

*The Oral Heritage and  
Linguistic Heteroglossia  
of Post-colonial Writings:  
Bob Marley and the An-  
glophone Carribean as a  
Case Study*

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**Introduction**

The importance of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) theory of language in postcolonial studies is widely accepted: his notion of dialogism paved the way for a discussion on the inherent multilingualism of literary texts (Bandia 2007), whereas his concept of hybrid construction gave birth to "one of the most widely employed and most disputed terms in post-colonial theory" (Ashcroft et. al. 1998, 117).

However, despite the diffusion of Bakhtin's terms in

post-colonial studies, there seems to be no book length research on the application of his methods on post-colonial writings: the kind of research that Bakhtin did on the novel, has not yet been done on postcolonial literatures. In other words, what is lacking is a work of textual analysis which might clarify how post-colonial authors appropriate and organize the multilingual reality at the core of their experience.

Sketching this analysis will be the main aim of this article: for the sake of clarity, before going deeper into textual analysis, I will briefly summarize some core concepts of Bakhtin's philosophy and connect them with post-colonial literary theories, having the Anglophone Caribbean as a case study.

My main reference will be Bakhtin's *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* (Problems of literature and aesthetics) first published in 1975 and translated in 1981 by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holoquist under the now famous title *The Dialogic Imagination*. As far as post-colonial theories are concerned, I will refer mainly to the classic *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et. al. 1989) a pioneer work in post-colonial studies, which remains a leading reference in its second edition (2002). Even if the authors of *The Empire* do not openly quote Bakhtin's work, their account of post-colonial languages and literatures overlaps with Bakhtin's theories on several points, as we will see.

## **Bakhtin's philosophy on language and its relevance in the post-colonial discourse**

Bakhtin's philosophy on language develops around a core concept: at the heart of existence is a constant struggle between centripetal, organizing forces (fixed systems) and centrifugal and chaotic ones (the plurality of experience). This struggle is always present – whether in culture, in nature, in human consciousness – but the most complete and complex reflection of these forces is to be found in human language. *Heteroglossia*<sup>1</sup> represents the peculiar interaction between these forces, as they operate into language, where a fixed and shared system constantly tries to tame and frame the plurality of live utterances. Heteroglossia is the locus where centrifugal and centripetal forces collide.

The main point here is a perspective on language as an historical, performative and situational act: the focus of linguistic analysis becomes precisely what had been considered marginal, namely the social diversity of speech types; a word uttered in a specific time and place will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions.

The focus of linguistics should be not only those basic and shared grammatical rules, but also those stratified meanings that words acquire in everyday reality. Of course, this social diversity of speech types reflects dif-

ferent world views, ways of thinking, ideologies, ages, backgrounds; therefore, establishing a linguistic hierarchy, a correct and un-correct way of speaking represents a direct form of social control:

We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of socio-political and cultural centralization. (Bakhtin 1981, 271).

Bakhtin's subject of study is the European novel: as one knows, a definition of what a novel is has always been quite problematic, and critics have always failed to identify the genre within two thousand years of prose production. For Bakhtin, the main feature of the novel lies in its language or, more precisely, in its heteroglot use of language: the novel, more than a genre is a force, working within a literary system "*to reveal the limits and the artificial constraints of that system in its attempt to unify the inherent plurality of language*" (Holquist 1981, xxxi. Italics mine).

In opposition with the closed and finished structure of other genres – epic, poetry, tragedy – the novel is in con-

stant dialogue with a polyglot and ever-changing present, and this dialogue is expressed in the multilingualism (heteroglossia) of its language.

In elaborating on this main feature of the novel – in its opposition to the epic – Bakhtin underlines the historical cradle where the novel was born. If the roots of the epic are so far in human history that the genre had reached its completeness long time ago, the novel came about in a particular era of European civilization: a time when socially isolated and culturally deaf patriarchal societies (where the epic came from) gave space to international and *interlingual* contacts and relationships (Bakhtin 1981, 12). It will be a fascinating and challenging task to compare the historical situation that gave birth to the novel with the present rise of post-colonial literatures.

Starting from this general theory on language and literature, Bakhtin goes on to research which are the *compositional forms* used by the novel for appropriating and *organizing* heteroglossia. It is here that he employs the notion of *hybrid construction*, which he defines as “an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages’, two semantic and axiological belief systems” (304). This is exactly what happens in post-colonial regions, where people load the European language they are forced to speak with their

own “speech manners” and “belief systems”.

The Caribbean gives us a significant example of the particular linguistic situation of post-colonial regions as “in the Caribbean the European imperial enterprise ensured that the worst features of colonialism throughout the globe would all combine in one region.” (Ashcroft et. al. 1998, 145).

Native languages were utterly destroyed with the genocide of the Arawak and Caribs and during the importation of slaves from Africa, there was a deliberate effort by the slave masters to separate people speaking the same language and to stop any attempt to perpetuate native customs. The result is a people in an alien land, speaking an alien language, which is itself alien to the place, and therefore inadequate to describe both their identity and experience. Because of this crazy and shocking situation, people in the Caribbean have always been very much conscious of language oppression and of its power in the dynamics social control.

## **Linguistic consciousness in the Caribbean**

Together with slaves, in the Caribbean arrived a new language structure; the imported African languages were many but they all had a common semantic and stylistic form. As we have mentioned, an intentional effort was made by slaves masters to divide and extirpate such lan-

guages. Nevertheless, the African structure continued to exist and to operate on an underground and submerged level, adapting itself to the new place and the new languages Africans were forced to speak. This African influence created what poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite (1984) has called *Nation language* :

Nation language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our new world/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timber, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree. (13)

Of course, we shall not consider nation language as monolithic and homogenous: Caribbean communities are *polydialectic*, that is to say that in the Caribbean a multitude of dialects intervene to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum (Ashcroft et. al. 1998, 44).

The term creole continuum is now widely accepted: the theory states that the Creole complex of the region is not simply an aggregation of discrete dialect forms but an overlapping of ways of speaking between which individual speakers move with considerable ease. As we have seen in Bakhtin's theory, the concern with historical and social varieties of language is of great relevance also in post-colonial studies:

The theory of the creole continuum is an outstanding example of post-colonial approach to linguistics, because it reaffirms the notion of language as practice and reintroduces the ‘marginal’ complexities of speakers practice as the subject of linguistics. (Ashcroft et. al. 1998, 46)

It was this main feature of language that had been neglected by orthodox linguistics and literary studies, and it is precisely the inadequacy of existing theories that gave rise to Bakhtin’s work as well as to post-colonial studies as a whole.

The power and relevance of language in the Caribbean emerges not only in academic theories – which are a main reference for post-colonial studies on language and literature – but also in the very consciousness of the people. The language created by the Rastafarian movement represents an outstanding example of language and subversion within a post-colonial context.

Rastafari (the self given name of the movement) is an African diasporic religion, which started in the Caribbean and quickly acquired a world wide dimension: it is because of this international dimension that postcolonial studies included Rastafari among the *Key Concepts* of the discipline (Ashcroft & al. 1998). Born symbolically in 1930 with the coronation of Haile Selassie (Ras

Tafari) as emperor of Ethiopia – the only African state free from colonial rule since Biblical times – the Rastafari movement developed in Jamaica among the downcasts and oppressed as a way to give dignity, identity and perspective to the African population. Research on the movement started in the fifties with the work of the University of West Indies and quickly acquired a worldwide, interdisciplinary dimension (Murrell & al. 1998; Barnett & al. 2014).

One of the first elements of Rastafari to attract the attention of post-colonial studies was language (Ashcroft & al. 1989): in order to rebel to the colonial linguistic oppression of their environment, Rastafarians deliberately restructured Jamaican Creole into an idiom that could represent them, *dread talk*. In a context where a language to oppose the imperial English simply did not exist, the Rastaman embraced his Creole, emphasized its African element and creatively forged new vibrant words to describe his experience. The use of the pronominal “I” is the most characterizing aspect of dread talk and it was mentioned by the authors of *The Empire* as a significant example of “Creole restructuring” (49), quoting one of the first field-work on the subject:

In pure Jamican creole, the first person singular in all its cases is expressed by the pronoun ‘me’: ‘me have me book’. [...] the Rastas, however, would seem to perceive this creole pronoun ‘me’ as expressive of

subservience, as representative of the self-degradation that was expected of the slaves by their masters. It makes persons into objects, no subjects. As a consequence, the pronoun 'I' has a special importance to Rastas and is expressly opposed to the servile 'me'. (Owens 1976, 64)

Another important aspect emphasized by dread talk is the coherence between sound and meaning: for instance, the word "oppressor" becomes "down-pressor", because "op"/ "up" has a positive connotation that does not match with the implication of the word. This restructuring might seem funny to us because its dynamics are alien to western languages – but they are much common in African ones (Pollard 2014). Generally, the concern with the sound of the word and with its power on reality is a main feature of oral cultures (Ong 2002). Therefore, coherently with African religions and oral traditions, songs are considered a true and real action against oppression: as Count Ossie – the leader of a group of drummers and singers called The Mystics Revelation of Rastafari – would say: "We were fighting colonialism and oppression but not with the gun and bayonet, but wordically, culturally" (Pollard 2003, 68). Similarly, Nigerian artist Fela Kuti describes his art as a "weapon against oppression" (Kuti n.d.). These positions underline not only the militancy of the artists, but also their sensitivity towards the spoken word, a sensitivity deeply enrooted in their cultures.

All these elements are to be found in nation language, which of course comes from the oral tradition. As Bathwaite (1984) says, “music is, in fact, the surest threshold to the language which comes out of it” (16): in his study, important examples of nation language are taken from reggae and calypso songs (24-27).

Nation language and dread talk used to be purely oral languages until authors gave them a written form. As an outstanding example, we can mention Louise Bennett, who started to write poetry in Jamaican “vernacular” around the thirties (and for several years her linguistic choice confined her to the back-scene).

In his 1962 poem “A far cry from Africa”, Derek Walcott (1992, 17) – whose main effort with nation language would come only in the late seventies (Brathwaite 1984, 10) – explains the dilemma of the poet in dealing with the overwhelming reality of heteroglossia:

I who have cursed  
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?  
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live?

However, as we have mentioned, post-colonial dialo-

gism (at least in the Caribbean case) is not only between different languages, dialects, cultures: it is also between the oral tradition and the written one:

The present continuity and vigor of orality in post-colonial societies is demonstrated in the example of the West Indies, where the emergence of a vigorous post-colonial culture is as much the result of figures like reggae performer Bob Marley, 'dub' street poet Michael Smith, and the women storytellers and performers of the Sistren Collective, as of writers like Walcott, Harris, Brathwaite or Brodber. (Ashcroft 1998: 166)

In post-colonial theory the word orature started to be used to stress that verbal art is as aesthetically rich and complex as book-bounded literatures. The continuum between extempore oral performances and formal scribal texts becomes paramount in Caribbean literature (Irele and Gikandi 2004, 720).

Therefore, studying linguistic heteroglossia in Caribbean writings does not only mean to identify the different voices, languages, perspectives in action within the same utterance, but also to explore the oral psychodynamics present in the text, as we will see in our examples.

Reggae lyrics constitute a particular form of hybrid construction. Differently from other forms of orature (e.g. the art of African griot) reggae music has developed in

dialogue with a post-colonial environment, as the artistic expression of the Rastafari movement:

Reggae claims a role of transmission – specifically, of an history that was broken by slavery and of a memory both to be conserved and built – and articulates the question of collective identity in relation to the African diaspora. (Daynes 2010, 3).

The international success of reggae is quite a complex and multifaceted phenomenon: it has linguistic consequences, spreading the use of patois English far beyond its linguistic borders; it has religious and cultural consequences, as it was through reggae that Rastafari became an internationally accepted religion attracting the attention of researchers and medias all over the world; and of course it has political consequences, being the music of the *down-pressed* (Barnett 2014). On top of that, reggae is also a literary phenomenon, being a form of post-colonial orature and operating through lyrics which are a particular example of the organization and expression of post-colonial heteroglossia.

Of course Bob Marley has a main part in the whole scenario, being both a *psalmist and prophet* of the Rastafarian movement and an international icon. With him a peculiar post-colonial culture acquired an international dimension: we shall not forget that Marley not only was the first third world artist to rise from extreme poverty

to international recognition, but so far it has been the only figure of the kind (Toybee 2007). The role of Marley as an *Herald of a Post-colonial World* and the social significance of his songs have been widely explored (e.g. Stephens 1999). At the same time, studies and anthologies on Caribbean literature agree on the representative status of Marley's work in the Caribbean literary scene (e.g. Brown & al.1989; Dawes 2003) and his work is taken into consideration in wide-ranging studies on Caribbean literature (Irele & Gikandi 2004). Significantly, in-depth analyses of his songs highlight their strong oral patterning: Daynes (2010) explores how reggae articulates and transmits the identity, memory and redemption of New World Africans, while Prahlad (2001) examines the use of proverbs that characterize the genre. Both authors give extensive consideration to Marley's lyrics: a recent literary analysis of his work focuses on his use and interpretation of Biblical quotations, mainly Psalms and Proverbs (MacNeil 2013).

In the next section a couple of Marley's lyrics will be taken into consideration together with a poem by Kamau Brathwaite and another by Louise Bennett. My aim is to underline the shared identity of the compositions, both in language and contents. The rendering of heteroglossia through hybrid constructions, multiplicity of voices, quotations and oral dynamics will be the main focus of my brief analysis.

## The linguistic heteroglossia and oral heritage of Caribbean writings

In Caribbean writings, traces of nation language and orality can be found in their materiality as well as in the deep structure of the composition. A closer look at Marley's lyrics will reveal their linguistic *heteroglossia* and their strong connection with the psychodynamics of oral cultures. Coherently with the hybrid construction of post-colonial writings, Marley's discourse contains, mixed within it, a blend of standard English, Jamaican Creole, dread talk and Biblical quotations. In the following analysis, together with reflections on language, I will highlight what Walter Ong (2002) identifies as main features of oral narratives.

Old pirates yes they rob I  
sold I to the merchant ships  
minutes after they took I  
from the bottomless pit  
but my hand was made strong  
by the hand of the Almighty  
we forward in this generation  
triumphantly.  
Won't you help to sing these songs of freedom?

(“Redemption Song” Marley 1979)

As we have mentioned, the particular use of the pronominal “I” (/ai/) is a main feature of dread talk: Rastafarians constantly affirm the first-person-dignity of a subject who had been objectified by centuries of slavery. The “I” is not only a word but a source of power in the shaping of a stronger identity, now able to address with dignity the memory of slavery: “*I and I build the cabin / I and I plant the corn / didn’t my people before me / slaves for this country?*” (“Crazy Baldhead” Marley 1976). This use of the “I” is so characteristic of Rasta speech that authors like Braithwaite (1992) have used it to identify the narrating voice in some of their poems.

In “Redemption Song” the first person remains a first person no matter what demands English grammar makes and, more importantly, no matter what mortifications the narrating voice has to bear. In this multileveled process of identification “Marley sings about the slave trade as if he had lived it” (Daynes 2010:95): the “I” embodies the identification with the collective experience, both in the present and in the past. As the author says “*I n I n I n I. That is a spiritual form of Unity*” (Marley 1975).

If the first stanza describes the painful memory of slavery, the second one is a declaration of redemption; the use of “rob” in its present declination is an unmarked form of Jamaican Creole, whereas the intransitive use of “forward” as synonymous of “advance” is typical of

dread talk (Pollard 2014, 78).

“Hand of the Almighty” and “bottomless pit” are clear Old Testament quotes (Ex. 13.14; Ps. 40.02): they point to the slave-and-redemption story of Joseph and to that “black biblical hermeneutics” through which Rastafarians identify themselves with the Judeo Christian narrative (Murrell 1998). In particular, what is quoted is Jacob/Israel’s blessing to his son Joseph (Genesis 49.22-24), one of the twelve patriarchs of Israel (*italics mine*):

22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough  
by a well; whose branches run over the wall:

23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at  
him, and hated him:

24 But his bow abode in strength, *and the arms of his  
hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of  
Jacob*; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Is-  
rael:)

These lines had been previously introduced in the back cover of “Rastaman Vibration”, published in 1976: the quotation was to become particularly famous – at least for the Jamaican public – because few months after the publication of the album, Marley did survive a shooting attempt, further embodying his identification with the biblical patriarch (Steffens 2017, ch. 20). Therefore, in this song Marley is taking his personal life-experience in an overlapping identification with several planes (and voices): the personal and the collective, the biblical and

the historical. All these planes are put into dialogue through language – the Creole of the oppressed, the words of the Rastaman, the blessing of the patriarch etc.

Moreover, in his use of biblical quotes and Rasta's words and symbols, Marley is rearranging themes and formulas belonging to his culture and easily identifiable by the Jamaican audience (Barrett 1977) – which is not only aware of Rasta culture, but being a deeply Christian society is also familiar with biblical references (Stewart 2005).

This “formulaic style” is a main feature that reggae music shares with oral narratives, but it is not alien to Jamaican literature, where it becomes evident in the use of proverbs (as we will see).

Another main feature Marley's lyrics share with the oral tradition is their use of the second person, which represents a direct address to the audience: such addresses are sometimes to be answered by the choir, sometimes they involve the very public. Linguistically, it is worth noticing that in “Redemption Song” the closing question is constructed in perfect standard English: what is implicit in this language shift is that the audience the author is addressing is an international one. After having evoked a specific identity, the song opens up to an international dimension and Marley's plea becomes a world-wide call for freedom.

As we have seen, heteroglossia can be found in its materiality as well as in the deeper structures of writing. “Redemption Song” is an outstanding example of both: on the one hand we have the constant shifting of language registers and a merging of the personal and the collective voice; on the other, elements implicit in the song – the collective dimension, memory, word power, formulas and quotations – point to the oral psychodynamics which constitutes the cultural foundation of the composition.

What we want to stress is that the continuity between performance, music and text is something that emerges through textual analysis, on a semantic, stylistic and linguistic level, without even considering these texts in their performative dimension but only on the plane page<sup>2</sup>.

In order to understand the paramount role language and identity have in Caribbean writings – be them songs or poems, written by intellectuals or ghetto artists – we will take into consideration the composition of an outstanding Barbadian poet and historian.

Like my first example, “Limbo” by Kamau Brathwaite (1990, 194-195), is a record of slavery written in the first person: however, if in Marley the movement is from the past towards (forward) the future, “Limbo” is dominated by the present form. But which present? The present of slavery or the present of the limbo song? As we will

see, at the core of the poem is the ambiguous and hybrid combination of meanings that the word “limbo” has acquired: in particular the author is contrasting the “party dance” which the word points to in his contemporary time and place, with the possible origin of that dance.

It is a *drum poem* and an official video has been recorded (Braithwaite n.d.); the video starts with the various definitions of the word “limbo”, definitions that will be put into dialogue by the author.

Limbo

1. an imaginary place for lost, forgotten or unwonted persons or things;
2. an unknown intermediate place between two extremes: in limbo;
3. a prison or confinement [ C14 from medieval Latin ‘in limbo’ on the border (of hell)];
4. a West Indian dance, in which dancers pass, while leaning backwards, under a bar. [C20 origins uncertain, but it is said to have originated after the experience of the cramped conditions between slave ship decks of the Middle-Passage].

And limbo stick is the silence in front of me

*limbo*

*limbo*

*limbo like me*

*limbo*

*limbo like me*

long dark night is the silence in front of me

limbo  
limbo like me

stick hit sound  
and the ship like it ready

stick hit sound  
and the dark still steady

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

long dark deck and the water surrounding me  
long dark deck and the silence is over me

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

stick is the whip  
and the dark deck is slavery

stick is the whip  
and the dark deck is slavery

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

drum stick knock  
and the darkness is over me

knees spread wide

and the water is hiding

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

knees spread wide  
and the dark ground is under me

down  
down  
down  
and the drummer is calling me

*limbo*  
*limbo like me*

sun coming up  
and the drummers are praising me

out of the dark  
and the dumb god are raising me

up  
up  
up  
and the music is saving me

hot  
slow  
step

on the burning ground.

In its structure the poem alternates two main voices, both in the first person: one is the authorial voice, who maintains the language register of the poet; the other is the chorus, which is taken from the popular “limbo song” by Frankie Anderson (n.d.). These two planes are merged in the first line, the only one where the word “limbo” appears in the narrative plane and not in the chorus: this line is a fifth definition of the word, a definition that will be deepened in the poem. The song as a whole reminds us of cumulative songs, songs with a simple verse structure modified by progressive addition; the contrast between the two planes – the joyful tone of the famous song and the tragedy of the experience – becomes more disturbing as we read the poem.

The narrative voice reflects the aesthetical and refined linguistic framework of the author; however, this voice is not alone but it is constantly interrupted by the voice of the limbo song, that is to say, by the voice that associates limbo with a playful situation whereas for the author it is the remainder of a painful memory.

In his concern with philology and definitions, Brathwaite is giving poetic voice to – and almost theorizing on – the hybrid reality of the word, actualizing in poetry what Bakhtin wrote about the novel:

For the novelist working in prose, the object is always entangled in someone else's discourse about it, it is already present with qualifications, an object of dispute that is conceptualized and evaluated variously, inseparable from the heteroglot social appreciation of it." (1981, 330)

In "Limbo" the poet is directly addressing the reality of heteroglossia, and the problematic and existential dimension it has for his people.

My impressions of oral literature are [that it is] multi-dimensional, multi-generic, multi-this, multi-that. It seems to me a much more holistic way of dealing with life and art ... Life is never just a song or a dance or a drama. (interview with Ama Ata Aidoo in Deandrea, 2002: 17).

As it happens with the African oral tradition, reggae songs are never limited to a singular aspect of life; they are for entertainment as much as for praise; for social commentary as much as for memory and education. In the following example we will see how this multiplicity emerges in language, in a text where multiple voices addressing multiple issues and intentions are put into dialogue and merged into a continuum.

Them belly full, but we hungry  
A hungry mob is a angry mob  
A rain a-fall, but the dirt it tough

A pot a-cook, but the food no 'nough

You're gonna dance to Jah music, dance  
We're gonna dance to Jah music, dance

Forget your troubles and dance!  
Forget your sorrows and dance!  
Forget your sickness and dance!  
Forget your weakness and dance!

Cost of livin' get so high  
Rich and poor, they start to cry  
Now the weak must get strong  
They say, "Oh, what a tribulation!"

Them belly full, but we hungry  
A hungry mob is a angry mob  
A fain a-fall, but the dirt it tough  
A pot a-cook, but the food no 'nough

We're gonna chuck to Jah Music-  
chuckin'  
We're chuckin' to Jah music- we're  
chuckin'

Belly full, but them hungry  
A hungry mob is a angry mob  
A rain a-fall, but the dirt it tough  
A pot a-cook, but the food no 'nough  
(“Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)” Marley 1974)

With regard to this song anthropologist Leonard Barret

(1977), a pioneer and leading figure in the study of Rastafari, wrote:

Reggae is a cultic expression that is both entertaining, revolutionary, and filled with Rastafarian symbolism. The symbols are readily understood in Jamaican society, but the real cultic dimension of reggae was unknown until the Rastafarian song-prophet Bob Marley made his debut in New York. (x)

Barrett's point is widely shared and has become a main subject of research (e.g. Daynes 2010): what has been less explored is how all these elements are reflected into the linguistic heteroglossia of the lyrics. "Rain a-fall but dutty tuff. Me belly full but me hungry" is a main Jamaican proverb; similarly, the "boiling pot" serves as a main image in popular wisdom (Llewellyn 1991, 214). In Jamaican literature, these quotations had been used by the popular vernacular poet Louise Bennett (affectionately known as Miss Lou, 1966, 120-121), in a poem which is a main reference for this song.

Sun a shine but tings no bright;  
Doah pot a bwile, bickle no nuff;  
River flood but water scarce, yaw!  
Rain a fall but dutty tuff

Because Marley's lyrics address an international audience, the transcription of Creole words and phrases often follows English spelling conventions: "dutty" as it appears written in Bennet's poem – and pronounced

in Marley's song – is a Jamaican word from Twi Akan (Ghana) language (Cassidy and Le Page 2002), stressing the African element of the song.

Popular wisdom and Bennet's poem are all extra voices that we find merged within the lyric: as we have seen in "Redemption Song", these quotations can be considered an example of that formulaic style belonging to the verbal art of oral traditions (Ong 2002).

The second stanza introduces the cultic dimension with the name *Jah*, a Rasta neologism for *Yahweh*, God (Barrett 1977). Behind a facade of standard English, the third stanza – which is the one Barrett refers to – points to ritual repetitions and trance dance. We shall not forget that reggae was strongly influenced by *kumina*, a religious ritual dance of Congolese provenience (Stewart 2005).

Jumping again into social commentary, the fourth stanza is another quotation from Bennett's poem (121):

De price of bread gawn up so high  
Dat we haffi agree  
Fi cut we yeye pon bred an all  
Tun dumplin refugee

However, Marley here uses a line that can be taken straightly from a newspaper's title – "cost of living get so high" – introducing further variety in the social diver-

sity of his utterance; but the actuality of the line has a biblical set, where the singer is calling upon the strength of the weak<sup>3</sup> whose voice makes its appearance in the form of direct speech – “*They say* ‘Oh what a tribulation!’”.

Using a standard English spelling form, the song combines a multiplicity of voices: the voice of the poor and oppressed, the voice of popular wisdom, the voice of the papers, the voice of the spiritual leader, the voice of the singer.

An entire paper could be written on the word “chuckin” /chackin/ in the sixth stanza, as “chuck to music” is clearly not an English construction. It seems that the word could assume different meanings depending on the background of the listener. As we find it written in the lyrics, the word might be an inappropriate spelling of “chock” /chack/ meaning “to take the lead in singing songs, hymns, etc.; to sing the verse [...] while others come in on refrain” (Cassidy and LePage 2002, 104).

Significantly, in American slang, “chuck” means food (Kipfer and Chapman 2007), and this possible meaning might suggest the spiritual nourishment provided by the music<sup>4</sup>. However, the word can be phonetically linked to another rich expression of black talk, the word “shuck” defined as:

One of the verbal performances practiced by blacks when they interact with the Man, the establishment, or any authority figure. [...] the function of shucking is both expressive and directive. It is designed to work on both the mind and emotions of the authority figure in order to manipulate him in a particular way. Like many other black speech acts, when it is viewed in its entire, shucking must be regarded as a performance. Both words and gesture are used to promote the desired image” (Lynn 1975, 150)

This word seems to be much more appropriate for our context as it has another important meaning:

To improvise chords, especially to a piece of music one does not know; FAKE IT, VAMP (1957+ Cool musicians) [black senses probably from the fact that black slaves sang and shouted gleefully during corn-shucking season, and this behavior, along with lying and teasing, became a part of the protective and evasive behavior normally adopted toward white people in “traditional” race relations; (Kipfer and Chapman 2007, 1141)

This is just a small philological research: the point is that the lack of a fixed spelling rule for the rendering of Creole amplifies the possible meanings of words, taking us directly in the heteroglot and multiform reality of the spoken word. We must remember that we are not only dealing with multilingualism, but also with the written

rendering of a purely oral language. To say it in Bakhtin's terms, in the language of the lyrics we have a dialogic relation between the written and the oral. Such relation goes beyond spelling to affect the very psychodynamics of writing. As Ong notes (2002, 46), oral cultures are homeostatic; their words acquire meaning only in the actuality of the situation: oral cultures don't have dictionaries and are uninterested in definitions.

I would like to conclude quoting the perspective of the artist: as we have seen in Aidoo's quotation, in oral cultures what western people see as different elements of life merge in the continuity of experience. It is also this world view, this feeling, that makes post-colonial authors and artists embracing the linguistic heteroglossia of reality, emancipating their writings from colonial linguistic norms and affirming their own identity:

[How can you] forget your troubles and dance? Because you got to dance to Jah music, the whole thing is what is inna your head you know? But we say dance to Jah music man, get your culture, from you getting your culture than we can move to progress ... But that is what we are gonna do, we say 'dance to Jah music', but it is 'educate yourself culturally towards His Majesty, Rasta', you know what I mean, it is not just dance, dance to Jah music, it can mean, talk Jah talk, run Jah run, do everything Jah way, do it Jah way, which is the righteous way. Dance the righteous dance.

## NOTES

1. Heteroglossia is the English translation of *raznorečie*, which defines multilingualism, the social diversity of speech types (Holoquist 1981).

2. “The very necessary connection to the understanding of nation language is between native musical structures and the native language. That music is, in fact, the surest threshold to the language which comes out of it.” (Brathwaite 1984, 16).

3. The “strength of the weak” is a main theme throughout the Bible, see: Is 35.03, Eze 34.16, 2Co 12.10, 1Co 1.25.

4. Significantly, in the last stanza the leading line of the song is reversed “belly full but them hungry”. In a press conference Marley gave such explanation of the song “Well you know what I mean is not just food alone, is a head thing, is not a food thing, because your belly can full but your head hungry, you understand, and your head can full but your belly hungry, so it don’t break down to

just a food thing, is not only that I-Man deal with”. Bob Marley, Press conference. “Bob Marley UN Peace Medal [1978, The Waldorf-Astoria” (Filmed in 1978. YouTube video, 50:05. Posted in April 2012). Accessed Sept 30, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQFIU6n-QJoo&t=1849s> .

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