
Care Living: The Poetics of Jamaican Women's Aliveness

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Abstract

My inquiries into the poetics of Jamaican women's aliveness enter through the space of care ethics and the dimensions of my own poetry. In my work, I syncretize Caribbean feminist praxis, resistance, creativity, collective catharsis, spirituality, imagination, community, friendships, kinships, and knowledge. In this crucible of being, care ethics and aliveness are not simply experienced as forms of decolonial resistance. Nor are they reduced to a mere disruption of intersecting oppressions. Rather, they are resources, continuously connected within and around each of us, forming the basis of our flesh, blood, spirits, and dreams. While aliveness and care ethics challenge *inter alia*, our most chaotic, tense, and violent experiences, they also go beyond these forces to become deep expressions, of what I call, the poetics of Jamaican women's existence, healing, and release. To develop this framework, I draw on Kevin Quashie's (2021) exploration of "Black aliveness" (p. 1), to argue (in poetic form) that Jamaican women's aliveness is not simply the antithesis to death, but that which can address vital questions about the ethos of Caribbean feminist theory and praxis. As Quashie explains, Black aliveness is "the invocation of a black world [and] is the operating assumption of black texts, a world where blackness exists in the tussle of being, in reverie and terribleness, in exception and in ordinariness. This black world is not one where the racial logics and harming predilections of antiblackness are inverted but one where blackness is totality, where every human question and possibility is of people who are black.... Since blackness cannot exist fully, humanly, in the world, we will imagine a world where the condition of being alive is of us. In a black world, the case of our lives is aliveness; not death, not even death's vitality, but aliveness" (p. 1-2 & 12). Guided by the above statement, I articulate this concept in the context of Jamaican women's lives, illustrating how, through a poetic reflection on care ethics and Jamaican women's aliveness we can "imagine a black world so as to surpass the everywhere and everyway of black death, of blackness that is understood only through such a vocabulary," (p. 1). I argue that we can experience this through the, as Quashie puts it, "quality of aliveness notable in the worldmaking aesthetics of poems...in how those poems...can be read for what they tell us about our being: about how we are and about how we can be" (p. 2). The questions guiding my poetic inquiry are as follows: 1) What is the role of care ethics in the context of Jamaican women's multiple acts of living? 2) How can the concept of "care" support and/or challenge our efforts to analyze the role of religion, ancestry, motherhood, land, and food in Jamaican women's lives? 3) What are the possibilities of studying this association between care ethics and aliveness through poetry?

Keywords

Black aliveness, care ethics, poetry, Caribbean feminist theory, praxis

Island Care

Island care is ancestral, a present past that Mama passes on
 Where we remember that the plantation did not care but we cared for the uncared for who labored
 through those uncaring hours
 We remember the nappies of care wrapped on the baby's bum, where we reimagined how to
 Care feed
 Care clean
 Care read
 Island care is an ethic of the bed, a place from which bodies are worshipped while they laboured in
 sickness and in health
 A care that called for the gathering of the community to sing, dance, and chant a care hymn
 For our lives – made in the organics of community care, kept by connections of water care and loved
 in the respect of mountain care
 This care, a Caribbean, survives despite the neglect and unfulfilled promises of the creative mind

Island care is real, a flow so rich – it flows from the Caribbean Sea –
 The salt that continues to care for the bones flung from the uncaring ship
 which continues to unlove us
 but we love us – says the Caribbean feminist placard

Island care searches for a better practice of care
 A search for resources inside the baptism of the market, farm, reggae, and the church
 Where care exists in a familial home that the island recognizes–
 Mapping the erasures, and reorienting our communities
 Whose echoes on the river hold hands in the possibilities of a rediscovery of care
 Island care is armed, militaristic, and triumphant
 A resistance in the revolutionaries of our everydays
 Against Babylon toward justice–
 An ownership of the land that cares
 To provide food that cares for the caring carers that the island loves

Caribbean Seas Care Ethics

As the seas rush to the shore, Jamaican women rush to care
 Bubbling with their sisters like the foam on the sand
 Extending to the farthest point on the land
 A cooling that takes all the pain away

 Toes in and blanketed under the wave of Jamaican women's embrace
 You swim against any current
 Gripped by the hands of swim lessons and diving practices
 Their hands care-y you to the boat of rest and restoration
 Disguising you in the sand of protection
 They colour the sky with the rod of the seas of care
 A mirroring which rises tides and sails us ahead

In the Caribbean seas care ethics, Jamaican women
Bathe us – and them – a romance
in the crystals of care – a rubbing and shining that keeps us in good health
Where the sounds from seashells echo the cares that the seas floods on the land
A sound that roars as Jamaican women listen
And watch
As the island dances a care song like the coconut trees rooted in the seas

From the Caribbean seas care ethics comes care writings messaged in the washed-up logs and rocks
Where Jamaican women await, then mediate, then takes
Away from the seas
To the land of care where they share the care
That the seas fair

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