

Chapter Title: Introduction

Book Title: The African-Jamaican Aesthetic

Book Subtitle: Cultural Retention and Transformation Across Borders

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Published by: Brill. (2017)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwwb7.3>

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— Introduction —

THIS STUDY EXAMINES the African-Jamaican aesthetic impulse in diasporic dub poetry and fiction paying particular attention to how these art forms have developed and been mediated in Canadian and British contexts. More specifically, I explore how African-Jamaican cultural productions of the diaspora are employed as a means of recovering, rearticulating, and remaking cultural identities that have been disrupted by histories of slavery and colonial conquest. My research demonstrates how the cultivation of an African-Jamaican aesthetic plays a key role in inspiring community activism, creating cultural spaces, and forging and sustaining cultural identities in Caribbean diasporas. In making these claims, I borrow from VèVè Clark's notion of "diaspora literacy," which offers a way to approach the literatures of the African diaspora from "an informed indigenous perspective,"¹ and Farah Shroff's definition of indigenous knowledge as a legitimate system of knowledges that has been discredited within the authority of Western discourse.² These definitions enable a focus on the creative continuity of indigenous knowledges and local cultures in African-Jamaican diasporic literary production.

According to George Dei, indigenous knowledges provide an anti-colonial framework and constitute a kind of "knowledge consciousness that arises from

¹ VèVè A. Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and Marasa Consciousness," *Theatre Survey* 50.1 (May 2009): 11.

² Farah M. Shroff, "Ayurveda: Mother of Indigenous Health Knowledge," in *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*, ed. George J. Sefa Dei, Budd L. Hall & Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000): 228.

the colonized presence.”³ Indigenous knowledges are also associated with the “everyday ideas and cultural knowledges of local peoples concerning the realities of living.”⁴ In this context, the multiple ways of knowing function in an alternative space that equates communal folk knowledge with other credited forms of knowledge. Within an African-Jamaican diasporic framework, these knowledges may include nation language (Patwa⁵), religion, music, dance, folk culture, and ritual, all of which inform African-Jamaican diasporic writing. The present study focuses on the function of nation language, religion, music and dance, and folk culture in the work of the Canadian dub poets Afua Cooper, Lillian Allen, and Adhri Zhina Mandiela; the UK dub poets Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze, Linton Kwesi Johnson (LKJ), and Benjamin Zephaniah; and the diasporic novelists Makeda Silvera and Joan Riley. The works of these poets and novelists provide rich material for exploring a diverse cross-section of African-Jamaican aesthetic applications.

While African-Jamaican culture boasts a rich array of artistic production, I have chosen to discuss dub poetry and fiction because, like popular music, literature has played a critical role in motivating community activism and articulating African-Jamaican experiences in the diaspora. These articulations include reflections on dislocation, racialization, belonging, and citizenship in diasporic contexts. It is important to note that, rather than exploring these reflections through either a fixed notion of identity or theories of “postmodernist hyper-hybridity,”⁶ this study offers an intervention in diasporic studies by arguing that close examination of African-Jamaican cultural productions reveals

³ George J. Sefa Dei, “African Development: The Relevance and Implications of ‘Indigeness,’” in *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*, ed. George J. Sefa Dei, Budd L. Hall & Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000): 72.

⁴ George J. Sefa Dei, “Spiritual Knowing and Transformative Learning,” in *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis*, ed. E.V. O’Sullivan, A. Morrell & M.A. O’Connor (New York: Palgrave, 2002): 124.

⁵ I use the spelling ‘Patwa’ interchangeably with the linguistic term ‘creole’ as opposed to the French usage of patois as a way not only to give legitimacy to the Jamaican local language but also to take away the pejorative and hierarchical connotation of the French spelling.

⁶ Postmodernist hyper-hybridity is a phrase I borrow from Chambers’ essay “The Black Atlantic: Theory, Method, and Practice,” which he uses to describe an over-emphasis on hybridity, which often results in a failure to acknowledge the specific ways in which blackness is performed and experienced in the African diaspora, both culturally and socio-historically.

both a persistent continuity of African aesthetics *and* a dialogue with local and diasporic realities. Even as Africa-derived cultural productions in Jamaica have been disrupted by histories of fragmentation and loss, and even while, out of necessity, they have interacted with the diverse cultural landscapes of the Caribbean and its diasporas, this work argues that they also continue a conversation with the memory of Africa, whether metaphorical or 'real'. Indeed, although these memories might be entirely re-created and re-imagined, for many diasporic African peoples they represent the only connection they have to a severed historical past and in this sense constitute a certain kind of reality. Such a revelation also suggests that while African-Jamaican identities may be anchored in African and Caribbean cultural traditions, they have also been fluid enough to respond to diverse local conditions and to open up dialogue across diasporic borders and the multiple formations of 'home'.

It is important to note that this research employs an anti-colonial discourse in its approach to theorizing cultural development. I am interested in unpacking the discursive agency in African-Jamaican cultural expression, particularly in terms of how they reflect the strength of local knowledges and social practices in aiding the survival of colonized peoples.⁷ In addition, the work draws on diasporic studies, black feminist thought, and pan-Africanism in its analysis of the meaning and social impact of African-Jamaican literary productions. These theories underpin my examination of how the African-Jamaican dub poetry and fiction selected serve as a means by which dominant discourses of 'race' and identity might be challenged, troubled, or possibly reinforced.

Finally, this study considers the role African-Jamaican cultural traditions play in the production of national identities in new diasporic contexts. I also look at how forms of black Jamaican cultural aesthetics are adapted by first- and second-generation Canadian and British Jamaicans. An African-Jamaican aesthetic, I suggest, continues to provide an important cultural 'grounding', which has allowed Jamaicans living abroad to identify and enter into dialogue with other African diasporic peoples in order to articulate new narratives about national belonging in differing geographic spaces.

⁷ George J. Sefa Dei & Alireza Asgharzadeh, "The Power of Social Theory: Towards an Anti Colonial Discursive Framework," *Journal of Educational Thought* 35.3 (2001): 297.

Anti-Colonialism in the Diaspora and the Decolonization of Jamaica's Literary Traditions

Without ignoring the tremendous contributions of the Taino, Arawak, and Kalinago and their struggle against extinction at the hands of European colonizers, this work argues that the long historical presence of people of African descent in the Caribbean, marked as it was by deliberate attempts to sever their connections with the past and by the impossibility of a physical return, has resulted in a genuine and sustained confrontation with and transformation of the social and cultural environment. This dual confrontation and transformation have given rise to centuries of accumulated memories that also situate peoples of African descent as indigenous to this region.

As I make this claim, I am cautioned by Melanie Newton about a tendency in Caribbean scholarship to inscribe "narratives of aboriginal absence."⁸ As she argues, anglophone Caribbean studies have largely relied on the assumption "that new 'natives,' predominantly Africans and their descendants replaced the original Antilleans and became indigenous to the Caribbean."⁹ My work, however, does not seek to replace one set of indigenous experiences or knowledges with another, but to recognize the complex interconnections that have shaped Caribbean experiences. The Amerindian, African, European, Indian, and Chinese presences in the Caribbean, as Stuart Hall maintains, have long been entangled with each other:

The New World is the third term – the primal scene – where the fateful / fatal encounter was staged between Africa and the West. It also has to be understood as the place of many, continuous displacements: of the original pre-Columbian inhabitants, the Arawaks, Caribs and Amerindians, permanently displaced from their homelands and decimated; of other peoples displaced in different ways from Africa, Asia and Europe; the displacements of slavery, colonization and conquest.¹⁰

⁸ Melanie Newton, "Returns to a Native Land: Indigeneity and Decolonization in the Anglophone Caribbean," *Small Axe* 17.2 (July 2013): 109.

⁹ Newton, "Returns to a Native Land," 109.

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990): 234.

In this sense, we can think of the Caribbean as constituting intersecting historical memories and intersecting indigeneities. Mark Campbell proposes, as I do in this study, that an African-Jamaican presence has existed in Jamaica long enough to be conceived of in indigenous terms.¹¹ Campbell argues in addition:

definitions of what constitute indigenous knowledge have often overlooked how transnational slavery has positioned some diasporic Blacks closer to being an indigenous population than a foreign population.¹²

Orlando Fals Borda agrees with Campbell, positing that ‘indigeneity’ refers “to knowledge resulting from long term residence in a place.”¹³ George Dei’s definition of indigenous knowledge can also be applied to the African-Jamaican experience, noting as he does that “these knowledges are part of the cultural heritage and histories of people.”¹⁴ The present survey recognizes this understanding of the experiences of people of African descent in the Caribbean as constituting a valuable set of indigenous knowledges.

In the exploration of this understanding of (shared) indigeneity, a cornerstone of the present study is the use of an ‘insider’ perspective to document agency and identity-formation in African-Jamaican diasporic communities. While an ‘insider’ perspective can be problematic when it represents narrow nationalist interests,¹⁵ my work insists that indigeneity exists in the shared experiences of a people even in diaspora. This study, therefore, challenges the notion that some voices and cultural locations have exclusive access and privilege within national discourses. Arguments like these ignore the ways in which cultures cross borders and the ways in which cultural flows intersect. The ‘insider’ perspective I employ expands on Dei’s notion of indigenous knowledge. He rightly notes that this indigenous knowledge is “an important entry point”

¹¹ Mark Campbell, “Indigenous Knowledge in Jamaica: A Tool of Ideology in a Neo-Colonial Context,” in *Anti-Colonialism and Education: The Politics of Resistance*, ed. George J. Sefa Dei & Arlo Kempf, foreword by Molefi Kete Asante (Rotterdam: Sense, 2006): 193.

¹² Campbell, “Indigenous Knowledge in Jamaica,” 195.

¹³ Orlando Fals Borda, “Science and the Common People,” *Journal of Social Studies* 11 (1981): 19.

¹⁴ George Dei, *Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy* (NALL Working Paper 58, 2002): 4–5.

¹⁵ Andrea Davis, “Translating Narratives of Masculinity Across Borders: A Jamaican Case Study,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 52.2–3 (June–September 2006): 25.

for anti-colonial research.¹⁶ While drawing on Dei's anti-colonial framework, I take the further step of suggesting that diasporic African-Jamaicans call on the indigenous knowledge systems they bring with them to construct their own vocabulary and to shape their cultural responses in cities like Toronto and London. In doing so, I expand on Dei's notion of indigeneity to include the way colonized peoples rework cultural aesthetics and knowledges in the specificity of their changing environments.

To be sure, the strength of an anti-colonial framework is that it allows one to draw on many different discursive traditions and to integrate indigenous knowledges in explorations and explanations of the socio-economic, political, and cultural phenomena affecting African diasporic peoples. As such, an anti-colonial discourse offers a language and prism through which to understand African-Jamaican cultural productions in a way that places African-Jamaican artists and their communities as active agents in their everyday experiences and struggles. In addition, while anti-colonialism may borrow from other theoretical frameworks, it is not constrained in any way by dominant epistemologies. As Dei and Kempf observe, anti-colonial research represents the "emergence of a new political, cultural and intellectual movement reflecting the values and aspirations of colonized and resisting peoples/subjects."¹⁷

Diaspora studies are also clearly relevant to my research, offering as it does a framework for conceptualizing and understanding the experiences of African-Jamaican people in Canada, the UK, and other diasporic spaces. Diasporic concepts such as the scattering of families and communities, forced displacement, shared histories of slavery, colonization, and neocolonialism, racialization, minority status, and lost identities are all helpful markers in mapping how peoples of African descent, especially those from the Caribbean, contest dominant socio-cultural meanings, reconstruct identity, and validate erased and distorted histories in their new diasporic homelands.

In particular, I find VèVè Clark's notion of "diaspora literacy," which she defines as the ability to "read and comprehend the discourses of Africa, Afro-America and the Caribbean from an informed, indigenous perspective,"¹⁸

¹⁶ Dei, *Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy*, 7.

¹⁷ George J. Sefa Dei & Arlo Kempf, "Introduction" to *Anti-Colonialism and Education: The Politics of Resistance*, ed. Dei & Kempf (Rotterdam: Sense, 2006): 4.

¹⁸ Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and Marasa Consciousness," 11.

especially helpful in considering the use of folk cultures in my selection of literary works. As Clark explains further,

This type of literacy is more than a purely intellectual exercise. It is a skill for both narrator and reader which demands a knowledge of historical, social, cultural and political development generated by lived and textual experience.¹⁹

Like Dei's indigenous knowledge systems, Clark's notion of diaspora literacy provides an anti-colonial reading that challenges the "monochrome logic of Western epistemology."²⁰ Clark's work is particularly useful because it allows us to think about how indigenous knowledges function in the diaspora. As Clark argues, "the consciousness accompanying the revision in which many of us participate has no name."²¹ It is this revision – "the reformation of form"²² – that is indispensable to the formation of a critical language that can frame the activism of the Caribbean diaspora in countries like Canada and Britain.

Scholarly work produced on the black diaspora that privileges eurocentric discourse negates global and collective narratives and over-simplifies understandings of people of African descent.²³ Such scholarship contributes to a perception of black people as the 'Other', thereby further silencing the subaltern and effectively shrinking the academic space available for multiple and diverse voices. In contrast, readings of the black diaspora that opens up a space for African-centred interrogations can result in deeper insights into Afro-Caribbean diasporic experiences. Kwame Dawes' book *Natural Mysticism*, for example, uses reggae music to foreground the cultural, political, and social development of Jamaican society. In this vein, my approach seeks to use inclusive theoretical frameworks that allow me to uncover personal and collective narratives and to articulate how these both reflect and influence the lived experiences of African-Jamaican people. Indeed, my intention is not to engage with

¹⁹ "Developing Diaspora Literacy and Marasa Consciousness," 11.

²⁰ Tony Moodie, "Re-Evaluating the idea of Indigenous Knowledge: Implications of Anti-Dualism in African Philosophy and Theology," paper presented at 'African Renewal, African Renaissance': New Perspectives on Africa's Past and Africa's Present (African Studies Association of Australia and the Pacific Annual Conference 26–28 November 2004): 12.

²¹ Moodie, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and Marasa Consciousness," 11.

²² "Developing Diaspora Literacy and Marasa Consciousness," 11.

²³ Dei, *Rethinking the Role of Indigenous Knowledges in the Academy*, 10.

diaspora studies as an exercise in theoretical abstractions but, rather, as a means of understanding the performance of the everyday (as represented in African-Jamaican aesthetics) in the lives of people of African descent.

Jana Braziel and Anita Mannur draw attention to the shortcomings of post-modernism when exploring diasporic themes:

theorizations of diaspora need not, and should not, be divorced from historical and cultural specificity [... but should] emerge from this base of scholarship rather than postmodern theoretical abstractions of displacement and movement.²⁴

It is important to note, however, that while diaspora studies provide a better framework for my work than postmodernism, some challenges remain. For instance, I find that Stuart Hall extends some of his discourse on the ruptures and discontinuities in African diasporic cultural formation too far,²⁵ in particular his decision to figure Africa “only [as] an imagined presence of Afro-Caribbean peoples.”²⁶ Indeed, Hall runs the risk of treating Africa as a mere ghostly shadow on African diasporic cultural identities. In contrast, I am interested in uncovering cultural continuities that flow from Africa and throughout its diaspora despite harsh histories of slavery, colonization, and migration. In doing so, I aim to acknowledge both continuities and discontinuities.

Other diasporic theorists exhibit different limitations. For example, while Floya Anthias offers a useful critique of Gilroy’s and Hall’s exclusion of gender and their emphasis on “differentiated ethnicity,”²⁷ she herself fails to adequately capture the intersections of race and gender in black people’s lives; thus, her work is limiting when considering Afro-Caribbean women. Michel Wieviorka proposes that our understanding of racism should be extended beyond current configurations of white versus black to a form he calls “differential/cultural racism.”²⁸ He goes on to use the experiences of Jewish Americans to delineate

²⁴ Jana E. Braziel & Anita Mannur, “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies,” in *Theorizing Diaspora*, ed. Jana E. Braziel & Anita Mannur (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2003): 3.

²⁵ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 226-227.

²⁶ Charles Piot, “Atlantic Apories: African and Gilroy’s Black Atlantic,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.1 (Winter 2010): 156.

²⁷ Floya Anthias, “Evaluating ‘Diaspora’: Beyond Ethnicity?” *Sociology* 32.3 (August 1998): 571.

²⁸ Michel Wieviorka, “Racism and Diasporas,” *Thesis Eleven* 52.1 (1998): 71.

the problem of racism in the USA; unfortunately, this approach depoliticizes racism in a North American context by silencing questions of race and class, even while reinserting troubling racial hierarchies. As such, Wieviorka's article limits our ability to fully contextualize the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. His discussion also lacks any analysis of gender and/or gendered racism.

Clearly, these limitations in diasporic studies are problematic. For my own part, as a scholar of African descent living in Canada, I find race, gender, class, and immigrant status, and the ways they intersect, to be pivotal to my examination of African diasporic experiences. Tony Martin suggests that the diaspora as a concept has itself become a dominant ideology, and he takes a subversive stance by eliminating the term entirely. Martin calls instead for the use of a new word that can accurately address the unique experiences of people of African descent. While I do not wish to depart wholly from the use of diaspora studies in my approach, I can appreciate Martin's desire to push against tendencies towards Euro-American hegemony in our adopted theoretical frameworks.²⁹

Neither diasporic theory nor anti-colonial theory alone is adequate to embarking on a study of the African-Jamaican aesthetic in the diaspora. I find the inclusion of black feminist theory vital because of its strengths in inserting and insisting on the lived narratives of black female subjectivity, which necessarily encompass categories of race, gender, and class. While literary movements such as the French Caribbean's *Négritude*, the Spanish Caribbean's *Negrismo*, and the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Aesthetic Movement in the USA served as pivotal strategies for a reinvigoration of black cultural aesthetics in the nineteenth century (as distinct from the customary white literary establishment), they were problematic in their over-reliance on black male voices. On the other hand, first- and second-wave feminisms were equally exclusive in their focus on the concerns of white, middle-class women and in their exclusion of racialized women in their imaginings of gender justice and definitions of womanhood and femininity. Using a black feminist discourse thus provides an important means of broadening the scope of examination when considering African-Jamaican diasporic experiences. The African-Jamaican female writers considered in this work use black diasporic aesthetic impulses to respond to

²⁹ Tony Martin, "Garvey and Scattered Africa," in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, ed. Joseph E. Harris (Washington DC: Howard UP, 1983): 243–49.

the specificity of their social location in the diaspora. A black feminist discourse helps to focus on those specificities and re-centres the black female subject as essential to the struggle for cultural liberation from white hegemony.

Two black feminist theorists of note, Michelle Wright and Althea Prince, strengthen the discourse of diaspora studies by placing race, class, and gender at the centre of their work. In order to explicate the experiences of African Caribbean people living in Canada, Prince delves into her own lived experience as an Afro-Caribbean woman. This allows her to uncover everyday narratives in her diasporic inquiry. At the same time, while Prince acknowledges sexism in the works of C.L.R. James and other notable black scholars, she is able to re-imagine and re-calibrate their concepts to explore her narratives of working-class black Caribbean women. Though Wright's work is grounded more in theory, she, too, highlights the multiplicity and complexity of African diasporic communities. In taking up themes of gender, race, and class, her scholarship speaks to the diversity of histories, events, experiences, and ideas that have shaped the development of the African diaspora. Certainly the literary writers that are included in my analysis are also reflective of this kind of diversity.

Although I find a black feminist discourse invaluable, I am also cognizant that, given its origins in the USA, one must be cautious about its tendency to "Americocentrism" (a term I borrow from George Elliott Clarke³⁰). Thus, when using elements of black feminism to contextualize the African diaspora, I am mindful of the importance of the specificity of local context, especially in relation to immigrant experiences. Nonetheless, as Roberta Timothy points out, anti-colonial or black feminist thought is invaluable, in that it "records, examines, strategizes and changes ideologies and structures, individually, collectively and transnationally," which enables diverse voices to be heard and hegemonic knowledges disrupted.³¹

Finally, in order to strengthen an understanding of the political and social dynamics underlying the development of African-Jamaican dub poetry and literature, I find it valuable to integrate pan-Africanism into my work. Indeed,

³⁰ George Elliott Clarke, "Must All Blackness Be American? Locating Canada in Borden's 'Tight-rope Time,' or Nationalizing Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 28.3 (1996): 56–72.

³¹ Roberta Timothy, "Resistance Education: African / Black Women Shelter Workers' Perspectives" (doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2007): 81.

many scholars have adopted pan-Africanism to help explain cultural links between the African continent and the black diaspora. Although pan-Africanism is often criticized for being essentialist, or idealist, or both, I believe it is worth taking into account. While pan-Africanism is not central to my own theoretical groundings, it is nevertheless useful when looking at both historical and contemporary forms of Jamaican literary expression. Many African Caribbean artists from the nineteenth century to the present have incorporated a pan-African sensibility in their work. For these artists, pan-Africanism is both a mode of resistance to European ideologies and a form of outlaw culture³² – a term bell hooks uses to denote insurgent culture – that allows them to explore and define their own cultural identity.

For some early theorists, such as Edward Wilmot Blyden and Marcus Garvey, pan-Africanism came to be defined as a call for African unity within, and between, the continent and the diaspora, while for others, like Frederick Douglass, it signalled the struggle for civil rights in their diasporic homelands. Nonetheless, as John Henrik Clarke contends, ultimately the aim of restoring of “respect” to persons of African descent remained the central impetus in all pan-Africanist agendas.³³ Black writers who inserted a pan-African sensibility into their literary work began creating a dialogue that was taken up in the Négritude and Harlem Renaissance movements and continued on through at least the end of the twentieth century. Prominent pan-African advocates, too, clearly saw the potential of art and literature as powerful political vehicles. Whether through prose, fiction, poetry or drama, black writers sought to validate an African presence that had been historically deemed culturally inferior and/or rendered invisible. At times they also returned their protagonist(s) to Africa through spiritual, metaphorical, or literal journeys of healing. Not surprisingly, then, incorporating pan-Africanism is important for my own research, as it helps me see the critical value of literary art (folk culture) as an often simultaneously philosophical, cultural, and political undertaking.

³² bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994): 5.

³³ John Henrik Clarke, “Pan Africanism: A Brief History of an Idea in the African World,” *The Third World First* 1.2 (1990): 9–24.

I find Christel Temple's work to be particularly useful.³⁴ She employs a methodology in her literary scholarship that relies on unconventional perspectives such as literary pan-Africanism to uncover shared cultural links between black diasporic literatures in the Americas and continental African literatures. Temple insists on considering alternative, African-centred knowledges, especially vernacular traditions, in her analysis of black literary production, an attempt, in part, to move away from dominant Euro-Western literary discourses.

Overall, as I have demonstrated in this section, I find Dei's anti-colonial framework, VèVè Clark's diaspora literacy, and Temple's literary pan-African discourse all invaluable for unpacking and understanding black diasporic literatures. By expanding and interweaving these various theoretical positions, I hope to demonstrate the centrality of the African-Jamaican aesthetic to an anti-colonial struggle in Jamaica and its diaspora.

Literature Review

There is a significant body of academic scholarship examining the links between the literature of the Caribbean region and its diaspora. Some of this scholarship focuses on literary production through the lens of migration,³⁵ while others consider questions of globalization and transnationalism.³⁶ Much is also concerned with issues of gender and sexuality.³⁷ Work on this topic has

³⁴ Christel Temple, *Literary Pan-Africanism: History, Contexts, and Criticism* (Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005); Temple, "Rescuing the Literary in Black Studies," *Journal of Black Studies* 36.5 (May 2006): 764–85.

³⁵ Adlai Murdoch, *Creolizing the Metropole: Migrant Caribbean Identities in Literature and Film* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2012); *Middle Passages and the Healing Place of History: Migration and Identity in Black Women's Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Brown–Guillory (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006); Meredith M. Gadsby, *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration and Survival* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2006).

³⁶ Jopi Nyam, *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction* (TexTet 59; Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009); Supriya Agarwal & Jasbir Jain, *Shifting Homelands, Travelling Identities* (New Delhi: Sterling, 2008); Christine G.T. Ho & Keith Nurse, *Globalisation, Diaspora and Caribbean Popular Culture* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2005).

³⁷ Odile Ferly, *A Poetics of Relation: Caribbean Women Writing at the Millennium* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); *Middle Passages and the Healing Place of History*, ed. Brown–Guillory;

increasingly moved beyond simply documenting the interconnections between Caribbean writers and their diasporic counterparts to complicating and problematizing various facets of those connections.

Among the works that look specifically at the literary and cultural interconnections between the Caribbean and Canada and Britain are those of Bucknor, Davis, and Kebe. Michael Bucknor examines themes of retention and transformation in Caribbean Canadian literary works through the use of the metaphoric framework “body memory,”³⁸ which is partly responsible for the emergence of a uniquely Caribbean Canadian poetic:

the distinctive poetics of Caribbean / Canadian writing [is] concerned with the fluctuations and pulses of aesthetic and linguistic patterns; body memory poetics accentuates verbal rhythm rather than verbal reference.³⁹

Andrea Davis scrutinizes the shared sensibility and understandings of black women reflected in African diasporic writing,⁴⁰ underscoring the formal and thematic links that bind the fictional writings of Afro-Caribbean writers to writers elsewhere in the Americas. She argues that these links point to a shared literary poetic in a shared cultural hemisphere. In a similar vein, Amy Kebe examines continuities in the work of three African Caribbean Canadian writers – Dionne Brand, Marlene Nourbese Philip, and Makeda Silvera – who, despite their differing nations of birth, enact a transnational feminist identity that rejects simplistic notions of gender oppression while simultaneously challenging masculinist notions of home. Kebe also looks at how these writers inhabit the ‘in-between’ spaces between patriarchal imperialism and colonialism.⁴¹

Gadsby, *Sucking Salt*; Angeletta K.M. Gouridine, *The Difference Place Makes: Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora Identity* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2002).

³⁸ Michael A. Bucknor, “Postcolonial Crosses: Body-Memory and Inter-Nationalism in Caribbean/Canadian Writing” (doctoral dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1998).

³⁹ Bucknor, “Postcolonial Crosses,” iii.

⁴⁰ Andrea Davis, “Hegemony of the Spirit: Black Women’s Resistance and Healing through African Diasporic ‘Counter Cultures of Modernity’ in Selected African Caribbean and African American Women’s Writing” (doctoral dissertation, York University, 2002).

⁴¹ Amy Kebe, “Geographies of Displacement: Theorizing Feminism, Migration, and Transnational Feminist Practices in Selected Black Caribbean Writers” (doctoral dissertation, University of Montreal, 2009).

The present study seeks to complement and extend the scholarship of Bucknor, Davis, and Kebe by looking specifically at African-Jamaican aesthetic approaches and how these are represented in the works of African-Jamaican writers residing in Toronto and London. While Bucknor's use of body memory is a valuable way of examining Caribbean Canadian literature, I rely chiefly on a textual analysis of Jamaican diasporic writings with a thematic emphasis. Such an approach allows me to consider how individual fiction writers and dub poets engage with vernacular language (i.e. Jamaican Patwa), folk culture, religious practices, racialization, migration, and working-class experiences in their artistic production. I believe that looking at dub poetry and novels through these lenses results in a deeper understanding of both African-Jamaican diasporic literatures and, more broadly, African-Jamaican experiences in Toronto and London. It is important to note that my aim here is not to provide socio-historical readings of African-Jamaican literary works but, rather, to provide a detailed analysis, charting patterns of identity retention and transformation in the African-Jamaican cultural aesthetic in the diaspora.

While my research also thematizes gender, I take a somewhat different approach from Davis and Kebe, whose studies focus mainly on recurring notions of trauma, gender violence, and patriarchy. My goal is to uncover how African-Jamaican women authors write from different geo-social locations from those of their male counterparts as they attempt to negotiate both racial and gender identity in new diasporic locations. In addition, I am interested in how these authors employ an African-Jamaican aesthetic strategy from a typically woman-centred, as well as indigenous, point of view by drawing on oral and folk cultural traditions.

Departing somewhat from the approaches already identified, Christian Habekost focuses solely on dub poetry in Jamaica, Toronto, and London.⁴² By studying multiple versions of dub poems, including printed, recorded, and live performance iterations, Habekost provides a working method for reading dub poetry within a sound and performance aesthetic and across geographic space. His work also contextualizes dub poetry by offering an overview of key practitioners, major dates, places, and events, and examining the art forms links to Jamaican popular music, dancehall DJs, Rastafarian religion, and Patwa (as a

⁴² Christian Habekost, *Verbal Riddim: The Politics and Aesthetics of African Caribbean Dub Poetry* (Cross / Cultures 10; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1993).

legitimate language for cultural and literary expression). While Habekost provides a useful overview of Caribbean dub culture in the Caribbean and its diaspora, his analysis privileges the performance of male poets. My work instead is a formal attempt to integrate an analysis of both dub poetry and fiction within analysis of race, gender, and sexuality, while thinking about the ways in which Jamaican cultural productions cross and mediate borders.

Existing literary scholarship that draws on the notion of diasporic literacy within the framework of indigenous knowledges includes the work of such scholars as Ingrid Reneau,⁴³ who identifies dance (ringshout) as a tool of continuity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*. Reneau focuses on how these writers use dance as an important site of remembrance and ancestral bonding. Her research, like mine, is informed by ideas about the interconnectedness of peoples of African descent and the ways in which the 'New World' continues to engage in an interdependent relationship with continental Africa.⁴⁴ In this way, both Reneau and I understand the potency of origin in a way that departs from a Black Atlantic epistemology.⁴⁵ My work, however, extends beyond dance to consider multiple cultural and aesthetic influences on African-Jamaican literature. And while Reneau concentrates on fiction, I include dub poems as part of my exploration of transnational articulation.

Hugh Hodges' book *Soon Come* also has some similarities with my study, particularly in terms of using African-centred religions and local cultures as a framework for analysing Jamaican poetry.⁴⁶ Both of our works attempt to position African-Jamaican aesthetics, in part, as a challenge to the British literary

⁴³ Ingrid Reneau, "Dancing the 'Clearing' in African Diaspora Narratives" (doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University, 2000).

⁴⁴ Reneau, "Dancing the 'Clearing' in African Diaspora Narratives," 2.

⁴⁵ Gilroy's (and others') Black Atlantic theories are significant in that they recognize cultural fluidity and provide a unique lens for looking at the creation of Blackness in the New World; however, they are also limiting, as they neglect the importance of collective cultural and racial experiential memories, a theme many African-Jamaican writers such as Una Marson, Afua Cooper, and Makeda Silvera affirm in their creative work. As a result of this, while the Black Atlantic thesis presents an interesting way of contextualizing the continuous creation of Black identity, it does not completely speak to my research.

⁴⁶ Hugh Hodges, *Soon Come: Jamaican Spirituality, Jamaican Poetics* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2008).

canon by giving voice to the African-Jamaican working-class as part of a commitment to tracing the decolonization of Jamaica's literary tradition. My analysis of class in the Jamaican context differs somewhat from Hodges', particularly in his reading of Una Marson and Claude McKay. I disagree with Hodges' conclusion, for example, that Marson and McKay employ an African-Jamaican aesthetic superficially because of their middle-class status and anxieties about folk culture. My reading of these two authors leads to a different conclusion.

Finally, another Caribbean diasporic literary scholar who examines many of the same cultural aesthetic aspects as I explore is Carolyn Cooper.⁴⁷ Her interdisciplinary approach draws extensively on indigenous knowledges to contextualize Caribbean cultural production, particularly in her close textual readings of the intersections of Jamaican popular music as literary expression. Her analysis also underscores the significance of African-centred religions, dance, and local language in Jamaican music, in terms both of tracing the historical trajectory of slave and post-Emancipation periods and of documenting connections to West African practices and rituals.

Perhaps the most important intervention of this study is its conscious attempt to incorporate interdisciplinary frameworks that have often been marginalized in the academic realm. For instance, I use a pan-Africanist discourse and rely on local, embodied, and anti-colonial knowledges(s) in my reading of African-Jamaican literature. My theoretical framework includes consideration of vernacular language and folk culture, as well as indigenous philosophical groundings such as Rastafarian sensibility. Such an approach places African-Jamaican voices at the centre, thereby offering a potentially deeper and more nuanced articulation of the cultural continuum and transformation present in African-Jamaican artforms.

As part of this commitment, I integrate secondary interviews with various dub poets and writers. I also consider secondary scholarly literature and audio recordings to help contextualize the literary works examined. The primary focus, however, is the textual analysis of literary works, which I hope will contribute to a decoding of some of the ways African-Jamaican writers from varied – but connected – locations negotiate day-to-day struggles and questions of

⁴⁷ Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1995).

identity through the use and retention of African-Jamaican aesthetic parameters. This close (and interdisciplinary) reading of selected poems and works of fiction is instructive because, as Barbara Christian observes, black writers have tended to do a great deal of theorizing in narrative form:

For people of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking.⁴⁸

It is precisely this play with language (and music and folk culture) in African-Jamaican diasporic novels and poetry, and the critical theoretical spaces thus revealed that animate this work.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter 1 of this study attempts a genetic mapping of Jamaican literature by proposing that Jamaican orality is a clear precursor to later scribal production in the country. The chapter looks specifically at early Jamaican work songs, proverbs, and storytelling as significant forms of nascent Jamaican literature. I begin with these early forms of orality because historically vernacular traditions have been foundational to African-derived world-views. Indeed, orality has been seen, in the twentieth century, as a key site from which to build social theory on black identity, both locally and internationally.

Chapter 2 explores how early Jamaican writers, such as Claude McKay and Una Marson, drew on these non-literary traditions to forge what Frantz Fanon termed a “literature of decolonisation.”⁴⁹ Here I look at the challenges and concerns early Jamaican writers faced: namely, the struggle to find a national voice and to legitimize African cultural identity. This chapter also provides a brief discussion of dub poetry in Jamaica as an emerging ‘radical’ body of literary production, which engaged the population and served as an impetus for some diasporic writers.

⁴⁸ Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory” (1987), in *The Black Feminist Reader*, ed. Joy James & Tracy Denean Sharpley–Whiting (Malden MA & Oxford: Blackwell, 1999): 12.

⁴⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, tr. Constance Farrington, preface by Jean–Paul Sartre (*Les Damnés de la terre*, 1961; New York: Grove, 1963): 239–40.

Chapter 3 discusses dialogic cultural flows between Kingston, Jamaica, and both London and Toronto, especially in terms of the mediated forms of expression that have helped to create local and diasporic identities for Jamaicans living abroad. The chapter explores the continuity of African Jamaica aesthetics in the work of the UK- and Ontario-based dub poets Afua Cooper, Lillian Allen, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Benjamin Zephaniah. Also considered is the balance these writers maintain between African-Jamaican cultural retentions and responses to new diasporic spaces. I have chosen the metropolises of London and Toronto as the geographical locations of this study because of their histories as salient sites for African-Jamaican literary production. Dub poetry especially has flourished since the early 1980s in both of these centres.

Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the female dub poets Afua Cooper, Lillian Allen, and Jean 'Binta' Breeze to illustrate how they harness African-Jamaican aesthetic elements to address issues of race, as well as to reflect on intersections of class and gender. The chapter outlines how these dub poets have incorporated a black feminist sensibility into their work to great effect.

Chapter 5 examines the presence of an African-Jamaican aesthetic in the context of diasporic fiction. Here, I return briefly to McKay's early novel *Home to Harlem* as a point of entry to consideration of African-Jamaican novelists working outside of Jamaica. McKay's novel reveals interconnections and divergences in the literature of African-Jamaicans inhabiting diasporic spaces. I then turn to the work of two novelists, the Jamaican Canadian Makeda Silvera and the British Jamaican Joan Riley, in order to demonstrate the continuity of African-Jamaican aesthetics in more contemporary fiction. Here again, I am interested in how these writers, working from within diasporic locations, transform and refashion African-Jamaican aesthetic modes.

I conclude by summarizing the main arguments made in the five preceding chapters, rehearsing the study's central focus, and identifying remaining questions that have emerged from the research. Additionally, a brief discussion is offered of some more recent writers of Jamaican descent and how they use an African-Jamaican aesthetic in ways similar to and differently from their predecessors.

