The Ghost of Mikey Smith

Space, Performance and Justice

HONOR FORD-SMITH

Mikey Smith: Stoned to death in Stony Hill[1]

ON 17 AUGUST 1983, THE JAMAICAN POET MIKEY SMITH decided to walk to Stony Hill from his mother's cottage near the valley village of Golden Spring. He took a side road and then headed out on the main road through Golden Spring, up the hill to Stony Hill village and then down the main road to Pigeon Valley. He was taking a route he had taken many times to meet the journalist John Maxwell. Golden Spring and Stony Hill in Jamaica were, at the time, deeply divided by partisan politics, marked and protected by different groups of armed strongmen associated with the two major political parties.

Originally a colonial fortification, the Stony Hill barracks was built by the enslaved and occupied by British troops until their removal to Newcastle in 1842. The area overlooks Kingston Harbour and is on the route to the mountainous interior and north coast. As Kingston grew, Stony Hill, which is only about ten miles from downtown Kingston, became synonymous with privilege as the colonial upper middle class built large homes there. It was cooler, had good roads and could be easily policed. It could 'oversee' the flatland where the impoverished inner city expanded as industrialisation took place. The space, though identified with the elite, is not stable because it combines multiple uses. A small farming community exists and so too does a working-class community traditionally aligned in the 1970s to the conservative Jamaica Labour Party. They live close to the village or on hillside plots, or they squat on government land, while large guarded houses of the elite occupy the land removed from the village in the surrounding hills and valleys and enjoy the best views of the city below.

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The story goes that as Mikey walked through Stony Hill, a group of men asked him where he was going. They told him he could not pass. His response is famously remembered as, "I man free to walk anywhere in dis I-land."

I think of Mikey every time I pass through Stony Hill Square. I see him running, running desperately, looking for a safe place to hide. Behind, a crowd pursues him along the main road. Their footsteps beat a rhythm on the hot asphalt as they follow him, outrunning cars. They are throwing stones at him and one of these hits him on his head as he jumps the low stone wall beside the cemetery and he falls, dead at twenty-nine.

The square, the road and the old cemetery where he fell are there as always, as if nothing unusual has ever disturbed the everyday movements of pedestrians, buses, trucks and cars, the sounds of gossip, back and forth of errands and shopping. There is no plaque, no stain, no mark at the spot where he fell. There is only a bewildering presence: an absence that disorients, makes the place unfamiliar, bringing into view all the contradictions that my generation – the first one to come of age after independence – thought would have been resolved by now. When I try to imagine him here in this second decade of the new millennium, I cannot. He would be sixty-three if he had lived. I still cannot imagine him free to walk without risk, not there, or anywhere in a world where movements are more tightly controlled than ever for racialised folks, for gender-nonconforming people, and for disabled and poor people from the colonised world. The boundaries and restrictions he railed against in his poetry are still there, compounded across the planet over time and place. Across the last decades, then, thousands more like Mikey, inside and outside of Jamaica, lie dead as a result of the place where they live, the identities constructed around their bodies, and the spatial borders they attempt to cross.

Mikey's absence haunts me decades after his death. His death was a personal loss for me as for many. But it is not that which haunts me. It is the questions it raises that trouble me. Avery Gordon defines haunting as the study of the ghostly aspects of daily life, the pursuit of the meanings of the present through absences.[2] Haunting, she proposes, is not an occult phenomenon but a social question that alerts us to the invisible strategies of power: "In haunting, organised forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the separations themselves."[3] Haunting can be a way to get at identifying the opaque workings of power, the legacies of troubles we thought

Mikey Smith

were long gone. Absent presences, what she calls ghosts, tell us that old forms of inequity are still around. The legacies of trouble show up when we follow ghostly absences – such as Mikey's – asking what they teach us.

In what follows I ask what Mikey Smith's death performs? When I ask what it performs, I do not refer to a fictional enactment. I use the term performance here not to describe a theatrical production but rather to explore the ways in which public actions can become statements about power. What does the scenario of Mikey's death on an open road in public space and in full view of any passers-by teach us? Power, as we know, has to be performed in material ways in space. So how can we get at the issues underlying this question by thinking about Mikey's death as a performance in which power is a protagonist?

Mikey Smith died a celebrated popular poet. His performances in Europe and in the Caribbean electrified audiences and stirred debates about activist art, orality and embodied performance and its relationship to literary poetic traditions. He had released recordings of his work and a book was planned.[4] All indications were that his work would make a significant contribution to the poetic and imaginative tradition of the region and the world.

There are at least two commonly held views of Mikey Smith's death. A first, less publicly stated than the second, is that Mikey's murder took place as a result of his own 'madness', the drugs he was rumoured to use, his explosive, sometimes violent behaviour and his mental health. In an interview, his friend Linton Kwesi Johnson says that a top Jamaican psychiatrist described his

behaviour as schizophrenia.[5] Those who support the view that he was stoned because of his craziness speculate that his assailants picked him out for attack because they found him different, crazy and frightening. They wanted to make him go away, get out of their space. Stones were thrown. He was hit. He died.

The second is the view that he was a victim of political violence and was stoned to death, assassinated by partisan thugs of the right, which was in power. Natasha Barnes argues that this reflects an investment in the idea of the black working class as degenerate and his death as "an indictment of the violent society Jamaica had become".[6] Those who support this view argue that his death was an act that reveals the consequences of a failed postcolonial politics, a politics that is predatory, reliant on the clientelism and patronage that has resulted in a state of living in-dependence – a state of failed anticolonial ideas. Barnes writes that interpretations of the death of the poet as a brutal murder make it something larger than it was, an ordinary working-class death, a fate that many face. She adds somewhat cynically,

> Mikey Smith's death makes good poetry. It confirms the metaphors Jamaicans have lately made of 'the people', as a brutish, backward and degraded folk whose senselessness makes them murder one of their own. Smith was the poet of the dystopia, the voice that bears witness to the failure of the postcolonial vision and its epistemic revisions.[7]

Had the vision "failed"? Or was it that it was never really put into practice? Or was in retreat after a violent defeat? Are the injustices that Mikey wrote about dead and buried? I think not. The argument that Mikey's mental health brought about his death risks individualising the incident and blaming the victim. The conclusion that his death is a testament to a postcolonial failure risks ignoring how that failure was scripted and it risks ignoring the remaining shards of a desire for decolonial possibility. Perhaps both arguments are partial truths which should prod us into asking what underlies the responses to Mikey back there on the day he died, 17 August 1983, the anniversary of Marcus Garvey's birth.

Thinking about Mikey's death now is a way to evoke Katherine McKittrick's notion of a "spatial continuity between the living and the dead".[8] In her article "Plantation Futures", McKittrick argues that the discursive space of the plantation extends itself into urban black life through continuing violence to the black body. In my view, Mikey's death was a performance – not of the brutish

barbarism of the Jamaican working class as some might suggest, but of the ways that legacies of older forms of plantation violence pop up unexpectedly, recomposing themselves in strange disguises to mark space and the human bodies in it, to limit the exits and entrances as well as the details of the script. Such violent legacies reconstitute themselves in ways that shape outer social geographies and the interior spaces of the humans that move across them, and they do so in ways which are not immediately obvious. Following Sherene H. Razack,[9] I propose that there is a spatial aspect to the enduring presence of this violent legacy – both transnational and local – and that an analysis of Mikey's death confronts us with what it does to certain bodies. Understanding this, and working to dismantle the unjust ways power marks space, can be critical to the ethical continuity McKittrick invokes, urging us to envision possibility in ways that suggest hopeful alternatives to narratives of criminality, policing, fencing, surveillance and arming, as business as usual.

Here I read what happened to Mikey on his final walk through his own poetic vision of space. I do so as a strategy for overcoming; a way into thinking about what a place of living joyfully and justly in decolonial space might look like. If memory and mourning can be an emancipatory political act, it is in that spirit that Mikey's ghost comes to me now across more than three decades, chanting:

> Give me little dub music
> right ya so
> tonight
> Give me little dub music
> right ya so
> tonight.
> A have dis haunted feeling
> So mek we bat een
> An ketch a reasoning.
> (32)

Poetic justice, exclusion and geographic imagination

Mikey Smith is critical to a black Caribbean poetic tradition committed to social and racial justice. His work joins the oral and the performative to the

scribal through the re-inscription of written traditions, call and response, vocal texture, experimentation and physical movement. He centres black working-class identity while relying on techniques of sonic participation and embodied gestures to call insurgent community into being. Carolyn Cooper describes his work as expressing "the protracted pain of generations of sufferers whose affirmative voice he becomes in a single gesture of communal defiance".[10] Mervyn Morris recognises the importance of Mikey's performative strategy as a complement to writing and links it to his formation in voice and acting training.[11] His use of ring games and popular children's rhymes was enhanced by his signature vocal score. Tone, pitch, rhythm and chorus are intrinsic to Mikey's embodied poetics of sound. He spoke in varied registers to present the reality of those who are repeatedly and across time bumped out of the category of human being and silenced.

The significance of this is that he created sonic community in space. His voicing of phrases like "Roooots" or "Laaaawwwd" were inevitably a piercing cry that alerted audiences to the urgency of joining with him in a call for justice reliant on collaboration and sonic power. His use of improvisation was, like jazz, a form of social practice which, as Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble and George Lipsitz argue, depends on an engaged encounter with audience, a poetics of attentive listening and partnering that together forge a relationship between audience members who move from being listeners and observers to participants and performers.[12] This performance is prefigurative. It models a utopian space that makes immediate what could or should be, while also performing cooperative responsibility. In this prefigurative and liminal poetic space, a tangible energy and spirit of community could be released in voices rising in rhythmic chant.

But this prefigurative performance space is only one of the many ways that Mikey engaged with the urban landscape. Much of his poetry reflects a social and geographic awareness. Many social geographers have argued that space is not natural or neutral but rather reflects and is marked by social relations and social facts. Mikey's work dramatises this, and in so doing shakes up easy ideas about nature, progress and social unity that characterised prevailing nationalist visions at the time. Edward Said, Frantz Fanon and indeed contemporary First Nations decolonial writers like Leanne Simpson[13] point to the importance of land in struggles over decolonisation.

Mikey's unpublished thesis production at the Jamaica School of Drama was

called *Yard*. The opening lines of the play illustrate how he places community and home within land or *grung* (ground) as a prelude to a work about the eviction of tenants: "Yaad is wi Muma. Pon ground wi sleep." Elsewhere he reiterates a bond and connection to land:

> Dis-ya dutty, a we create it
> Wid we sweat an we blood;
> An we nourish it.
> (46)

Said argues that geographical space is central to an imperial imagination that aims to control the territories of earth. Imperialism is a contest over space and none of us is free from this geographic struggle.[14] He further contends:

> Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored . . .[15]

Said's point is that this restoration is achieved through the poetic imagination. In contrast, Mikey Smith's poetry, unlike that of Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite and most recently Kei Miller, reflects the actual struggle for this restoration. It establishes connection to 'dutty', to ground, to earth, but then continuously narrates and laments loss of locality, alienation and exclusion.

Mikey often creates a poetic persona that is either moving across the urban landscape on foot – "I an I alone / a trod through creation" – or sitting in on a reflective reasoning (often from a street corner or on a wall). As he moves through, or alternately sits in, the landscape, he renders urban dispossession, eviction, homelessness, observing short scenes that shift rapidly:

> Lawd
> me see some blackbud
> livin in one building
> but no rent no pay
> so dem cyan stay
> Lawd
> de oppress and de dispossess
> cyan get no res

What nex?
Teck a trip from Kingston
to Jamaica
Teck twelve from a dozen
an me see me mumma in heaven
Madhouse! Madhouse!
(15)

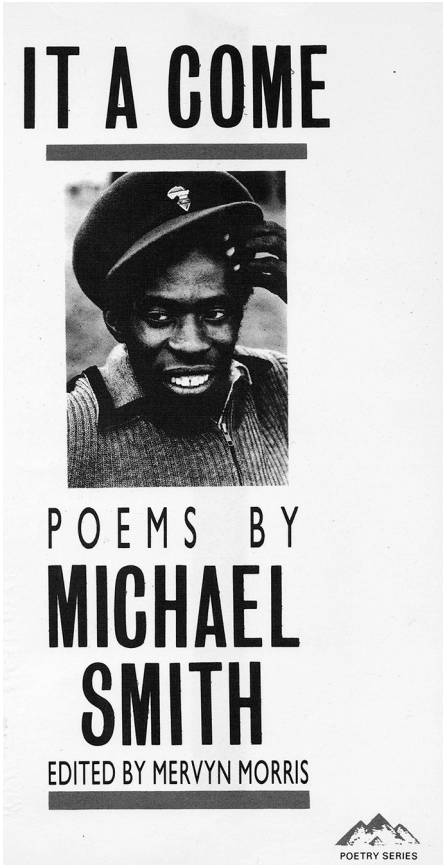
His characters sleep in public toilets, clean dog shit, are hungry, humiliated, homeless, degraded, sleepless and preyed upon by police. He calls out the haughty segregation between ghetto and mansion and warns against the casual violence of political clientelism, police, unemployment, anti-black racism, and injustice. Mikey tells of characters who are often angry to the point of violence and barely able to contain their desire to break through social exclusion. He warns:

It a come
fiyah a go bun
blood a go run
it goin go teck you
it goin go teck you.
(19)

At the same time, Mikey also attends to the ways displacement shapes human subjects, causing them to identify with the hostile power that objectifies them. He points to a desire to avoid pain through a kind of conformity that results in mimicry of hierarchy:

I used to live ina one yard which part
everybody think them better off than de other,
an de only thing mi coulda do
fi meck dem know dat mi naw Skin up
when di area ready fi go erupt
is fi mek dem know
dat mi is a man dat will bun up harp
and tear off house top because
I got some wicked thoughts . . .
(58)

His hustlers, tenement dwellers, and in particular his female characters internalise norms of respectability as a means to a toehold on respectability. In a Fanonesque move of masking, his victims assume personae that mimic powerful perpetrators and act to elevate their status above that of others who are just like them. In "Revolutionary", the narrator describes this consciousness:



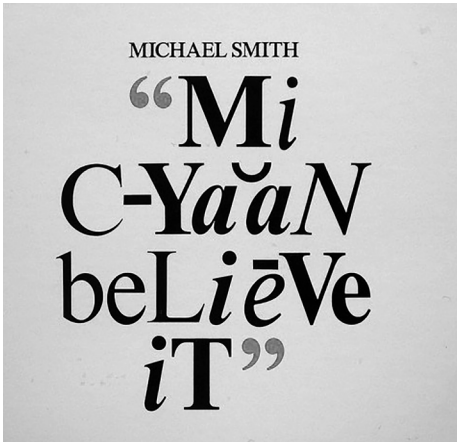
> She never business bout Africa,
> Much less fi go like Rasta,
> An she woulda wuk night and day,
> Make sacrifice an pray.
> For all she waan fi know,
> Dat her son come out to sinting better
> So she can move outa de hog pen
> An show off pon her friend.
> (44)

Mikey knew well what it meant to be the target of power games and to be excluded. Some of this was due to race and class, but there were other factors which do not appear in the poems. He sometimes stammered, and he walked with a hop and drop that made him the butt of jokes. As a child, he had fallen out of a mango tree and suffered a broken hip. It finally healed after several botched operations, but it was too late for a conventional high school education in his early teen years. He told me that it was during his long illness when he was out of school and unable to walk that he found within himself that inner space where poems are made. It came to him in waves of rhythm followed by phrases and words. His mother had found a place to live in

Golden Spring and there, away from the crowded heat of Jones Town in Kingston, he found refuge in reasoning sessions with Rasta elders. These sessions radicalised him. He refers to them in "I Still Deh Ya", but he never mentions his disablement:

> Yuh member how we get conscious as a yout
> dem days when we used to talk nuff bout Garvey.
> An buy ital yatty till it swell we head
> Fi come walk wid Rodney?
> It use to bun dem odder one
> De way we use to chat bout Marley
> An tell dem dat as long as dem imitate
> Dem will always full up a self-hate.
> (45)

His poem "Mi Cyaan Believe It" brought him to the attention of community leaders and won him a scholarship to the newly established Jamaica School of Drama, then under the leadership of Jamaican poet and playwright Dennis Scott who initiated an innovative curriculum. Mikey started in acting, but later found community with poets like Oku Onura, Jean "Binta" Breeze, Mbala, Poets in Unity, Owen Blakka Ellis and others. There, under the big tree outside, he developed his poetic voice, chanting over drum rhythms or the rhythmic backing tracks for reggae music that were called dub plates. In time they came to be known as the 'dub poets'.



After graduation, his poetic successes grew with tours to the UK, Cuba and Europe, but his situation remained socially precarious because of the contradiction between what he had become and how he was seen in Jamaican space. Abroad and in diaspora he was a unique representative of all those who could not represent themselves. He carried the burden of being a representative of the voiceless, a representative of the

race, a signifier of the grassroots. Inevitably this symbolic designation as an 'authentically grassroots' star imposed a huge psychic cost. Such cultural politics are the result of centuries of inequity. They turn one person into a 'cultural specimen', while leaving untouched all the forces that lead to the production of disadvantage for the rest of the group. One person, no matter how brilliant, can never adequately represent all the differences that inhere in any social group, can never hold the weight of all aspirations and desires in any community, especially if that person is in a precarious social situation. In any case, success makes the authentic marginalised black voice, inauthentic. In a sense, having been 'out' of Jones Town and Jamaica, Mikey was no longer 'authentically grassroots' precisely because his access to circuits of cultural production gave him cultural capital and made him visible and recognisable. He was no longer an uncomplicated representative of the invisible and the voiceless, because in becoming recognised as 'the voice of the people' he became differentiated from his origins.

Unlike Bob Marley, he had nothing material to give back to his community. He noticed that the youth he had grown up with in Jones Town saw him as different as a result of his travels. So did the folks on the corner in Golden Spring, his second home. The travelling brought questions, carried obligations to the community: how you so famous, star, and you cyaa help me? How you so brukpocket? Uptown, middle-class intellectuals found him different too. He was not university-educated, nor did he hold a salaried job. His language and his colour marked him as working-class and he did not have the skin privilege or the whitening cultural capital bestowed by the experience of traditional high school or education abroad.

As he moved between uptown and downtown, tensions heightened between the space of his origins and that of his achievements. This was stress incarnate. It could be challenging to go freely between working-class Cross Roads or Half Way Tree and middle-class uptown, with its contrasting wealth and ways of

being. Moving out of place and across boundaries confronted him with the difference between spaces. He looked and dressed like a youth on the corner, and so government buildings, tourist sites or businesses all presented the risk of being hassled, carded, stopped.

Mikey experienced all these spaces as an alien. He returned from the 1978 Festival of Youth and Students in Cuba inspired by the revolution. He told me he felt he had glimpsed a place where hierarchies had come down. He remarked that Cuba was not a "dress-up culture" like Jamaica. He complained that Jamaicans had a petty bourgeois obsession with respectability and fashion. Clothes, he argued, only marked class and the desire for status. He wanted a revolution that would purge hierarchy and hypocritical desires for respectability once and for all. Then we could start anew. He wanted to move beyond the passivity of a religion that led folks to accept meekness and he envisioned a form of radical spirituality, which he wrote about in his prescient poem "Sunday":

> I sit
> Sunday
> not meditating on
> people clapping
> shouting
> meek
> shall inherit earth
> but meditating
> freedom
> I
> Shall not die
> A natural death
> But fighting.
> (37)

On being matter out of place

The fighting Mikey refers to in "Sunday" has to be understood in the context of the politics of the time. During the 1970s, Jamaica underwent a period of political reform against the background of the Cold War. Significant reforms

for women, families and workers were brought into being from 1972 to 1980, and some efforts were made to repossess and recover land in terms of both ownership and settlement. A sign at a march in the period proclaimed "We are not for sale" in stark contrast to the moniker of the millennium which frequently commodifies the island with the term 'Brand Jamaica'.

Unsurprisingly, the reforms of the 1970s produced a well-documented violent and polarising political reaction, and an urban civil war played out as a brutal struggle for control of space and bodies. The conservatives were backed by the United States and better armed than the state. In the fighting hundreds of urban working-class dwellers were displaced. Mikey's friends who lived on the border between neighbourhoods on either side of the political divide were often burned out of their homes by persons allegedly acting on behalf of well-known politicians, or caught in the midst of gunfire night after night.[16] The army was not equipped to compete with the weapons on the street, and so space was marked along partisan lines and defended as such. Urban space fragmented along party lines as members of communities identified with one or other political party could no longer cross into each other's space. Those in dissent either kept it to themselves or left the area. Stopped at a roadblock at a boundary between communities you could be asked "Capitalist or Socialist?" If you gave the wrong answer you were in trouble. Boundaries solidified between folks who shared the same conditions but who identified with different struggles. Crossing could cost you your life or your home. Some, such as Mikey's mother, resettled in the rural terrain of Golden Spring, the neighbouring community to Stony Hill. Mikey accurately named them as refugees in "Reality Seh":

> See ya, I cyan understand
> How we surrounded by de sea
> Yet we have political refugee
> Fleein from community
> Dat is terrorized by mercenaries.
> (35)

In 1980, the conservatives won the election and policies were reversed. Debt and deregulation ushered in neoliberalism which, as David Harvey argues, has its own spatial logic. The borders opened to accommodate the rapid movement of foreign capital, policies stressed de-industrialisation in favour of tourism,

mining and service rather than agriculture and industry. Expanding interest in tourism led to urbanisation of the island's northern and western coasts and unemployment in Kingston escalated. The devaluation and extraordinary inflation that resulted made daily life impossible for poor people and the shrinking, near bankrupt, state sector meant that the political patronage of the 1970s was unravelling. The enforcers of the previous decade became entrepreneurs in an informal or illegal economy.

Mikey had often encountered social rejection when he tried to move across social borders, but the ethos of the 1980s, which was overtly about reinstating social distinctions and social order, naturalised this, made it ordinary. When he encountered this, it triggered in him an explosive anger that frightened people. His anger roared in his poetry like reverb. "Laaaawwwwwd" was his characteristic wail. His voice climbed walls and scaled fences where his whole body could not go and was not welcome. He raged.

He had reason to be angry. He was constantly being reminded that, as the anthropologist Mary Douglas might put it, he was matter out of place.[17] Douglas argued that the meaning attributed to dirt is connected to the categorical classifications 'clean' and 'dirty' and the distinctions maintained between them. For her, what is considered clean or dirty in any particular society has to do with the boundaries that maintain the classifications that hold a society in place. Dirt, so interpreted, is a relative concept. It is fine in its place, but threatening in the wrong place – like the kitchen or the bedroom.[18] Anything that crosses a boundary between categories and is in the wrong place can be considered, as Douglas famously put it, "matter out of place".

Douglas's ideas have social implications. Distinctions maintain social order and differentiate social groups. Such rupturing of categories can be dangerous because in rupturing the distinctions that rest on them, they also seem to threaten stability and so-called moral purity. Dirt in such a schema is more than a waste object to be discarded; it can also be a metaphor for the way some humans are seen. Mikey wrote about feeling like dirt, being dehumanised in "Trainer":

> Yuh know what wake me up, Trainer?
> Is a man come deh inna de early morning.
> Im mus did know is a human
> siddung deh a ketch a nap,

yet im dash a bucket a Jeyes water pon me
widdout even saying sayin sorry at dat.
A look pon im. A never seh one ting.
(59)

I have pointed out that Mikey knew what it meant to be seen as out of place, as deviant, outside of social norms, to be that figure onto whom some folks project their own fears about being out of control, alone and out of place. He knew what it meant to be unmapped, so to speak. Identified as a voice for the oppressed and the dispossessed, in his personal life, he was accustomed to loneliness. He wrote about the solitariness of his being, the isolation of his journey. In "I an I Alone", he is again walking across the cityscape overhearing a montage of voices juxtaposed with the chorus:

I an I alone
A trod through creation
Babylon on I right, Babylon on I lef,
Babylon in front of I and Babylon behind I,
An I an I alone, in the middle,
like a Goliath wid a sling shot
(27)

The attack on Mikey that led to his death is linked to this isolation and to his refusal to accept boundaries to freedom of movement because they were inherently unjust. The boundaries that isolated him had been placed there by "Babylon" as his poem states, by imperial agents that wanted to control the land for their own uses. These old boundaries of power operate on several levels but are always, when threatened, finally held in place by violent control. This is, as the cold war violence of the 1970s demonstrates, never completely local. It travels by routes across land and sea, moving like the humans, sugar and bauxite between here and there.

Stony Hill at the border of the urban and the rural is marked by all these global/local flows. These mark the land with a series of unstable spatial separations put in place during colonial occupation. The community swelled in the 1970s when groups of displaced refugees from the fighting downtown fled into the hills, sometimes squatting on unused land.

When Mikey began his walk on the morning of his death, he ventured into

this unstable terrain. Sometime before, he was reported to have heckled the minister of education, who was also the member of parliament for Stony Hill, at a public meeting with her supporters. Many likely had the same criticisms of her that he had, but they would doubtless have thought twice about expressing them in a space where her supporters dominated, or voiced them politely through the correct channels. Mikey did not stand on such decorum and rarely took covert paths. His blunt and outspoken anger was easily seen as being 'out of order' or taken personally as rudeness – a rudeness compounded by race, class and also his physical disability. As someone who absorbs the violent energy that targets what is designated as deviant, he was in danger of being seen as social waste that must be disposed of. The minute he walked across a boundary, he ruptured a taboo and disturbed the very old spatial distinctions that underlie a social order in which no one should 'forget themselves' and move out of their place. The fact that he troubled the borders with his presence endangered him. The fact that he would not let that rest, that he continued by himself to spontaneously tackle the injustice at the heart of this, meant that he was himself at risk and in danger, even though others saw him as a threat. His difference confirmed the normalcy of others – including those who tried to purge him. Attacking him proved their respectability. He died because normalcy has to be guarded spatially. Throwing stones at him, as often dogs or cows are stoned, was a performance of how to do that while making it clear that he was in the category of animal. Holding space, as Razack has argued, can be a violent business,[19] and Mikey's murder was an act that determines what can happen when the spatial order that underlies social hierarchy senses a threat.

"I man free to walk anywhere in this I-land" is what he is reported – by journalist John Maxwell who investigated his death – to have said.[20] The operative word here is "free". It invokes the histories of a past of chattel slavery and the meanings it has imposed on bodies like Mikey's. If freedom means the right to liberty of movement and dwelling, if it means finding a place from which to speak and be heard in community, if it means the elimination of casual violence, hierarchies of domination and subordination based on the reduction of some humans to things, the acquisition and abuse of the environment as property or the invented meanings attached to the shape, size, colour, genitalia, age or weight of the body, then Mikey's death demonstrated in practice the ways in which the ghosts of colonial moment haunt the terrain of emancipation.

Conclusion

Mikey died a working-class death, ordinary in its repeatability. Since then, thousands have died as he did because they have crossed taboo boundaries. Their deaths have been normalised, justified by arguments that they are social threats, criminals, and so in some way they become waste, throw-away disposable bodies. But Mikey's work made his death visible. Remembering it now disrupts easy narratives about progress and unity and makes visible the fact that old ideas about who belongs where have formed all of us and produced our relationships to the space we move through.

News of his death was carried by media in Jamaica and in Britain. A demonstration took place outside the Jamaican High Commission in London, organised by the Race Today Collective. There was a parallel, less publicised demonstration, acted out in Stony Hill, Jamaica, right after his funeral. Standing at the side of the road, protestors held signs that called for the community to break the silence, to come forward and identify the people who had thrown the stones that killed him. A committee was struck in Jamaica to monitor the trial and to organise a workshop on poetry and rights in the tradition that Mikey had led. Poets from Amiri Baraka to Kamau Brathwaite have written poems that protested his death.

The activism that followed focused on making those who killed him accountable, and on continuing his work. Important as this was, there is more to be done if we are to engage the "ethical spatial continuity between the living and the dead".[21] I have argued that Mikey's death performed the ways that power marks human bodies and the land. It was a performance of spatial injustice, a death that made injustice visible in space. It performed the ways that power can imprint itself lethally on the body when socio-spatial boundaries are challenged. Carol Boyce Davies suggests that there is a kind of "twilight zone" between borders – of nation, city, class and race.[22] Perhaps Mikey's ghost attempts to move us into the space between an absence (that is unresolved) and a memory that persists, as a way of inspiring us to think about fairer futures and their enactment in space. This process of performing between the boundaries can perhaps be a way to recover what must not be lost in future scenarios.

Throughout this discussion, I have used the term 'performance' to refer to Mikey's poetry and his final walk. In this sense performance acts as what Diana

Taylor might describe as "a vital act of transfer", an act that is able to transmit social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity.[23] I want to add that such embodied acts of transfer can be a privileged site for transmitting the perspective of dispossessed or marginal groups, who historically do not have adequate access to the archiving systems of the powerful to tell their stories. This approach follows the work of thinkers like Rex Nettleford and Kamau Brathwaite, as well as others.[24] All these thinkers recognise that embodied meanings created in sounds, actions and space transform limited notions of freedom and knowledge. Studying public and embodied action can reveal meanings that might otherwise remain invisible.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in his work on colonial occupation and space, reminds us that the power of the artist, like the power of the state, depends on the manifestation of their work in a spatial sense.[25] In its broadest sense as public action or rhetorical displays, performance can be a place where power relations are both dramatised and undermined with important effects. In analysing Mikey's movement across and through space, I have argued that his final walk and indeed his death call into question the ways in which relations of power are enacted spatially. Who accesses space and how that access is regulated are key, but so also are the history of the public acts that produce that space in the first place and the sources of authorisation through which it comes to be understood. In the case of Jamaica, the history that produced performance was that of conquest, plantation culture and resistance to it. This performance can be enacted again and again in multiple ways and multiple disguises.

If, as Fanon and Said propose, recuperation and a decolonised sense of place are central to overcoming the loss of locality, eviction from home and the destruction and exploitation of nature set in motion by the aftershocks of colonial violence, Mikey's ghost beckons to us to consider how we might perform spatial justice in the present in ways which centre the many who have become placeless as a result of being considered social waste. It might then be possible to imagine strategies of change that are different from those that normalise exclusion and violence as inevitable. CQ

NOTES

1. This subhead is taken from the dedication in Kamau Brathwaite's poem "Stone" in his collection *Middle Passages* (New Directions: New York, 1992). The full dedication reads "for Mikey Smith (stoned to death on Stony Hill, Kingston 1954–1983)" (59).
2. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 6–7.
3. Ibid., 20.
4. Mikey Smith's debut album *Mi Cyaan Believe It*, produced by Linton Kwesi Johnson, was released by Island Records in 1982. The volume *It a Come*, edited by Mervyn Morris, was published posthumously (London: Race Today Publications, 1986). All subsequent page references to this publication will appear parenthetically within the text.
5. See Angus Taylor, "Remembering Michael Smith", 2013 (first published in *Woofah* magazine no. 4, 2010), http://www.angustaylorwriter.com/remembering-michael-smith/ (accessed 14 March 2017).
6. Natasha Barnes, *Cultural Conundrums: Gender, Race, Nation and the Making of Caribbean Cultural Politics* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2006), 174.
7. Ibid., 175.
8. Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures", *Small Axe* 17, no. 3 (November 2013) (No. 42): 2.
9. Sherene H. Razack, ed., *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002).
10. Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the Vulgar Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1993), 69.
11. Mervyn Morris, introduction, in Smith, *It a Come*.
12. Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Co-creation (Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
13. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Leanne Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love: Stories and Songs* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2013).
14. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 7.
15. Edward Said, cited in Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, "Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of the Earth", in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment,* ed. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.
16. Personal communication, anonymous source, 2008.
17. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1966).
18. See Sut Jhally and Stuart Hall, *Race: The Floating Signifier / Stuart Hall in Lecture,*

film, prod., dir. and ed. Sut Jhally (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 1996).

19. Razack, *Race, Space and the Law.*
20. John Maxwell, personal communication, 1983.
21. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures".
22. Carol Boyce Davies, *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from Twilight Zones* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).
23. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.
24. See, for example, Rex Nettleford, *Dance Jamaica: Renewal and Continuity – The National Dance Theatre of Jamaica* (1985; Kingston: Ian Randle, 2010); Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice: Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon Books, 1984); Michael Bucknor and Alison Donnell, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011); C. Woods, *Development Arrested: The Cotton and Blues Empire of the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 1998); Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz, *Fierce Urgency of Now.*
25. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams: Toward a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).