

The arts of resistance in the poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson¹

Jair Luiz França Junior²

Resumo: Este artigo analisa insubordinação e resistência manifestas na poesia pós-colonial contemporânea como forma de subverter os discursos dominantes no ocidente. Mais especificamente, a análise centra-se em estratégias textuais de resistência no trabalho do poeta britânico-jamaicano Linton Kwesi Johnson (também conhecido como LKJ). A qualidade sincretista na obra desse poeta relaciona-se com diáspora, hibridismo e criouliização como formas de re[escre]ver discursos hegemônicos com bases (neo)coloniais. Críticas pós-coloniais, em geral, irão enquadrar esta análise de estratégias de dominação e resistência, mas algumas discussões a partir do domínio de história, sociologia e estudos culturais também poderão entrar no debate. Neste sentido, há uma grande variedade de teorias e argumentos que lidam com as contradições e incongruências na questão das relações de poder interligada à dominação e resistência. Para uma visão geral do debate, este estudo compõe uma tarefa tríplice. Primeiramente, proponho-me a fazer um breve resumo autobiográfico do poeta e as preocupações sócio-políticas em sua obra. Em seguida, apresento algumas leituras críticas de seus poemas a fim de embasar teorias que lidam com estratégias de dominação e resistência no âmbito da literatura. Por fim, investigo como estratégias de resistência diaspórica e hibridismo cultural empregados na poesia de Linton Kwesi Johnson podem contribuir para o distanciamento das limitações de dicotomias e também subverter o poder hegemônico. Além disso, este debate está preocupado com a crescente importância de estudos acadêmicos voltado às literaturas pós-coloniais. O presente artigo visa, portanto, analisar poemas contemporâneos em Inglês-Jamaicano como técnicas estratégicas de descentramento da retórica ocidental dominante, a qual tenta naturalizar desigualdades e injustiças nas relações entre os detentores de poder e os oprimidos em ambos os contextos local e global.

Palavras-chaves: Poesia Pós-Colonial; Discurso Hegemônico; Resistência.

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² Mestre em Letras – UnB e Ex-Bolsista IFP-Fundação Carlos Chagas.

It is not the mere existence of deviant subcultural themes that is notable, for they are well-nigh universal, but rather the forms they may take, the values they embody, and the emotional attachment they inspire.

James Scott *Weapons of the Weak*

We speak
for the same reason
that
the flowers bloom
that the sun sets
that the fruit ripens

because temples built
to honour myths
must crumble
as the dawn breaks

Merle Collins *Because the Dawn Breaks*

In this paper, I will proceed first by briefly introducing a biographical account of Linton Kwesi Johnson and the intellectual trends that shape his work, covering issues such as his moving from Jamaica to England, dub music and poetry, the socio-political concern of his work and so on. Then I will go on to read some critical works on his poems and thereafter I offer my own analysis clearly foregrounding the issue of strategies to write over the rules of standard English; the deterritorialised Caribbeanness and the diasporic movements towards a hybridisation of Great Britain; the depiction of public spaces populated by migrants and the working class dealing with state violence, unemployment and racism; and finally, the support of social movements, forms of popular rebellion and mobilisation, and differing, hybrid identities as reversal discourse to hegemonic power.

A Short Account of the Poet's Life and Work

Linton Kwesi Johnson (also known as and henceforth LKJ) was born on 24 August 1952 in Chapelton, a locality of Clarendon, Jamaica, and initially lived with his parents in Kingston and then with his grandmother in the countryside.³ At the age of 11, he moved to England to join his mother, who had immigrated earlier to look for a better job and live in Brixton, South London. He attended Tulse Hill high school and Goldsmith College, University of London, where he obtained a degree in Sociology in 1973. While still a student, during the early 1970s, he started to appreciate poetry and soon joined the Black

³ These biographical details are largely based on Chevalier (1991), Dawson (2006), Hitchcock (1993) and Johnson (2006).

Panther Youth league, a militant and Black Nationalist group inspired by the US Black Power movement of the late 1960s. While in this movement he helped to organise poetry training courses in association with Rasta Love, a grouping of drummers and poets with whom LKJ produced some of the poems that were released in his first album *Dread Beat an' Blood* (1978). The connections in this political and cultural environment provided LKJ with the inspiration and commitment to write his poetry and perform it publicly. LKJ's verses make witty use of the unpatterned dictation of Jamaican Creole blended with the dub style. His poetry usually entails the reciting of his own verses over dub music, and its discursive contexts are significantly influenced by political activity and social engagement.

His poetry first appeared in the magazine *Race Today*, a publication of Race Today Collective which, under the leadership of LKJ's friend Darcus Howe, has become a leading force in British with a radical black political orientation, and for which LKJ became an official member and arts editor by 1976. Through this publication, he launched his first collection of poetry, *Voices of the Living and the Dead* (1974; it includes a play). His second collection, *Dread Beat An Blood*, was published in 1975. The following years saw the release of *Inglan is a Bitch* (1980) and *Tings an' Times* (1991). LKJ's best known sound recordings comprise his debut semi-album *Poet and Roots* (1977), and then the first full-length record edition *Dread Beat an' Blood* (1978), followed by *Forces of Victory* (1979), *Bass Culture* (1980), *Making History* (1984), *In Concert with the Dub Band* (1985), *Tings an' Times* (1991) and *More Time* (1998). Throughout these records, we find classics of dub poetry performance—and, in fact, of reggae itself—such as *Dread Beat an Blood*, *Independent Intavenshan*, *Inglan is a Bitch*, *New Craas Massahkah*, *Sonny's Lettah* and *Want fi goh Rave*. LKJ was a discerning activist and his track *All Wi Doin Is Defendin* accurately foresees the Brixton riots in 1981. Regarding the beginning of LKJ's career, Ashley Dawson comments as follows:

LKJ was quickly immersed in the radical currents that circulated throughout the black and Asian diasporic world at the time. The Black Panthers, whose youth wing he joined while still attending secondary school, exposed LKJ to the fertile blend of socialist political-economic analysis and black consciousness that characterizes the internationalist strands of the black radical tradition. In addition, as a young member of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) in London during the early 1970s, LKJ participated in the groundbreaking debates that took place within that organization concerning the appropriate forms and themes of artistic production among members of the Caribbean exile community in Britain. Popular culture acquired increasing significance as these artists struggled, under the weight of the increasingly incendiary political events of the period, to forge a role for themselves as artists and popular leaders. (Dawson 2006:54)

The greatest part of LKJ's poetry is politically oriented, and one of the topics he chiefly addresses in his writing is the experience of being a black Briton and a West-Indian descendant in London. Apart from his ethnic-racial and diasporic concerns, he has also dealt with other issues such as British foreign policy and support for the working-class British community. His most

famous poems were composed during the Thatcher era. These poems give vivid accounts of the alleged routine police violence against minorities occurring at the time, as in the case of the death of Clement Blear Peach, a New Zealander special-needs schoolteacher who became a symbol of resistance and anti-racist struggle.⁴

Reggae fi Peach

everywhere yu goh it's di tak af di day
everywhere yu goh yu hear people say
dat di Special Patrol dem are murder, murder
wi cant make dem get noh further

...

kaw dem kill Blear Peach, di teacher

(Johnson 1998: disc 1, track 17; transcription mine)

During the 1980s he dedicated much of his efforts to journalistic writing, working closely with *Race Today*. Among many cultural activities, LKJ has promoted international poetry readings and concerts, narrated his 10-part radio serial about Jamaican folk music for BBC Radio 1 called 'From Mento to Lovers Rock', and also presented a BBC television documentary on Carifesta called 'From Brixton to Barbados'. One of only two living poets to have had a Penguin Classics collection devoted to his work, LKJ in 2004 was elected as an Honorary Visiting Professor at Middlesex University in London. Since the late 1970s the author has received awards and honours including fellowships and prizes. In 2005, he was honoured with the silver Musgrave medal from the Institute of Jamaica for distinguished reputation in the art of poetry.

Critical Readings of Linton Kwesi Johnson's Poetry

In a recent newspaper interview, journalist Nicholas Wroe begins with the following comments about the importance of LKJ's poetry in changing the attitude of British teenagers in the late 1970s:

Thirty years ago, it was not uncommon to encounter white, middle-class suburban and provincial teenagers wearing badges that proclaimed "SMASH THE SPG". The primary spark for their opposition to the Metropolitan Police's Special Patrol Group and its role in policing London's immigrant communities came from the work of Linton Kwesi Johnson. When the SPG was eventually disbanded in 1986, it was under a deluge of public condemnation. It is not too outlandish to suggest that Johnson's poetry and music shaped that opinion: so much for Auden's claim that "poetry makes nothing happen". (Wroe 2008:[Online])

As a matter of fact, it is not prudent to place all the weight of LKJ's influence in his writing solely, because his music has been also very important in spreading his work. As he declares in an interview:

⁴ Kozain mentions that one of the poems of note on *Bass Culture* is 'Raggae fi Peach', 'a lament in memory of Blair Peach, an anti-racist activist killed by police in South Hall, April 1979, during demonstration protesting against National Front activities' (1994:97).

People already knew me as a poet before the first record, and when the record came out my audience, of course, increased dramatically, because a lot of people who wouldn't have bothered to maybe come to a poet reading, or even buy a book, *were attracted to the music*. And I rationalised it by saying that with these records at least I am trying to reach a wider audience, trying to bring poetry to a music audience. But I suppose one is fooling oneself with that because, at the end of the day, most people who buy records buy them for the music rather than the poetry. (in Caesar 1996:67, emphasis added)

A couple of words may therefore be required to describe the influence of dub music on LKJ's poetry. Indeed, critical analyses of LKJ's verses are often associated with the study of dub poetry.

Rhythm and poetry were blended to generate not only a prominent music style known as rap music, but also another one, less known to audiences, so-called dub poetry. By the late 1970s, a new poetic movement, related to students of the Jamaica School of Drama, had emerged. Dub poetry was the label given to the new style of verse that reflected a revival of orality in Caribbean 'sound' poetry, and is commonly referred to as a kind of poetic recital or performance art that mixes (usually politically oriented) rhymes with an instrumental basis on reggae music. Dub is instrumental reggae with various sound mixing effects (echoes, loops, reverberation, vocal bites, et cetera) replacing the removed lead vocal track. Like in rap and techno music, it challenges the ideology of the artist as original creator or performer. And dub poetry lays down a voice closely allied to the beat of the reggae rhythm (Hitchcock 1993).

The famous exponents of and influences on this genre are Oku Onuora, Malachi Smith, Poets-in-Unity, M'bala, Jean Binta Breeze, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Benjamin Zephaniah, Mutabaruka, Brian Meeks and Michael Smith. The Jamaican poet Oku Onuora, according to Stewart Brown, is considered the inventor of the term 'dub poetry' so as to portray a sort of oral art that had been developing in Jamaica since the early 1970s (1987:51). He characterises the dub style as poetry with a built-in reggae rhythm since even when the poem is read out with no backing reggae song, it is possible to distinguish the reggae rhythm emerging from the poem. Afterwards, Oku Onuora made that definition more comprehensive and included all types of music-influenced poetry in the label of dub poetry. Hitchcock (1993) nevertheless tells us that LKJ claims to have coined the term in that period, contradicting Brown's contention that 'dub poetry' was first used by Oku Onuora in 1979. But above all it is important to bear in mind that 'most West Indian poets resist easy classification, even in terms of style, shifting across boundaries of the oral and the literary, the private and the public, as the poems they are writing demand' (Brown and McWatt 2005:xix).

Being forged from signs of violence immanent to the crisis connected with conflicts of racial and cultural difference, dub poetry discourse emerged with the question of what out-of-the-native-land intercultural initiation represented to the West Indian diaspora. For that reason, it has obliged British nationalist selfhood to face its postcolonial history. Being related to forms of

cultural identification and disjunctive temporalities experienced by West Indian immigrants in political-economic centres of power, dub poetry is a voice trying to subvert the kind of rationality that has hindered the displacement to and relocation of hybrid signs in the metropolitan areas. Furthermore, it has fired a poetic and political question at British nationalism, exposing the rejection or incapacity of this nationalist model to articulate heterogeneity, a distinctive aspect of the postcolonial population.

Donnell and Welsh, quoting Braithwaite, consider that the genre dub poetry was 'one of the most exciting developments to emerge from the "explosion of grassroots artistic/intellectual activity" in the late 1960s and 1970s' (1996:18). These authors explain that the great names of this poetic style, as those above-mentioned, 'were strongly influenced by Rastafarianism and the politics of an ascendant black power movement on both sides of the Atlantic' (1996:18). In the case of an increasing presence of this sort of poetry in Britain, the main reason was that

Although dub poetry had specific roots in Jamaican popular culture, it also found fertile soil in the newly militant atmosphere and confrontational politics of 1970s Britain; the 'touch-paper' of two decades of discrimination against blacks in Britain being lit with the sparks of high black (especially youth) unemployment and the perception of heightened police intolerance and brutality in urban multi-racial areas.(Donnell and Welsh 1996:18)

In such cases, shall we see, LKJ's writings played a pioneering role in relation to the conflictive scenario affecting West Indian immigrants in Brixton and London, as his poetry (especially the 1970s verses) was particularly intended to provide evidence of this environment of discrimination and violent incident. As the poet himself makes known in an interview:

My initial impetus to write was political—from the very beginning—it wasn't a need to clear things of my chest or to, in any way, express any profound, deep inner emotion or anything like that. From the very beginning I saw myself as giving voice to, and documenting, the experiences of my generation.(in Caesar 1996:66-7)

Hence LKJ's poetic career has been dedicated to express his community's anger and frustrations, hopes and aspirations, first within the Black Panthers and then with the Race Today Collective. Although Donnell and Welsh recognise LKJ's pioneering voice and great influence in confronting a pervasively, visibly racist British society, they are also aware of the fact that the oppositional and subversive stance assumed in LKJ's early verses 'has not always worked in favour of the reception of dub poetry' (1996:18). As they argue, 'it has enacted to "muddy the waters" of any critical appreciation by instigating the notion that dub poetry dealt only in the kind of protest rhetoric' (1996:18). This perception has hindered, for instance, the appreciation of dub poetry as a fully fledged literary form, and it has been sidelined by a great deal of literary critics.

The Jamaican critic and writer Mervyn Morris (1997) looks at the poetic styles elaborated by singers who employ dub music. He recalls that Linton

Kwesi Johnson's work is clearly influenced by the lyricism of this style both in his poems and dub songs. As a result, singers who belong to such a musical genre have to be considered on the whole as poets. He underlines that according to Oku Onuora, dub poetry can use the whole gamut of rhythmic styles originating in Africa. The author estimates that dub singers wish to inspire themselves with all musical styles, including European ones. Morris furthermore makes an analysis of the impact of musical performance on dub songs. Accordingly, as time has gone by the concept of dub has encapsulated a literary style widely based on principles of traditional ballads, heroic poems and many other contemporary oral genres such as pop songs, folk and protest songs, and especially reggae music.

As Bhabha argues, 'it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence' (1994:9); so dub poetry can be distinguished as a 'performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of self in the world of travel, the resettlement of borderline community of migration' (1994:9). Also because, as Frantz Fanon puts it in *Black skin, white masks*: 'I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom' (1986:231). In this sense, LKJ's poetry helps to disclose a key and interesting dimension to the concept of creolisation, especially the creolisation of language, as long as his writing raises questions about what composes the relationship between vernacular/official versus Creole languages, constructions of self-narratives and self-ethnographies, discourses of subversion and resistance in the Caribbean migration/diaspora.

By making an effort to give a voice to a community forged on the borders of privation and marginalisation, dub poetry is composed of a deeply antagonistic and conflictive nature (as most of the legitimate claims made from the minorities' perspective). This poetic genre affirms the existence of an insurgent and interstitial culture through the performance of a migrant voice; a voice coming from the margin of the empire, coming out of endurance, to make itself socially, culturally and historically visible in a hostile, excluding modern world. Consequently, the zenith of aspirations in this literary art is to reach a space of social articulation of differences, contributing to redefine the British ideal of community and society because, as Bhabha puts it:

When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychical survival. To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity: 'I am looking for the join . . . I want to join . . . I want to join.' (Bhabha 1994:18)

From the viewpoint of 'interstitial perspective', dub poetry heats up the debate on solidarity, social, historical and ideological limits of the community understood as a system resulting from contiguous transmissions of historical and cultural traditions. Therefore, dub poetry aims to be considered as a sign of

the rising of a community whose revisionist spirit reconstructs current political conditions, as long as it depicts a social scenario where there is an open possibility of acceding to or preserving the difference, without entailing the hazard of an implicit reaffirmation of a Western dogma of universality.

This debate brings us again to the question of domination, alterity and otherness, which reveals the strategies used to subject the colonised/dominated/subaltern/powerless through degrading stereotypes and usurpation. However, things do not occur necessarily in this sequence of events. The intervention and resistance are processes that disclose the way the subject groups fight back against the hegemonic power by means of what is theoretically termed as *mimicry*, *parody*, *sly civility*, *weapons of the weak* (Bhabha 1994; Scott 1985), albeit without direct confrontation or explicit violence in many cases. Thus the subjugated (namely in the specific case here West Indian immigrants) may reinstate themselves in the position of subjects of their own reality. The hegemonic power reaction when being decentralised is usually based on violent counter-resistance and strategies of division among the insurgent group, as Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the earth*. Again, shall we see, this is not necessarily a rule and that sometimes fruitful compromise may occur between power holders and subordinated groups.

Dub poetry and reggae music are interesting examples of how all these phenomena occur, as long as such artistic trends bring colonial subjects to the forefront, as protagonists, and look for an autonomous discourse that joins colonialist and colonised forces in an environment of commitment that inspires and looks forward to democratic liberty. Thus, the colonial and postcolonial encounters do not always lead to blood, death and tragedy; they can also precipitate scenarios of two-way exchange and constructive agreement.

As for the concept of creolisation, it gains a special and thoughtful contribution in LKJ's lively poetic style since his writing looks at the Caribbean and its social and cultural body beyond the boundaries of geographical circumscription as well as racial, linguistic and nationalist determinisms. Thus his work explores the construction of self in the interstices of domination and resistance, coloniser and colonised, oppression and subversion in accordance with the view that "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself' (Bhabha 1994:1-2). As a result, the poet's discourse dovetails with works that look through and analyse Caribbean nationalism and its relation to Creole identities, cultural hybridity, and the importance of creolisation to diaspora studies. Here Shalini Puri's *The Caribbean postcolonial* (2004) plays an important role in the disciplinary imagination of postcolonial and cultural studies.

Puri underscores the impasses of non-comparison and non-elucidation of multiples pros and cons that characterise the Caribbean region and its literatures. Her study seeks to interpret social performances along the range of West Indian practices and identities (manifestos, novels, national languages...)

not only to take on some of the ways in which hybridity is recognised, depicted and praised in West Indian theory production, but also to demonstrate how interpretative communities in the region contribute to the creation of both official and unofficial recitals and accounts of their own history. Shalini Puri charges postcolonial debate with sidelining West Indies and the central position of its cultural hybridism as its prevalent condition. Puri's discussion does not only try to remedy this mainstream denial of the Caribbean, but also exhibits its effects for the cross-examination of hybridity's poetics and politics.

Moreover, throughout the last decades, one of the predominant trends in cultural studies has been the practice of putting away essentialist discourses on race and nationality and turning the focus on the dynamics of a hybrid socio-cultural legacy. Such a perspective comes especially from the historical interchange of multiple heritages that are repeatedly fragmented and recreated to accommodate new configurations. Examples of studies addressing these questions are Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Brent Edwards' *The Practice of diaspora* (2003) and again Shalini Puri's *The Caribbean postcolonial*. By and large, such authors tackle the problematic around the violence in the Atlantic crossing, black transnational culture and the huge ethnic heritages brought from the African continent to re-elaborate, transform and be transformed in the New World.

The poet Linton Kwesi Johnson is aware of this multi-faceted culture and its tensioned reality, and he uses his work to make a draft of the official history and show its interstices and lapses. The poet does not deny the so-called classic culture, but he revisits and rewrites it, subverting it by inserting his diasporic, Afro-Caribbean experience into it. For this reason, his writing is sometimes ambiguous and can present aspects of Jamaican oral tradition, concerns for civil rights and minority struggles, as well as rhythmic inspiration from reggae music. That is why his literary style is conventionally labelled as 'dub poetry'.

For some critics LKJ is considered the pioneer of dub poetry. And his quest for a *sui generis* poetic style has acquired a key significance since his dub poems have given a voice to the oppressed and expressed concerns about riots and confrontations. Hence, he has inspired black Britons and other minorities in England to stand up against police brutality and fight for their rights. Attached to the rhythm of reggae music, dub poetry then turns into a strategy of resistance and a weapon of liberation. The diasporic experience, however, will invariably let the West Indian subject know that he/she is a distinctive kind of creature in the social order, or the Other, which means that when it comes to talk about 'human rights', other kinds of people have been addressed historically.

Nonetheless, the eight dub poems that comprise the seminal 1978 work *Dread Beat an Blood* have a clear-cut political vision and LKJ, as Kozain points out, 'calls attention to and asserts, in a defiant and confrontational manner, the presence of black West Indians in Britain' (1994:84). This radical change of viewpoint certainly contributed to a definitive transformation of the image of West Indian Diasporans in the English metropolis. In this sense, Bruce King

(2004:108-109) states that LKJ played a decisive role in the consolidation of a marked diction and language within black British poetry. Furthermore, he helped to consolidate the idea that West Indians were not only immigrants living in England, but were in fact legally and historically British citizens. This stance made it clear that political dialogue would not be enough to change the white British population's attitude towards the blacks, and thus the necessity for a constant battle against the hegemonic social order.

LKJ also explores an apparent lack of confidence in his work in a humorous manner in one of his key poems. Robert McGill finding 'troubling taxonomies' in LKJ's 'If I Woz a Tap-Natch Poet' points out how the poem 'explores its own slippery position in relation to the polarities of music and poetry, of "high" art and popular culture, of politics and aesthetics' (2003:561). According to McGill, the text is aware not only of dub poetry's debarment from the literary canons, but also of its potential to assimilate itself into those canons and even change them. For him, both literary canons and LKJ's persona come out as visualised formations that call upon, intermingle and remodel one another. The poet then exploits the poem's indefiniteness to make himself a subtle subject within the canonical milieu, unable to be situated, subverting the classificatory stratagem to which canons are attached (2003:561).

if I woz a tap-natch poet
 like Chris Okigbo
 Derek Walcot
 ar T. S. Eliot
 . . .

I woodah write a poem
 soh rude
 an rootsy
 an subversive
 dat it mek di goon poet
 tun white wid envy
 (Johnson 2006:94-5)

McGill furthermore analyses how LKJ's dub poetry defies the stability of (US-European) literary canons themselves by emphasising 'the imaginative, subjunctive aspect of subjectivity—who he *might be*—undermines the taxonomical strategies which they might use to decide who he is' (2003:564; emphasis original).

It is not surprising, then, that while various institutions and anthologies have dismissed dub as something less than poetry, others would accuse dub poets as 'selling out' and having 'degenerated mento, ska and reggae'. Gilroy condemns such attitudes, which imply that to have 'mixed' is 'to have been party to a great betrayal. Any unsettling traces of hybridity must be excised from the tidy, bleached-out zones of impossibly pure culture.' Preferring routes to roots, Johnson operates in what Homi Bhabha calls the 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications'. By oscillating between the third-person goon poet and the subjunctive topnotch one, Johnson offers no single subject position. (McGill 2003:564)

Now let us turn our discussion to the examination of some of Linton Kwesi Johnson's poems and look at the importance of this writer in promoting strategies of resistance by combining aesthetics and politics in the guise of dub poetry.

Diaspora, Difference and Grassroots Movement in Linton Kwesi Johnson's Poems

It is beyond the scope of this paper to look at all poems of Linton Kwesi Johnson in detail, as time and space permit only the examination of a few examples of his work. This research will therefore try to do its best to cover LKJ's classic poems in three different decades: the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The rationale for carrying out a debate on a selected corpus of his poems will be considered through the following aspects: firstly, the poetic strategies by which the formalisms of standard English language are deconstructed (this is an aspect that has been to some extent discussed in the work of both LKJ and Rampolokeng, so my purpose is just to mention *en passant* this characteristic of resistance in LKJ's poetry); secondly, I will look at LKJ's defence of the West Indies immigration and the diasporic movements towards a hybridisation of Great Britain; the third aspect is the depiction of public spaces populated by migrants and working class dealing with state violence, unemployment and racism; and finally, the support of social movements and differing, hybrid identities as reversal discourse to hegemonic power. Presenting LKJ's selected poems according to this scheme will also be a stimulus for the readers, whose interest in his poetry may be stirred up since they will be allowed an insightful perspective on his most important poems and the topics of discussion arising from them.

At this initial stage, it is worth giving heed to the multiple aesthetic interpretations that LKJ's work is open to, ranging from the postmodern forms of combining discursive texts and contexts of popular culture and 'high art', to the expressions and celebrations of voices of the disadvantaged, the oppressed, the subalterns, the diasporans, as well as to the poeticising of bottom-up movements making grassroots demands within the spectrum of postcolonial arts of resistance. The most evident aspect of his work tackles the problem of putting neglected and peripheral narratives onto the pertinent stage of postmodernity and difference. He is entirely aware of the power of words and discourses as modes of recognition and domination. Thus, if discourses have the capacity to establish the patterns of recognition and domination, his poetry aims at discursive formats as pertinent spaces to articulate the enunciative potential of a peripheral modernity. Such spaces are composed of a hybridisation formed in-between the contact zones of imperialist powers and postcolonial territories and peoples.

This heterogeneity is the first element to be noticed when the poet employs the Jamaican Creole to distort the formalisms of Standard English so as to create a different space of enunciation, as we can infer from the majority of his poems. Let us take 'Want fi Goh Rave' as an example:

I woz
 waakin doun di road
 di adah day
 when I hear a likkle yout-man say

him seh:
 yu noh si mi situation
 mi dont have noh acamadaeshan
 mi haffi sign awn at di stayshan
 at six in di evenin
 mi seh mi life gat noh meanin
 I jus livin widout feelin

still
 mi haffi mek a raze⁵
 kaw mi come af age
 an mi want fi goh rave
 (Johnson 2006:33)

As usual in his compositions, the poet turns a blind eye to the formal patterns dictated by English grammar and makes a sheer written carnivalisation with the orality of creolised and slang languages. Journalist Vicky Allan once observed that the poetic fusion of the Caribbean language of LKJ's home and the urban patois of the street with rhythms of reggae was partly 'the best means of expression for his message, but also he liked the idea of subverting the English language, of knocking at the foundations of "Queen's English"' (2004:7). In the particular message of 'Want fi Goh Rave' the poet provides a setting where common young people suffer constantly from the pressures of not having a roof over their heads, lack of jobs, lack of security, but still keeping alive the hope of getting some money at least for going to a rave. This poetic perspective resounds in Julia Kristeva's argument that, 'carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law' (1986:36). So LKJ's basic strategies of resistance to challenge official codes and traditional poetic formulas are mostly based on language experimentation with the objective of amplifying the practice and comprehension of radical literature and political uneasiness.

LKJ describes the link of this orally-linguistic experimentation to real-life experience and community thus:

The kind of thing that I write and the way I say it is as a result of the tension between Jamaican Creole and Jamaican English and between those and English English. And all that, really, is the consequence of having been brought up in a colonial society, and then coming over here to live and go to school in England, soon afterwards. The tension builds up. You can see it in the writing. You can hear it. And something else: my poems may look sort of flat on the page. Well, that is because they're actually oral poems, as such. They were definitely written to be read aloud, in the community. (In Salkey 1975:8)

⁵ 'mek a raze': get money.

From the very beginning, the reader will notice LKJ's purpose is focused on the language of the poem, in order to establish a new way of interacting with that reader. When creating ruptures in the written language, sometimes difficult to comprehend, the poet demands a less passive behaviour from the receptor so as to decode the message. As a result, the reader is invited to cross the conventional boundaries of poetry and writing, and has more participation in the construction of meanings. At times, of course, this intention may also create uneasiness or non-conformity (a predominant tactic in the way the author deals with his own creation). In addition, the poet will use the ruptures with formal language for several purposes: the political non-conformity is a way to rethink poetic practice; the incorporation of elements least recurrent in traditional or canonical poetic conventions, as a norm of exploring new themes and experiences especially from the margins, is a way to oppose the values established by the market and mainstream; the subversion of grammatical rules and discourse codes is also a denouncement of tainted power structures, neither renouncing the very act of experimentation, nor resorting to dangerous political naivety. Such linguistic and ideological ruptures can be seen, for instance, in the poem 'Di Anfinish Revalueshan':

now watchya mistah man
 mi noh like di way yu tan
 an yu tan soh too lang yu know man
 a meditate yu a meditate pan di same sang soh lang?
 well hear mi man:

mi naw preach
 mi naw teach
 mi jus a how yu
 ow mi seit
 caw di trute well sweet
 jus like a African beat
 like wen yu si whey yu coming fram
 like wen yu site whichpawt yu reach
 soh mi noh care if yu waan vex
 ar even gwaan like yu perplex
 mi a goh show yu whey mi si mistah man
 (Johnson 2006:107)

Among other new and privileged aspects of this innovation in the use and dominance of language, the poet creatively incorporates, as in a social ceremony, the element of colonial repertoire and legislative control (namely the official language) and the system of non-official communication, which is composed, among other things, of a myriad of rumours, gossip and all sorts of idioms, music, poetry and songs. With this new communicative tool at hand, LKJ sets down a chronicle of social life and political criticism blended with dub songs and other genres of popular culture that comment, for better or worse, on the deeds of power holders. Hence, the interference and influence of hegemonic power is taken and understood as a phenomenon that reaches the most recondite realms of everyday life and that belongs to the domain of perception and experience. Employing this mix of codes, LKJ is therefore able to defy the 'mistah man' in a conflictive opposition (Fanon 1965) as well as

using the typical weapons of the weak such as sabotage, dissimulation, feigned ignorance, slander, foot-dragging, rumours, among others (Scott 1985, 1990).

Steet 66

di room woz dark-dusk howlin softly
 six-a-clack,
 charcoal lite defying site woz
 movin black;
 di soun woz muzik mellow steady flow,
 an man-son mind jus mystic red,
 green, red, green...pure scene.

...

di mitey poet I-Roy⁶ woz on di wire,
 Western did a scank an each one lawf:
 him feelin irie, dread I.
 'Street 66,' di said man said,
 'any policeman come yah
 will get some righteous raas klaat licks,
 yea man, whole heap a kicks.'

hours beat di scene movin rite
 when all of a sudden
 bam bam bam a knockin pan di door.
 'Who's dat?' asked Western feelin rite.
 'Open up! It's the police! Open up!'
 'What address do you want?'
 'Number sixty-six! Come on, open up!'
 Western feelin high reply:
 'Yes, dis is Street 66;
 step rite in an tek some licks.'
 (Johnson 2006:9-10)

As a matter of fact, LKJ's poetic style relies widely on a blending pattern where aesthetics and politics are used to depict public spaces. In such milieus everyday facts of life are surrounded by common people (especially young people) suffering from shortage of employment, police violence, segregation, misgovernance, scepticism, lack of perspective, et cetera. Moreover, the exploration of poetic language by depicting public, open spaces of conflict and hardship brings forward a preoccupation with the crisis of public spaces in contemporary urbanised societies. Projecting a perspective of experimental poetic creation, generally in association with left-wing politics, LKJ's ditty is both an addition to other critical worldviews of social problems and a mouthpiece to claim representation for marginalised individuals, be it in racial, diasporic, political, social or other contexts.

last satdey
 I nevah deh pan no faam,
 so I decide fi tek a walk
 doun a Brixton
 an see wha gwaan.

di bredrin dem stan-up
 outside a Hip City,⁷

⁶ Jamaican reggae rapper popular during the 1970s.

as usual, a look pretty;
dem a lawf big lawf
dem a talk dread talk
dem a shuv an shuffle dem feet,
soakin in di sweet musical beat.

but when nite come
policeman run dem dung;
beat dem dung a grung,
kick dem ass,
sen dem paas justice
to prison walls of gloom.
(Johnson 2006:3)

The poetic discourse, despite dealing with local problems in a creolised language description, also presents a state of affairs that is adaptable to the need of widening our perspective to the facts of both globalism and difference. For instance, it points out differences carefully scrutinised, in a scenario of accommodation of knowledge where the subaltern assumes their own voice, their own history. From the moment when the poet denounces politicians as morally corrupt and policemen as gratuitously violent, and when he gives space for the 'likkle yout-man [to] say' what he thinks and what afflicts him, there will come to the front line a crucial deconstruction of several categories that classifies such individuals as distinct, or subaltern, or second-class citizens. This is due to the fact that recognition of differences emerges from the spaces of marginalised zones, which is not always prone to share the Western tendency to rationalise monolithically. And such a transit is enunciated permanently within both the physical and subjective displacement observed in contemporaneity, where there is room for developing particular and collective, local and global imaginaries.

The very fact of displacements and transits of subjects from the periphery to the centre of power puts forward the deconstruction of a marginal subjectivity marked territorially, culturally, ethnically, linguistically. The physical phenomenon of dislocation and resettlement, the backbone of diasporic movements, disrupts old structures of meanings and reshapes central, hegemonic discourses on the grounds of postmodernity, postcoloniality, globalisation, hybridisation and difference. Working as an operative means to provoke and persuade the central discursive programs, this 'incursion' has nothing to do with an analysis of external forms surrounding a centrality. Indeed, it is a reality that entails comprehending, internalising, and reshaping the practices of knowledge and colonial discourses that have been historically based on the recognition of the other as an odd figure. But this other comes from the multiplicity, the plurality that is part of us, and therefore it is increasingly and permanently linked to ontological questions in contemporaneity.

⁷ Desmond's Hip City: a popular record shop in the 1960s and 1970s for Jamaican music, on Atlantic Road, Brixton.

In this regard, the Caribbean migratory experience places a considerable weight on the balance of diaspora. In their explanation of the question, 'Who counts as a Caribbean poet?', Brown and McWatt argue that

If we take a fairly conventional notion of 'nationality' as someone born in the region, who lived and worked for most of their lives there, then a significant percentage of the [Caribbean] writers...would not have been eligible. Migration has been a fact of Caribbean life—indeed, it is arguably the defining experience of Caribbean 'being'. Historically, with the exception of the few surviving Amerindian communities in the islands (and, of course, in the mainland South American territories), all the people of the Caribbean are 'incomers', whether from Africa, Europe, India, China, or the Middle East. So a sense of being 'half home' as Derek Walcott put it, is perhaps part of what it means to be a West Indian. That being so, it's not surprising, then, that so many Caribbean people have been willing to uproot themselves 'again' to pursue economic opportunities or other ambitions. All through the last century West Indians migrated in significant numbers, to Panama, to England, to Canada, and to the USA. Many writers were among them, most famously the group who ventured to Britain in the 1950s and collectively drew attention to the region's literary ambitions...Hardly any of those writers returned to live in the Caribbean, but all continued to write about the region throughout their careers.(Brown and McWatt 2005:xxi-ii)

This diasporised Caribbeanness and its flexibility in appearing in different corners of the world is sometimes explored by LKJ as a way of protest and resistance. An example of it occurs in the poem 'It Dread inna Ingran', in which LKJ pays homage to George Lindo, a Jamaican worker living in Bradford, a 'family man' living in the melting pot of England who 'nevah do no wrang' and despite that was wrongfully convicted of armed robbery under the regime of Margaret Thatcher. So LKJ's poem, despite campaigning for Lindo's release, sounds like a very utterance for diasporans to unite and 'stan firm inna Ingran' against a hegemonic power that insists in treating the different, or the 'minority', as a subaltern:

mi seh dem frame-up George Lindo
 up in Bradford Toun
 but di Bradford Blacks
 dem a rally roun...

Maggi Tatcha on di go
 wid a racist show
 but a she haffi go
 kaw,
 rite now,
 African
 Asian
 West Indian
 an Black British
 stan firm inna Ingran
 inna disya time yah
 far noh mattah wat dey say,
 come wat may,
 we are here to stay

inna Inflan,
inna disya time yah...
(Johnson 2006:25)

Hence, as Hitchcock (1993) once noticed, the Afro-Caribbean peoples and their postcolonial Asian fellows are caught up in the Manichean logic of exclusion/inclusion that drives the British hegemonic ethnic group. When questioned about the notion of black British identity and how it fits into the whole experience of afro-diaspora, Linton Kwesi Johnson answered more or less in consonance with V. S. Naipaul's conclusion when, after graduating at Oxford, the latter found himself on his own in early 1950s London, racially marginalised, without a job or prospects, unable to have his first literary attempts published, desolately homesick, but reluctant to admit defeat and return to Trinidad, even after his father's death. Then LKJ's stance is pro diaspora as a way of realistic resistance:

From an early age, in fact from when I was in the Panthers, I realised that black people were in this country [Great Britain] to stay and we had to accept that we weren't going anywhere, and this whole thing that our parents had come with, a dream of coming to work for a few years and then going back home, that wasn't on at all and we had to accept that we're a part of Britain and that we had to build our own independent institutions here—cultural, political and social institutions—and accept the reality of our situation.(in Caesar 1996:69)

This clear-cut political vision in LKJ's work, which as Kozain argues, 'calls attention to and asserts, in a defiant and confrontational manner, the presence of black West Indians in Britain' (1994:84), is particularly present in the late-1970s and 1980s verses, a period marked by radical change in the political awareness of West Indian immigrants in the British metropolis. As a result, when LKJ establishes the Jamaican diction and Creole language as a pattern for his poetic writings, he helps to consolidate the idea that black communities were not only immigrants living in England and serving as blue-collar workers, but were in fact legally and historically British citizens. LKJ always takes a clear stance that he has been living in Europe since he was 11 years old, so he has put down roots in British soil: 'Whether we want to accept it or not, our children and grandchildren are Europeans'. And he does not mean that merely in a racial sense, but in a geopolitical sense as well: 'We are Europeans and we are part of Europe. In the same way that one can speak about African-Americans, one can talk about black Europeans, because we are part of Europe. Europe will never be white again. Never.' (in Caesar 1996:76-7). (To the same extent it is also crucial to begin the deconstruction of the myth that Africa is the black man's land, given the complexities and diversities of the continent. In addition, diaspora and globalisation are currently changing the demographic maps of the world, so determinisms based on the association of racial typologies with different territories will sooner or later vanish.)

'Inflan is a Bitch' is another poem dealing with the West Indian migrant experience in Great Britain. In this poem LKJ empathises with the immigrants, recording the many difficulties they have to go through to survive in the 'land of

opportunity'. Apart from the diasporic element reflected upon, the protest element is easily noticed: protest against alienating chores, inequality, racism, class prejudice, exploitation, oppression and so forth.

wen mi jus come to Landan toun
 mi use to work pan di andahgroun
 but workin pan di andahgroun
 yu dont get fi know your way aroun

Inglan is a bitch
 dere's no escapin it
 Inglan is a bitch
 dere's no runin whe fram it

...
 well mi dhu day wok an mi dhu nite wok
 mi dhu clean wok an mi dhu dutty wok
 dem seh dat black man is very lazy
 but if yu si how mi wok yu woodah seh mi crazy
 (Johnson 2006:39-40)

The depiction of public spaces and mass organisations, intertwined with discursive resources for storytelling and dub sounds, are also a common base in the construction of LKJ's ditties. Thus, a fully current overview of the dramas and strains suffered inside the West Indian collective based in 1970s and 1980s London is recorded in his poetry. Since the beginning of his artistic production Linton Kwesi Johnson has amalgamated poetic expressions and public performances, resorting to a whole arsenal of (un)subordinated rhythmic discursiveness. This is the reason why in *Dread Beat an Blood* we can find perceptible funk sonorities, as in the case of 'Doun di Road' or 'Song of Blood,' or the firing nature of the street engagement. As an instance of this engagement, we can inspect the poem 'Forces of Victri,' a poem that sounds like a rally chant dedicated to the Race Today Renegades and the Carnival Development Committee, the pro-carnivalists who won over the anti-carnivalist forces that tried to prohibit the Notting Hill Carnival in the late 1970s. Like a griot of the people, LKJ brings together story, poem, song and dance in a couple of dub verses that celebrate the maintenance of the carnival as a symbolic weapon, as well as a 'niche' of autonomy where people find their dignity as a subordinated group:

we're di forces af victri
 an wi comin rite through
 we're di forces af victri
 now wat yu gonna do

wi mek a likkle date
 fi nineteen-seventy-eight
 an wi fite an wi fite
 an defeat di State
 den all a wi jus fahwod
 up to Not'n' Hill Gate

...
 wi dressed in red
 an wi feelin dread

wi dressed in green
an wi feelin mean
wi dressed in purple
an wi dressed in yellow
wi dressed in blue
an wi comin rite through
(Johnson 2006:37)

The poet himself remembers with great enthusiasm the deeds of the event in an interview:

Forces of Victory itself was a celebration of the victory that the pro-carnivalists had won over those people who had tried to ban the Notting Hill Carnival, because, remember, they tried to police the carnival off the streets with so many policemen in 1976 it led to a riot, and another riot again in 1977. And in 1978 I celebrated because Race Today Renegades, which is the mas' band to which I belonged at the time, were playing a mas' called 'The Forces of Victory' and the mas' was also symbolic of the victory of the pro-carnivalist forces against the anti-carnivalist forces, and it was a military mas' with tanks, infantry, airforce, sailors and so on and so forth.(in Caesar 1996:69)

In his analysis of the configuration of social conflicts, LKJ brings forward an environment of deep social and economic problems, where the functionality of State usually does not reach, and into which a brutal police force is brought instead. The result is a fuelling of tensions as crowds gather to manifest, protest and fight for their political and economic rights, in a practical demonstration of the objective coordinates of social class disputes. This is also a parameter LKJ uses to reflect immediately on the struggles of social movements and their demands for improvement of public politics. On the other hand, the poet does not think twice to express his disapproval when these movements seem to be internally fragmented, oriented to liquidate their own autonomies, leaving room therefore for the truculent repressive strategies of the State to be continued. No doubt the poet also recognises the challenges of social movements and exhorts the willing possibility of situating such struggles in a horizon of rights conquest and gaining the battle of ideas.

As an example of strategies of resistance of social movements in urban areas, it is worthwhile to emphasise the Notting Hill Carnival conflicts and the violent 1981 Brixton riots. Both events were described by LKJ's verses respectively as 'Forces of Victri' and 'Di Great Insohreckshan'. These confrontational events highlighted the need to put pressure on the government to assure the end of institutional racism in the Metropolitan Police, the continuous harassment the (black) population felt they were under, the combating of segregation and social inequality, and the promotion of a positive general view of the dynamic celebration of Britain's multicultural diversity. Doing battle with the degeneracy of a conservative intelligentsia, and avoiding the traps of ideological cocoons, have been essential steps for social movements like these ones continually adjusting to urban spaces in a changing world. Such movements have then too much to say about modern-day postcolonial trends, such as hybridisation, third spaces, creolisation, diaspora, et cetera. As a matter

of fact, hybridity with an inbuilt tendency to resist and transform has been an implicit subject in Bhabha's theories: 'The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation' (1990:211).

Di Great Insohreckshan

it woz in april nineteen eighty wan
 doun inna di ghetto af Brixtan
 dat di babylan dem cauz such a frickshan
 dat it bring about a great insohreckshan
 an it spread all owevah di naeshan
 it woz truly an historikal occayshan

it woz event af di year
 an I wish I ad been dere
 wen wi run riat all owevah Brixtan
 wen wi mash-up plenty police van
 wen wi mash-up di wicked wan plan
 wen wi mash-up di Swamp Eighty Wan⁸
 fi wha?
 fi mek di rulah dem andastan
 dat wi naw tek noh more a dem oppreshan
 (Johnson 2006:60)

From these excerpts we may surmise not only a call-for-action attitude in LKJ's poetry, but also an instrument to mobilise people to celebrate their conquests. But his verses also address other feelings such as frustration, despair and lack of perspective amongst the youth, migrants and working class. It is simply enough to listen to or read poems such as 'Dread Beat an Blood' and 'Five Nights of Bleeding', the first two texts in his acclaimed collection entitled *Dread Beat an Blood* (1975), to have an idea of the consequences of collective frustration and discontent simmering in the sheer bosom of Afro-West Indian youth. 'Five Nights of Bleeding' was the first of LKJ's published poems and, according to him, 'that was one of my earliest attempts at writing in the Jamaican language, with the English language, and using reggae rhythms at the same time' (in Caesar 1996:66). Dedicated to Leroy Harris, a victim of internecine violence, the poem draws a clear-cut picture of a violent scenario in North and South London involving black youths:

madness... madness...
 madness tight on the heads of the rebels
 the bitterness erupts like a hot-blast
 broke glass
 rituals of blood on the burning
 served by a cruel in-fighting
 five nights of horror an of bleeding
 broke glass
 cold blades as sharp as the eyes of hate
 an the stabbings
 it's war amongst the rebels
 madness... madness... war.

⁸ Swamp 81: code name for Brixton police stop-and-search operation in 1981.

night number one was in brixton
 soprano B sound system
 was a beating out a the rhythm with a fire
 coming down his reggae-reggae wire
 it was a soun shaking down your spinal column
 a bad music tearing up your flesh
 an the rebels them start a fighting
 de yout them jus turn wild
 it's war amongst the rebels
 madness... madness... war.
 (Johnson 2006:6)

Although the persona could keep a distance from the depicted events, there are moments in which it is possible to spot and determine his position in relation to the happenings. Therefore, when two police officers, or 'babylonian tyrants', are victimised in the violence fired by discontent, the poet has no qualms in singing: 'righteous righteous war'—celebrating thus in a defiant manner what will undeniably end as precedent for a series of tragic events to come.

night number three
 over the river
 right outside the rainbow⁹
 inside james brown was screaming soul
 outside the rebels were freezing cold
 babylonian tyrants descended
 pounced on the brothers who were bold
 so with a flick
 of the wrist
 a jab an a stab
 the song of blades was sounded
 the bile of oppresson was vomited
 an two policemen wounded
 righteous righteous war.
 (Johnson 2006:7)

The landmark of this social convulsion, which shortly after would literally set afire the streets of the English capital, came when 'a bran new breed of blacks' (as LKJ defines the members of his generation in the poem 'Yout Rebels') realised that white British ruling class were out to trample upon their legitimate aspirations and rights. It is not fortuitous then that poems such as 'It Dread inna Ingran' and 'New Craas Massakah' had been composed in the heyday of community outrage, mobilisation and protests against the judicial proceedings in which the British establishment, particularly the Thatcher government, were accused of both committing violations of rights in the case of George Lindo by finding him guilty of offences he had not perpetrated, and neglecting the racially motivated arson attack at Yvonne Ruddock's birthday party in South London in 1981, which resulted in the deaths of fourteen young blacks and twenty-six seriously injured (Hitchcock 1993, Johnson 2006). Racial hatred was certainly the main reason why these individuals either seemed immediately suspicious to or suffered neglect from the police authorities.

⁹ A former music venue in Finsbury Park, London.

Moreover, when we listen to or read 'All Wi Doin is Defendin', text in which LKJ makes a seminal contribution to dub poetry, we may assume that the album *Dread Beat an Blood* is an authentic time bomb:

war ... war ...
 mi seh lissen
 oppressin man
 hear what I say if yu can
 wi have
 a grevious blow fi blow

wi will fite yu in di street wid we han
 wi hav a plan
 soh lissen man
 get ready fi tek some blows

doze days
 of di truncheon
 an doze nites
 of melancholy locked in a cell
 doze hours of torture touchin hell
 doze blows dat caused my heart to swell
 were well
 numbered
 and are now
 at an end

all wi doin
 is defendin
 soh get yu ready
 fi war ... war ...
 freedom is a very firm thing
 (Johnson 2006:11)

Another poem worthy of note is 'Sonny's Lettah', whose features are not only responsible for a rich expressiveness and a communicative strength characteristic of dub poetry, but also for its capacity for instigating revolutionary action. LKJ himself declares that a lot of people could identify with this poem because the events described in it 'was so prevalent an experience in the black community'; he also recognises that 'Sonny's Lettah' 'struck a chord in the black community' and that people who know him still thank him for that particular poem (in Caesar 1996:69). This text was originally and fully edited in the album *Forces of Victory* (Island, 1979), and then was included in the compilation *Inglan is a Bitch* (1980). As the author gives the subtitle 'Anti-Sus Poem' to the above-mentioned poem, the reading and analysis of this undeniable classic of dub poetry deserve some explanatory lines regarding the SUS law.

Established in the 1824 Vagrancy Act, the category SUS, short for 'suspicion', was employed by the British police to arrest any person suspected of having the intention of committing an illegal act. According to what was declared in this act, a magistrate could throw anybody into prison simply by considering the testimony of police officers who could affirm having seen the detainee acting suspiciously on two distinct occasions. According to an article

published in *Race and Class* no. 6 of 1979, more than 40 percent of people arrested and sentenced to prison under this law were black youths. Nonetheless, perhaps nothing has been as decisive in denouncing the arbitrary nature of the SUS law as the poem 'Sonny's Lettah'. The law was only repealed in 2000 (Campbell 1997:194, Johnson 2006:27).

Dear Mama,
 Good Day.

...

I really dont 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.

...

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 batan.
 Dem waak straight up to mi an Jim.

...

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 mi 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.
 (Johnson 2006:27-9)

The format of 'Sonny's Lettah' resorts to the epistle genre. Therefore, the persona is the sender of a letter in which he unveils to his mother some regrettable events that have occurred to both him and his brother. Since the sender could not resort to an alternative means of communicating with his mother, it is reasonable to infer that she does not live in London. Sonny tells his story, therefore, literally and updates the storytelling role of this poetic genre. It

is also worth noting the spontaneity of his narrative performance which is exempt of ideologically dogmatic designs, commonly found in certain 'socially committed poetry', including, we cannot help saying, part of the very same Linton Kwesi Johnson's production. Furthermore, the entire text is immersed in a musical atmosphere that stresses the dramatic characteristic of the account. This aspect, in turn, is strengthened by the onomatopoeic nature of the vocabulary that the poet chooses, especially in the last verses that communicate the maximum dramatic tension of the poem: verses literally conformed by a firing of acoustic impacts and authentic signifiers to depict a sequence of violent actions that ends in homicide and arrest.

As for the poem 'More Time', LKJ launches a vigorous attack on the workaholic and technocrat world that does keep workers imprisoned in an exhausting, unremitting and usually competitive activity and routine, especially a pressured urban working life spent trying to get ahead with little time left for leisure, for contemplation. The very first stanza delineates the scenario of this rat-race phenomenon, bringing up a deconstructive, unconventional discourse about such theme. Basically, the poet states that contemporary human beings are living through a technological revolution that has been transforming the way in which we work, create, communicate and so on, so that social movements have to push for shorter working days and shorter working weeks, and resort to idleness, pleasure and educational activities as a strategy of resistance:

wi want di shatah workin day
 gi wi di shatah workin week
 langah holiday
 wi need decent pay

more time fi leasure
 more time fi pleasure
 more time fi edificaeshun
 more time fi reekreashan
 more time fi contemplate
 more time fi ruminare
 more time fi relate
 (Johnson 2006:86)

To come to this conclusion the poet recounts briefly the history of work:

wi mawchin out di ole towards di new centri
 arm wid di new teknalagy
 wi gettin more an more producttivity
 some seh tings lookin-up fi prasperity
 but if evrywan goin get a share dis time
 ole mentality mus get lef behine
 (Johnson 2006:86)

Work then is represented as a synonym of degradation, torture, or at least a burdensome activity. The poem recounts the ideology of 'prasperity' through the centuries, as work activities grow increasingly into new technologies relying on the Western status or parameter of growth and productivity. However, the persona argues that old mentality still hinders an equal share of such development, and that human and social values must be cultivated instead.

Next, some advice is given as an attempt to improve and develop the human condition. The idea of pleasure is then defended as a salutary way of life. Here the notion of hedonism is brought back as a salvation from a technological world that tends to transform human beings into automatons, living in a continuum consisting of pain and stress.

In fact, from the 20th century onwards the notions of entertainment, leisure and also good health have been massively associated with consumption of goods alongside the increasing of workaholic activities. No doubt, 'More Time' is a relevant critical poem attacking compulsive work, unemployment and low wages. The way out, according to the poet, is that leisure, rest and pleasure give us more time for contemplation about our own human condition, therefore the need to exercise it. On the other hand, the question that immediately arises is how to loaf our life away in a society that demands so much of us? An implicit answer in the poem seems to be that we should practice our critical mind by ruminating, meditating, living and creating our everyday activities, taking heed though whether our desires and necessities are true or fabricated and modelled by a capitalist advertisement-oriented media and market.

Notwithstanding, the poem fails in not considering that today the sheer ideal of 'leisure' has been engulfed by the roll of obligations dictated by the rules of labour and 'teknalogy'. Workers usually engage in holiday activities as an obligation of travelling, staying in nice hotels, going to clubs, buying many goods and so on. In other words, leisure has become a ritual of consumerism and a product of the necessity imposed by the media and the market. Another point worth considering is that there are those people who regard the work they do as a fountain of pleasure. Such people can work weekdays, weekends and holidays, and they might not be annoyed with it. Of course, these are usually highly skilled workers occupying privileged positions in big companies; in a sense, they comply with the hegemonic rules of power since they are part of it. On the other hand, what the great majority of workers really want is more time away from the chores and exploitation of their workplaces. Thus, the poem is one more chant for workers to unite and resist the impositions to obey a technocratic, workaholic schedule, so that they can achieve more time to develop their full human potential. In addition, as Scott explains: 'Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines. Just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, wily-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic barrier reef of their own' (1985:36).

In short, besides being a writer, Linton Kwesi Johnson can also be considered a socially engaged activist and performer who contributes greatly to voicing the desperation of oppressed communities at local and global levels. He conveys his political issues in his poetry, songs and performances, as well as through his activism. Even though at times his work levels criticisms against old-fashioned socialist states and the plenty problems of autocratic and bureaucratic control stratagems, such as in the poem 'Mi Revalueshanary Fren':

mi revalueshanary fren is nat di same agen

yu know fram wen?
 fram di masses shattah silence—
 staat fi grumble
 fram pawty paramoncy tek a tumble
 fram Hungary to Poelan to Romania
 fram di cozy kyawsl dem staat fi crumble
 wen wi buck-up wananada in a reaznin
 mi fren always en up pan di same ting
 dis is di sang him love fi sing:

Kaydar¹⁰
 e ad to go
 Zhivkov¹¹
 e ad to go
 Husak¹²
 e ad to go
 Honnicka¹³
 e ad to go
 Chowcheskhu¹⁴
 e ad to go
 jus like apartied
 will av to go
 (Johnson 2006:67)

Notwithstanding LKJ certainly remains committed to fair principles of equal sharing of the world's wealth and ending the exploitation of labour the lot of hundreds of millions of civilians across the world live under. In addition, the poet also shares his theories about what it means to identify oneself as part of a 'minority', as well as his own experiences as a Caribbean immigrant in Britain who tries to find his discourse outside imperial paradigms of recognition by emphasising his own identity and difference.

The black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde, once commenting at a 1979 panel upon the role of difference of race, sexuality, class and age within the lives of US women, asserted that

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference; those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older, know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those other identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (Lorde 1983:99; emphasis original)

¹⁰ Kadar: last communist leader of Hungary.

¹¹ Last communist leader of Bulgaria.

¹² Last communist leader of Czechoslovakia.

¹³ Honecker: last communist leader of East Germany.

¹⁴ Ceausescu: last communist leader of Romania.

The strategy Lorde suggests by advocating empowerment through differing identities as an effective way to undermine the neglect and non-acceptance of poor, black, third-world women in the circles dominated by patriarchy and white feminism relates to significant extent to LKJ's subterfuge to get past the master's stronghold. By exploring the question of language as a weapon of the weak, the poet is giving a voice to those who had been silenced and helping resurrect discredited discourses from society's systems of exclusion; so he is aware of Lorde's preoccupation and is employing the subaltern's tools to assail and dismantle the master's house (or language=power). As aforesaid, LKJ's pen struggles to write over the OED and bend the rules of English grammar by emphasising the native voice (as much as Kamau Brathwaite emphasises orality in his essay 'History of the Voice'), and in doing so LKJ's work makes an effort to transform the prejudice against speaking and writing the Creole language into an innovative source of poetic creation, for the lyrical shifts in language and music, style and content are closely linked to West Indian diasporans' colloquialisms and subjective experiences. He is deconstructing and recreating syntax, spelling, sentence structure, verse pattern, level of forms..., in a way that in other circumstances would in fact appear nonsensical, for it is very different from conventional usage. Nonetheless, it must be surmised that such tactical style is crafted with artifice and elegance to subvert and almost deliberately eradicate the possibility of a derisive heckling of emerging identities that wants to break with dominant tradition and formalisms.

In a sense, those people subjected to Western imperialism experience a need to acquire a notion of self beyond the contamination of totalising concepts or images, and LKJ is conscious that bringing different, hybridised identities to the forefront of the battle of ideas is a key strategy in subverting the power hierarchy of arts, politics, class, gender, et cetera. Such identities emerge from the experience of marginalisation engendered by universal or Eurocentric concepts and images. Hence LKJ's stance on not being a 'tap natch poet' makes a claim for new sorts of political and cultural resistance, new identities, new forms of creation, new representations and 'new word hawdah'. And dub poetry, pure, simple, apparently inoffensive, remains his weapon of first resort.

The adopted route leads to the unveiling of the histories of (post)colonial territories and peoples, leaving an opening for them to represent their geocultural characteristics and mutations. This changing effect is increasingly present in the arts, where most postcolonial production finds its place, as in literature, music, visual arts and so forth. The whole scenario, however, is encapsulated in the unequal development of advanced capitalism, which has serious difficulty in keeping a common cultural logic, and manifests itself permanently in inequalities and imbalances. In the years to come we will see how these complexities of inequalities and imbalances in the contemporary capitalist world will be dealt with in the literary work of other postcolonial writ[h]ers along with the context of history and literature.

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