

Jamaican-Canadian 'Poetics of Relations': Dub Poetry, Musical Rhythm, and Flows of Transnational Black Consciousness¹

"La 'poética relacional' jamaicano-canadiense: Poesía dub, ritmo musical y flujos de conciencia negra transnacional"

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Para citaciones: Raussert, Wilfried. "Jamaican-Canadian 'Poetics of Relations': Dub Poetry, Musical Rhythm, and Flows of Transnational Black Consciousness". *PerspectivasAfro* 3/2 (2024): 274-293. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.32997/pa-2024-4731>

Recibido: 30 de septiembre de 2023

Aprobado: 15 de diciembre de 2023

Editora: Silvia Valero. Universidad de Cartagena-Colombia.

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ABSTRACT

The article places dub poetry in the context of traveling sounds of music and oral poetry between the Caribbean, Canada, and England. Looking at dub poetry from a hemispheric and transnational perspective and through the lens of Glissant's 'poetics of Relations,' the article puts focus on Canadian dub poetry and relates it to Jamaican beginnings and diasporic extensions in Britain. As the article shows, dub poetry plays a key role as transnational and transgeneric sound archive (Antwi) and as poetic form of yearning for completion, thus adding new narratives to a larger discourse of Black transnationalism that is by no means limited or necessarily linked to "pan-Africanism or other kinds of Black-isms". Instead, dub poetry also responds to all kinds of international movements such as anti-colonialism, socialism and feminism to create transnational imaginaries and historiographies of diasporic Black cultures.

Keywords: dub poetry, Black music, Black Canada, call-and-response, transnational archive.

RESUMEN

El artículo sitúa la poesía dub en el contexto de los sonidos itinerantes de la música y la poesía oral entre el Caribe, Canadá e Inglaterra. Enfocando la poesía dub desde una perspectiva hemisférica y transnacional y a través de la lente de la "poética de las relaciones" de Glissant, el artículo se centra en la poesía dub canadiense y la relaciona con los inicios jamaicanos y las extensiones diaspóricas en Gran Bretaña. Como muestra el artículo, la poesía dub desempeña un papel clave como archivo sonoro transnacional y transgenérico (Antwi) y como forma poética de anhelo de culminación, añadiendo así nuevas narrativas a un discurso más amplio de transnacionalismo negro que no está en absoluto limitado ni necesariamente vinculado al "panafricanismo u otros tipos de negritud". Por el contrario, la poesía dub también responde a todo tipo de movimientos internacionales como el anticolonialismo, el socialismo y el feminismo para crear imaginarios e historiografías transnacionales de las culturas negras diaspóricas.

Palabras clave: carnival; Buenos Aires; race; Afro-Descendants; women.

¹ The article is the outcome of individual research in the larger framework of Merian Sybilla CALAS investigation about Latin America and the Caribbean. The author is currently Director of Research

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beat yu drums
Rasta Man
an revive de people dem soul
Stir dem blood
mek dem art beat as one
wid yu drums
(Oku Onuora, *Echo*)

Traditionally, reggae artists have cherished admiration “for a united Africa with Ethiopia serving as the core in Rastafarian faith and reggae music” (Tomlinson, “Dancehall” 267). Especially, artists like Bob Marley, Burning Spear, and Peter Tosh encouraged Black empowerment, expressed anti-colonial resistance, and denounced racism as well as social inequality. Dub poetry’s relationship with reggae and dub is symbiotic, as I argue, in content and style. Dub poetry has its roots in Jamaican deejay culture and represents an expression of performance poetry for which the rhythms of reggae are central and defining features. According to Christopher Partridge, dub brings “the spheres of music, literature and oral performance into creative engagement [...]” (198). For Christian Habekost, “[...] the sound of the spoken word gives rise to musical ‘riddim’” (1). Like reggae is seen as “the voice of the people,” dub poetry serves as poetic expression from the people for the people (Tomlinson, “Dancehall” 267).

Dub poetry followed the principal migratory routes of Jamaicans to England and Canada. It traveled in the slipstream of reggae with the global musical success of artists like Marley and Tosh. It also made its presence in cultural festivals in the Americas such as in Cuba where Lillian Allen listened to the Jamaican poet Oku Onuora; an experience which inspired her to launch the Canadian dub poetry movement in Toronto in the 1980s (Tomlinson, *Aesthetic* 71). Radio shows and recordings provided further venues for dub poetry to cross borders and turn into “a transnational and transgeneric sound archive” (Antwi 66). As traveling sound, dub poetry has served important functions for Black diasporic communities. From Jamaican poets Mutabaruka and Onuora to the Canadian dub poets Lillian Allen and Afua Cooper, dub poetry has served as consciousness-raising and community-building artistic expression, as transnational historiography, and as expression of Black empowerment. It is a transnational diasporic imaginary, also drawing upon Pan-African ideas, that feeds dub poetic expression and lets it reach out to Black communities on a global scale in its protests against inequality, poverty, racism, class oppression, and political corruption in Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, Europe, Latin America, and the USA (Tomlinson, *Aesthetic*). Dub poetry along with reggae, dancehall, and other Black Cultural expressions has shaped our contemporary popular culture beyond Black diasporic communities. As Stuart Hall puts it, “For a time, black Afro-Caribbeans were in the vanguard of these avant-garde cultural practices, like cultural navigators crossing without passports between ragga, jungle, scratch, rap and electro-funk” (13). These cultural forms “mark the production of ‘the new’ and the transgressive alongside the traditional and the ‘preservation of the past’” (12). Dub poetry gains its transgressive beats “from various ideological counter-discursive pressure points, Black consciousness, decolonization, Garveyism, Rastafarianism, Marxism/socialism to anti-colonial nationalism” (Buckner 255-256).

Dub like reggae functions as seismographic reaction to crisis, it expresses the feelings and burdens of history as well as the everyday present and it seeks to provide answers for crisis. In Jamaica, Canada and England twilight and aftermath of colonialism created multiethnic and multicultural societies struggling in different ways

with colonial burdens and colonial consequences. Jamaica's post-independence after 1962 cemented racial and class divide, the rural and urban split, drug consumption, crime and violence (Thomson 3-5). While the beginning of Afro-Caribbean migration to Britain dates back to the Windrush generation of the 1940s, during the 1980s, England witnessed a new wave of migrants from former colonies like Jamaica, the larger Caribbean, and Africa. The discrimination and marginalization of black immigrants by British authorities culminated a series of race riots. In 1981 and 1985 major riots broke out in British cities. These included: in 1981, Brixton (London), Toxteth (Liverpool), Handsworth (Birmingham) and Chapeltown (Leeds), and in 1985, Broadwater Farm (London), Brixton (London) and Handsworth (Birmingham). While multicultural politics in Canada in the 1970s promised integration and inclusion, increasingly, racism and exclusion shaped the reality of many Jamaican immigrants up North (Rausser We break bread, 40). In all three geographical settings dub poetry has poetically responded to these moments of crisis.

What is dub? Originally and by definition, dub is the disassembled and exclusively prepared version of an existing music track (primarily from the genre of reggae music) for use with sound systems. Dub versions thus serve as a basis for improvisation by deejays and singers and have become the live forum for these artists in Jamaican dancehall (Philipps 15). The development of dub goes hand in hand with the development of studio technology and experimentation in the world of electronic sound. For dub poets, this cultural practice also provides a platform to compose poetry in the rhythms of ska and reggae and/or perform it to rhythms of the aforementioned musical genres. This type of poetry is embedded in the technological sound innovation brought about by Black Jamaican and Caribbean culture and represents a striking example of the intersection of technological creativity, oral culture, and written expression. Building on a long tradition of Caribbean oral poetic tradition, dub poetry has become an important venue to create transnational links in diasporic cultural processes of affirmation and resistance among Black communities in the Americas and beyond.

According to Carolyn Cooper, to understand Jamaican popular culture we need "to cross the divide between Slackness and Culture, between Jamaican and English, between the oral and the scribal traditions" (*Noises* 12). The sound and rhythm of language of this kind of poetry like dub derive from the expressive power of Caribbean Creole. Caribbean Creole represents "a new language to be called dialect, patois, Bad Talk, and now Nation Language or Creole" (Berry xxv). Its idiosyncratic textures give this language a melodic and rhythmic quality and enables poets and musicians to express particular Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic experiences. Historically, it has emerged from various cultural contact zones in the colonial period. Mostly West African cultures, and their variations, intermixed with cultural expressions of Western, Eastern, and indigenous cultures. While English with its London, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh voices became the hegemonic language in many parts of Caribbean Island cultures, a West African language response united the polylingual African diaspora in the creation of a new Creole language. This language became the everyday expression of the West Indian population which were predominantly descendants of the African people taken by capture and enslaved for labor from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.

In 1943, Jamaican folklorist and poet Louise Bennett was allowed to present some of her poems as dialect verse in Jamaica's first radio station (Berry xvi). Her reading became a major source of inspiration for Black poets in the Caribbean to draw on Caribbean Creole language to express their poetic sentiment. As Berry sums it up nicely, "Essential are the live electric patterns of Jamaican speech she reproduces, clustered and heightened with surprise. She makes it seem her feelings are always merged with the people's" (xvii). With a nod to Berry, I

maintain that the roots for dub poetry's power to create transnational alliances lie precisely in its folk-based linguistic vitality to express and capture the everyday experience of West Indian and Caribbean diasporic lives including their living consciousness of history. The creation and poetic use of a new language represent a direct creative response to crisis, threats to be silenced and annihilated. They give voice to resilience, resistance, but also belonging.

It is a poetics of relations (Glissant, *Introduction*) that shapes the emergence and development of dub poetry in Jamaica, the larger Caribbean, Canada, the USA, and England. While dub poets respond to the cultural environments they are speaking from, they also respond to a larger transnational trajectory of Black political and historical consciousness that draws on African, Caribbean, American, and European histories. Lecturing on the 'Creolizations in the Caribbean and the Americas,' Edouard Glissant emphasizes the importance to see "identity as rhizome, identity no longer a single root, but a root reaching out to other roots" (11). For him, it is "a poetics of Relations" that allows us to understand the multiple connectedness of individuals and communities in the contemporary world (11). Glissant's ideas also recall Paul Gilroy's concept of "Black metacommunication" (Gilroy 75); this aesthetic practice expresses a cultural tradition of repetition with a difference. It is different than declaring a "style, genre or particular performance [...] as expressive of the absolute essence of the group that produced it" (175). 'Black metacommunication' then becomes a signifier for Black diasporic creativity at large. Reggae, dub, and dub poetry are Black cultural expressions that depart from local origins, initially in Kingston, Jamaica, and then follow the migratory routes of Jamaicans to England and Canada in particular to take on new forms of expression. Satch Hoyt calls this process "Afro Diasporization" and emphasizes the key role of Black musical expression in this context (10). With reggae, dub, and dub poetry we encounter forms of sonic transmutations that on the one hand respond to change, contact, and crisis in the diaspora; on the other hand, they represent creative expressions that give voice to transnational histories and experiences. Dub poets tend to embrace a "plurality of vision [which] gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal" (Said 148). Their transnational visions join a larger discourse of Black transnationalism that is by no means limited or necessarily linked to "pan-Africanism or other kinds of black-isms" (Kelley and Patterson 27). Instead, they also respond to all kinds of international movements such as socialism, feminism, surrealism among others (Rausser and Steinitz 6).

Jamaican Beginnings

Dub poetry's beginnings date back to the 1970s in Jamaica, where it rapidly became a powerful expression of popular culture and political resistance. Dub as spoken-word-written-text-music-performance is deeply embedded in Caribbean performance culture. Bob Marley's reggae music with its 'roots' quality shaped Jamaican culture in the 1970s. Marley's reggae songs expressed an "expanded folk consciousness" (D'Aguiar xxv), gave voice to Rastafari philosophy, and inspired Jamaican born poets like Linton Kwesi Johnson and Oku Onuora to create a performance-style poetry to become known as dub poetry. Dub poetry followed reggae music to England and Canada in the 1970s. Black and white youth in London, Toronto, and Montreal gravitated towards reggae produced in Jamaica. Singles of reggae tunes flooded record stores in cities beyond Kingston, Jamaica. In particular, the slow, steady, and repetitive bass line from reggae invited DJs to perform their poetry on the instrumental B sides. With Jamaican migration to England and Canada, the music flows crossing national and

continental boundaries, and Jamaican-invented sound systems in a battery of huge speakers presented reggae sounds in music clubs and private parties (ix-xi). With reggae music and sound system-based verbal improvisation, Jamaican and Caribbean culture at large made its presence in England and Canada, in particular. The songs and lyrics promulgated an awareness of coloniality, the history of enslavement, and a Pan-African consciousness spurred by Marcus Garvey's ideas of liberating Black people from slave mentality. The Caribbean experience of colonization and exploitation spoke to urban experience of the inner-city Black youth in metropolis like London, Toronto, and Montreal. Jamaican dub poet Oku Onuora's emblematic poem "Echo" provides a good example: "fi I de ghetto youth / it kinda cute / all day I trod earth / a look fi work / till I shoes sole wear down / an I foot a touch de groun / wey I live fa eh?" (Onuora 33). Dub poets have shared a strong edge to connect the experience of history beyond local, regional, national, and continental boundaries as expressed in Onuora's poem "Yesterday / Today / Tomorrow" in which the poetically declared anti-colonial struggle links Africa, Cuba, and the larger Caribbean (77-81). Dub poetry is characterized by a strong transnational dialog which shows in the formation and influences behind its poets. Lindon Kwesi Johnson's poetic form, e.g. while rooted in Jamaican oral culture, shows transcultural influences by writers like Kamau Braithwaite (Barbados), Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Christopher Okigbo (Nigeria), and the Last Poets (USA) (D'Aguiar xi).

Through poetry, performed in public – on the radio, in live shows – to the rhythm and sound of ska and reggae music, dub poets advanced Black oral tradition and created a new blueprint for Black poetic expression that conquered stage and page at the same time. While blues and jazz had inspired African American poets in particular to create performance-oriented poetic expressions to give voice to pride, protest, and transnational Black alliances in the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, and jazz, funk, and soul during the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s, dub poetry based on ska and reggae in the 1970s and 1980s turned into a powerful medium for transnational visions of solidarity and belonging in Jamaican diaspora cultures in England and Canada. As concerns Caribbean beginnings, artists like Oku Onuora, Mutabaruka, and Michael Smith established dub poetry in Kingston, Jamaica. In London, speaking to a continuing anti-colonial struggle, Jamaican born Linton Kwesi Johnson and Jean Binta Breeze wrote and performed dub poetry, creating an artistic scene that reached out to other Jamaican communities in England. Lillian Allen, Afua Cooper, and Clifton Joseph, among others, created a diasporic dub poetry scene in Canada, with Toronto as its center but also a strong presence in Montreal (Carr 10–12).

Dub Poetry and the Creation of Voice

For the dub poet, writing involves the rewriting of history, the creation of voice, and the creation of audience or if you like community beyond place and nation. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur exalts poetry for preserving memory while the instances of power often silence it for political interests: "only poetry preserves the force of unforgetting" (501). Similarly, Glissant stresses that the writer alone holds the power to create expressions of memory capable of transcending "nonhistory" (*Poetics* xvi). Literature is conceived as a relational force that connects people, places, and times. Literary expression thus becomes a privileged medium to unfold the writers' ability to project the future of their communities in a reassessment of the past. Or as Toni Morrison puts it so eloquently: "a silence broken, a void filled, an unspeakable thing spoken at last" (149). Dub poetry stands for an Afro-Caribbean rhythmic mode of telling diasporic histories. Through musical and rhythmical

elements dub poetry performs envisioned and lived bridges between uneven temporalities, distant, yet entangled hemispheres on various continents.

How do dub poets translate a poetics of relations into text and performance? While dub poetry is generally associated with resistance and protest, it is frequently overlooked that it also plows the ground to create a sense of belonging. Dub poetry addresses its audience in a holistic way, as “a site of an embodied, erotic cognition” (Antwi 72). Antwi speaks of “making yearning a poetic diction for dub poets” (74). Addressing issues of disappointment and incompleteness, dub poetry seduces the listener into a politics of relation and engagement. For Antwi, dub poetry represents “an erotic poetic form” (74). In particular through its rhythmic component serving up iambic line beat into a reggae rhythm, it talks, makes us move, makes us respond, moves us into consciousness and engagement (D’Aguiar xi). Transnational memory and political consciousness meet emotional expressivity, and the rhythmic quality inspires head-shaking, spine twisting, and foot tapping among the listeners. The longing expressed in dub poetry speaks of completion and belonging and makes it appealing to diasporic communities as shall be explored further by looking at selected poems by Oku Onuora from Jamaica, Jamaican born Linton Kwesi Johnson from England, Afua Cooper and Lillian Allen, both Jamaican born and expressing their Canadian diasporic experience. A stronger focus will be on the Canadian dub poets to strengthen the hemispheric perspective and include a still often neglected Canadian perspective in the research on dub and reggae cultures.

Oku Onuora and Linton Kwesi Johnson

Oku Onuora started writing his first poems in Ford Augusta prison in Jamaica in 1971. At that point in time he was serving a 15-year sentence due to participating in guerilla activities, armed robberies, demonstrations against police violence, and anti-government political action. As Tim Wells reminds us, Onuora was the first prisoner allowed to present and perform his radical poetry with the musical support of Cedric ‘Im’ Brooks’s reggae band, The Light of Saba, at Ford Augusta prison in 1974. Two years later he won three awards at the Jamaican Literary Festival (Wells 91-92). The first edition of his book *Echo* was published in 1978. While he was released from prison, his poetry continued to be censored and condemned as too radical. Still frequently overlooked by critics, though, Onuora’s work is full of love poetry. “Then Beloved” from the collection *Echo* (1985) is just one example:

when the bloody mud has dried
...
then beloved
we can lie
upon the grass
under the stars
make love
and create. (Onuora 51)

The poem expresses a longing for a post-oppression period of community and creativity. Important is the connection that the poet makes between love and creativity. This connection appears essential for creative action in the future but also suggests its already prevailing presence in the here-and-now. Similarly, the diction

of Onuora's "Poem (for D.F.)" (57) presents a seductive and soothing sound relating painting, dance, and poetry and fusing them into a collaborative act of creating an aura of love and freedom.

rousin pride
blak body
mo vin
mooovin sen/su/ous/ly
before eyes
into mind
through space
& time
paint lov
& freeeeeeee
dom. (57)

The poem suggests a dialogic interaction between various artistic expressions and the sensual rhetoric evokes a sense of belonging expressed through the co-presence of love and freedom. The key factor to success is the creativity of artists in dialog as the poem is dedicated to the Jamaican visual artist and dancer Denise Francis.

A longing for completion also underlies Linton Kwesi Johnson's poetic expression. He moved from Jamaica to England at a young age in the early 1960s. Arguably England's most prominent Jamaican dub voice until today, he mixes a strong race and class consciousness with a reconciliatory vision. While dramatizing the Black struggle against oppression in England, against despotic authority on a global scale and demonstrating a relentless desire for the eradication of poverty in Africa, England, and Jamaica, his canon of poetry shows an underlying principle of love and harmony that nourishes his creativity as form of social consciousness and resistance (D'Aguiar x). In "Seasons of the Heart," he announces that "Life is the greatest teacher / Love is the lesson to be learned" (Johnson 79). In his poetic contemplation "Bass Culture," he lets the principle of love emerge out of a poetic mood of anger and rebellion:

Culture pulsing
High temperature blood
Swingin anger
...
Yet still breedin love
Far mor mellow
Than di soun of shapes
Chanting loudly. (Johnson 14-15)

This sense of 'breedin love' finds its dialogic expression in the lines of Johnson's poem "Beacon of Hope": "I will give him bread / He will bring good news from afar / I will give him water / He will bring me a gift of light" (59). As a response to crisis, Johnson's poetry promotes transnational solidarity. This becomes most explicit in his poem "It Dread inna Ingran" where he refers to colonial history and cultural hybridity in the Caribbean but transplants it into the racial struggle for integration in England during the racist Thatcher administration in the

1980s. The poem represents a call for inclusion and explores transethnic, transcultural as well as transnational solidarity as key for a continuing Black presence in England.

rite now,
African
Asian
West Indian
an Black British
stan firm inna Innglan
far noh mattah wat dey say,
come wat may,
we are here to stay. (22)

The naming and listing of various Black cultures as interconnected appear common practice in dub poetry and are repeatedly used to create a transcultural Black tapestry that helps propagate the idea of transnational Black communities. The yearning of staying and belonging is embedded in a dialogic connectivity between various (im)migrant groups.

Dub Poetry in Canada

We observe similar dialogic patterns in Canadian dub poetry. In the poetry of Lillian Allen and Afua Cooper, these patterns form the matrix to link Jamaican cultural roots with Canadian diasporic culture and to connect Black cultural experience in cities like Toronto with transnational archives of Black history. Their poems, while extending the resistance narratives of Jamaican antecedents, create a sense of love and belonging in the diaspora (Raussert 2021). For them, poetry represents cultural expression with potential for social change and a call-and-response model with its roots in Afro-descendant music and oral culture occupies a natural place in their poetic and performative practice. Their rhythm-oriented poetry adds new narratives to the transnational and transgeneric sound archive (Antwi) linking Black cultures and people across borders. Creating their poems from their diasporic positioning within Canada, their poems express a yearning for belonging in critical dialog with a multiethnic Canadian society and a still prevailing white hegemonic structure. The quintessential Black call-and-response model represents a temporal and spatial component in the process of creating transnational and transcultural links within an imaginary of belonging to and within Canadian society. On the one hand, it allows the poets relate the voices of the past to the voices of the present, on the other hand, it allows to think together distant places metaphorically and symbolically. As I argue, it represents a cultural practice that calls for completion, directly connects the poet with her audience, creates a sense of solidarity and connectedness because it involves an unmistakable address and invitation to exchange. This also means that in the act of performance, a temporary sense of community, shared experience, and togetherness is already conveyed. At the same time, the use of call-and-response signifies the poet's assumed readiness to respond and communicate directly to her audience. Thus, many of Allen's and Cooper's dub poems appear as narrative extensions of and lyrical responses to a call already lanced by Black diasporic audiences and Black historical experience. While explicit in their critique of racism, exclusion, and oppression, they conserve a caring tenderness in their poetic

voices expressing a yearning for connectivity, community, family, and harmony with nature and society, as in "Uncles", one of Cooper's poems from *Black Matters*:

Uncles have been travelling and toiling for a long time
They often think of home
Of their mothers making them chocolate tea
And fry fish and bammie
Of teaching their nieces to ride bicycles
Sitting on verandahs with their wives eating popsicles. (Cooper and Raussert 32)

Allen's and Cooper's poetry resorts to music as a rhythmic structure, content, and performance in order to mediate temporalities from the colonial past with the promised land of a better future. Both poets express historical transculturations (Raussert and Isensee 2008) in terms of language through a mix of Standard English and Jamaican Creole/Patois, and through a mix of oral and printed poetry. The blending of distinct linguistic rhythms of Jamaican Creole/Patois with musical beats from reggae creates a strong rhythmical expression of lived and remembered temporality (Habekost). In sum, dub poetry in the style of Cooper and Allen is oral history. And its memory work is self-reflexive, including mnemonic patterns that support memorization in contemporary cultural work.

Born in Jamaica, Cooper moved to Canada in 1980. She literally makes history tangible and audible in her writing and performances. She embeds her writing within a conception of the social as changeable. History does not remain an abstract thing. History is felt, lived, expressed, and reflected in the work of this poet, who at the same time is a historian. As a founder of Toronto's Dub Poets Collective and a vibrant performer, with several recordings to her credit including *Love and Revolution* (Cooper, *Love*), Cooper makes history come alive through a voice whose rhythm and accentuation is shaped by the soundings of reggae and other musical expressions. As Lisa Tomlinson puts it, Cooper's dub poetry and her literary historical work "reposition the path of the Black Atlantic" to include "the unique feature of cultural exchange between Canada, her native Jamaica, and the wider Caribbean" (*Aesthetic* 107). Indeed, Cooper puts Black history and Black literature on the cultural map of Canada. "Canada is the place where Black literature is happening," she insists, referring to contemporary writers such as Dionne Brand, Olive Senior, and Esi Edugyan (110).

Strongly influenced by Oku Onour's dub poems from Jamaica, Cooper locates in reggae and its rhythms major possibilities for shaping "sound, rhythm, voice, and music in her poetry" (qtd. in Tomlinson, *Aesthetic* 112). In her diasporic historiographies she synthesizes the oral and the "page poet" (113). Like dub poetry overall, Cooper's poetry is frequently chanted and performed to reggae rhythms. It also borrows from and mixes together American rhythm & blues, calypso, jazz, Afro-Latin rhythms, and rap, and draws on African and Caribbean oral traditions while adding diasporic variations dependent on the performance setting. Her poetic historiographies spiritually resort to the Rastafarian movement (Knopf 254) and reveal that her vision of the social world embraces the rational as well as the spiritual. Her work fuses the factual with the affectionate, and archival memory with imagination. In her most recent poetry collection, *Black Matters* (Cooper and Raussert), a sense of belonging is memory work and imaginary flight at the same time. In the poem "A World greener than Eden," Cooper is remembering her father and grandfather as planter, gardener, and cultivator. She creates a multi-generational tapestry of Black men as rooted and connected to land and community:

My father planted a provision ground
with yam of all sorts
yellow
Negro
afu....
My father always praised the soil
Decades before my grandfather planted citrus groves ...
and grapefruit trees that bore so much that neighbours
friends, and passersby
invited themselves into our yard to partake ...
These men built a well,
with a spout pointing in each of the four directions,
that carried water to irrigate the crops they planted. (Cooper and Raussert 67-71)

While the above poem expresses the poet's act of remembering, in the poem "Live with you in a house by the river," of the same collection, Cooper envisions a pastoral scene of fulfilled domestic life in the future:

You will grow lilies and morning glory
at the bottom of the steps that lead to the verandah
You will line the footpath with red and white roses
You will colour our cottage
with blue and gold from a Haitian painting. (59)

Both poems express a deep desire for home and belonging that is cloaked in images of Black Caribbean culture and universal in its appeal.

Cooper's work is emblematic of a dub poetry scene in Canada characterized by dynamic compositions and performances, as well as mixed media borrowings from theatre, video art, and electronics. Thematically, she addresses a wide range of issues such as colonialism, slavery, diasporic displacement, racism, sexism, police violence, immigration, homelessness, and class divide. In Cooper's poetry, history is written large and juxtaposed and fused with personal life stories. Her dub poetry, accordingly, represents an individual and collective way of telling history(ies). Similar to African American poets in the USA and dub poets in Jamaica, Cooper employs call-and-response patterns with a recurrent chorus that also rhythmically structures the poems and invites a dialogue between poet and community. In an interview with Emily Allen Williams she insists, "I am in communion with the audience. I am creating a dialogue – a discursive space" (Cooper, qtd. in Williams 323). Performing poetry becomes a sacred act: "We – the audience with me – are 'breaking bread together'" (323).

Cooper has made her mark in African Canadian culture and politics as a dub poet, activist historian, and cultural worker. She has challenged the Canadian myth of the "Two Solitudes" – the French and the English and their conflicted relationship (Knopf 38). In her work, she unearths silenced Black Canadian history and draws attention to the lot of First Nation people in Canada as well as the Caribbean. According to her, "slavery in Canada has been Canada's best-kept secret" (Cooper, qtd. in Williams 324), and she makes it her objective to recover and discover the history of Black people in Canada and their transatlantic and inter-American diasporic links from colonial times to the present. From the very beginning of her career as poet, music has played a central role. Hand-clapping and singing from church services and roadside preaching practices in Jamaica formed her first

musical influences. In an interview with H. Nigel Thomas (2006), Cooper remembers: "We were discovering who we were as Africans and making it central to our identity" (Cooper, qtd. in Thomas 74). To her, heritage and music became a firm bond: "Popular music – reggae music especially, dub poetry with drums in the background – and theatre with a focus on African style and issues of African identity were all ways we used to reclaim that heritage" (74).

For her early poems from *Breaking Chains* she worked with an African percussion group in the style of spoken word (Williams 317). Having grown up in the 1970s, she belongs to a generation with a new consciousness of Black historiography. Rastafari was prominent, reggae music blossomed in Jamaica, Black history and Black power ideas circulated among the younger generation, and Walter Rodney became a source of inspiration for Black struggle. Already before Cooper's move from Jamaica to Canada, the ideas of anti-apartheid and Black Power crisscrossed the Americas. The Toronto dub community emerged out of the Black political struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. In Cooper's memories, demonstrations and marches would end in public places and parks where people would talk, dance, sing, perform, and make music. An artistic movement accompanied the political movement, and "the arts were central in every way" in the Black struggles against discrimination and apartheid (319).

Cooper's poems in many ways pay homage to Black musical expression, celebrating the musical achievements of Bob Marley and Mahalia Jackson, among others. Music to Cooper represents a rhythmic and spiritual force. The content, structure, and performance of her poetry have musical roots. "Politically she is anti-colonial and a Black feminist" (Rausser 43). Her poems let female bodies in particular move, dance, and transcend. Bodies give birth, die, and rise up again. Music and movement are conceived as fundamental to the liberation of spirit, body, and society at large. Jamaican Creole/Patois adds a rhythmic tonality to her voice in "She Dance":

She dance wid di wind
fi di wind
against di wind
har hands held high in supplication to God
she dance and dance
now is like Damballah possess har. (Cooper, *Memories* 99)

The female dancer's moves are multidirectional. She goes with and against the wind. Cooper suggests both affirmation and resistance in the short poetic lines. The woman's dance expresses a Pan-African consciousness. Music, rhythm, and dance from the African west coast join with Black diasporic moves. Music is celebrated as a life force. Many of the poems in *Memories Have Tongue* like "Stepping To Da Muse / Sic" and "The Upper Room" are expressions of transcendence. Black music and rhythms pave the way to uplift and ascent. Inspired by the voice of Mahalia Jackson, icon of African American gospel music, the poetic voice in "The Upper Room" declares:

You crown me with your chants
And I spin, yes
I stumble and then

I rise
As you take me to the Upper Room. (101)

Cooper's poetic women are women in the whirlwind of history. As Keith B. Mitchell puts it, "Cooper is especially interested in recuperating and revising forgotten and submerged histories of African-Canadian women" (38). For her, it is essential to address different generations, from the very young to the very old, to remind them of the bonds and ties of past and present African diaspora. In her historic imagination she resurrects Marie Joseph Angélique, a slave woman who put fire to her master's house and burned down most of Montreal as a consequence, and she does so in different types of texts, for different age groups and audiences. Cooper starts off with a children's poem, "Marie Joseph Angélique." A longer, more elaborate version occurs in "Confessions of a Woman Who Burnt Down a Town" and the historical biography *The Hanging of Angélique: Canada, Slavery, and the Burning of Montréal* (2006b), which became a bestseller and award-winning historical book.

Cooper wants to make unheard voices heard. She is especially interested in filling the gaps in Canadian history, pointing to slavery and racism in colonial and contemporary Canada, which enables her to create a new sense of history and belonging. Remembering for her is an act of knowledge production; at the same time it is an important step toward raising consciousness and fueling social action. In all three texts by Cooper about Marie Joseph Angélique, she humanizes her protagonist beyond questions of class, citizenship, gender, and race. She firmly establishes her as a model freedom fighter, as a feminist abolitionist of time past, and an inspiration for Black immigrant women in Canada today. By resurrecting a freedom-seeking woman from colonial times, she lifts the veil from race and colorblindness in Canadian history writing and conscience. Her rhetoric reveals her to be the poet-as-historiographer and the historiographer-as-poet. She writes history with sounds and rhythms that are intricately connected to content, creating a holistic historiography, one that embraces the oral and written discourse through the performative. Her texts appear "oraliterary" (Mitchell 40). Her prose and poetry have a chant-like quality that turns her scholarship into a public text to be shared, spread, and appreciated far beyond the academic discourse – another side of her creativity which shows that she envisions a more inclusive vision of the social. She extends African griot traditions and brings old African ways of storytelling and history-making into the discourse of African Canadian historiography.

Through the fusion of contemporary rhythm (reggae in particular) with the unearthing of unnoticed historical data of African Canadian history, she adds new pieces of knowledge to the tapestry of African diaspora history. One such example is her poem about Richard Pierpoint, "Revolutionary Soldier (a poem in three voices)" (Cooper, *Copper Woman*). In this poem from *Copper Woman*, Richard Pierpoint writes the king's governor a letter requesting permission to return to his homeland. Pierpoint was born in Africa, enslaved, and brought to the Americas where he served in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 "in a corps of colour raised on the frontier of Niagara" (57). In her poetic rendering of Pierpoint's letter, Cooper retells his entanglement in the history of the slave trade, the independence movements in the Americas, and the establishment of early settlements. One of the voices in the poem is the migratory subject Pierpoint himself, writing, "at the age of sixteen I was made prisoner / sold as slave / conveyed to America in the year 1760 ... I wish to see again the Senegal waters flow" (56; 58). A second voice belongs to Cooper's envisioned public, voicing support for Pierpoint's plea: "So please your Majestic / Listen to the petitioner's plea / He yearns to return / To the land of

his family" (58). The third voice is that of Cooper herself, the dub poet, chanting "Revolutionary soldier" to reggae rhythms with reference to Bob Marley's song "Buffalo Soldier." Marley's song laments the conscription of freed slaves by the government to fight Native American tribes. Cooper transfers the historical setting to Upper Canada:

Revolutionary soldier
revolutionary soldier
stolen from Africa
brought to Upper Canada
revolutionary soldier
Revolution. (59)

Cooper discovers historical sources and chants history so that Black diasporas in the Americas get entangled with the African homeland. Thus, she establishes a model for Black historiography as an alternative knowledge to the established historical discourse. Cooper's objective is "to revise English and French Canadian historiographies" (Knopf 38). Just like the actors in her poem "Negro Cemeteries" in *Copper Woman*, Cooper unearths the silenced (his)stories and songs of Black people in Canadian society:

"Negro" cemeteries are surfacing all over Ontario
Ancestors rolling over
Bones creaking
Skeletons dusting themselves off
Dry bones shaking in fields of corn. (25)

In the poem, Black history awakens and infuses her social social. Dead Black bodies turn into agents who expose the cracks in Canadian myth-making and the silences in Canadian history writing. In "500 Years of Discovery," Cooper admits that she, a "Black African Jamaican woman whose ancestry sprang from another continent, another hemisphere," is still trying to understand "her place in these Americas" (*Copper Woman* 29). To unearth uneven temporalities and their connectedness, to connect body, history, and place is at the core of Cooper's poetic vision. And it is through musical voice and rhythm that she performs the act of bringing silenced and forgotten history to social consciousness, so that a better Canada and Canada as a place of belonging can emerge.

Canada as Black diaspora also assumes a central role in the poetry of Lillian Allen. Born in Jamaica, she has crisscrossed the Americas with stays in the U.S., the Caribbean, and Canada. She emigrated from Jamaica to Canada in 1969 and first got into a vital dub poetry scene in New York City in the seventies. Arguably one of Canada's most prominent dub poets, she performs verses on cultural, social, and political topics. Her performances include a distinct rhythmic and declamatory vocal style that is in dialogue with reggae and calypso accompaniment. Allen has consistently published in both sound and print, as is common in dub poetry. Since the 1980s, she has performed at cultural, literary, music, and political festivals and events in Canada, the U.S., the Caribbean, England, and Europe. She published her first book of poems, *Rhythm an' Hardtimes*, in 1982, and as a performance artist she recorded *Dub Poet: The Poetry of Lillian Allen* (1983) and *De Dub Poets* (1984), the latter including the voices of Toronto poets Clifton Joseph and Devon Haughton. Collaborating with various musicians,

she later recorded *Revolutionary Tea Party* (1986) and *Conditions Critical* (1988), the former including songs like "I Fight Back" and "Riddim an' Hardtimes," which reached a broader public in Canada and Jamaica. Both records were released and distributed by Allen's label, Verse to Vinyl, and received Juno Awards for best reggae/calypso album in 1986 and 1989 respectively (Roberts).

As poet and recording artist she has shown that "dub poetry has continued to inspire and sustain struggle in the many locales where it has been rerouted/rerooted in the Caribbean diaspora" (Gingell 220). Allen resorts to reggae to fuse rhythm, body, and voice as political media. "Though Allen asserts the transformative pleasure of the body through reggae and dance-hall rhythms," Carr explains, "she does so without inversions of male-originated strategies of sexual boasting" (24). She embraces a poetics of the body but replaces the above practices by adopting a "griot-inspired, broad-based social commentary central to the African-Jamaican national liberation struggle" (24). Allen addresses the physical pleasures of rhythm and dance in her performances, yet she channels body politics through Audré Lourde's vision of the erotic as a political tool to express a collective movement whose aim is social change. She links the imaginaries of the Black Power and other African American movements with Rastafarianism, thus creating a Black diasporic matrix for affirmation and resistance. Inspired by a trans-American expansion of Black Power, the "Black is Beautiful" cultural movement, and Rastafarian spirituality, Allen's dub poetry gives voice to women's experiences in the Caribbean diaspora. It is through the musical framing of her political messages that she reaches subaltern and dominant groups "through the backdoor of mainstream cultural establishment" (Knopf 80). Carolyn Cooper observes that "reggae business is also a magical enterprise in which poor ghetto youths, identifying with the heroes of Hollywood fantasy, can rise to international fame and fortune" (*Sound Clash* 153). At the same time, dub poetry has continued to sustain struggle in the many locations of the Caribbean diaspora.

Her reflections on Black experience are often embedded in immigration settings that loom large in her poetry. Color as metaphor is omnipresent in *Women Do This Every Day*. Black as color and marker of identity is important in the aesthetic and communicative intent of poems like "Jazz You." The poem begins,

Molten shimmer red
charcoal roasting
like hot, burn
burn black, burn sax
burn blue
burn into my flesh
brewing a potpourri of a storm
ablowing waves of hues. (Allen, *Women* 120)

But in the refrain of this dub, *black* has a different significance, tied to oppression:

what the people have to do today mi say
just a juggle fi get a little peace. (120)

As the dub poem expresses in diasporic Jamaican, transculturation is complex, presented as conflicted, contested, and promising. Rethinking a sense of belonging, she reflects immigrant experiences in multiple perspectives. In the poem "In these Canadian Bones" (Allen, *Psychic*), Allen performs a more positive view on

transformative processes. In the course of the poem, the Caribbean immigrant becomes a cultural and political agent who shapes the social world within a multigenerational diasporic experience. Music, in its reggae and calypso expressions, represents the matrix for shaping new cultural landscapes in Canada. Poetic body politics unfold, as collective imagination, musical rhythm, and personal voice fuse in the poetic voice of the immigrant persona: The lines "In these Canadian bones / where Africa landed" mark the beginning of a multilayered and multitemporal diasporic agency. The words "and Jamaica bubble inna reggae redstripe and calypso proddings of culture" expose the musical flows within the Americas that led to new cultural production. The immigrant persona is equipped with power and is perceived as mobile and productive: "We are creating this very landscape we walk on" (65). Allen's vision shows that Black diaspora subject is equipped with agency to create a sense of inclusion in a metaphorical as well as material way.

In Allen's vision of the social environment, it is the act of musical and cultural creation that facilitates the immigrant's immersion into Canadian society. Evidently, the immigrant's voice is full of diasporic history and a global Black cultural consciousness that empowers the immigrant to take a creative role in shaping Canadian culture and society. The poem unfolds a generational narrative that highlights different temporalities within migration and immigration. Where the immigrant persona stands for arrival, first contact, and orientation in the opening of the poem, the second stanza celebrates a positive second-generation transculturation in the presence of the immigrant persona's daughter. Again, it is through musical tropes that Allen lets the immigrant persona reflect immersion and integration: "My daughter sings opera / speaks perfect Canadian" (Allen, *Psychic* 65). The immigrant persona herself is aware of difference and tension: "And I dream in dialect / grown malleable by my Canadian tongue" (65). Yet, music also remains a consolation and inspiration for a future vision: "I dream ... of a world where all that matters is the colour of love / compassion / heart and music that grooves you" (65). The immigrant persona "dreams in dialect," seeking to make the utopia of a true Canadian transnationality and transethnicity a reality. The power to achieve utopia is located in music, be it opera, reggae, or calypso. For her, transculturation is in process, never to be completed, and full of ruptures. While the daughter's experience provides hope, the poem does not negate her continuous marginalization in Canadian society.

Allen is conscious of the conflicted temporalities involved in an imaginary nation-building. Her poems traverse several space and time zones to capture the diasporic sentiment of her own Canadian experience. Being in diaspora often challenges linear modes of time that are connected with homogeneous progression. Alternative expressions of temporality frequently shape the cultural and social rituals and practices in diasporic communities. A co-existence of different real and imagined worlds emerges; ancestors, homeland, and diasporic location – with its historical roots and routes – inhabit an imagined spatiotemporal world in motion. Similar to Walter Benjamin's "messianic time," these "ancestral chronotopes" suspend clear-cut temporal differences and priorities (Eisenlohr n. pag.). "We are Hurons, and visitors and traders / Adventurers and underground railroaders," Allen's poetic voice announces in *pOetic gEsture* from a series of recorded Toronto poems (Allen, *Toronto*). First nation people, colonial traders, and fleeing slaves merge in a diasporic conception of time and space.

The line "We are the Iroquois's promise of unity" signals that this conception of the social world can be reached only through an embrace of difference and change. The diasporic self continues in a process of becoming: "Making us larger than we are becoming." Transcendence is found in social and artistic creativity: "Dub Poetry, Hip Hop, Opera, Visual smarts and Community Arts" (Allen, *Toronto* n. pag.).

Allen sees poets, artists, and cultural workers as crucial players in the making of a diasporic world and a historically multilayered Canada. For her, specificity of sound, expression, and rhythm is part of Jamaican speech and lends a sonic particular quality to her poetic vision in which every syllable and word matters. "The rhythms of Jamaican speech, sustained by and reflected in the musical beat, constitute the dub experience," as Haberkost emphasizes (92).

The intimate connection between voice, speech, and beat enhances poetry as a medium for both reflecting and promoting activism. "I Fight Back" is in the style of "signifyin'" and the "cuss poem" (Carr 10; 25), and one of Allen's poems from *Women Do This Every Day* that shows precisely this empowering synthesis. Allen reflects the in-between-experience through diasporic motherhood. Her poem links generations and invokes motherly ties that are threatened by and challenge the experience of displacement and political exclusion in Canada. The lines "My Children Scream / My Grandmother is dying" set the emotional tone before the lyrical I as mother reflects her migration experience: "I came to Canada / And Found the Doors / Of Opportunities Well Guarded" (Allen, *Women* 139). Space and time are multiplied in the exploitative working system. "I Scrub Floors / Serve Backra's Meals on Time" "Spend two days working in one / And Twelve Days a Week" (139). Allen intensifies the time-space compression of diasporic experience by relating it to a work load that makes lived time more intense than real time. In addition, motherhood takes on dual bonding and care: "Here I Am in Canada / Bring Up Someone Else's Child / While someone Else and Me in Absentee / Bring Up My Own" (140) The mother figure stands for a double agency that keeps ties strong between homeland and Canada and within (extended) family circuits. The chorus in capital letters that repeat the poem's title, "AND I FIGHT BACK," expresses the endurance, resistance, and, here, triple agency of the female poetic person: working, caring, taking political action. The dub poem provides a critical reflection on Canadian immigration myths and takes a critical stance against neocolonial practices in the Canadian labor system. In performed and recorded versions of "I Fight Back," the speech-beat dialogue underscores the urgency of Allen's plea to revise immigration policies and expresses a desire for belonging.

Clearly, then, as a dub poet, Allen relies on the spoken Jamaican word for many of her effects. When she writes her poems down, she uses alliterations, repetitions, and elliptical phrasing to translate the sound effects on the page. Next to the speech-beat dialogue, performativity of words plays a crucial role in her poetic work. Many of her poems put to music such as "For Billie Holiday" show a complex dialogical relationship between music and text through which Allen reflects the social world, expresses a yearning for completion, and proposes betterment. These performances ask the listener for an intense and concentrated engagement with the play between words, sound, and music. However, Allen also uses her chants and slogans in performances in political demonstrations to create a common voice among participants; music and poetic chant become a tool to channel protest in the diaspora communities. In Allen's poetic practice, sound as power is a concrete physical and social force.

One example of Allen's participatory poetic approach is her poem "Colors" that is also included in the recording titled *Family Folk Festival: A Multicultural Sing Along* (Allen, *Colors*). Questions like "Who thinned the colors for the atmosphere" address the audience directly. The rhetorical strategies in the poem thus support Allen's poetic performance, which in a call-and-response mode traverses the promises and fractures of a Canadian multicultural mosaic. Caribbean oral tradition and a slow-paced reggae rhythm form the basis for a musical-poetic progression that culminates in the chorus sung by children and Allen together. Her performance is an

invitation for the children to join, a projection of a better future Canada. "Colors" illustrates that Allen resorts to a broad spectrum of resistance practices. While "I Fight Back," with its "cuss style," is straightforward in its argumentation and accusation, "Colors" uses modes of indirection through which Allen addresses the shortcomings of Canadian foundation myths. "Is anyone listening here?" She asks in the poem, highlighting the necessity of sounding protest and critique. She creates a metaphorical tapestry of colors that recalls Canadian ideals: "Blue tights / green overcoat / polka dot underwear / Yellow ribbon / brown bobby pin / hanging from her hair / Black belt / purple shoes / mauve hat / striped socks / Red and white Crinoline top." A series of rhetorical questions – "Who made the sky blue / Who made the pink hot" – expresses discomfort without accusing anyone directly. The poem circles back to the opening line of colors – "Blue tights / green overcoat / polka dot underwear" – but finishes on a note of welcome and inclusion: "Yellow ribbon / brown bobby pin / glad you are here." Individual and collective voices carry the message when she alternates with a children's choir that chants the chorus lines to a slow reggae rhythm. Like the slow groove underlying the poem's performance, the critical commentary of the poem cautiously takes shape. Allen's poem challenges Canada's self-acclaimed status as a multi-ethnic and multicultural paradise, asking "Who took day and night / Joined them back to back?" She shifts between lost utopia and utopia reimagined when she contrasts Canadian immigrant realities with high flying Canadian ideals. As a coda, the poetic voice recites the multiple colors existing side by side. Sound in Allen's poetry is persistent, expressing endurance as well as insisting on the recuperation of lost dreams and ideals and expressing a desire for completion.

From Onuora and Johnson to Allen and Cooper, dub poetry spans a transnational and transcultural continuum of Black poetic yearning for love, belonging, and social change. Dub poetry is a performative and textual translation of oral historiography and Black musical expression, primarily reggae, dub, ska but also resorting to gospel and other African American musical forms, that voices protest and a longing for community, not simply in a blatant style of political protest but in a reflective, holistic, and kinesthetic appeal to its audience. While always ready to respond to the present historical moment in any given location, be it in Jamaica, Canada, England, Africa, or with The Last Poets in the USA, dub poetry rhythmically translates the core message of shared Black histories of oppression, an irrepressible will to survive as well as an unbroken spirituality that transcends material existence and has accompanied Black cultural and social moments across borders since the 1960s up to the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement.

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