

Stage or Page? A Dub Performer or A Dub Poet? A Study of Linton Kwesi Johnson's Political Activism in "Five Nights of Bleeding" and "Di Great Insohreckshan"

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This paper investigates Linton Kwesi Johnson's political activism in "Five Nights of Bleeding" and "Di Great Insohreckshan" in order to answer the much-debated question: which is more effective in conveying Johnson's political message: the performed song or the scribed poem? First, the paper gives a brief history of dub music which started in Jamaica, Johnson's motherland. A discussion of dub poetry follows highlighting the pioneers such as Johnson and Mutabaruka. I argue that the performed songs and the scribed poems under study are effective in convey Johnson's message each in its own way; however, the scribed form has a stronger, more longstanding impact on imparting the message than stage performance because it relies on the musicality of the words created by sounds and aural images easily grasped even by an international readership alien to the heritage of dub music. An analysis of political events in the two poems shows that a scribed poem, which, as in "Five Nights of Bleeding", graphically represents a tension between Standard English, and Jamaican Creole and Jamaican English, and which highlights sounds at play as in "Di Great Insohreckshan", asserting identity, can do without stage performance.

Dub Music

The origin of "dub" may be traced back to film making or dubbing and "the ghoulish habit of re-recording voices onto a soundtrack" (Sullivan 7). It echoes in the pronunciation of the word "ghost" in Jamaican, which sounds as "duppy" (Sullivan 7). It is "a sub-genre of reggae" (Pablo 120). Many definitions have been given to "dub", some of which are sexual referring to rub-a-dub dance where a man rubs against a woman's body, or citing The Silverstone's song title "Dub the Pum Pum", "(("pum pum" being the Jamaican slang for female genital)" (Veal 73). Compared to jazz, blues and salsa, dub is distinguished by levels of modification. It was in Kingston that the process of mixing is completely achieved. In fact, deconstruction is an artistic process per se:

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The way in which the dub pioneers (with Lynford Anderson, Errol Thompson, Augustus Pablo, King Tubby, Keith Hudson, Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry among them) began deconstructing songs into their constituent parts then rebuilding them into alternative compositions –literally turning them inside out to reveal their ‘seams’– made the music simultaneously avant-garde and hugely popular with the sound system crowds. (Sullivan 8)

Dub music is characterized by reverb and delay, things a printed poem/song loses. Reverb and delay are used to present the song as a unified whole and to create a psychedelic vision for the listener in order for him/her to “greater appreciate the stripped-down ‘riddim’ of the track” (Chambers 122) and to go into their ancestral past. Dub music is characterized by bass, a lower powerful tone similar to an old man’s voice, which refers to masculinity. Dub music has also been claimed to have a feminine power. However, as Jah Wobble argued, the main purpose, besides having both masculine and feminine powers, is that it is supportive (Sullivan 11). It was almost a decade -from 1970s till 1980s- that dub music flourished in Jamaica. The strategies of dub, viz., the sound system, the deejay, the remix, have outlived it and their repercussions reached different places in the diaspora.

In Kingston Jamaica, dub music developed so much that the accompanying dances witnessed social gatherings where people discussed social and political affairs along with listening to dub music. In music competitions, known as clashes, sound systems, which owned up-to-date specific records, played an important role in deciding on “Champion Sound” (Sullivan 16). In 1960s “Jamaican Stereo” (Sullivan 21), which depended on recording the band on one track and the vocals on another, emerged and later proved important to the appearance of dub music. “The rude boys” and “skettels” played rocksteady and reggae whose “slow rhythms” and “extra sonic space” (Sullivan 23) were very important in releasing dub music, known also as “drum and bass mixes” (Sullivan 26), which came to existence in 1967 as a result of Byron Smith’s unwitting mistake and Rudolph Ruddy Redwood’s embrace as “art” (Sullivan 23-4). Dub paved the way to the emergence of Jamaican deejay/selectors in 1950s who were first allowed to toast between songs till their presence in the version became so effective that the first acclaimed generation of dub toasters, led by U-Roy (Sullivan 30; Moskowitz 94).

Multi-tracking made it easy for dub to be created with an option of adding to the final mix at liberty. However, it should be noted that there is no such a thing as an original mix since the nature of dubbing defies this notion of originality (Toop 355). Lynford Anderson (Andy Capp) is considered one of the early

landmarks of dub music. Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry was a follower of Anderson. Sylvan Morris is another landmark who later became a mixing engineer. He mixed many dub albums and released two on his own. For some time, Errol ‘E.T.’ Thompson worked with Morris; however, he left Morris and later worked with Clive Chin. There are many other Jamaican dub pioneers such as Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry, King Tubby and Scientist.

After World War II many Jamaicans migrated to Britain but they were faced by racial treatment as they were denied the right to have a job and a respectable life. Though the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 limited entry to Britain, the Caribbean Community became part and parcel of the British society (Sullivan 57). Duke Vin (Vincent Forbes) and Count Suckle (Wilbert Campbell) were of the first soundmen to reach Britain. They helped introduce white British youth to Jamaican music. “By the mid-1960s, sound system culture had spread to most major British cities” (Sullivan59). Later on other famous figures appeared such as UK dub producers was Dennis Bovell, Adrian Sherwood, a producer in the post-punk scene, and Neil Fraser, aka Mad Professor.

Dub Poetry

In her article, “Dub Poetry: Legacy of Roots Reggae” Janet L. DeCosmo highlights the importance of dub poetry and reggae as “critical social instruments” (33). For Linton Kwesi Johnson African consciousness, which can be approached through “cultural nationalist”, representing identity, and “pan-African imaginary”, showing solidarity, is best expressed through reggae music, priding on “African ancestry” and highlighting “ the historical experience of slavery”, helping form “new identities of un/belonging” and providing “a nexus for a cultural of resistance to racial oppression”. However, for “today’s Black British youth, reggae is no longer “the dominant music” (Johnson, “African Consciousness in Reggae: Some examples” 41-43). Although Johnson is known to be the founder of dub poetry, Oku Onuora is claimed to have coined the term dub poetry in 1970s. Louise Bennett’s performance poetry and Bob Marley’s roots reggae are sources of dub poetry, “a continuation of the African oral tradition” (DeCosmo 34).

In her article, “Orality, Creoles, and Postcolonial Poetry in Performance” Janet Neigh maintains “[w]hile the reader can see the end rhyme represented on the page, hearing it reveals its full rhythmic effect” (172). Dub poetry’s status, whether to be printed on page or sufficient to be performed on stage has been much debated by supporters of both points of view (Gingell 222-25; DeCosmo 34-35). Dub poetry has been seen by many, including Lillian Allen and Carole D. Yawney, as political in nature since dub performance entertains as well as provokes the oppressed audience in order to protest against racism, oppression

and social injustice exercised by the hosting culture against the “accented culture” (Gräbner 56). Therefore, dub poets vocalize anger, protest using certain rhythms that suit the sounds of their words. In 1970s, Both Mutabaruka and Linton Kwesi Johnson use of ‘toasting’ classified their work as “dub poetry or dub lyricism” (Nerys 107). Wheatle Coppola defines dub poetry as “the fusion of reggae rhythms with practice of the spoken word, focusing on the primacy of the voice (...) dub poetry offers interesting insights on standardization and textualization of Creole” (12). Dub poetry bridges the gap between white and black traditions, with themes that focus on political and social aspect. It investigates “narratives of oppression, histories of economic exploitation, and protests against racism and police brutality” (Nerys 108). Famous figures of dub poetry are Mutabaruka, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Michael Smith, Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze, and Levi Tafari and Benjamin Zephaniah.

Mutabaruka’s “Dis Poem” is a protest against all kinds of racism, against segregation on national and international levels. It is a call for past figures to attend the contemporary scene and try to solve the longstanding problem in a way or another. On the other hand Johnson’s poem ‘Di Great Insohreckshan’ is a cry against police brutality and misuse of political power. Benjamin Zephaniah’s can be considered as a development of Johnson’s and Mutabaruka’s works. Zephaniah’s “Dis poetry’ from City Psalms” (1992) marks a shift away from the first wave of anger of dub poets in order to provide a soothing effect through rhythm. “The implications of this healing are evident in Zephaniah’s desire to create poetry, as he puts it in ‘Dis poetry’, which ‘goes to yu / WID LUV’ (13)” (Nerys 112). In “Rapid Rapping” he paid homage to Johnson and Mutabaruka since they paved the way of dub poetry to others.

Linton Kwesi Johnson

In 1963 Linton Kwesi Johnson, born in Chapelton, Jamaica, travelled to London and joined the Black Panther Movement. He wrote many volumes of poetry but his first works were published in *Race Today*. In 1974, his first volume, *Voices of the Living and the Dead*, was published. The following year he published *Dread Beat An’ Blood*. In 1980 *Inglan Is A Bitch* was published. In 1981 he started his *LKJ Records*. He released different albums the latest of which is: *LKJ-Live in Paris with the Dennis Bovell Dub Band, 2004*. He is considered the first black poet whose work was published by *Penguin’s Modern Classics series*.

A seventeen-year-old boy, LKJ discovery of back literature written by black people had a formative influence on his life (Johnson, “A Conversation with Linton Kewsi Johnson” 36). However, these books were not that accessible. LKJ

had to search for them in bookshops that sell Caribbean/Black literature. Sam Selvon, author of *Lonely Londoners* 1956 and *Moses Ascending* in 1975 encouraged him to read and start from the scratch since his work is original. He was lucky to have attended Caribbean Artists Movement when he was a young poet. In 1982, and as a member of the Race Today, he participated in setting up an International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books where booksellers and publishers from England and all countries took part. That Book Fair, which lasted till 1995, was a “whole cultural movement” (Johnson, “A Conversation” 36).

Johnson’s aim was to write poetry with words that have music in themselves; therefore, his voice would make his words a bass line:

I wanted to write poetry. ... I didn’t want to be a DJ. I wanted to draw upon my Jamaican Heritage, use the everyday language of Jamaican speech. I was also heavily influenced by dub – I wanted my verse, the actual words, to sound like music, to sound like a bass line. So when I was talking, I wanted to use my voice like a talking bass and that’s how I developed my style as well as my poetics. (Johnson, “A Conversation” 38)

Johnson’s scribed poems are based on oral tradition, preferring to choose “phonetical spelling” and to “follow the demands of pronunciation” (McGill 568); therefore, as Mutabaruka, talking about the dub poet, says: It’s not the music that’s pushing the poem, it’s what he’s saying (Doumerc 24; Phillips 257), contrary to what DeCosmo maintains concerning teaching dub poetry at schools as she deems it necessary to provide a recording of the performance along with the printed poem (36). Johnson’s work is very often recognized and categorized as performance poetry bearing the sense that it is not real poetry. He objected to such categorization and never seeks recognition from any literary institution for he insists on doing things on his own without being forcedly and unjustly categorized.

Dub poetry depends in written British Creole where conventional Standard English is modified; hence, representing a great variety of Jamaican and diasporic speech communities. Jamaican Creole is used in oral as well as in written communication. Poets as early as Claude McKay wrote their poems in Jamaican Creole. With the passage of time the use of Jamaican Creole has appeared almost in all aspects of life to the extent that, in 1961, Jamaican Vernacular standardization was much debated highlighting the political implications of orthography which supports identity of creole (Coppola 8-10). It was much debated whether performance poetry was fit for publication or not.

Many attempts had been made in order to homogenize and standardize the spelling of Jamaican Creole (Coppola 11).

Sound and “riddim” representation on the page is one of the most important issues of the textualization of dub poetry. In her paper, “Always a Poem, Once a Book”: Motivations and Strategies for Print Textualizing of Caribbean-Canadian Dub and Performance Poetry”, Susan Gingell considered what Michael Andrew Bucknor offered as answers to the strategies for print textualization, viz., “graphic configuration, aural structure and spatial arrangements” (221) insufficient; therefore, she proposed a complete account of printing strategies used by dub poets in order for the aural performance to be printed:

Providing introductions and other explanatory apparatuses; using contextualizing illustrations and other graphics; exploiting the semantic possibilities of unusual placement of words and letters on the page; privileging sound over verbal semantics; using varying fonts and letter sizes, and employing capitals to script differing voices and sound dynamics; deploying non-alphabetic symbols as semantic resources; making allusions to substantive and stylistic aspects of music and other parts of oral tradition to link the written text to the oral and to guide how the text should be vocalized; and paying careful attention to prosody and using non-standard spelling and code-switching in order to convey the riddims and other phonological dimensions of Caribbean English Creoles and dub itself. (221)

Kamau Brathwaite was considered the forerunner of getting performance poetry printed. However, it was not an easy task since many problems arose so much that using “eye dialect” was a necessity. Absence of Jamaican Creole standardized orthography made writers free to show variations. LKJ did not agree on “authenticity” and “correctness” and “resist the notion of standardized orthography” (Coppola 14). As a political activist, his poetry records historical events such as Notting Hill Carnival disturbance (1976/1977), New Cross Fire and Black People’s March (1981), and Brixton and Toxteth uprising (1981/1985). “Fite Dem Back” and “Sonny’s Lettah” (1979) point us to Johnson’s attempt at subverting Standard English as a means of protest, while poems such as “Di Great Insohreckshan” and “New Craas Massakah” (1983) underscore political aspects in Johnson’s poetry. (Saroukhani 257-258). Therefore, his dialect poetry highlights efforts exerted on subverting linguistic hierarchies and pinpointing political lines supported by these hierarchies (Connel & Sheppard 183). Johnson disapproves of passive thinking such as the

Rastafarian back-to-Africa call and worshipping Selassie; however, he accepts the rest of Rastafarianism (Sarikaya166).

“Five Nights of Bleeding”

“Five Nights of Bleeding”, Johnson’s first published poem (1974) republished in *Dread Beat and Blood* (1975) and *Voices of the Living and the Dead* (1983), was dedicated to Leroy Harris, a black victim who was stabbed at a party. The music depends on the diction and syntax of the poem which is an attempt at following Standard English accompanied by a tension between Standard English and Jamaican Creole and Jamaican English, which marks a cultural difference and preserves identity.

In fact, mixing Jamaican Creole with Standard English is an intentional attempt at Standard English spelling subversion. Johnson’s unique system of spelling drags the reader’s attention to what this system implies of resistance and cultural identity, to the creativity and prestige of Jamaican Creole. Non-standard spelling used by British Creole is a strong example of resistance against assimilation in British culture. Of many words that show phonemic and phonetic differences, Coppola quotes, are: “cyan”, “dung”, “ taak”, “numbah”, “oppreshan” (15). Johnson has been noticed to show inconsistencies throughout his work. For example, “Forces of Victory”, 1979, was spelt as “Forces of Viktry”, only to be spelt “Forces of Victory” when included in *Inglan is a Bitch*, 1980. Moreover, the spelling as “vict’ri” occurs throughout the text (Coppola 15).

The opening stanza, which introduces the five nights in the subsequent five stanzas, starts with anaphora of “madness” creating an audio-visual image of violent acts enhanced by the sounds. The /k/ sound in “broke”, “cruelin” and “cold” gives a sense of smashing, cracking bones and crying of pain. The /s/ sound in “madness”, “bitterness”, “glass”, “nights”, “stabbin” and “amongs”, along with the /z/ sound in “heads”, “rebels”, “blas”, “blades” and “eyes” stress the crescendo of the fight which starts as a hissing sound and develops into deafening buzzing sounds of cries, stabs and smashes. It ends in “it’s war amongst the rebels/Madness...madness...war”, a recurrent motif, a riff that closes almost every stanza underscoring the futility of back-against-black war.

Dioramas of riots are depicted in the five stanzas of the poem, reflecting nightlife in London. Night number one marks the spark of ferocious fighting accompanied by powerful music, referred to in rhythm beating by “the legendary Streatham sound system soprano B” (McNamee), creating a simile of violence likening strong music to street fighters. The aural image portrayed by the intersection of different sounds anticipate the ferocity of the carnage. The /s/ sound in “Brixton”, “soprano”, “sound”, “system”, “spinal” and “start”, which

creates a hissing illustrating the first signs of fighting, develops into a /d/ sound in words such as “down”, “bad”, “wild” and “madness”, illustrating the readiness of the “rebels” for stabbing and bloodshed.

Commenting on Johnson’s combining music with themes, giving this poem as an example, Andy wood maintains that “LKJ employs aspects of music and musical cultures, along with the street as a location, in his music and poetry, which is full of references to reggae artists, sound systems and record shops, together with quotes from lyrics” (111). Moreover, Such works as “Five Nights of Bleeding” may suggest “an epic sweep of suffering and resistance” (Baugh 269), an apocalyptic image of the black beast, an anti-hegemonic state threatening the system, and a record of black violence colored with blood and rhythm (Bajraktarević 56-58).

The aural image in night number two unexpectedly introduces the carnage. The bustling of drinking people, the sound of music with the rhythm “bubbling” and “back-firing”, “raging” and “rising” create a carefree ambience disturbed by the “cut” of music, the sound of silence was so trenchant as it prepares for the bloody action, for the sound of stabbing by steel blades. The metaphor of blades drinking blood illustrates the bloody scene which is fiercely developed in night number three when suffering is portrayed in heartbreaking sound of a “screaming soul”. The confrontation of the rebels and policemen is depicted in a complex aural image. The sound of the fight created by “pounced”, “a jab an a stab” (Johnson, “Five Nights of Bleeding.” *Selected Poems* 23: 45), develops into a simile of a cacophony, of notorious sounds of blades being likened to that of a song. This simile develops into another one of blacks’ expression of protest against bitter oppression likened to an act of vomiting a bile, the sound of which illustrates black people’s hatred of oppression and racial practices. This bloody scene culminates into a cry suggested by the wounds of two policemen as a result of the fight. The /sh/ sound followed by /s/ sound in the anaphoric righteous seals the scene with such commandingly approving sounds and underscores the attack on policemen as undoubtedly legal.

The “blues dance” in night number four ends in Leroy bleeding near death. The aural image suggested by “broke glass” “axes”, “blades” and “storm blowing” crystallize a powerful vent of depressed feelings of the rebels. The visual image in “splintering fire” (Johnson, “Five Nights of Bleeding.” *Selected Poems* 25:55) completes the chaotic scene. Night number five witnesses acts of wrecking vengeance among the rebels, so violent that vengeance is personified as a person walking through the door of the telegraph. The aural image suggested by such a walk, which is “so slow, so smooth/so tight and ripe” (Johnson, “Five Nights of Bleeding.” *Selected Poems* 26: 65-66), and the caesura suggested by the comma that separates slow and smooth are put in juxtaposition with the

unexpected attack crystallized in the aural image of “smash!/ broke glass, a bottle finds a head” and “crack” (Johnson, “Five Nights of Bleeding.” *Selected Poems* 26: 66-68). The night ends in a carnage with rebels stabbing each other and bleeding as a result.

“Di Great Insohreckshan”

The poem, which is part of the album *Making History* (1983), and is republished in *Tings an Time* (1991), commemorates the 1981 Brixton riots and shows a revolutionary spirit that protests against injustice and oppression, against the “brutally oppressive stop-and-search tactics of the Brixton police”, giving full vent of black people’s anger (Saroukhani 264; Sarikaya 173; Wilson 806). In fact, the poem’s anger and protest represent different ethnicities. It highlights “frustrations and activism of blacks, whites, and Asians alike” (Buettner 365).

The opening lines illustrate the setting and highlight the government’s political failure which causes such social disturbance crystallized through sounds:

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

(Johnson, “Di Great Insohreckshan” *Tings an Time* 43:1-6)

The first stanza’s stretched rhyming sound “an” echoes the ending sound “an” in the last word of the poem’s title “Insohreckshan”, which functions as a tuning fork supported by other examples of /n/ sound dispersed all over the lines in such words as “nineteen”, “wan”, “doun”, “inna”, “babylan” and “bring”. The aural effect of the rhyme raises a question: which has more powerful impact: a poem performed, or a poem scribed? The two opinions have been much debated by supporters of both sides. For Johnson, he prefers to be called a poet whose words create music and whose voice, used as a bass line, complements the musicality of the poem. By so doing the message of the poem, commemorating Brixton riots, is conveyed to the reader/listener.

The riots can be traced back to what was suspected by black people as an arson rather than an accident, later known as the New Cross Fire of 18 January 1981, when a house party caught fire and thirteen black people died and twenty six were seriously injured. On March 2, known as the Black Peoples’ Day of

Action, a peaceful march from New Cross to Hyde Park, protesting the death of black people and demanding justice, was organized but some of the marchers were arrested. The spark of riots was ignited by a rumor that a young black man died while in police custody. As a result, there was a violent clash between 7000 policemen and 5000 young people, white and black. Other main reasons that might have caused the riots are the “sus” law, “swamp 81”, unemployment which was recorded as the second reason (Solomos 138-9), poverty and discrimination.

In Brixton between 6 and 10 April, 1981, one arrest for robbery was recorded from 943 stops with a great number of police targeting black people only, which “cause extra resentment and anger on the streets of Brixton” (Cloake & Tudor 62). Johnson portrays the negative results of the government’s miscalculated measures such as swamp 81:

it woz event af di year
 an I wish I ad been dere
 wen wi run riot all ovah Brixtan
 wen wi mash-up plenty police van
 wen wi mash-up di wicked wan plan
 wen wi mash-up di Swamp Eighty-wan
 fi wha?
 fi mek di rulah dem andahstan
 dat wi naw tek noh more a dem oppreshan

(Johnson, “Di Great Insohreckshan” *Tings an Time* 43: 7-15)

Johnson subverts the false image of black people being well-integrated in UK’s social fabric. The antithetical relation between “wi” and “dem” subscribes to the irresolvable problem of “oppreshan”. The anaphora of “mash-up”, whether in these lines or in subsequent ones, stresses the forceful action taken by black people, by “wi”, against racial practices in the hope “di rulah dem understand”. Time and again, sounds play a vital role in conveying the feelings and the message of no more oppression. The /n/sound is so dominant that it prepares for the crescendo of violent acts. The riot was fearful in its expenditure of energy, of souls and property. It was reported that more than 300 people were injured, and the damage caused came to an estimated value of £7.5m (John). This is illustrated by couples of twin acts Johnson has drawn from the rebels’ stories: “di burnin an di lootin/smashin an di grabbing/di vanquish an di victri” (Johnson, “Di Great Insohreckshan” *Tings an Time* 43: 20-22).

The Brixton riots encompassed other cities such as Leeds, Moss Side in Manchester, Nottingham, Liverpool, Bristol, Leicester, Handsworth in

Birmingham, Derby, and Southampton. Margaret Thatcher's policies were blamed as being the direct cause of the riots since many black people suffered from penury. The riots come as a result of black people's frustration, voicing their anger against racial policies and practices. Johnson shakes the belief in stereotypical images of black people as savages and organized gangs, of saboteurs who care for ransacking and looting. They are depicted as defending themselves against the atrocities of the police who use an iron fist no matter it is legal or not.

well now dem run gaan goh plan countah-ackshan
but di plastic bullit an di waatah kannan
will bring a blam-blam
will bring a blam-blam
nevah mind Scarman
will bring a blam-blam

(Johnson, "Di Great Insohreckshan" *Tings an Time* 44: 46-51)

The above lines portray an aural image which illustrates the violent counter attack. The anaphora of resounding "bam-bam" highlights bloody acts of killing protesters. Using hoses recalls into mind Bull Connor who curbed a march organized by Martin Luther King in Birmingham in 1963 using police dogs and pressure hoses fiercely. Johnson records the impracticability of Scarman's report which approves of racial practices so long as it is not *institutional*. Lord Scarman's report on Brixton's riots published in November 1981 stressed the fact of racism as part of British life, yet it exculpated the institution of the police from any racial acts. Scarman's report led to many improvements in building trust between the police and ethnic minorities such as Police Complaints Authority; however, it did not lead to the abolition of "sus" law (Runnymedetrust.org) though Cindi John, a BBC News community affairs reporter, in his article titled "The legacy of the Brixton riots", saw that Scarman's report "led to an end to the Sus law".

The poem outlives Briton riots of 1981 so much that when Tottenham riots took place, after the murder of Mark Duggan by the police, in 2011, Johnson was giving a performance of the poem in Belgium. Commenting on the Tottenham riots, Johnson pointed out that problems have increased since "the days of Di Great Insohreckshan" (Crossley 264). He further relates Tottenham riots to Brixton riots stressing the fact that "It is clear to me that the causes of the riots are racial oppression and racial injustice, as well as class oppression and social injustice" ("Trust between the police and the black community is still broken").

Conclusion

Even a cursory look at the printed version of “Five Nights of Bleeding” and the version performed on stage many differences show up. Although the printed poem mostly adheres to Standard English, intervention of Jamaican Creole and Jamaican English cannot be avoided. Words such as “doun” and “soun”, “an”, “yout” and “jus” endorse the tension created because of linguistic mixture which functions both as a subversion of Standard English and a preservation of identity. Johnson’s reading of the poem from a book (Johnson, “Linton Kwesi Johnson - Five Nights of Bleeding” 3:49) asserts that music is essentially created by both carefully choosing his diction and using his voice as a bass line. On the other hand, Johnson’s performance of “Five nights of Bleedings” (Johnson, “Linton Kwesi Johnson - Five Nights of Bleeding (Poet and The Roots)” 4: 28) has been a success in conveying the message and attracting audiences; however, it lacks the linguistic tension the scribed poem has. Further, the scribed poem conveys the message to readers alien to the reggae music as well as those familiar to it.

In “Di Great Insohreckshan”, Johnson chose a celebratory tone because, as he maintained “I wanted to capture the mood of exhilaration felt by young people at that time” (“Trust between the police and the black community is still broken”). The mood of exhilaration is conveyed through performance as well as scribal form. Johnson’s reading the poem (Johnson, “Di Great Insohreckshan - Linton Kwesi Johnson - Venezuela 2008” 2:08) stresses the fact that the words and the poet’s voice create effective music enough to attract the audience so much as a performance does. If compared to this reading, the accompanying music of Johnson’s performance (Johnson, “Linton Kwesi Johnson - Di Great Insohreckshan” 4:04) supports the “mood of exhilaration” and fills in the gaps created by the very nature of the performance.

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