular singers would re-record their vocal melodies, modifying the lyrics in order to praise the sound system that commissioned the special.<sup>126</sup> Simply put, this process of versioning became a method of serially recycling recorded material developed by producers who desired to ensure the longest commercial life of a given piece of recorded music in the face of economic constraints and a limited selection of musicians.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the dub plate would come to represent the combination of two creative practices -- the multitrack recording machines through which musical performances could be partially disassembled, and the interruptive performance logic of the sound system deejays.

One of the first producers/soundmen to use this technique was Ruddy Redwood. After a dance one night in 1967, Ruddy was playing a record from a rocksteady group called the Paragons called “On the Beach,” which was released as a 45. As Ruddy was playing, however, he realized that the sound engineer had inadvertently left the vocal track off, which sounded like the perfect innovation to Ruddy’s ears. As he left the studio for his next dance, Ruddy carried an acetate with just the backing track on it and the Paragons dubplate special mixed by Duke Reid’s engineer, Byron Smith.<sup>128</sup> When Ruddy played the backing track at the dance the next night, the dance floor was “rail[ing] -- everybody was singing.”<sup>129</sup> Following this success, Ruddy began cutting more versions and eventually by 1970, it became standard for the B-side of a 45 to carry an

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<sup>125</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 53.

<sup>126</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 54.

<sup>127</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 55.

<sup>128</sup> Barrow and Dalton, *The Rough Guide to Reggae*, 216.

<sup>129</sup> Barrow and Dalton, *The Rough Guide to Reggae*, 217.

instrumental.<sup>130</sup> These versions were used in the dancehall, as the stripped down mixes allowed the deejays -- who were previously confined to introductions and interjections -- to take a more central role. Consequently, deejays could now invent new lyrics to songs, which could either answer or commented on the original track.<sup>131</sup> One deejay that made a name for himself during this era of dub was U-Roy (born Ewart Beckford). Having served as an apprentice in the 1960s under Sir Mike the Musical Thunderstorm and Dickie's Dynamic, U-Roy began MCing for Osbourne "Tubby" Ruddock (a.k.a King Tubby), the sound engineer and operator of Home Town Hi-Fi in the Waterhouse ghetto of Kingston.<sup>132</sup> The first vocal record with a full dub version on its flip is usually accorded to Little Roy's "Hard Fighter" on Lloyd 'Matador' Daley's Syndicate Label in March 1971.<sup>133</sup>

By 1972, however, sound engineers began to experiment with a new technique, called "drum and bass versions." While earlier versions had been alternate vocals, instrumentals, or rhythm versions, "drum and bass" would focus on the propulsive motion of the drum and bass, occasionally filtering through.<sup>134</sup> This treatment of the chordal instruments reflects what would become two central strategies of dub mixing -- fragmentation and incompleteness. These strategies allowed for the prominence of the drum and bass pattern, de-emphasizing a traditional sense of harmony.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, it would become one of the central techniques of dub. Other techniques of dub included reverberation and equalization, the inclusion of extraneous material and nonmusical

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<sup>130</sup> Barrow and Dalton, *The Rough Guide to Reggae*, 218.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Barrow and Dalton, *The Rough Guide to Reggae*, 219.

<sup>134</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 57.

<sup>135</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 58.

sounds, and the backward sound and tape speed manipulation. Reverberation refers to the blending of a series of simulated echoes sequentially to simulate spatial dimension within a recording. This blending makes the music sound as if it were performed in a theater, arena, or cave instead of the acoustically (dry) recording studio.<sup>136</sup> Reverb had two basic uses in dub mixes -- to imply a series of spatial configuration in the mix and to saturate the recording with high amounts atmospheric dimension.<sup>137</sup> Equalization refers to the manipulation of instruments until it sounds full, warm, and robust, or until it sounds thin, shrill, and eviscerated.<sup>138</sup> It could be used to craft the ambient aspects of a performance, especially in the interplay of echo, which enabled engineers to make simulated sound spaces sound as if they were continually morphing in dimension and texture.<sup>139</sup>

Central to this era's popularity and innovation were two sound engineers -- King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry. Born in Kingston in 1941, King Tubby was an electrician who repaired electronic equipment for various Kingston sound systems during the 1950s. By the mid-1960s, he founded his own sound system called King Tubby's Home Town Hi-Fi.<sup>140</sup> This system was based in the Waterhouse section of Western Kingston. His sound system was popular for three main reasons. For one, Home Town Hi-Fi was not affiliated with any political parties. Secondly, the popularity of U-Roy's versioning over popular Treasure Isle songs amassed many followers.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, Tubby's facility with electronics was unmatched, especially since he was the first to employ separate amplifiers to boost the various frequency ranges of music he played.

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<sup>136</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 71.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 73.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 108.

<sup>141</sup> Veal, *Dub*, 109.

Tubby was also the first to employ reverb and echo effects in the sound system in order to intensify the experience for the audience.<sup>142</sup> It is important to underscore that King Tubby's studio, due to its small size, was used for remixing and adding vocals to basic rhythm tracks that were recorded at other studios such as Dynamic and Channel One. Consequently, Tubby did not work with live musicians.<sup>143</sup> Instead, he focused on developing a cadre of producers such as Bunny Lee, Vivian "Yabby You" Jackson, Glen Brown, and Augustus Pablo. Central to Tubby's sound was its ability to reflect the roughness of Waterhouse, which in the 1970s, due to political rivalries, gained the name "Firehouse." This name referred to Tubby's mixing of machine-gun fire, emergency sirens, and screeching brake tires with the bracing sound of his dropping a spring reverb unit, and an endless barrage of gunplay. These mixes sonically reflected the day-to-day life of living in the Kingston ghetto.<sup>144</sup>

Inspired by the rhythms of African American music during the 1960s, Afro-Protestant cults, the aura of Jamaica's Obeah tradition of neo-black magic, and an eye for the international market of reggae music, Lee "Scratch" Perry became an innovator in the dub scene while working with King Tubby. Between 1972 and 1974, the two reworked the productions of vocalists such as Leo Graham and Junior Byles.<sup>145</sup> In late 1973, he opened The Black Ark Studio as a four-track facility.<sup>146</sup> This facility allowed Perry to dump completed tracks onto one track so as to free them from further overdubbing, losing what was thought of as "sound quality" every time it occurred.<sup>147</sup> Unlike Tubby,

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<sup>142</sup> Veal, 110.

<sup>143</sup> Veal, 116.

<sup>144</sup> Veal, 118.

<sup>145</sup> Veal, 148.

<sup>146</sup> Veal, 150.

<sup>147</sup> Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton, *The Rough Guide to Reggae*, 174.

Perry worked with many live session performers such as The Upsetters, Prince Jazzbo, Jah Lion, and even recorded himself speaking commentaries on some tracks.<sup>148</sup> Thus, dub music brought forth an opportunity for further technological experimentation with sound for Jamaicans to explore the concepts of sound, lyric, and the word.

### **Dub Poetry Movement**

From the socio-political consciousness of the Black Power Movement, the literary challenge of the Caribbean Artists Movement, and the sonic innovation of the dub music movement, it is clear that dub poetry embraces a dynamic articulation of the Caribbean transnational experience between London and Kingston. This section endeavors to present an overview of this movement. It will identify key artists; outline dub poetry's aesthetic formation; and criticisms of dub poetry. This section hopes to address the following questions: 1) who were the main dub poets that traversed the London/Kingston landscape? 2) what are the various elements of dub in terms of form, style, and themes? and 3) what are the various types of dub poetry?

#### *The artists*

Deemed as the “originator” of dub poetry, **Oku Onuora** was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1952 as Orlando Wong in the Eastern ghettos.<sup>149</sup> He primarily received his education on the streets and in the yards of his neighbors. Taught by Rasta elder, Negus, he became determined to do something about the desperate situation of the “ghetto youths.”<sup>150</sup> When their project for a ghetto school and community center ended in failure, Onuora engaged in guerilla activities in the hills surrounding Kingston, and tried with

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<sup>148</sup> Barrow and Dalton, 176.

<sup>149</sup> Christian Habekost, *Verbal Riddim: The Politics and Aesthetics of African-Caribbean Dub Poetry*, (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi B.V., 1993), 19.

<sup>150</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 19.

armed robberies to raise the money needed for the projects in the ghetto.<sup>151</sup> In 1970, during the robbery of a post office, he was caught by the police and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Regarded as a security risk after two attempts to escape and a prison riot instigated by him and other inmates, Onuora faced even harsher repression from the prison authorities.<sup>152</sup> Downtrodden by the realities of the Jamaican penal system, he later reasoned that in order to change the system, he had to change people's minds.<sup>153</sup> Literature became his way of enacting that change. In 1974, Oku Onuora made history when he became the first inmate to be allowed to give a poetry performance with a reggae band.<sup>154</sup> Following this performance, however, his cell was searched, all his writings were confiscated, and prison officials declared his poetry subversive.<sup>155</sup> These poems were later smuggled out of prison and won a number of prizes in the Jamaica Literary Festival. This recognition sparked widespread conversation about Onuora's eventual release.<sup>156</sup> In 1977, Onuora had been allowed to read his poetry outside prison at the Tom Redcam Library. This same year, the Jamaican Broadcasting Company produced his prison-centered play, *Confrontation*. When public pressure for his release from prison grew stronger, he was finally let out on parole in September 1977. His book of poems, *Echo*, appeared shortly thereafter, one of the milestones in the development of dub poetry.<sup>157</sup> Shortly following his release from prison, Onuora enrolled in the Jamaica School of Drama on scholarship, where he met with a group of poets who would form the

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 20.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

nucleus of the movement.<sup>158</sup> Feeling unable to conform to the rules and regulations of such an institution, Onuora dropped out, forming the “Prugresiv Atis Muvment” together with his wife Adugo. In 1979, Tuff Gong label released a single by him, “Reflections in Red,” the first Jamaican dub poetry record.<sup>159</sup> His first album, *Pressure Drop* (1985), was celebrated as an outstanding achievement, both for reggae music and dub poetry.<sup>160</sup>

Alan Hope, widely known as **Mutabaruka** (Muta) was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1952, receiving a high school education and later trained in electronics; he took employment at the Jamaica Telephone Company.<sup>161</sup> Drawn into the Black power movement, he developed a militant political stance, which resulted in his becoming part of the Rastafarian faith.<sup>162</sup> Inspired by the works of Angela Davis, Malcolm X and the Black American poets of the Harlem Renaissance, Mutabaruka started to write his own poetry. His earliest pieces appeared first in *Swing* magazine in 1971, and in March 1973, his first collection of poetry, *Outcry*, was published.<sup>163</sup> His voice reached the Jamaican masses when he released his first single, “Evrytime A Ear de Soun,” in 1981. In 1983, his first album, *Check It*, was celebrated as one of the outstanding reggae productions of the early 1980s, especially on the international scene.<sup>164</sup> Known for his consistent ability to exploit the music medium, Muta abandoned the raw roots sound and began to explore music technology.<sup>165</sup>

**Mikey Smith** (born Michael Smith) was born in 1954 in Kingston, Jamaica. He went to school in Jonestown and attended high school at Kingston College Extension

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<sup>158</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 21.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 21-22.

<sup>161</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 25.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 26.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.



School.<sup>166</sup> He graduated from the Jamaican School of Drama, where he specialized in directing and linked with Jean “Binta” Breeze and Oku Onuora to form the core of the dub poetry movement in Kingston.<sup>167</sup> He wrote plays and represented Jamaica in poetry at international level performing in Cuba, Panama, and Barbados.<sup>168</sup> He made one record with two poems, *Mi Cyaan Believe It* (1982), which featured his infamous poems “My Cyaan Believe It” and “Roots.” A year following this release, however, Smith was stoned to death on Stony Hill, Jamaica on August 17, 1983.<sup>169</sup>

Born Jean Lumsden in Patty Hill, Hanover Jamaica, **Jean “Binta” Breeze** was educated at Ruseau High School and the Jamaica School of Drama. From early childhood, her mother had nurtured her to love poetry, which she sustained throughout.<sup>170</sup> But it was in the stimulating atmosphere of the Jamaica School of Drama, in the company of leading dub poets Michael Smith, Oku Onuora, and others that the “quest for the muse began to take root.”<sup>171</sup> She soon began writing dub poetry and giving live performances with a group of poets and musicians based at the school. By the time of her first collection of poems, *Answers*, was published in 1983, Breeze’s reputation as a dub poet began to grow. Her reputation was further enhanced when she recorded *Slip/African School*, for **Mutabaruka’s** “The Poets” label. This was followed by *Get Back*, her celebrated castigation of the “slackness” school of reggae deejays who denigrate women with their lewd lyrics.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Compilation. *Caribbean Roots: Black British and Caribbean Poets Read Their Own Work*. British Library, 2011, compact disc.

<sup>167</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 23

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Opal Palmer Adisa, “IT A COME by Michael Smith,” *The Black Scholar* 20, no. 2 (March/April 1989): 34.

<sup>170</sup> Jean Binta Breeze, Liner Notes, *Tracks*, Shanachie Records, 1991, compact disc.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

Known as the “pioneer” of dub poetry, **Linton Kwesi Johnson**, also known as **LKJ** was born in 1952 in Chapelton, in the rural parish of Clarendon, Jamaica.<sup>173</sup> In 1959, when Johnson was seven years old, his parents moved to Kingston, leaving him under his grandmother’s care. In 1963, he immigrated to London to join his mother in Brixton.<sup>174</sup> There, he enrolled in Tulse Hill comprehensive, where he graduated with five “O” levels at age sixteen and studied “A” levels at home while making a living as a civil servant.<sup>175</sup> In 1970, Johnson joined the Black Panther Youth League.<sup>176</sup> Influenced by the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Martin Carter of Guyana, George Campbell of Jamaica, Tchicaya U Tam’si of the Congo, and Christopher Okigbo of Nigeria, LKJ began writing poetry.<sup>177</sup> After the decline of the Panthers, in 1973, he became involved in Rastafarianism<sup>178</sup> and enrolled at Goldsmith’s College, University of London, where he began studying sociology, focusing on Jamaican popular music.<sup>179</sup> He published his first collection of poetry, *Dread Beat and Blood*, in 1975 -- the first book published by a dub poet.<sup>180</sup> Following this publication, Johnson left the Rasta scene and returned to serious political activism, with a Marxist orientation.<sup>181</sup> In 1976, LKJ graduated from Goldsmith’s, after which several of his articles were published in *Race Today*, and he was a regular reviewer for *Melody Maker* magazine. In 1978, he released the first dub poetry album named after his first book of poetry. Following *Dread Beat and Blood’s* success,

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<sup>173</sup> Robert J. Stewart, “Linton Kwesi Johnson: Poetry Down a Reggae Wire,” *New West Indian Guide* vol 67 no. 1/2 (1993): 69.

<sup>174</sup> Robert J. Stewart, “Linton Kwesi Johnson: poetry down a reggae wire,” *New West Indian Guide* vol 67 no. 1/2 (1993): 69

<sup>175</sup> Stewart, “Linton Kwesi Johnson,” 70.

<sup>176</sup> Michael Horovitz, “Michael Horovitz Meets Dub Poet Linton Kwesi Johnson,” *New Statesman and Society*, 4/151 (1991 May 17): 29.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 17.

<sup>179</sup> Stewart, “Linton Kwesi Johnson: poetry down a reggae wire,” 76.

<sup>180</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 17.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

Johnson signed a contract with Island Records and released two acclaimed LP's -- *Forces of Victory* (1979) and *Bass Culture* (1980).<sup>182</sup> Partnering with Barbadian-born reggae bass guitarist Dennis Bovell, Johnson would release three more albums *Making History* (1984), *LKJ In Concert with the Dub Band* (1987), and *Tings An' Times* (1991).<sup>183</sup>

**Benjamin Zephaniah** was born in 1958 into a family of Jamaican immigrants as one of nine children in England. He learned his early lessons on the streets of Handsworth in Birmingham.<sup>184</sup> Not interested in formal education, he concentrated on sports and burglary. At the age of 14, he was caught by the police and sent to reform school.<sup>185</sup> Shortly after leaving the school, however, he was arrested again and charged for his involvement in a disturbance where several police officers were attacked. He was sentenced to prison for two years.<sup>186</sup> Having contracted a lung infection in prison, Zephaniah was determined to get involved in more constructive endeavors; so, he became involved in the sound system and dancehall scene. He moved to London, establishing himself as a poet and sociopolitical activist. In 1980, his first collection of poetry, *Pen Rhythm*, appeared in a pamphlet by an alternative bookshop that he co-founded.<sup>187</sup> He released his first album, *Rasta*, in 1982. By 1984, he formed his own band and toured England and several European countries.<sup>188</sup> Never really having the backing of an international audience, his poetry became associated with being an underground classic.<sup>189</sup> By 1985, Zephaniah embarked on a project to expand dub poetry, developing

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<sup>182</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 18.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 28.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

the idea of a “dub opera,” writing his first two plays *Playing The Right Tune* and *Job Rocking*.<sup>190</sup>

*Dub Poetry -- the movement*

Together, these artists formed the dub poetry movement between 1975 and 1991 between London and Kingston. When this paper uses the term “dub poetry movement” it must be clear that, at its basic essence, dub poetry is written to be performed and can incorporate a music beat, typically but not limited to reggae.<sup>191</sup> This performance is usually, but not always written in Jamaican nation language. By extension, however, it can be written in the informal language of people from anywhere.<sup>192</sup> Most often, it is politically focused, attacking oppression and injustice.<sup>193</sup> Oku Onuora, attesting his identity as a political poet, would say, “what I’m doing is to dub *out* the unconsciousness out of people head, and to dub *een* consciousness.”<sup>194</sup> Even though the ideal context for dub poetry is the live performance, these poets used radio, television, audio recordings, video recordings, film, and published books as suitable mediums.<sup>195</sup> It is important to underscore that prominent poets who produce dub poetry find the term “dub poet” limiting. In order to respect these artists personal identification, this essay focuses on the form and themes of the “dub poems” instead of limiting the poets’ broader trajectory of works.<sup>196</sup> Consequently, dub poetry was a movement rooted in form, which may or may not be connected to the personal identification of the artists themselves.

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<sup>190</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 30.

<sup>191</sup> Mervyn Morris, “Dub Poetry?,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Dec 1997): 1.

<sup>192</sup> Mervyn Morris, “Dub Poetry?,” 1.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 4.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Mervyn Morris, “Dub Poetry,” 3.

*Forming a name*

Several scholars cite LKJ's<sup>197</sup> 1976 article "Jamaican Rebel Music," as one of the first scholarly catalysts for the dub poetry movement. In this article, Johnson coined the term "dub lyricism" to locate dub music deejays such as I-Roy, U-Roy, and Big Youth at the intersection of the music and literary tradition. Dub lyricism refers to the deejay turned poet who intones lyrics rather than sings them.<sup>198</sup> This intonation creates a new form of oral music-poetry where the lyricist overdubs rhythmic phrases on the rhythmic phrases on to the rhythm background of a popular song.<sup>199</sup> LKJ's interrogation, as a writer and poet of reggae and dub music, reflects what Jamaican-Ghanaian poet Kwame Dawes identifies as the "reggae aesthetic" in his seminal work *Natural Mysticism: Towards A New Reggae Aesthetic* (1999). In *Natural Mysticism*, Dawes locates reggae as an artistic form that has provided writers and other artists a postcolonial aesthetic model for contemporary Caribbean writing.<sup>200</sup> He argues that after the achievement of independence in the 1960s, reggae served as a departure from the anti-colonial-centered construction of Caribbean identity and opened a self-contained discourse that allowed for a full articulation of postcolonial Jamaican identity.<sup>201</sup> Foundational to Dawes's argument is his definition of *aesthetic*, which he develops from Edward K. Brathwaite's groundbreaking work "Jazz and the West Indian Novel" and New Orleans poet Kalamu ya Salaam's writings on the blues.<sup>202</sup> He defines aesthetic as "a cultural, ideological, and formal framework that is identifiable within an artistic form to which it gives

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<sup>197</sup> From here on, I will refer to Linton Kwesi Johnson as LKJ or Johnson interchangeably.

<sup>198</sup> Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Jamaican Rebel Music," *Race Class* 17 (1976): 398.

<sup>199</sup> Johnson, "Jamaican Rebel Music," 398.

<sup>200</sup> Kwame Dawes, *Natural Mysticism: Towards A New Reggae Aesthetic* (United Kingdom: Peepal Tree Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>201</sup> Dawes, *Natural Mysticism*, 18.

<sup>202</sup> Dawes, *Natural Mysticism*, 67.

coherence.<sup>203</sup> Accordingly, the reggae aesthetic operates in two ways. On the one hand, the aesthetic serves as a self-consciously applied frame, guiding and shaping the work being produced, where the artist is looking to reggae for a model of creative expression.<sup>204</sup> At the same time, the aesthetic represents developments within an artistic community as a whole within a larger society.<sup>205</sup> Consequently, the aesthetic is simultaneously about the self and the community.

### *The dub poetic aesthetic*

While dub poetry draws upon the deejay culture of the dub music movement, there are some differences with regard to word creation, word message, word performance, word rhythm, and word and music when it comes to these two art forms. Whereas deejay culture relies on the improvisation of lyrics in the dancehall, building them around a few pre-recorded lines or catch phrases, dub poets rely on the writing (oral composition) of the text. Even though some dub poets rarely write down their poems, they would rather memorize them prior to performance.<sup>206</sup> With regard to *word message*, dub poets generally have an explicit concentration on the meaning of word, providing a more deep and broader approach than the deejay.<sup>207</sup> In terms of *word performance*, dub poets tend to focus on vocal style, deliberately paying attention to words and language.<sup>208</sup> *Word rhythm* is a crucial tool for dub poets. This can be recognized as soon as a band or a playback begins to lay down the background for the performance of a poem. The rhythm remains a tangible presence even if a poem is performed without accompaniment. Dub

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Dawes, *Natural Mysticism*, 74.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 57-58.

<sup>207</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 58.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

poems have an in-built rhythm, insinuated into the text from the outset of the composition.<sup>209</sup> Unlike the deejay, the dub poet does not need a musical accompaniment for the rhythm.

The *dub poetic aesthetic* is rooted in the relationship between three discourses -- riddim, language, and orality. Rhythm depends on the systematic grouping of notes according to their duration.<sup>210</sup> This rhythm, however, becomes riddim as the bass line accompanied by drums, melodically defined, and following a fixed rhythmic pattern. The bass line covers one or two bars (4/4 time) and serves as the basic unit, which is constantly repeated to create a foundation for the whole piece.<sup>211</sup> As a derivative of the Black music tradition, repetition is a dominant feature, forming a complex syncopated pattern.<sup>212</sup> Unlike traditional poetry, *riddim* signifies more than just a mere pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.<sup>213</sup> For one, words in dub poetry revolve around a rhythm that takes the form of a distinctive musical beat.<sup>214</sup> Secondly, the riddim is created by the call-and-response pattern, fundamental to Black expression. Dub poetry uses *call and response* with verse and a recurrent chorus/refrain, where the refrain is often the most rhythmic part of the piece.<sup>215</sup> In order to create this riddim, dub poetry employs rhyme (couplets, multiple and internal rhymes, assonances), alliteration, and repetition. In terms of the intersection between riddim and performance style, dub poets such as Oku Onuora insist that the riddim must not be forced on the poem. Rather, the poem's word choice and beat are internally merged. If the riddim becomes independent

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<sup>209</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 58.

<sup>210</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 59.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim* 91.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim* 92.

of the poetry, the words become interchangeable, creating an overpowering beat.<sup>216</sup> Thus, the musicality and theatrical skills of the performer allows dub poetry to move audiences even without the assistance of instrumental accompaniment.<sup>217</sup> These skills revolve around two concepts -- *minimal expression* and *onomatopoeia*. With regard to minimal expression, early dub poetry used single words instead of long sentences since a single word, in and of itself, expressed a whole host of cultural concepts.<sup>218</sup> For example the word *riddim* not only signals a musical pattern but also (in written form) represents a linguistic affront to the hegemony of the English orthography. Though best heard in performance, dub poetry's minimal expression can be identified, in print, through short lines, which sometimes divided the words into their syllables, indicating a rhythmic flow of beats.<sup>219</sup> Dub poetry's frequent use of *onomatopoeia* not only keeps the riddim vibrating but also allows the words to have expressive meaning.<sup>220</sup> For example, then, Linton Kwesi Johnson's "Bass Culture" uses the phrase "SCATTA-MATTA-SHATTA-SHAK! what a beat!"<sup>221</sup> to not only emulate the beat of the sound system but also to provide a break for the poem to transition into a new subject. Oftentimes, echo, reverb, and double-voicing are used in the recording of dub poetry in order to link the written poetic form to modern recording technology.<sup>222</sup>

In terms of language, dub poetry uses Jamaican nation language as its primary mode of oral-scribal expression. These poets do so in order to subvert the linguistic oppression that English has enacted upon the voices of African Caribbean people.

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<sup>216</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim* 95.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim* 96.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>222</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim* 98.



Relying on Edward Kamau Brathwaite's theory of nation language<sup>223</sup>, dub poetry embraces the spectrum of linguistic expression afforded to African Caribbean folk through the history of resistance and survival. Another part of this linguistic affront is the use of *dread talk*, Rastafarian language, in a majority of dub poems. As Rastafarian Jah Bones writes, "The British...used their language as they used guns, money, law, religion, politics...as a weapon..."<sup>224</sup> Consequently, many in the Rastafari movement also endeavored to subvert the domination and logic of English. Rastafarian scholar Velma Pollard, in her essay, "Dread Talk: The Speech of Rastafarians in Jamaica," divides *dread talk* into three categories:

- (1) known items bear new meanings,  
e.g. /baa led/, bald' with little hair = non-Rasta
- (2) words bear the weight of their phonological implications,  
e.g. /ovastan/ = understand since if you are in control of an idea, you must stand over it
- (3) and /ai/ words, which denote the universality of the Rasta community. "I" does not simply mean one person. The I-I-I construct signifies the total expression and concern for mankind. Consequently, the I'n'I represents the *I*, *me*, and *we*, all at once.  
e.g. aizaya = ganja.<sup>225</sup>

These linguistic modes of resistance and transformation correspond with what African Caribbean poet, M. NourbeSe Philip terms "i-maging," the ability of the African

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<sup>223</sup> The English spoken by the "people who were brought to the Caribbean...not the official English, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by the conquistadors." It is, of course, a marginalized language due to its inherent African roots. Brathwaite explains that the slaves had to initially submerge their original tongues due to the tragedy of the slave trade and colonialism thereafter. A colonialism where English, Spanish, French, or Dutch were the only languages the conquering Europeans allowed in public discourse, conversation, and respectability as a tool of command and lingual oppression. But, even though the slaves continued to speak Victorian English (in the Anglophone Caribbean), their speech patterns continued to be influenced by their submerged languages, moving "from a purely African form to a form that was African, but which adapted to the new environment and adapted to the cultural imperative of the European languages." This was the foundation of Caribbean nation language - a language developed through the simultaneous process of survival and resistance. It is a strategy that the slave used to disguise herself, to disguise her personality and to retain her culture. It is a language that strives on the tongues, in the mouths, between hands, and below feet of African Caribbean people.

<sup>224</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim* 66.

<sup>225</sup> Velma Pollard, "Dread Talk: The Speech of the Rastafarian in Jamaica," *Caribbean Quarterly* 26, 4 (December 1980): 34-39.

Caribbean writer (and by extension performer) to deconstruct words in order to decipher the irreducible essence of the folk.<sup>226</sup> The writer, artist, or poet, then, is able access a myriad verbal techniques and methods in order to create new i-mages that are able to speak to “the essential being of the people among whom and for whom the artist creates.”<sup>227</sup> In other words, in employing i-maging, dub poetry creates a discursive and performative space that not only speaks to African Caribbean people but also represents the African Caribbean experience.

Relying on these concepts of *riddim* and language, orality is the third element of the dub aesthetic. Dub poetry primarily embodies orality by the simple fact that poets do not simply write them down, they perform them. These poets also link the experience of the Atlantic slave trade to performance as the primary mode of expression. They recall that during enslavement slave owners denied African slaves folk access to resources to read and write. Nonetheless, African slaves were able to create informal spaces of spreading history, tradition, and the like without slave owner’s knowledge, of which storytelling was the lifeline to memory and survival. The oral tradition was central to this subversion in order to transcend the absence of books, documents, and scripture to validate the humanity in the existence of African peoples. Many scholars site Jamaican folklorist Louise Bennett (Miss Lou) as the first Jamaican artist to validate this technique of storytelling and preservation. Her work during the pre-independence era between London and Kingston connected the oral tradition to national pride in articulating an “indigenous” cultural heritage.<sup>228</sup> In dub poetry, however, the oral tradition is not only

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<sup>226</sup> M. NourbeSe Philip, *She Tries Her Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks*, (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>227</sup> M. NourbeSe Philip, *She Tries Her Tongue*, 12.

<sup>228</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 71.

connected to the context of nationalism but also within the context of a revolutionary politic, which critiques society for the continued cultural and physical oppression of African Caribbean folk.

Dub poetry employs the oral tradition in five main features -- song, folk tale, children games, nursery rhymes, and imagery of the Bible. In the first feature, *song*, dub poetry uses the African-derived pattern of call-and-response, where the lead singer (bomma) tells the story in tune while the group (bobbin) responds with a one-line refrain/chorus commenting on the theme given by the leader.<sup>229</sup> These songs were equally rooted in the African-derived religions such as kumina, pocomania, and “revival”, and in European/Christian hymns. *Folk tales* refer to “historical narratives” about individual slaves, ghost stories, or famous trickster tales, which revolved around the story of Anansi stories.<sup>230</sup> With regard to *children games*, dub poems elude to ring games and handclapping that Jamaican children participated in during recreation.<sup>231</sup> Although taken from British tradition, dub poetry uses *nursery rhymes* to reflect their meaninglessness in the reality of poverty-stricken Jamaican ghetto. Mutabaruka’s “Nursery Rhyme Lament”:

little jack  
rememba im?  
im use fe siddung a de corna  
a king st. & barry st.  
de adda day im put im thumb  
inn aim mout’ ...an  
vomit...whiule  
tom tom was stealin’ a woman wig.

Here, the absurdity within the nursery rhyme lies in the fact that these British characters are out of place within the context of ghetto. A final feature of orality is biblical imagery,

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<sup>229</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 71.

<sup>230</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 72.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

which primarily refers to the use of biblical metaphors that apply to a Rastafarian ethos such as Babylon, the delivery of the Righteous, retribution for the Wicked, Judgment Day, Zion, and the Promised Land.<sup>232</sup> In relying on the oral tradition, dub poetry situates itself firmly within a West African aesthetic that relies on 1) the griot tradition and 2) the significance of *nommo* (the spoken word). Linked to the West African griot tradition, dub poetry serves as the mouthpiece and historical text for Jamaican communities.<sup>233</sup> In terms of *nommo*, the power of the word, dub poetry's focus on the sounded word allows things, ideas, and images into being just by being named.<sup>234</sup> According to Jesuit philosopher Walter Ong, this process of "magical potency" not only situates dub poetry as message but also as a vital created experience. Hence, the word without sound (the performance) is unable to set the body and mind of the audience into movement and transformation.<sup>235</sup>

### **Linton Kwesi Johnson: A Case Study**

This section will provide a close reading of Linton Kwesi Johnson's dub poetry, as a case study. It will specifically focus on two poems "Sonny's Lettah" and "Bass Culture" in order to highlight the ways in which LKJ engaged the transnational Jamaican experience and contributed to the dub poetry movement. Primary question is, how does LKJ use the dub poetic aesthetic to articulate a transnational Jamaican experience? What issues does he highlight of significance or critique?

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<sup>232</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 72-73.

<sup>233</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 78.

<sup>234</sup> Habekost, *Verbal Riddim*, 79

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

“Sonny’s Lettah”<sup>236</sup> (1979) appears in LKJ’s second album, *Forces of Victory*, the first record to note that Johnson composed all the words and music. Furthermore, critics have commented that the album was the first to provide a balance between the music and the poems.<sup>237</sup> In “Sonny’s Lettah,” Johnson takes on the persona of Sonny, a recent immigrant to Britain from Jamaica, who has written a letter to his mother in Jamaica, informing her of his brother’s arrest and his imprisonment. In both print and recording, LKJ employs the *dub aesthetic* in order to “dub een” a consciousness of disgust “dubbing out” an unconscious respect for the London police. Within this consciousness, the poem highlights the absurdity of police brutality and the ways in which the London police have inflicted both physical and psychological damage to Jamaicans in the transnational under the SUS laws.<sup>238</sup>

LKJ’s use of the epistolary form is not only an attempt to break traditional poetic form in print but also an attempt to construct a dialogic relationship that situates the audience between London and Kingston. Within this construction, LKJ is able to explore the relationship between a mother and son through the physical and emotional experience of migration. The fact that the poem is a letter begs two questions: 1) who is the intended audience? and 2) what role does the audience play when reading this letter? In many ways, the audience is those who identify as Afro-Jamaicans and/or those who can understand the Jamaican nation language. As the audience is reading the letter, LKJ forces us to embody the totality of a consciousness of a Jamaican mother learning about

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<sup>236</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>237</sup> Stewart, “Linton Kwesi Johnson,” 82.

<sup>238</sup> A revival of the Vagrancy Act of 1824, which allowed police to arrest those they suspected of criminal intent without any evidence; facilitated aggressive presence police in urban areas where blacks had been forced to settle in post-war London (Ashley Dawson, 81).

the violent arrest and imprisonment of her sons. The second and third stanzas<sup>239</sup> apologetic tone create a pathos-oriented framework for this consciousness. Here, LKJ forms the persona of a mother who, seemingly, does not have the means to travel to London to be by her sons' side, which is why Sonny is writing the letter. This also becomes apparent in the penultimate stanza, when Sonny says, "don't fret/ don't get depress an doun-hearted/ Be af good courage till I hear fram you." Here, Sonny continues his apologetic tone in order to calm his mother down, knowing how being so far from her children in their time of need and duress could psychologically and physically debilitate her.

In terms of using language, LKJ not only uses Jamaican nation language as an act of linguistic resistance to the poet form but also becomes a *home space* for Sonny. Under imprisonment, Sonny's comfort lies within the nation language. Not only is this a language that both he and his mother share, it is also Sonny's native tongue of testimony and self-dignity, especially under the inhumane conditions of prison. In utilizing this native tongue, without shame, Sonny is able to present his humanity under the most oppressive of environments -- without a mother, without his brother, in isolation. Sonny's nation language breaks that isolation, allowing his testimony to take full form, squarely in the context of the Jamaican transnational experience, an experience of linguistic community. Furthermore, it forces the audience to "un-read" Sonny as a murderer, and instead as a loving son and brother, whom Babylon has wronged.

LKJ's mastery of *riddim* is best heard in the recording of the poem. The beginning of the recording opens with a smooth reggae beat, initiated by the one-drop *riddim* of the drums, calling the testimony to order. The light strumming of the guitar and

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<sup>239</sup> See Appendix.

the ever-present harmonic sounds correspond with the apologetic tone of Sonny's first five stanzas. The instrumental ends at the lines "Jim start to wriggle/ di police start to giggle." This abrupt end of the initial instrumental not only focuses the audience's attention on the conflict between Jim and the police but also signals the beginning of Sonny's testimony to take shape in the dub. When the instrumental re-enters the soundscape in the seventh stanza, Jim's beating is accompanied by a straight drum and bass *riddim* with no harmonica, sonically embodying the *clash* that ensued between the police and Jim and Sonny. The recording closes with the original instrumental, signaling Sonny's focus on his apology to his mother. Within "Sonny's Lettah," the dub poem becomes more than just a letter, it becomes a lively judicial testimony to both his mother and to the court of public opinion since Sonny's truth will have no other place to have full authority and equity but in the letter, in the *dub*. Dub poetry becomes the sole aesthetic of critiquing police brutality, linguistically and rhythmically providing a platform for the stories of the Black oppressed to come alive, in full truth.<sup>240</sup>

"Bass Culture"<sup>241</sup> appears on the album of the same title in 1980. LKJ dedicates the poem to roots reggae and dub deejay, Big Youth, who was not only known for revolutionizing the deejay scene with his Rastafarian ethos but also known for his ability to bring "every day" talk into the dancehall.<sup>242</sup> In "Bass Culture," embodies Big Youth, explaining the socio-political platform for his dub poetry. Divided into seven sections, the first section roots dub poetry within the context of the transnational history of Black people. Using words such as "blood," "black," and "reared," LKJ creates the imagery of

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<sup>240</sup> Other poems of this kind by LKJ include "Five Nights of Bleeding," "Reggae fi Peach," "Man Free," and "Fight Dem Back"

<sup>241</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>242</sup> Lloyd Bradley, *This Is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music*, (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 291.

dub music as the submerged anger, pain, and history of the enslavement African people, which has come to the surface to “pulse” and “bubble” into the consciousness of the world. He describes it as a “frightful form/like a righteous harm/giving off wild like is madness.” Here, LKJ locates dub poetry as a dignified form of rebellion. Although this rebellion is not necessarily physical, it’s ability to bring this infectious “mad” consciousness, breaks the psychological hold that Babylon has on African and African-descended people.

LKJ continues this imagery of Babylon and madness in the third section. He creates the image of Babylon as a perpetual fiery pit, which the “dread”/Rastas have to confront by honing onto the latent “powah” of “madness” to topple Babylon and all of “di wicked.” In continuing this imagery, LKJ effectively turns the dub poem into a call of action for Black people, specifically African Caribbean people to rise up against the systems of oppression. In the fourth section, LKJ uses reportage diction in order to create the imagery of the travelling Black man, observing the destruction of Babylon but still holding firm to “love,” one of his tools for surviving Babylon. LKJ extends this juxtaposition between Babylon’s hurt and the dread’s love into the fifth section. In LKJ’s vision of dub poetry, the tension of Babylon will “shatter” the more people wail, sound, and “chant” the suffering into the human consciousness, bringing “love” to the future generation of Black folk. In the sixth section, “SCATTA-MATTA-SHATTA-SHACK!/ what a beat!,” LKJ poignantly and succinctly uses onomatopoeia to show the power of the sound, the pulse, and the word to metaphorically tear down Babylon. The seventh section simply confirms this strategy with its rhythmic ending. This is the only time in the



poem when LKJ employs a consistent end rhyme to a stanza, signaling of oppression's demise.

Through a close read of "Sonny's Lettah" and "Bass Culture," LKJ's dub poetry offers a vivid picture of not only the transnational Caribbean experience in London but also ties their struggle to the global affects of racism and white supremacy. While "Sonny's Lettah" serves as a more specific concern with regard to police brutality. Both poems attest to the poetic safe space that dub poetry affords to the transnational Jamaican experience, nestled in the fight against Babylon and dubbing een the rhythmic and lyrical reality of that experience.

### **Conclusion**

At the intersection of the Black Power Movement, the Caribbean Artist Movement, and Dub Music between Kingston and London, dub poetry became a cultural art form that represented the transnational African Jamaican experience into the social, poetic, and musical consciousness. In doing so, dub poetry formed a vast network of stories and soundings, expanding the discourse of the transnational Caribbean experience. This experience is more than just political movements; more than just literary interventions, more than mere musical innovation. This experience encompasses the totality and links between these movements. Consequently, for further inquiry into the \ transnational Caribbean experience, scholars must embody the language, discourse, and perspectives from these movements in order for these stories to thrive in the consciousness of Caribbean people, wherever they may reside.

This paper has answered some important questions, has key implications, and raises further questions for future research. Firstly, since this research did not include the dub poetry in the Caribbean diaspora, I think that more intentional analysis of the links and breaks between the Canadian dub poetry within the transnational Jamaican experience is in order. Moreover, while my research did explicitly discuss gender within the context of the dub poetry, poets/artists such as Jean “Binta” Breeze, Afua Cooper, and Lillian Allen, provide a African Caribbean feminist critique and understanding of migration, colonialism, and white supremacy that must not be forgotten, especially in poems such as “Riddym Ravings,” “Woman A Wail,” and “Harriet Tubman,” respectively. Finally, during the time period of the dub poetry movement, African American poets in the United States such as Gil Scot Heron, Gary Byrd, and the Last Poets were experimenting with combining poetry with soul and jazz music. The Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement, and the rise of soul, R&B, and later hip hop inspired these artists. Further research should engage the ways in which the dub poetry and spoken word movements interacted with each other in a larger, nuanced conversation around the connection between art forms that break literary and music boundaries across the African Diaspora.

I’ve adhered to the Honor Code on this assignment

X Warren Harding

## Appendix

**Sonny's Lettah**

(Anti-Sus Poem)

Brixtan Prison  
 Jebb Avenue  
 Landan south-west two  
 Inglan

Dear Mama,  
 Good Day.  
 I hope dat wen  
 deze few lines reach yu,  
 they may find yu in di bes af helt.

Mama,  
 I don't know how fi tell yu dis,  
 cause I did mek a salim pramis  
 fi tek care a likkle Jim  
 an try mi bes fi look out fi him.

Mama,  
 I really did try mi bes,  
 but nondiless  
 mi sorry fi tell yu  
 she poor likkle Jim get arres.

It woz di miggles a di rush howah  
 wen evrybody just a hosel an a bosel  
 fi goh home fi dem evening showah;  
 mi an Jim stan-up  
 waitin pan a bus,  
 nat cauzin no fus,  
 wen all af a sudden a police van pull-up.  
 Out jump tree policeman  
 di hole a dem carryin batam.  
 Dem waak straight up to mi an Jim.

One a dem hol awn to Jim  
 she him tekin him in;  
 Jim tell him fi let goh a him  
 far him noh dhu notn  
 an him naw teef,  
 nat even a butn.

Jim start to wriggle  
 di police start to giggle.

Mama,  
 mek I tell yu whe dem dhu to Jim  
 Mama,  
 mek I tell yu whe dem dhu to him:

dem tump him in him belly  
 an it turn to jelly  
 dem lick him pan him back  
 an him rib get pap  
 dem lick him pan him hed  
 but it tuff like led  
 dem kick him in him seed  
 an it started to bleed

Mama,  
 I jus coudn stan-up deh  
 an noh dhu notn:  
 soh mu jook one in him eye  
 an him started to cry  
 mi tump one in him mout  
 an him started to shout  
 mi kick one pan him shin  
 an him started to spin  
 mi tump him pan him chin  
 an him drap pan a bin

an crash  
 an ded.

Mama,  
 more policeman come dung  
 an beat mi to di grung;  
 dem charge Jim fi sus,  
 dem charge mi fi murdah.

Mama,  
 don't fret,  
 don't get depress  
 an doun-hearted.  
 Be af good courage  
 till I hear fram you.

I remain

your son,  
Sonny.

### **Bass Culture (for Big Yout)**

1  
muzik of blood  
black reared  
pain rooted  
heart geared

all tensed up  
in di bubble an di bounce  
an di leap an di weight-drop

it is di beat of di heart  
this pulsing of blood that is a bubblin bass  
a bad bad beat  
pushin gainst di wall  
whe bar black blood

an is a whole heappa  
passion a gather  
like a frightful form  
like a righteous harm  
giving off wild like is madness

2  
bad out deh

3  
hattah dan di hites of fire  
livin heat doun volcano core  
is di cultural wave a dread people deal  
spirits riled  
as rise an rail thunda-wise  
latent powah  
in a form resembling madness  
like violence is di show  
burstin outta slave shackle  
look ya! Boun fi harm di wicked

4  
man feel  
him hurt confirm  
man site

destruction all aroun  
 man turn  
 love still confirm  
 him destiny a shine lite-wise  
 soh life tek di form whe shif from calm  
 an hold di way of a deadly storm

5

culture pulsing  
 high temperature blood  
 swingin anger  
 shatterin di tightened hold  
 di false fold  
 round flesh whe wail freedom  
 bittah cause a blues  
 cause a maggot suffering  
 cause a blood klaat pressure  
 yet still breedin love  
 far more mellow  
 than di soun of shapes  
 chanting loudly

6

SCATTA-MATTA-SHATTA-SHACK!  
 what a beat!

7

for di time is nigh  
 when passion gather high  
 when di beat jus lash  
 when di wall mus smash  
 an di beat will shif  
 as di culture alltah  
 when oppression scatah

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