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Carolyn COOPER, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large*

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C'est ce que démontre Ras Miguel Lorne, avocat, éditeur et Rasta, en soulignant l'iniquité de la justice coloniale : il raconte comment, pour diriger le procès de Howell en 1934, les Britanniques rappelèrent du Nyasaland (Malawi) le juge Robert William Lyall-Grant qui s'était rendu célèbre pour ses jugements féroces.

Quant à Louis E.A. Moyston, le seul journaliste jamaïcain à avoir fait des recherches poussées sur le leader, il nous propose, un « portrait » et une bibliographie très complète (206) retraçant les chemins insidieux pris par l'histoire pour effacer, puis ressusciter la mémoire d'Howell.

Et c'est bien là que le bât blesse : l'omerta sur Howell est levée, mais les voix qui s'élèvent reflètent encore les inhibitions héritées du passé. On remarque l'absence des femmes, pourtant majoritaires parmi les premiers adeptes. La contribution de l'ethnologue britannique Petrine Archer, décédée en 2012, décrypte le processus de créolisation manifeste dans deux diagrammes dessinés par le leader, mais n'aborde pas la place des femmes. On

note aussi que les connexions haut-placées de Howell sont poliment laissées dans l'ombre – la mention des familles influentes reste un tabou ; et surtout, l'accent est mis systématiquement sur les influences africaines (kumina, revivalisme...) au détriment de la pensée globalisée de Howell, l'expérience de 16 années sur les routes du monde parmi les révoltés et les libres-penseurs. Nous n'en saurons pas plus sur ses trois tours du monde, son séjour à New York, ses vingt-quatre mois d'internement à Sing Sing, ou ses rapports avec le Komintern.

Seul l'interview des deux fils de Howell, Monty (77 ans) et Blade (74), qui racontent leurs souvenirs du Pinnacle, apportent des éléments substantiels et concrets nouveaux. Voici enfin de quoi nourrir la recherche historique, et répondre aux attentes de tous ceux pour qui le mouvement Rasta est bien plus qu'un folklore – une branche inédite du mouvement de libération noire, une part de notre histoire à tous.

Hélène LEE

Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

"Dancehall good to we and we love it... A mi seh healing in de dancehall, healing in de dancehall..." For those who deliberately fail to read and listen beyond the lyrics of Jamaica's dancehall music, *Sound Clash: Jamaica Dancehall Culture at Large* is an exploratory text which serves to consolidate, institutionalize and integrate Jamaican dancehall culture not just locally

or regionally, but also to identify the internationalization of a genre of music often steeped in controversy.

The text represents a detailed study of dancehall culture taking into account the multifaceted product it is, not limited to "bad-man tunes," wining and bamboo lawns. Following the negative stereotypes and controversy surround-

Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture At Large

ing Jamaican dancehall culture in the 1990s, and lacunae of study on dancehall culture, it is rather fitting that the author Carolyn Cooper, one of the chief architects of the Reggae Studies Unit at the University of the West Indies Mona Campus in Kingston, has published this compilation and definitive study of dancehall culture to date.

This text foregrounds the importance of understanding Jamaican dancehall culture publicly labelled as “poor/ghetto people” music, mistaken and misinterpreted as a contributor to Jamaica’s increasing culture of violence, blamed for portraying too much “slackness,” dismissed as “jump-up” music disturbing the peace, frowned upon by the intelligentsia and those whose area code remains well within Kingston’s Golden Triangle. Written in true dancehall sympathizer style, the book is an authentic literary tour de force not to be overlooked. With substantial knowledge and in-depth cross cultural references privileging Africa and the African diaspora cultural retention, Cooper examines and contextualizes dancehall music as an insider, who has firsthand knowledge and experience of dancehall culture and is a frequent attendee to stage shows as well as extending invites to artistes for discussions to one of her many lectures, much to the chagrin of others since the “insider’s perspective is constantly invalidated as the outsider positions him/herself as the ‘real’ authority in these matters.” (12)

Expressive of gender roles, border-crossings, socio-economic and at times political conditioning, identity, bodies of contestation in a space/place having its own aesthetics, the book ought not to be read solely through the

myopic lenses of dancehall culture as representative only of music, but as a unique cultural blending of complexities rooted to a specific space constructed by the marginalized masses in their own language, dress code, movements, morals and rules seeking no validation from “high” society (as opposed to the so-called “lower” class), since Jamaican dancehall culture in a sense has symbolically—if not literally—evolved as a legitimate state within a Nation. After all, culture is not static and neither is it universal. Cooper’s unapologetic use of a Jamaican epistemology and boldness in her public defense of dancehall music illuminate readers with lyrical waxing through word and sound, thus inviting thought-provoking moments that those already familiar with her work will easily recognize. Her ten engaging chapters cover a wide array of topics: religion, music, gender roles, sexuality, literature, popular culture, body politics, globalization and broader socio-economic constructs that inform and promote these subjects. The author delves

into discussions and draws from a wide repertoire of dancehall artistes and their musical archives as equal “backtivity” to her own arguments. Hence, it is helpful if readers possess background knowledge of Jamaican music in general and socio-cultural history, as the catalogue of events here requires familiarity with language and the institution that is dancehall.

In her introduction aptly titled “Word, Sound, and Power,” Cooper gives readers a refresher’s course on her previous, groundbreaking work on dancehall culture, *Noises in the Blood* (1993). Additionally, each chapter in the text features scholarly discourse beyond the confines of dancehall, as the author tactfully dismisses and unmasks outsider narratives that assume that they have enough exposure to this culture to fully dissect and criticize it. Cooper takes to tasks the ever present Eurocentrism at play in the writings and arguments of those privileged individuals in their attempts to construct and deconstruct dancehall culture—particularly its language. As she later writes,

This 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... The persistence of this tradition of role-play in contemporary Jamaican dancehall culture makes it difficult sometimes for outsiders to accurately decode local cultural signs. (153)

In chapter Five, “‘Lyrical Gun’: Metaphor and Role Play in Dancehall Culture,” a revision of an earlier work that appeared in *The Massachusetts Review* in 1994, Cooper’s analysis of lyrics argues on the duality of word-play encrypted by DJ’s and the art of performing. Unfortunately, some Jamaicans have taken on a literal

interpretation to the DJ’s lyrics, and to be fair, a few of them have taken the performance from the stage to the streets with their bad-man persona. Cooper underlines society’s ambivalence towards a certain type of bad-man, interpreted here as a dichotomy between the State’s legal enforcers (police force, soldiers) and the poor people’s defender (dons and DJ’s). Evident failure of successive governments to meet the most basic needs of the masses has allowed for dons and to some extent DJ’s to fill the gap of providing social services to citizens, but with severe repercussions.

Therefore, readers must bear in mind that Cooper is a formidable linguist. Similar to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986), Cooper views language as “cultural capital,” a means of social mobility. For the DJ in Jamaica, his/her lyrics are typically birthed through hardships, poverty, adversaries and ghetto suffering. Thus, the use of language through lyrics are his/her weapons [no pun intended], labour, access to resources and a means of appropriating wealth.

In the following chapter, the book’s contemporary feel draws attention to facets of dancehall culture readers would perhaps overlook. Noting the boundaries of Jamaica’s political and religious conservatism, Cooper includes the sensitive and contentious issue of sexuality—in this case homosexuality and dancehall resistance to this practice immortalized in songs such as TOK’s “Chi-Chi Man” and Buju Banton’s “Boom By-By.” The imagery of violence against homosexuals portrayed in foreign media has done much to hurt the local music industry and prevented certain artistes from “eating a food” or earning that much cov-

eted foreign dollars, due to the cancellation of overseas shows in Europe and North America. However, it is not just that Jamaica is homophobic, but the resistance to this practice lies with the fact that, again, acceptance is being imposed from outside. The problem stems from Euro-America referencing of the "other," meaning local people, whereby in modern times natives must still be told what is good for them or rather what is in their best interests without full consideration of their social, cultural and political realities. This is perpetuated through foreign laws and interventions undertaken using forced systematic methods of acceptance.

Of value is the final chapter, "The Dancehall Transnation: Language, Liter/orature and Global Jamaica," which takes on a post-colonial narrative of Jamaica's colonial legacy. An ardent advocate for the recognition of Jamaican Creole, this is probably the chapter that explains the cultural dissonance of the two Jamaica's (uptown/downtown), language as identity and global commodification of dancehall music. The internal dynamics of Jamaican dancehall culture exists within the established realms of a society taught to value the "Queens English" and speak "properly." However, creole or patois is the *lingua franca* of dancehall subverting the Standard English language that is the hall marker of the educated in Jamaica. Cooper gives an historical overview of the developing stages of linguistic studies in Jamaica from as early as the XIXth century, and even before: "Jamaican linguists Jean D'Costa and Barbara Lalla confirm that as early

as 1740, 'connected discourses' in Jamaican appeared in print." (282) This was believed to be a fascination of the colonial masters with the Jamaican slaves way of communicating. In later years, Jamaican creole was utilized in public literary spaces by Claude McKay and Louise Bennett, one of Jamaica's most prolific writers and stage performers, who took the Jamaican language on the international stage through satirical parodies evoking colonial sentiments. Dancehall culture has thus challenged the status quo of the elitist class, acquiring its own power; through multilayered language and slangs, the masses and musicians are constantly giving new meanings and functionality to lyrics. The global impact that Jamaican dancehall culture has achieved is *in continuum*, withstanding clashes at home to become large abroad.

Dennis HOWARD

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