

# Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture

By Carolyn Cooper

The language of Jamaican popular culture—its folklore, idioms, music, poetry, song—even when written is based on a tradition of sound, an orality that has often been denigrated as not worthy of serious study. In *Noises in the Blood*, Carolyn Cooper critically examines the dismissed discourse of Jamaica's vibrant popular culture and reclaims these cultural forms, both oral and textual, from an undeserved neglect. Cooper's exploration of Jamaican popular culture covers a wide range of topics, including Bob Marley's lyrics, the performance poetry of Louise Bennett, Mikey Smith, and Jean Binta Breeze, Michael Thelwell's novelization of *The Harder They Come*, the Sistren Theater Collective's *Lionheart Gal*, and the vitality of the Jamaican DJ culture. Her analysis of this cultural "noise" conveys the powerful and evocative content of these writers and performers and emphasizes their contribution to an undervalued Caribbean identity. Making the connection between this orality, the feminized Jamaican "mother tongue," and the characterization of this culture as low or coarse or vulgar, she incorporates issues of gender into her postcolonial perspective. Cooper powerfully argues that these contemporary vernacular forms must be recognized as genuine expressions of Jamaican culture and as expressions of resistance to marginalization, racism, and sexism.

With its focus on the continuum of oral/textual performance in Jamaican culture, *Noises in the Blood*, vividly and stylishly written, offers a distinctive approach to Caribbean cultural studies.

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Review

"*Noises in the Blood* is a highly original and important study that will change the direction of literary/cultural studies in the Caribbean. Fascinating and forcefully written."—Stewart Brown, Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham

"*Noises in the Blood* theorizes aspects of Caribbean popular culture in an exciting and new manner."—Selwyn R. Cudjoe, Wellesley College

"Carolyn Cooper's book is lively, stimulating, challenging, witty, and skillfully-written. *Noises in the Blood* is the kind of text that a range of scholars and specialists and general readers in oral literature, cultural studies, African diaspora and Caribbean studies, popular culture, and cross-cultural literatures will find useful, helpful, and necessary."—Carole Boyce Davies, State University of New York, Binghamton

From the Back Cover

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