New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry
Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring 2024) Pp. 7-16

The Postcolonial Complexities of Black Taste in Jamaican Rock Music

Nadia Whiteman-Charles
Department of Africana Studies, University of Arizona

ABSTRACT: Reggae and dancehall represent popular taste in Jamaica. Black nationalist discourses advocate that authentic Jamaican music be tied to the experiences of poor Blacks and local resistances to Western imperialism. Unfortunately, the local rock music scene's affinity for 'foreign' music styles kept the community on the fringes of the music industry. To secure distinction, rock musicians reimagined and imitated 'ideal' Black tropes in conceptualizing lyrics and their family tree, villainizing Whiteness and justifying their taste. This paper outlines the complexities of Black taste in Jamaica to highlight the barriers Black nationalism has engineered in the production of local music.

KEYWORDS: Jamaica, taste, rock music, Black nationalist discourses, distinction

Introduction

Aesthetic tastes in cultural products like art and music reflect a field of power and not abstract standards of value. For Bourdieu (1993), the habitus regulates choice and social dispositions along class lines. In the Caribbean, history greatly complicates the value of tastes. Music and art express the struggle between social distinctions in race, class and citizenship which are embodied in the reproduction or "mimicry" of local and foreign tastes.

Race and colour distinctions qualify as embodied capital. Embodied capital credits work on mind and body, which sees the personal cost of social improvement as investment, privation, and sacrifice. This is a process of achievement and cannot be transmitted instantaneously by gift, purchase or exchange (see Bourdieu 1986). Bhabha describes colonial policies as fashioning postcolonial dependence on mimicry of an embodied type – an "ideal" type (1994, 97). Mimicry is therefore a sign of difference but also acceptance in that it is a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which imagines the Other as a sign of power or its lack. Bhabha's ideas are of import to this paper as it attests the dizzying double articulation Jamaican rock musicians will display in subsequent sections.

The Jamaican music industry's national strategy and action plan stressed that "Jamaican music is a mature product with an established tour circuit and over 50 years of innovation behind the music, but which is constantly being renewed and re-invented with new compositions and genres" (Brown 2004, 3). These words suggest that Jamaican music is constantly being reconceptualised with new sounds and influences. Yet, on the ground, there are negative connotations attached to "new compositions and genres." The imagined lack of complexity in Jamaican music by locals safeguards perceptions of Black authenticity and dismisses non-African-based music as inauthentic and non-traditional (Lazarus 1999, 197).

From August 2013 to October 2015, I conducted ethnographic research into Jamaica's rock music scene, its physical and virtual domains. The members

of the rock scene were between the ages 19 and 51, lived in Kingston and were from various socio-economic brackets. The ethnic composition was highly varied, and the community also housed a large visible lesbian membership which was uncommon compared to other Jamaican scenes. Through participant observation at events and on WhatsApp as well as in-person interviews, I collected narratives on taste in "local" and "foreign" music. My analysis interrogated the visual, verbal and written discourses of the scene for issues related to taste, race, nationalism and the politics of difference. Consequently, this paper outlines the complexities in the production of Jamaican music. Definitions of Blackness pervades the production of local sounds and overshadows the realistic hybrid/creole processes which have been a part of Jamaican music since its inception. I argue that local musicians must contend with national ideas of the Black ideal type by reimagining and/or miming its tropes in their lyrics, taste, perception of Whiteness and family background to procure distinction.

A Brief History of Reggae and Dancehall

In the academy, Jamaican music is typically depicted as synonymous with dancehall and reggae. These two genres have been propelled by various features of the local music economy. The sounds' ability to motivate dance is said to be one of the guiding forces of Jamaican music (Chang and Chen 1998). Additionally, the birth of the sound system aided in cultivating an appreciation for local music with Jamaican audiences (Stolzoff 2000, Clarke 1981). Sound systems were "mobile discotheques" which played at fairs, nightclubs, dances, and house parties. They were like modern day disc jockeys which provided the blueprint for the latter's performances at dancehall and hip-hop events. The expression "Jamaican music" is synonymous with the reggae sound as "since its birth reggae has been the Jamaican nation's main emotional outlet" (Chang and Chen 1998, ix).

Another important feature of the Jamaican music economy is the Rastafarian movement, which began in the 1930s and was reggae's main influence by the 1950s (Nettleford 1970, Clarke 1981, Daynes 2010). Though persecuted for their Black-cantered philosophies and lifestyle by colonial authorities, Rastafarians' message of Black pride attracted sympathisers and followers, largely from Kingston's ghettos. Their songs of worship connected religious motifs with the social oppression of the Black poor, their economic hardships, and the colour prejudice they faced. In effect, against a series of economic crises, reggae became the economic and psychological escape of the uneducated and unemployed ghetto youth.

Reggae gained wider exposure in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Though perhaps overly romantic, Hebdige saw reggae in Britain drawing upon oral traditions, adopting Bible verses and Jamaican creole to "question the neat articulations of common sense" (1980, 37). The disenfranchised rude boy of ska and rock steady was replaced by the Rasta. The Rastafarian movement "refract[ed] the system of black and white polarities, turning negritude into a positive sign" (Hebdige 1980, 37).

As a result of the popularity deejayed songs, dancehall emerged in 1980s – taking on the name of the initial physical site. Riddim makers were extremely important to the industry as riddims are the heart of dancehall. The potency of dancehall depends on repetition, rhythmic vibrancy and. crude analogies (Chang and Chen 1998). Like reggae, dancehall is said to reflect the identity of Black lower-class youth and their expressions of resistance considering poverty and racism (Stolzoff 2000, Stanley Niaah 2010). Moreover, dancehall lyrics defied the strict moral codes of Christianity and Rastafarianism and provided new ways to talk about sex and heterosexuality. The lyrics embody the "ideological conflicts between competing value systems in Jamaica" (Cooper 1993, 104). Carolyn Cooper (1993) typifies the music as promoting slackness which offered a "politics of subversion" which facilitated the confrontation of patriarchal ideologies and the antagonising of law and order.

In the 1990s, dancehall artists made strides in the global music market. Reportedly between 1992 and 1993 dancehall made approximately $300m in the US (Stolzoff 2000, 115). This is believable given the success of Shaggy's Boombastic/Summertime in 1993 and Ini Komoze's Here Comes The Hot Stepper the year thereafter. By the 21st century, dancehall acts

like Sean Paul, Movado, Lady Saw and Vybz Kartel were regular features in the US music industry.

Despite the policing of the mixing of "foreign" music with local styles within Caribbean borders, many foreign music groups are appropriating the Jamaican sound. No Doubt's alternative pop rock which mixes reggae beats made them highly successful in the U.S. market. Justin Bieber, Chris Brown, Nicki Minaj's and Rihanna's use of the dancehall and reggae aesthetic in hip hop and pop music have earned them international success. Chang and Chen (1998) see that these success stories do not deter local audiences who feel that their best artistes should concentrate on 'Jamaican music' and less on these international sounds. They do not want their artistes to succumb to over-commercialisation which dilutes the quality of the music.

In summary, at the beginning of both their histories reggae and dancehall were seen to have subverted dominant colonial ideologies which disenfranchised Black Jamaicans of the lower classes.[1] The changing status of reggae and dancehall underlines more than the sounds' development from the rich lineage of music stemming from enslavement and original sounds like mento, ska and rocksteady. It also highlights that the sounds were initially reserved for poor Blacks before being accepted by Jamaica's upper classes and then an international audience, much like the steelpan in Trinidad. Eventually, both sounds crossed into the mainstream with the hesitant acceptance of the government and upper classes (Nettleford 1970, Clarke 1981, Cooper 1993, Chang and Chen 1998; Stolzoff 2000).

Additionally, the symbolic marker of Blackness in reggae and dancehall underlined the sounds' opposition to American and European tastes (Moore and Johnson 2004). At the time of their conception, reggae and dancehall were positioned as antithetical to British civility, a preference for White and Brown bodies and an affinity for American popular sounds by the middle class (King 2002). European and American sounds were ostracized from local musicians' repertoire because they represented, for the Jamaican people, past oppression suffered under British rule as well as the conflicts the Jamaican government had with the U.S. in the 1970s and 80s. Resistance to "foreign" music was seen as an anti-imperialist action. But there are also local political dynamics. For example, the focus on Blackness in reggae was a deliberate tactic used by the Michael Manley government in the 1970s to supersede the divisions which colonialism instigated in ethnicity, race/colour and religion. The government sought to create a new vision of positive Black citizenship based on anti-colonial sentiments. Black nationalism is embedded in the imagination of the Jamaican population's racial majority (Nettleford 1989, King 2002, Brodber 2012). Therefore, in the contemporary, a taste for reggae and dancehall represented a recognition of the experiences of poor Black Jamaicans and the nation's liberty from the tools of Western oppression- American and European music. Hence the nation's music (dancehall and reggae) was esteemed while rock music was disparaged.

Of Mimicry and Rock Music

An act of memorialisation in the Caribbean is the repurposing and re-historicising of artforms such as literature, calypso, poetry and jazz which confronts the different ethnic heritages, class struggles of exploitation and explores "adamic renewal or return, and existentialist sense of void" (Rohlehr 1992, 15). Reimagination employs both myth and history and is synonymous with the conversion and reconversion between social, cultural and economic distinction in Bourdieu's class struggle.

However, some attribute revision to imitation which reveals a lack of social power to promote changes in the society. Bhabha (1994) and Taussig (1993) suggest that imitation of the "ideal type" was a sign of the imitator's lack of power, and acceptance of oppressive regulations. The effect of one's mimicry then is the constant reproduction of oppressive norms which Others their identity. One can never reproduce the original wholesale. This results in the double

1 While Chang and Chen (1998) see similar biographies of reggae and dancehall. As both move from working class insurgency to incorporation within national iconography, they suggest that dancehall can be perceived as an extension of reggae. That said, there are important differences between the two musical forms. For example, by opposing the moral codes of Christianity and Rastafarianism, Carolyn Cooper (2004) argues that dancehall decenters prevailing mores and decorum.

articulation of both local and foreign practices. This section outlines the various strategies of imitation and reimagination employed by rock musicians in their lyrics, performances, musicianship and family tree.

The Rhetoric of Oppression

The imitation of metaphors and motifs synonymous to reggae music, which Daynes (2010, 191) calls "the rhetoric of oppression," informed the content of Jamaican rock music. Sentiments surrounding resistance to social oppressions, gender roles and tributes to marijuana were mimicked. Daynes believes that these motifs are prominent Black tropes in Rastafarian culture that has been commercialized in reggae music. Skygrass was one of the most popular rock bands (if not the most) in Jamaica at the time of this study. However innovative Skygrass' reggae-pop rock sound, their lyrics were extremely banal and reused the rhetoric of oppression. Themes such as kingship, marijuana, immortality and resisting oppression were employed throughout the group's career:

Immortal Steppa (2015)
Chorus:
I am the Immortal Steppa
My footprint burn the ground
Fire never burn me down
That's why you never tear me down
Hope yuh have nothing to fear when you hear this song

I Am King (2014)
Intro:
I am King of my destiny
No change, Jah Jah set me fee
Set me free x4
It's my destiny

Verse:
You could have locked me in a dungeon or prison or cell
I would eat through all the walls like it is eating at your flesh
If you grab me by the collar, drag me into hell
I would climb up into heaven and be smiling on the steps
Never could you get me conquered
I will fight until my death
The fire in the lion is the fuel pon himself
Never could you get me conquered with every breath
Never quit x3

Chorus:
I am King of my destiny
No change, Jah jah set me fee
Set me free x4
It's my destiny

High Grade Love (2011)
Intro:
High grade love
The way that you move me baby is not normal
High grade love
Straight to my soul, my lady is so partial x2

Verse:
High grade is the loveliness
Give me 50 bags of this
You pretty like my mama kids
I'm flipping out like cannabis
Love you like kids love cakes and chocolates
Love you like the leaders of the world love politics
Need you like youths need schools and colleges
Need you like needy people always needing dollar bills
Miss you like the government missing the taxes
Miss you like bald head missing dreadlockses
Love you like the preachers in the church love Sunday
Just to take collection and they take it and runway

The lyrics show that the band drew on stereotypical motifs: the legalising of marijuana (High Grade Love), resistance to oppression (Immortal Steppa) and hyper masculinity (I am King). Simon, the primary songwriter and lead singer, described the group's mission to break into foreign markets as a driving force of their creativity. The logic of his lyrics was never described as an attempt to fix or change the social landscape. It appeared that the content and the inspiration for the direction of songs, not just by Skygrass, but many other local bands like Robot Taxi and Downstairs, followed the formula of traditional reggae songs to gain Black distinction with local and foreign audiences.

An understanding of the economic, cultural and social determinants of taste can be assessed through various experiences with products that reflect the temperaments derived from social positions. Bourdieu postulates that "taste classifies, and it classifies the

classifier" (1984, 6). Tastes represent for him "natural" and "right" preferences which are intolerant to the "unnatural." Consequently, in representing oneself as a Jamaican artiste, highlighting one's connection to the experiences of the Black lower classes and/or advocating resistance to oppressive groups classifies the musician as Black.

Reimagining the Rock Aesthetic

Live rock performances swayed between local familiarity found on reggae and dancehall stages and the stereotypical rock visuals in U.S. music videos. The forms of address used to capture the audience's attention from the stage moved from well-known creole expressions and flirtatious teasing of women to familiar rock sayings like "Rock on." Head-banging, protruding tongues and impromptu mosh-pits were not unknown audience responses during live performances. A fixture at these events was also the "groupie." This was the female audience member who showed her love of the music by excessively screaming, calling out the band's name and dancing with abandon directly in front of the stage. The label "groupie" did not extend to their sexual proclivities but rather highlighted that these local female fans embodied some of the behaviour identified with female groupies in the U.S. media.

As a participant observer, I sensed I was observing attempts to recreate the quintessential rock music video. The solo electric guitar performances, irreverent expressions of resistance, the feeling of community and the bar setting were markers for this visual performance. Local rock performances felt more like auditions for the foreign stage. In my discussions with musicians Brian, Vernon, Dominique and Kat C.H.R. each stated that they hitched their wagons to foreign sites of success and saw Jamaica as a means to that end. The volatile political climate which has left the average Jamaican subject robbed of their rights and freedoms has alienated rock musicians from the mainstream. Like many young Jamaicans, they championed their rights in everyday speech, but when asked how their music represented these sentiments, most were quick to describe their work as a project in self-expression.

The drive for success in Europe and the U.S., wariness of the oppressive local economy and the pursuit of individual choice outside the restrictions of the nation's tastes may have resulted in the absence of the next Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff or Barrington Levy. Ibo Cooper, Third World alum and past president of the Jamaica Reggae Industry Association (JaRIA), disclosed that young emerging reggae artistes were just as guilty of being ineffective agents of social change (Ibo Cooper, interview with author, September 15, 2013). Local musicians were inclined to focus on success in foreign markets instead of their present realities because the U.S. and Europe were successful markets for Jamaican music.

Brian, lead singer of Downstairs, seemed a bit offended when I asked him if the lyrics to any of his songs represented resistance against any social oppression which Jamaicans, his band or he faced. Brian stressed that his music was about the "ting" in rock. This "ting" was not further defined by him, and he retreated into the implied certainty of the musician's right to create music for music's sake (Brian Jones, interview with author, April 8, 2014). Omar, lead singer and guitarist of the Free Willies, Kat C.H.R. and Vernon, the lead guitarist of Robot Taxi, explained that they do not focus their attentions on the political realm but rather the artistry of their craft; word play, musical skills, and vocal techniques (Omar Francis, interview with author, February 24, 2015; Kat C.H.R., interview with author, October 17, 2013). Maybe Ibo Cooper has a right to fear Western imperialism of Jamaican music. The devaluation of Afro-Caribbean experiences, says Rohlehr (1992), were once visible in the colonial need to reinforce stereotypes through coercion and propaganda in laws, punishments and education during and after enslavement.

Ibo Cooper described the rock scene members' reluctance to deal with local issues as the result of their alienation from Jamaican culture because of their descent into the virtual worlds of U.S. media (interview with author, September 15, 2013). However, the rock audience did not regard themselves as imperialised puppets but as active consumers of media content with a right to individual choice. They did not think that this choice undermined their Black identity but exemplified an awareness of the shades of feeling and emotions different types of music can generate. Vernon Da Costa, a 20-year veteran of the alternative

scene describes why he is an avid and active rock fan and musician:

> When I came back to Jamaica I was actively seeking out music that moved me. Like Dave Matthews, Metallica, Sting… There is a way I feel when I listen to this [dancehall and reggae] music. There is a way I feel when I listen to rock music. There are some songs I can listen to over and over and over and over again. The first Metallica album I bought was the Metallica Black Album and when I bought that cassette it never left my Walkman for two weeks. Play, flip a side, play, flip a side, play, flip a side. I played that until I broke it. I did the same thing for a couple other albums... Meanwhile, reggae did nothing for me, nothing at all. And people would say things like "oh Yuh White!," "You is a roast breadfruit." What that did was make me feel like an outsider but I was fine with that. And what made me more fine was the fact that I was beginning to meet people who were like me. They were interested in the same things, the same sense of humour. (Vernon Da Costa, interview with author, September 27, 2013)

"Oh yuh white" signifies that the person who listens to rock music is pretending to be of Euro-American or European descent because it is believed that tastes in this genre are specific to this ethnic group. Relatedly, the Jamaican national identity is constructed around ideas of Blackness and the narratives of other ethnic groups are dissolved to consolidate all persons under one imagined community. Thus, Whiteness is mythologised as in opposition to the "Black" nation and subsequently rock music is in opposition to local music, experiences and identities. "You is a roast breadfruit" also coincides with an interpretation of rock music as "White music" as a roasted breadfruit is blackened on the outside but white on its inside. The expression communicates that the rock listener is confused and though his skin might appear Black (Afro-Jamaican), his insides, his internal logic is Westernised (White).

The ability to choose one's music was not seen as a feature of the public domain by rock scene members. The limitations of belonging to the nation imposed an appreciation for all things reggae and dancehall, essentially all things Black. An openness to exploring different tastes outside the set regulations of nation music burgeoned free-thinking cosmopolitans rather than narrow–minded citizens in the rock scene. Unfortunately, it also deprived Jamaica of fresh blood in the reggae and dancehall scenes:

> They [rock members] just support. They don't come here and say no. In the rock scene people don't give a fuck about your opinions. So you could tell me that my hair should be tall and I should be a ras and I can tell you that my hair is going to stay natural and it's going to be this way- short. And I just don't give a fuck what you say and you don't give a fuck what I say…In the rock scene, people think that people have a right to their opinions. In the rock scene people are open minded. And in the rock scene, people have been everywhere, seen everything. So you don't limit yourself in the rock scene. If there is a limited mind person in the rock scene, give them three weeks to three months. You'll realise that all those shackles and chains are broken by everyone they come up upon. And if they are still limited, there are people who are lost causes. (Shauna Franklin, interview with author, October 30, 2013)

Authenticating Local and Foreign Tastes

Many conversations were held about the authenticity of American blues, rock and roll and Jamaican rock music. It seemed imperative to the group that local rock musicians acquire originality through adept musical skills in innovation and creativity by drawing on the past. In an exchange on WhatsApp amongst Brendon, Reece, Spyda and Wayne, the history of rock was understood as a timeline of creative innovation. Many in the chat took offense to Brendon suggesting that Spyda did not know the history of blues as the latter was seen as one of the most innovative and adept musicians in the scene. Spyda produced music as well as sang, played the bass guitar, rhythm guitar, piano and drums. From his informed position, Spyda explained that the blues birthed many musical forms like jazz and rock and roll but that did not mean that this limited the potential of these musical forms. Local musicians did not have to adhere to the initial formula of blues. Brendon acceded with the statement: "Don't copy the greats... seek what they sought." Spyda clarified that Brendon stretch himself,

to realise the possibilities of the music. Vernon corroborated this position by suggesting that playing in E only makes the musician seem limited. Brendon agreed, promising that he would not remain in this key for all his future compositions (WhatsApp group chat with author, June 30, 2015).

This conversation also referenced a myriad of innovative musicians, bands and songs across genres: gospel artiste Kirk Franklyn, emo rock band My Chemical Romance, blues vocalist and guitarist Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love?," Robert Johnson, alternative rock band Nickelback, rock and roll artiste Chuck Berry's "Maybellene," blues musician Willy Dixon's "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man" and the classic rock band The Rolling Stones. This highlights the eclectic tastes of musicians within the rock scene. There was also a strong belief that the repurposing of tones and keys by a musician counted as an expression of originality. Few explained that their music was unoriginal as every sound was subject to a genealogy of other sounds, styles and compositions. Brendon quoted the Beatles' "All you need is love," to drive the point home. He typed – "There's nothing you can sing that can't be sung...nothing you can do that can't be done." Spyda responded with a rhetorical question "Yeah, but who else have ur feel?" Vernon summed up Spyda's perspective by interjecting that, "Innovation, despite owing to previous innovations, is no lesser for being so" (WhatsApp group chat with author, June 30, 2015).

As the main opposition to the assumption that there is a lack of originality in Caribbean music, Wayne asked Brendon what was original about the latter's music. Brendon replied "Nothing." Wayne remarked, "ok. Well what I see as original is a Jamaican dude playing slide." The group concluded that Brendon and his supporters had a lot of growing to do. Every musician in their eyes questioned the innovation and originality of their products but to cross the threshold from novice to master, local musicians must accept and hone what is unique about their skill within the sea of history (WhatsApp group chat with author, June 30, 2015). The effect of mimicry is felt in the embodiment of the Other's norms. This fixes the colonial subject as partial; limited, incomplete and virtual. For example, Stolzoff (2000) describes how enslaved Jamaicans' attempt to imitate the planter class assisted the social order on plantations. Miming European ways encouraged conformity to social rules. The enslaved were always outside the privilege of the whiter, browner positions, despite their expertise at miming.

Ibo Cooper suggested that members of the rock scene were subject to cultural imperialism by the U.S. (interview with author, September 15, 2013). But it can also be argued that the recreation of Jamaican experiences in rock music symbolically realigned the rock scene with concerns of the nation – preserving the local "Black" tropE considering global "White" hegemonic structures. The reconstruction of a tradition of rock music to house Black preoccupations epitomises the syncretic negotiation of various musical genres like the blues and r and b. Never in their discussions on music did rock musicians advocate for the imitation of foreign or local sounds. In fact, they usually urged other musicians to move beyond simple imitation to locate a sound that was uniquely Jamaican:

> **Vernon**: So what if we don't know our heritage we created our own. And in fact we keep recreating it.
>
> **Brendon**: Well, I'll accept that. No. that's the wrong attitude. If everyone brings something to the table u can't show up with sumn new with no past. That's like picking up a guitar and not knowing who Hendrix is.
>
> **Vernon**: Why not? Black people have been doing it for decades now.
>
> **Vernon**: And we keep going from strength to strength.
>
> **Brendon**: We worship everythin white.
>
> **Vernon**: No we don't. And for those that do is because they grew up in that system
>
> (WhatsApp group chat with author, June 30, 2015).

The Myth of Race

In Jamaica, like most of the region, narratives of the past have been historicised from imperial centers. Critical Caribbean scholars have been engaged in the antithesis to colonialism by reconstructing imperialist views of the West Indian experience. Writing in the 1970s, Rex Nettleford describes the hierarchical binary of Whiteness and Blackness as structural and atti-

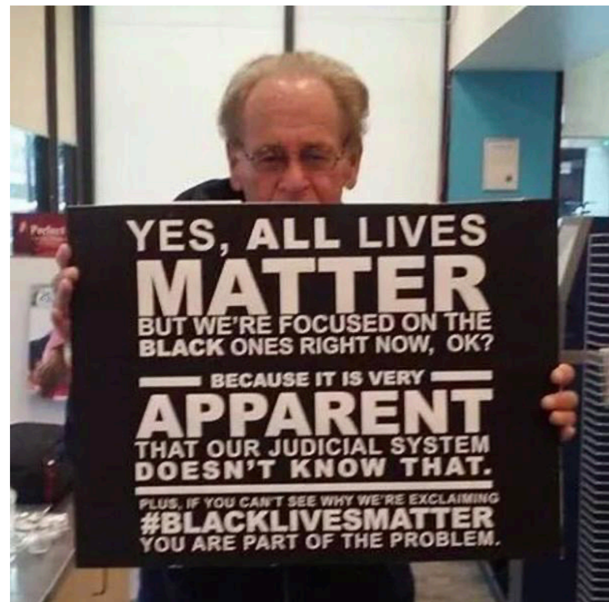
tudinal. Arguing for creative syncretism within creole subjectivity, Nettleford writes, the "in-betweenness and half-identification resulting from these attitudes is probably one of the positively distinctive features of Caribbean communities emerging from a plantation and colonial system" (1970, 21). This understanding is held by those in Jamaica who possess the colour of skin which connotes poverty, lower class stations, ignorance and manual labour. Shepherd clarifies that the colonial objective of shaping laws and scholarly work was to demonize Caribbean peoples and,

> project them as immoral, uncivilised and barbaric in order to justify their military and spiritual subjugation. In the aftermath of these conquests, these works exhibited a tendency to negate or minimize the role of the indigenous peoples in the advance of modernity, presenting both text and sub-text that projected perceptions of the indigenous Caribbeans as a 'problem' for colonial development and an obstacle of the European march to progress. (Shepherd, 2007, 4)

The act of reconstruction or (re)presentation is synonymous with the Caribbean's resistance to colonial imperialism. Much like most creole groups, the rock community resisted as well as substantiated colonial constructions of race. Furthermore, the postcolonial preoccupation with (re)presentation is linked here to Victor Turner's (1977) description of the communitas as either a facilitator of social change or subject to the widely held norms of society. Consequently, the dark play of race reflects both mainstream and rock scene agendas through the maintenance of the society's race/class/colour politics.

Race and racism were a consistent topic of conversation within the group. Racist remarks were exchanged as humor between group members who themselves were of mixed heritages. Their logic of race and race relations betrayed the syncretism of Jamaica's creolised past. However, the myth of the "enduring" and "blameless" qualities of Blackness and the "evil" and "imperialistic" qualities of Whiteness were present in many of the group's debates.

Many times the group denied partiality to any one race and rackled off the prejudices of the wider society. The members made comments like "Me a mongrel tuh. Nuhbaddy nuh pure" which articulated a creolised origin story. The group seemed to create an equitable stage where each member ensured that their race and the colour of their skin held no sway in the conversation. However racist humour was not used to depict Blackness. Sarcasm, irony and wry humour through memes and word play were often used to articulate the oppressive nature of "White ideologies" on Black people and culture. These strategies tried to persuade members of the marginalization of the Afro-race considering Euro-American imperialism:



Despite the pro-Black stance of the group, the responses to Bobby's statement "We [Black people] can be prejudice as fuck but not racist" ranged from disbelief, anger, uncertainty to denial. Many strongly held that the statement was untrue. Yet Bobby thought that the Black 'race' did not possess the political and social power to be racist. Against all arguments that racism was prejudice against any race, even one's own, Bobby suggested that racism was a strategy of White supremacy. He stressed that the Black identity was not conceived around groups who forwarded Black supremacy. To him this was evidence that the blame lay at the "white man's" door. Vernon countered quite succinctly "My main thing is I don't believe that just because you don't have world power doesn't mean you can't be racist" (WhatsApp group chat with author, September 2, 2015).

Embodied capital reproduced from colonial scripts mandated that the colour of one's skin ori-

ented one into a racial group and class. This is the "economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognised thereby recognised, hence legitimate" and secures distinction (Bourdieu 1994, 75). Thus, class in Jamaica, regardless of its economic and educational determinants, was also embodied in the objectification of the local body. Musical taste connected to racialized bodies suggested "[w]ho was free to imitate whom and how it was interpreted, had everything to do with one's position and power in the hierarchy" (Stolzoff 2000, 32).

Moreover, to certify their membership in Black culture, rock scene members creolised their family trees. Wyatt and Bobby located their cultural heritages in Obeah. Wyatt referred to seeing his "Granny tell the future with a glass of water, an egg white and a church door key" with Bobby sharing his "great granny was called "Mother Kai." Obeah is regarded as an African tradition. This knowledge became a sign of Black authenticity in their conversation as they proclaimed they descended from Obeah practitioners. To verify their descent they also described Obeah rituals in a bid to outdo the other by claiming they possessed grandparents who were adept practitioners: "Mek mi guh kill one chicken right now" Wyatt said, referring to ritualized animal sacrifice (WhatsApp group chat with author, July 2, 2015).

Reece and Jennifer imagined a syncretic history of East Indian heritages and rock music. Reece used lyrics from Journey's rock song "Don't Stop Believing" to insert his origin story as in search of the American dream while Jennifer positioned herself as descending from "Indian royalty, gypsies and the "Columbians and Aztec Indians." Bobby and Wyatt exclaimed that she represented "Bollywood" (the Indian film industry) as well as confirmed her 'gypsy' heritage by locating her as a descendant of the Magyar culture. These humorous origin stories served to locate Caribbean history as a part of nothing and everything; to represent the Jamaican nation's mantra, "Out of many, One people" as well as the rock scene's preoccupation of making all welcome. However, regardless of the creolised history imagined, the enduring Jamaican middle-class values on Blackness concluded Bobby's story – "I'm just Black" (WhatsApp group chat with author, July 2, 2015).

Conclusion

Black nationalist discourses have dissolved the historical complexity in Jamaican reggae and dancehall. What results are musical styles derived from hybrid or creolised processes, like local rock music, being assessed as Western clichés that abandon a rich African tradition. Pessimistic opinions about changes to "authentic" local music generally envisage a future where the sound's Black genus is left bankrupt (Lazarus 1999, Sadre-Orafai 2005). My ethnographic fieldwork revealed the Jamaican community as having musical tastes tied to Black expectations. The Jamaican rock music scene's efforts to secure Black distinction were contradictory to the Black nationalist agenda. The scene's production of music encompassed resisting mainstream norms; the production of reggae and dancehall. Yet a drive to imitate Black conventions by rooting their rock lyrics in the rhetoric of oppression was also pursued. Furthermore, the group vigilantly creolised their family trees and policed group conversations to ensure the hero of history was the Black protagonist and the "bad guy" was Western states (the "white man"). Embodying Blackness was no simple feat for Jamaican musicians.

Dancehall and reggae served as the antithesis to rock music for most of the Jamaican politic. Subsequently, rock music was deemed a contemporary form of imperialism, tasked at reinserting a system of oppression. Many traditionalists like Ibo Cooper were concerned that the influence of American music might lead to the death of "authentic" Jamaican sounds – local music which represented the experiences of the poor Black and resisted White oppression.

In truth, rock music embodied anti-Black principles in complex ways which did not allow the sound's entry into the popular domain. Its life on the fringes is clear evidence that reconstruction and imitation can birth new stereotypes or various types of Othering – "Roast Breadfruit." Notwithstanding the critique of the scene's "imitation" of foreign practices, rock musicians drew on foreign traditions to influence their music as well as the tenets under Black nationalism. Rock scene musicians like Vernon and Wayne felt that their creativity in merging both foreign and local music highlighted innovation and experimentation

which all great musicians must undergo to be truly skilled at their craft.

Bhabha (1994) states that social ambivalence is a hegemonic tool used to rigidly confine the postcolonial character to sentiments on race and maintain dominant/subordinate positions. The ambiguity which clouds the character of rock music and its audience's tastes may project a threatening force to traditionalists like Ibo Cooper. However, the indistinct nature of producing Jamaican rock music can be viewed as an act of rebellion, an act of postcolonial rebellion against any ideal type, White or Black.

References

Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John Richardson, 241-58. New York: Greenwood.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1994. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Randal Johnson and Lawrence D. Kritzman (eds). New York: Columbia University Press.

Brodber, Erna. 2012. "Reggae as Black Space." In *Global Reggae*, edited by Carolyn Cooper, 92-110. Mona: Canoe.

Brown, Hilary. 2004. "National Strategy and Action Plan to further develop the Jamaican music industry." Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture and the Global Alliance Programme. UNESCO.

Chang, Kevin O'Brien, and Wayne Chen. 1998. *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Clarke, Sebastian. 1981. *Jah Music: The Evolution of the Popular Jamaican Song*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

Cooper, Carolyn. 1993. *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*. London: Macmillian.

Cooper, Carolyn. 2004. *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian.

Daynes, Sarah. 2010. *Time and Memory in Reggae Music: The Politics of Hope*. New York: Manchester University Press.

Hebdige, Dick. 1980. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.

King, Stephen. 2002. *Reggae, Rastafari, and the Rhetoric of Social Control*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Lazarus, Neil. 1999. *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moore, Brian, and Michelle Johnson. 2004. *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica*. Jamaica: UWI Press.

Nettleford, Rex. 1970. *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica*. Jamaica: William Collins and Sangster Ltd.

Nettleford, Rex. 1989. "Introduction: Fledgeling Years." In *Jamaica in Independence: Essays on the Early Years, 1-16*. Kingston: Heinemann.

Rohlehr, Gordon. 1992. *My Strangled City and Other Essays*. Port-of-Spain: Longman Trinidad Ltd.

Sadre-Orafai, Stephanie. 2005. "Hypernationalist Discourse in the Rapso Movement of Trinidad and Tobago." In *Globalisation, Diaspora and Caribbean Popular Culture*, edited by Christine Ho and Keith Nurse, 33-52. Kingston: Ian Randle.

Shepherd, Verene. 2007. *I Want to Disturb My Neighbor: Lectures on Slavery, Emancipation and Postcolonial Jamaica*. Kingston: Ian Randle.

Stanley Niaah, Sonjah. 2010. *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

Stolzoff, Norman. 2000. *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Taussig, Michael. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge.

Turner, Victor. 1977. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti Structure*. New York: Cornell University Press.