

Sonic Self-Liberation: An Exploration of the Social, Political, Cultural & Spiritual Dimensions of Jamaican Popular Music

Teagan Wall
Mentor: Sean Heim
Chapman University Honors Capstone
May 2025

I. INTRODUCTION

Jamaican popular music is a well of creative exploration, a resource for deep discovery of culture and, perhaps most importantly, an archive of the collectivization of people under shared beliefs, morals and dreams. Jamaica's rich musical history is complex and overlapping, and therefore it is challenging at times to linguistically articulate the dynamics at play. The value of the experience of listening, especially in the context of Jamaican sound system culture (and successive sound system subcultures globally), is **finding presence and purpose within paradox**. This value informs my work's main objective: to investigate the processes of building peace and resilience as they manifest themselves in everyday life and in individuals — i.e., in the local, in the mundane, in the rituals and routines of life — specifically in terms of the mental construction of an internal world that is able to transcend the material world through an appeal to a higher, and perhaps (in its ideal for) divine purpose. How does this imaginary, this ideological framework, become tangible to those who hold it? In other words, how does it achieve enduring value? Any attempt to understand involves a meditation on self, a willingness to submit one's own body and bias to analysis, and the intention of bearing witness to the subjective, yet deeply affective, experiences garnered by sound.

My work is informed by a network of interdisciplinary considerations, including sociology (postcolonialism, diasporic studies), social psychology (colonial mentality, double consciousness, epistemological disengagement, sociogenic marronage), social organization (social identity theory, group / political / oppositional consciousness), popular music studies (genre creation, subcultures, musicking), and culture (interaction, exchange, syncretism), alongside the emerging sub-disciplines of sound studies, sound system culture and bass culture. The essential role of Rastafari thought in Jamaican music also necessitates a consideration of

spirituality (orality, liberation theology), and thereby a detailed understanding of the political, spiritual and philosophical dynamics of Ethiopianism, pan-Africanism and Garveyism. These considerations are contextualized within their respective social, political and economic contexts, both domestically and internationally.

Researchers and musicians in the UK have recently begun a more passionate pursuit of Jamaica's legacy in British musical trends and subcultures, where, as a consequence of colonialism, Jamaican culture exercised its most powerful influence. Academic initiatives —such as Sound System Outernational, Bass Culture Research, and the Black Music Research Unit— have played a crucial role in increasing awareness of Jamaica's inextricable sonic presence in British music. Bass Culture Research, for example, intends to explore “bass culture as a creative practice, an independent economy and a source of alternative philosophical and political ideas” and how this culture “has dramatically re-versioned the British city and sound-tracked the emergence of a post-colonial urban multiculture.”¹ This mission triangulates creative production, economic flow and ideological production as crucial vectors enabling the strength and stability of the sound system as a countercultural movement, and provides a useful framework for my own dialectical approach. There is an overwhelming trove of resources on Jamaican music online, ranging from independent blogs, podcasts, documentaries, databases, discographies and research initiatives to newspaper archives and historical pop music charts. Discogs, Riddim.Id, RiddimGuide, Downbeat, and Sonic Street Technologies, among other informal sites, were consulted to augment my research.

Lloyd Bradley's *Bass Culture* (2000) provides a basis for our timeline. Bradley's work is largely considered the seminal text, offering a comprehensive account of Jamaica's musical heritage. This timeline will be supplemented by Norman Stolzoff's *Wake the Town & Tell the*

¹Black Music Research Unit: Bass Culture. “About.” 2019. <https://archive.bmru.co.uk/about/>

People (2000), Carolyn Cooper's *Sound Clash* (2004), Dick Hebdige's *Cut 'N' Mix* (1987), Paul Sullivan's *Remixology* (2014), Christopher Partridge's *Dub in Babylon* (2010), Beth Lesser's *Rub-a-Dub Style* (2012), and Michael Veal's *Dub* (2007), among others. Interviews with Jamaican musicians are primarily provided by Bradley (2000), Bilby (2016) and Lesser (2012).

To integrate music into social life, I follow the assertion of Small (1990) that musicking – the active role of participating in music — is uniquely powerful through its integration of social dimensions. I expand my analysis through Julian Henriques' *Sonic Bodies* (2011), its sound system-focused successor. Building upon Small's concept of *musicking*, Henriques' *Sonic Bodies* translates this concept to the context of the Jamaican dancehall, and provides extensive insight into the sound system's technical, sociocultural, and material vibrations. I explore the relationship between communities and genre creation, following Jennifer Lena's *Banding Together* (2012). Therefore, I interpret music as a cultural byproduct, conditioned by the popular sentiments of the communities that create them. The dynamic role of music in Jamaican society, founded upon a sound system culture, makes it uniquely insightful in this regard. Jamaica provides a useful example because of its small size but relatively high population density. Identifying this connection between musical form and community facilitates a deeper understanding of the connection between culture and colonialism, allowing us to integrate theories on postcolonialism and the Caribbean by Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Edouard Glissant and Stuart Hall.

Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) centralizes on illustrating the metaphysical and psychological damage of the colonial structure. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), on the other hand, articulates the material realities of the process of decolonization, as well as their psychological implications.² Fanon's works provide the framework through

² Srivastava, Devarya. "Chapter 3. Revolt." 2023.

which I interpret many of the social, political and psychological (and therefore cultural – i.e. musical) changes of twentieth century Jamaica. Situating ourselves in this period, and its theorists, I follow Benedict Anderson's theory of '*imagined communities*' in shaping national identity (1983). I approach social identity and organization through the *rhizomatic approach* of Deleuze & Guattari (1987) and situate it within the post-colonial context of the Caribbean.

There are numerous methodological limitations (or perhaps, distinctions) that make the case of Jamaica uniquely situated for interdisciplinary analysis; the most dominant: that Jamaica's cultural heritage has largely been transmitted orally, thereby any musical history is traced through the accounts of its contributors and witnesses. As such, these historical narratives are highly subjective, greatly contested, and deeply personal. Much of the music, especially in the early stages of the Jamaican music scene, was concentrated in Kingston and thereby primarily speaks to their experiences and sonic taste. Thus, it is not within the scope of this project to account for all of the roots and linkages of the culture. Our story follows the lives and legacies of Hedley Jones (1917 – 2017), Arthur 'Duke' Reid (1915 – 1975), Clement Seymour 'Sir Coxson' Dodd (1931 – 2004), Cecil Bustamente 'Prince Buster' Campbell (1938 – 2016), Osbourne 'King Tubby' Ruddock (1941 – 1989), Ewart 'U-Roy' Beckford (1942 – 2021) and Manley Augustus 'Big Youth' Buchanan (1949 –).

II. GROUNDING: frames

In this paper, I trace a legacy embedded within Jamaican music forms, following what I conclude to be a spiritual heritage of resilience and self-liberation made tangible through the sound system. Invoking Henriques' theories of '*thinking through sound*,' '*sonic dominance*' and '*sonic logos*,' I articulate the innate power of sound — especially rhythm — on bodies, both the individual's physical being and 'bodies' of people, as well as how its multidimensional powers of affect and effect carried on by those with whom it most deeply resonated. Building upon this foundation, I shift to a social analysis; drawing upon the argument that musical subcultures are shaped by communities that produce them (Lena 2012), I integrate W.E.B. Du Bois' reflections on the psychological impacts of the colonial system (*double-consciousness*), positioned within the social context of the Caribbean by Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant. Conceptions of sound organically re-emerge within Glissant's statement that music, gesture and dance were the vehicle through which slaves "first managed to emerge from the plantation: aesthetic form in our cultures must be shaped from these oral structures."³ I invoke Paul Gilroy's theories of *rhizomatic cultures* and the *black Atlantic* to integrate the global dynamics implicit in our discussion of creative and cultural evolution in Jamaica. These sonic and social frameworks are interwoven through an enduring theme — a '*rhythm of the times*' — an anthropological lens derived from Raymond Williams' (1980) theory of *structures of feeling*. As Vanke interprets, structures of feeling "shape cultural patterns and forms reflecting a particular spirit of the time or atmosphere of the age[, and ...] look[] at both collective (structure) and individual (feeling) experiences." A necessary consideration made evident in Williams' theorization is that of *dialectic analysis*, a positioning that reappears throughout my work. This conceptual structure of

³ Glissant, Édouard. *A Caribbean Discourse*. 1989: 248

feeling is made rhythmic through the insights of Fanon, Glissant and Gilroy, as well as the work of Henri Lefebvre in the discipline of ‘rhythm-analysis.’

a. SOUNDING: sound in social action

‘Musicking,’ a term coined by Christopher Small, is understood as the act of participating in music in any form, including listening and performing. Small argues that the power and “essence of music lies not in musical works but in taking part in performance, in **social action**,”⁴ therefore, in the relationships that are formed between participants.⁵ Use of the term ‘social action’ is striking, hinting at a duality: acting in a group (many, **harmony**) and acting together (one, **unison**), as a group. Thus, the value of any musical form cannot be rooted solely in the commodified product, but in the experiences of its contributors and participants, as well as the network of social relations that tie subculture communities together.

Through these relations individuals learn about one another, which “unites the living world, and [...] is in fact a ritual by means of which the participants not only learn about, but directly experience, their concepts of how they relate, and how they ought to relate, to other human beings and to the rest of the world.”⁶ In other words, musicking creates a space for individuals to explore their identity and how they relate to the rest of the world in ways that they may not be able to articulate. Within musicking, complex and even contradictory relationships can be “articulated effortlessly [...] enabling the participants to explore, affirm and celebrate them.”⁷ I augment this concept of ‘musicking’ with that of ‘sounding’ from Julian Henriques’ *Sonic Bodies* (2011).

⁴ Small. *Musicking*. 1998: 9 ; emphasis added

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

Sonic Bodies attempts to address the question: “What can thinking through sounding tell us about social and cultural practices and the processes of communication in particular?”⁸ Henriques’ approach frames *sound* — “a periodic disturbance or longitudinal wave that propagates through a medium”⁹ — in terms of the Jamaican dancehall scene, arguing that it has been constructed by, around and for these vibrations. The dancehall is the place in which listening occurred for a majority of Jamaicans throughout the twentieth century. Henriques makes an intentional effort to translate Small’s work on *musicking* to the Jamaican dancehall scene through development of his parallel concept of sounding. Sounding, in short, is *musicking* in a more modern sense, especially in a bass culture where convention emphasizes the re-production, re-presentation and re-playing of sounds, rather than live performance. Henriques draws upon the cultural studies approach to subcultures that emphasize an auditory dynamics – what he calls *sonic dominance* – in contrast with the existing visual dominance of cultural anthropology. As he depicts it, “seeing is believing, but hearing is only hearsay.”¹⁰ In other words, in the hierarchy of senses, visual observation has traditionally been held as the most reliable — necessary for hypothesis, theory and any widely-held concept of ‘truth.’

Then, what is thinking through sound? Henriques argues that “there is a distinct and different *way* of thinking expressed through sounding [... that] emerged from the intimate nature of the relationship between sound and embodiment.”¹¹ To think through sound, it is necessary to ground the individual in their own role as a body (and a mind) experiencing the vibrations. As a research methodology, thinking through sound is a *grounded theory*, inductive and “organically ‘grown’ from a particle embodied engagement with the research process and materials.”¹² It

⁸ Henriques, Julian. *Sonic Bodies*. 2011: xxiii – xxiv

⁹ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xxx.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

¹² *Ibid.*, 115.

demonstrates *theory as technique*, “a practical process, or way of ‘making sense’ of the research materials, rather than a ‘law of nature’” or a preconceived hypothesis.¹³ The value of ‘thinking through sound’ as a research methodology is therefore rooted in the experience of active, present listening, accessible by all. Further, building upon Small’s earlier invocation of *musicking* as an exchange between performer and listener, Henriques posits that “listening is part of a reciprocal movement.”¹⁴ As such, listening is *active*, not passive; it invokes the act of *bearing witness*, of *presence* with sound; it inherently involves a *relationship* between subject and object; it concerns *participation*.¹⁵ Listening is “concerned with the embodied qualities of tone, texture and timbre [... and it] emphasizes the sensual world of actual embodied presence, corporeal performance, matter, energies, intensities, relationships, flows and affects.”¹⁶ In environments of *sonic dominance*, listening becomes immersive: “... there is no separation in time and space between the subject and the object of sounding.”¹⁷ *Thinking through sound*, as Henriques depicts it, is inherently *rhizomatic*.

Henriques’ work echoes many of the qualities described in Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis* (1992), which builds upon our understanding of embodiment: “The rhythm-analyst will not be obliged to *jump* from the inside to the outside of observed bodies; he should come to listen to them *as a whole* and unify them by taking [... their] own rhythms as a reference: by integrating the outside with the inside and vice versa.”¹⁸ Further, they “must simultaneously catch a rhythm and perceive it within the whole, in the same way as non-analysts, people, *perceive* it [... and] arrive at the **concrete** through experience.”¹⁹ This form of analysis is also concerned with

¹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁸ Lefebvre, Henri. *Rhythm-analysis*. 1992: 20

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

relation and with embodiment, and therefore conceives of the body as “polyrhythmic and eurhythmic,” in other words, as composed of many distinct rhythms that work together in harmony.²⁰ The body is composed of coexisting, physiological rhythms — of one’s heartbeat, of breath, of movement. The rhythm-analyst therefore dissolves the division between subject and object; it could be surmised that the ‘objective’ is found through one’s own subjective experiences, and those of others. Thus, the embodiment factor of thinking through sound counters our ingrained cultural emphasis on the visual, by affecting the body. In an environment of *sonic dominance* where sound becomes immersive and encompassing, like that created by the Jamaican sound system, the body itself becomes a sonic being; the sound system’s auditory power has been carefully engineered to maximize this vibrational power. Sonic bodies are “*systems* of sounding, where sound is always in relation to the other senses, other vibrations and other things.”²¹ Through sound, the Rastafari ideological framework and its fine-tuned world view is made tangible – given a presence, embodied in both individual and collective; it manifests itself and is *felt*. Subjected to sound, the individual becomes one of many and one of a whole — vibrating in polyrhythmic harmony.

b. BANDING TOGETHER: social organization

The creation of new music forms, no matter where or when they occur, is closely related to – and arguably dependent on – the context in which they are formed. Communities are fundamental in this process and shape the cultural byproduct, as demonstrated in the latter half of the twentieth century with early forms of recorded music (Lena 2012). Music subcultures, especially across the African diaspora, can be understood as microcosms of society, rather than

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

²¹ Henriques, 41.

as spaces defined purely for entertainment, enjoyment, escapism, education or education — though they offer themselves as such. It is important to note that the term ‘subculture’ is used loosely within this piece. This is not an exhaustive study of any subculture specifically. For our purposes, subculture refers to the organic development of local styles, expressed through music, dance, dress, speech, values, etc.; further, we specifically focus on counter-hegemonic subcultures, as they developed in response to imposed Western institution

The basis of our sociological framework is found within *social identity theory* (Tajfel & Turner 1979) which posits that one defines their own identity through organization of sensory inputs into different categories. This process of mental categorization offers the individual a method of organizing their sensory inputs and in processing the information they receive. Human beings utilize this framework, especially in their formative years, to categorize the world and, in turn, their place within it. This process provides the basis for how one identifies themselves, also known as their in-group associations, and inherently defines one’s antithetical groups, referred to as out-groups. One’s in-groups are the ‘social circles’ that (a) recognize them as a member and that the individual identifies themselves with (*description*), but more commonly (b) the group they are assigned to by the dominant social group, based on their adherence to a set of criteria, determined through sensory observation and preconceived knowledge (*ascription*).

Colonial and postcolonial studies also emphasize this dichotomous method of identity construction, especially as it translates to the colonized subject. More specifically, Caribbean society under colonialism was structured around the dichotomy of colonizer (in-group, *thesis*) and colonized (out-group, *antithesis*), categorized by the physical characteristics of race, justified by the colonial ideology of white supremacy. Not only does the plantation embrace and embody this dichotomy — as a system of human domination, it depends upon this

differentiation. A *system of human domination* is a “constellation of institutions, values, ideas, and practices which successfully enables one group to achieve and maintain power and privilege through the control and exploitation of another group.”²² Further, in order to maintain privilege, the system will “develop and disseminate a hegemonic culture that symbolically legitimizes their rulership” (see Marx 1965; Gramsci 1971).²³ In other words, the symbols, values and norms of the system will be constructed to promote the dominant group, at the expense of the subjugated — they become the symbols of domination and suffering.

As Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* (1990) articulates, the plantation *system of human domination* is an enclosed social pyramid, supposedly self-sufficient but inherently dependent on globalization and characteristically stagnant, largely due to its “technical mode of production that cannot evolve because it is based on a slave structure.”²⁴ The structural inequalities of twentieth-century Jamaica, following Glissant’s conception, are rooted in the lasting implications of the plantation’s power relations. Further, these consequences were not solely material: through their imposed hegemonic culture, imbued in religion, literature and historical narratives, systems of human domination inflict psychological damages, a *colonial mentality* that internalized the sense of one’s own inferiority. Fanon depicts:

Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. **With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it.** This effort to demean history prior to colonization today takes on a dialectical significance.²⁵

Indoctrination into the colonial mentality is subtle, only revealing itself to the individual in retrospective self-examination. Becoming conscious of this phenomenon provides a basis for the *double consciousness*, first coined by W.E.B. Du Bois (1904) in reference to the black man’s

²² Morris 1992 ; Qtd. in Morris & Braine 2001: 25

²³ Morris & Braine, 25

²⁴ Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. 1990: 64

²⁵ Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1961: 149

experience of American society; the experience of a society that “yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world [...] this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”²⁶ Frantz Fanon interrogates this affliction of mind and of self-image in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952):

Every colonized people—in other words, **every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality**—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with **the culture of the mother country**. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness [...] ²⁷

Fanon astutely pinpoints the impact of *double consciousness* on culture and cultural identity, one’s concept of themselves in relation to their community and collective history. The renunciation of one’s ‘blackness’ – and effectively the dehumanization of the non-white population – was posited as necessary to reach the Eurocentric standard of ‘civilized’ in the colonial era, bringing one closer to ‘whiteness.’ Fanon’s objective in *Black Skin, White Masks* is to counter this dehumanization, “to help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment.”²⁸

The issues demonstrated to arise from ‘black and white thinking’ necessitate an alternative approach, one capable of considering oppositional dynamics. As such, we consult a *dialectical* approach, which holds that “the social world is in a continuous state of becoming — social arrangements which seem fixed and permanent are temporary, arbitrary patterns and any observed social pattern are regarded as one among many possibilities.”²⁹ The dialectical approach therefore enables the coexistence of paradoxes demonstrated in Du Bois’ *double*

²⁶ Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chapter One: Of Our Spiritual Strivings. 1904.

²⁷ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952: p 9

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p 30

²⁹ Benson 1977, 3

consciousness. Further, discussions of the Caribbean necessitate an astute understanding of social construction in Paul Gilroy's *black Atlantic* — “the rhizomorphic fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation.”³⁰ Through forced displacement (slavery) and migration (within the colonial system), Gilroy argues that the cultural roots of the Caribbean to be a *rhizomatic* ‘counterculture of modernity’³¹ that stretches across the Atlantic Ocean. Along these lines, the rhizome is a useful model for conceptualizing the global and local networks of cultural exchange and learning implicit in our discussion.

The rhizome is “the horizontal stem of a plant that indefinitely reproduces roots from underground nodes,” growing “around the edges and between gaps, and [...] always on the outside.”³² Originating as a botanical term, the concept of *rhizomatic* systems has begun to be explored in the theory of organizational learning (March & Olsen, 1975; Argyris & Schon, 1978). Organizational learning theory holds social organization “as a means of ordering, structuring and controlling the chaotic world outside.”³³ *Rhizomatic* considerations appear in post-structuralist organizational theory through a focus on the practice manifestations of organizational desires (see Chia 1996); a framework that accounts for the belief that relationships are formed in ‘existential gaps,’ and therefore are not bound by linearity or traditional logic.³⁴ As Clegg (2005) reflects, “organizations are thus infused with the non-rational and non-cognitive where emotions and learning ‘form their own unpredictable mixture, which can shape, guide and inhibit change ... mediated through a thick layer of emotion, fantasy and desire.’”³⁵ In this context, organizations are therefore in a continuous state of unfolding and interconnecting,

³⁰ Gilroy, 4

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4

³² Park 2014: 484

³³ Clegg et al. 2005: 152

³⁴ Burrell and Cooper 1988 ; qtd. in Clegg et al. 2005: 152

³⁵ Antonacopoulou and Gabriel 2001: 448 ; qtd. in Clegg et al. 2005: 152

seeking resolution for the tension between order and disorder.³⁶ Change and innovation occurs when “we try to ... disturb harmony with noise.”³⁷ This methodology “requires the researcher to observe diversity and fluidity in organizational life.”³⁸

This emphasis on complexity and fluidity in social organization is a necessary consideration when returning to the ‘syncretic expressive’ cultures of the black Atlantic’s “rhizomorphic systems of propagation.”³⁹ Fanon, Glissant and Gilroy all point to a conception of cultural identity that aligns with Stuart Hall’s definition, as “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’ ... transcending place, time, history and culture,” “constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth.”⁴⁰ During decolonization, cultural identity developed an intimate and dynamic relationship with national identity, as former colonies emerged as newly independent nations. Anderson (1983) conceives of the nation, in this context, as “an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁴¹ The concept of a nation was only possible under the unity of shared language, religion and culture, i.e. the identification of a common ‘in-group.’⁴² Thus, a political consciousness requires a group consciousness integrating culture, primarily through linguistic and religious practices. This concept, of *imagined communities*, is beneficial for understanding the role of group consciousness (and its politicization) in the history of cultural creation.

Let us move further into the dynamics of group consciousness for the colonized subject; where the *imagined community* is not embodied in the national community, which is controlled by the colonial system of governance. Thus, our rhizomatic understanding of ‘organic’ culture

³⁶ Clegg et al., 154

³⁷ Clegg et al., 154

³⁸ de Oliveira Zioli et al., 554

³⁹ Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*. 1993: 73

⁴⁰ Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” 1989: 225, 226

⁴¹ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. 1983: 6

⁴² *Ibid.*, 197

must consider the colonial cultural hegemony. Morris & Braine (2001) articulate that any group's ability to create a shared culture — through which unity and collective action can be achieved — “is heavily determined by the position of the group being mobilized in existing structures of domination and subordination.”⁴³ Morris & Braine (2001) depict the colonial mentality as a ‘subordinate consciousness,’ i.e. accepting subordination. For collective action, an *oppositional consciousness* must be nurtured: “an empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to act to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of human domination.”⁴⁴ The oppositional consciousness of the individual is subjective, and therefore the collective oppositional consciousness is continuously evolving and exists on a spectrum. The development of an *oppositional group consciousness* necessitates the existence of an *oppositional culture* (Mansbridge 2001).⁴⁵ According to Morris & Braine, “an oppositional culture contains the frameworks of oppositional ideas and worldviews that permeate the larger culture of certain subordinate communities,” including “partially developed critiques of the status quo” and “knowledge of isolated rebellious acts and prior episodes of organized collective action.”⁴⁶ For Jamaican popular consciousness, theirs was a heritage of resilience and self-liberation, as symbolized in the lasting Maroon communities. As we will come to learn, in the context of Jamaica — and then across the *black Atlantic* through the vehicle of the sound system — the ideological basis of ‘unity in opposition of oppression’ in the Rastafari movement made it an attractive philosophy for the undervalued and ostracized youth searching for identity and purpose amid their respective contexts.

⁴³ Morris & Braine, 25

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 26

c. **RHYTHM of the TIMES: harmony and dissonance**

Historical times slow down or speed up, advance or regress, look forward or backward. According to what criteria? According to representations and political decisions, but also according to the historian who puts them into perspective. Objectively, **for there to be change, a social group, a class or a caste must intervene by imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner.**⁴⁷

We are polyrhythmic beings, composed of a symphony of underlying, subconscious, physiological processes. Thus, beyond our conception of the body itself as a polyrhythmic being, rhizomatic organizational theory contends that structures of social organization can similarly be considered a polyrhythmic system, composed of a multitude of rhythms, both organic (days, seasons, the tides) and imposed. Lefebvre posits that cyclical rhythms are organic, generated by the cosmic — observable in days, seasons, waves and tides, and planetary movement — upon which linear rhythms of everyday life are imposed and governed by political, social, cultural and economic institutions. According to Lefebvre, there are rhythms to relations of domination and power, and “... once one discerns relations of force in social relations and relations of alliance, one perceives their link with rhythm. **Alliance supposes harmony** between different rhythms; **conflict supposes arrhythmia**: a divergence in time, in space, in the use of energies.”⁴⁸ As such, there was a certain rhythm to the plantation and to colonial exploitation, one disturbed first by the Maroons and then by the Rastafari until, finally, this spirit of disruption became embodied in and propagated by sound system culture. Through a grassroots sound system culture, Jamaican society, rather than political authorities, were able to explore and articulate their unique cultural identity. In this context, music assumes a unique role. Musical rhythms have an ethical function — simultaneously illustrating and ‘purifying’ the trials and tribulations of everyday life, and

⁴⁷ Lefebvre, 14

⁴⁸ Lefebvre 68; emphasis added

compensating for the “deficiencies and failures” of “everydayness” — through its integration of rhythm.⁴⁹

For Lefebvre (*quote at beginning of section*) change is accompanied, and perhaps identified, by its establishment of a new rhythm. Therefore, I ground the interplay of our social and sonic frameworks as a ‘rhythm of the times.’ This conception of rhythm is grounded in Williams’ (1980) concept of a ‘structure of feeling,’ which “refers to the different ways of thinking vying to emerge at any one time in history[, and ...] appears in the gap between the official discourse of policy and regulations, the popular response to official discourse and its appropriation in literary and other cultural texts.”⁵⁰ In his studies, Williams uses art and literature “as crucial resources for his analyses of the relations between the structuring constraints of institutional societal orders and the emergent structures of interpersonal, social and cultural formations.”⁵¹ This concept, of art (music) as a space capable of articulating experiences and sentiments far beyond any imposed dynamics or institutional intentions, can be integrated into our social and organizational framework, where it reiterates the importance of looking to the ‘gaps’ of society. Recalling social identification theory and the plantation’s dichotomous social structure, Filmer argues that “structures of feeling are generated through the imaginative interactional social and cultural practices of initiation and response — quintessentially social practices of reflexive communication of experience which are at the root of the stability of and changes in human societies.”⁵² This emphasis on the ‘interactional’ nature of social and cultural practices, echoes Gilroy’s concept of *rhizomatic culture*. Each community will have its own rhythms, conditioned by their sonic sensibility. The lifespan of a rhythm (its ‘time’) depends

⁴⁹ Lefebvre, 66

⁵⁰ Oxford Reference. “structures of feeling.”

⁵¹ Filmer, Paul. “Structures of Feeling and Socio-Cultural Formations.” 2003: 200

⁵² Filmer, 201

upon its resonance with the sonic bodies who experience its vibrations. The rhythm will be felt by all but will resonate differently in each individual, conditioned by one's familiar rhythms of everyday life.

III. GROUNDING: roots

With our theoretical framework established, it is time to turn to the roots. Understanding Jamaica's cultural impact through sound requires an understanding of the 'spirit' with which it was imbued, independent of lyrical content. I ground us first in the act of *marronage* and Jamaican Maroons' history of resistance and self-liberation, tracing it to Roberts' theory of sociogenic marronage, which informs our understanding of internal liberation. Advanced in conjunction with Glissant's creative marronage, this concept offers insight on the fundamental psychological shifts engendered through this form of ideological self-liberation, and how it becomes embodied in artistic production.

a. ROOTS OF REBELLION

It is important to note that within Caribbean histories, agency is often revoked from the enslaved and the self-liberated, which rewrites the course of historical events to reinforce the cultural hierarchies instituted by colonial authorities. As stated by Nobles (1973), "Those who have the power to define control, dictate, and define reality for those who do not." This Eurocentric erasure is evident in the lack of recognition for the Maroon communities that developed across the Caribbean, and the role that these groups played in resistance movements in Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad (among others). Histories, written by the conquerors, prioritize the

European center, at the expense of the non-European periphery. In this context, we recall the theme of *banding together*, the web of relations that tie communities together.

Jamaica was originally inhabited by the Taíno and Arawak people, who named the island ‘Xaymaca.’ In 1494, Christopher Columbus seized the island from the natives for Spain, who began the process of colonization. Jamaica would remain under Spanish colonial authority until 1655. During this period, a practice of self-liberation through flight would become common; an act of flight and social reorganization known as *marronage*, coming from the Spanish word ‘marron.’ Neil Roberts’ *Freedom as Marronage* (2015) articulates that “marronage is a multidimensional, constant act of flight that involves [...] four interrelated pillars: distance, movement, property, and purpose.”⁵³ In 1655, after a century of Spanish domination, British colonial forces arrived, seeking to claim the territory. During the conflict between colonizers, Jamaica’s maroon communities were strengthened by an influx of escapees, alongside others who had been freed in exchange for military service on the side of the Spanish. When the Spanish were eventually defeated, others escaped into the dense forests on the outskirts of the island during the period of transition from Spanish to British authority. The Maroon communities of Jamaica were steadily growing, close-knit, and advantaged due to their extensive knowledge of dangerous landscapes. Unable to displace the Maroons, the British government ordered the importation of more Africans, reaching a slave population of 130,000 in 1754. The continuation of the Transatlantic Slave Trade continuously augmented the population of rebel community.

Helg depicts:

Rebellions followed by slave escapes multiplied, strengthening Jamaica’s two major maroon societies: the preexisting one in the Blue Mountains (the Windward Maroons), which expanded with the arrival of hundreds of African men, women, and children, forming an alliance of villages dominated by the bellicose personality of the priestess Nanny; and a community in the densely

⁵³ Roberts, Neil. *Freedom as Marronage*. 2015: 152

wooded mountains of Cockpit Country in western Jamaica (the Leeward Maroons), which was more autocratic and centralized around an Akan chief.⁵⁴

As Helg reveals, the Jamaican Maroon communities were diverse and autonomous, self-sustaining and in stark opposition to colonial power. Viewed through the framework of James Scott's *non-state spaces*, these communities became zones of refuge, where "marshes, swamps, mangroves, hills, and mountains are sites of resistance and sanctuaries away from the enslaving norms of the state."⁵⁵ These sites of resistance nurtured collective ideological disengagement with the colonial system. Roberts articulates that physical disengagement — "escape from state legibility and the enactment of local forms of lawmaking, epistemology, organization, agriculture, and relations" — lended itself to a natural ideological shift.⁵⁶ He asserts that "marronage is a flight from the zone of nonbeing to zones of refuge."⁵⁷ In other words, physical escape was inherently a protest against the plantation's system of dehumanization and exploitation. The dominant framework identifiable within Further, echoing Glissant's and Fanon's perspectives on the consciousness of the colonized, Goldson argues that *marronage* then becomes "resistance to antihuman and antifreedom practices and ideas [... involving] the construction of and constant engagement with African-centered epistemologies."⁵⁸ This ideological disengagement invokes Roberts' (2015) theory of *sociogenic marronage*, which

denotes a revolutionary process of naming and attaining individual and collective agency, non-sovereignty, liberation, constitutionalism, and the cultivation of a community that aligns civil society with political society. Flight can be both real and imagined. [...] **Freedom is not a place; it is a state of being.**⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Helg, Aline. *Slave No More*. 2019: 54

⁵⁵ Roberts, 152

⁵⁶ Qtd. in Roberts, 152

⁵⁷ Roberts, 119

⁵⁸ Goldson, Randy R. "Liberating the Mind." 2020: 370

⁵⁹ Roberts, 11 ; emphasis added

Sociogenic marronage conceives of liberation as being within one's reach at all times, of a freedom within; this is the form of marronage that lends itself to the experience of **sonic self-liberation**, as it exists within the constraints of the colonial system.

b. CREATIVE MARRONAGE & COUNTERCULTURE

Keeping in mind this concept of sociogenic marronage, we must return to our consideration of social rhythms and the impact of plantation society on cultural identity to find sonic self-liberation. Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1990) provides useful insights into the dynamics of existence under the strict conditions of life on the plantation and the lasting implications of the hierarchical system of dehumanization. As Glissant posits, oral expression developed (and its importance was confirmed) by its structural opposition to written expression, and colonizers' creation of intentional distance between enslaved populations and literacy. Glissant highlights the role of oral tradition as "the only form possible for the slaves" and therefore a vehicle for preserving and reproducing a shared historical memory and a basis for cultural identity.⁶⁰ As Glissant describes, "historical *marronage* intensified over time to exert a creative *marronage*, whose numerous forms of expression began to form the basis for a continuity [...] their concern, its driving force and hidden design, is the derangement of the memory, which determines, along with imagination, our only way to tame time."⁶¹ His illustration of musical tradition as *creative marronage* is worth citing in full:

It is understandable that in this universe every cry was an event. Night in the cabins gave birth to this other enormous silence from which music, inescapable, a murmur at first, finally burst out into this long shout – **a music of reversed spirituality through which the body suddenly expresses itself**. Monotonous chants, syncopated, broken by prohibitions, set free by the entire thrust of bodies, produced their language from one end of this world to the other. These musical expressions born of silent: [...] salsas and reggaes, assembled everything blunt and direct,

⁶⁰ Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. 1990: 67

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 71

painfully stifled, and patiently diffused into this varied speech. This was the cry of the Plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world.⁶²

Drawing upon Glissant, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* echoes the notion that "the power and significance of music within the black Atlantic have grown in inverse proportion to the limited expressive power of language."⁶³ Resulting from the absence of "grammatical unity of speech to mediate communicative reason," Gilroy argues that "[i]n many respects, the plantation's inhabitants live non-synchronously."⁶⁴ The collaborative construction of a shared oral or musical culture allowed for some semblance of harmony across the enslaved population of the plantation.

From here, we shift our emphasis to the constant evolution of Jamaican music throughout the twentieth century, which involves a nuanced conversation on genres. In its most basic sense, "a genre exists when there is some consensus that a distinctive style of music is being performed."⁶⁵ Around this style is built a network of musicians, producers, record labels, fans and audiences — i.e., an *art world* (Becker 1976; van Maanen 2009). My discussion follows the assertion of Lena (2012) in that the development of a genre is fundamentally tied to the community of people involved in its construction; the style is defined by the individuals who pioneer and shape it. Thus, a genre is defined by the "features of the organizational environment and institutional practices that arise within it" as well as "attributes of the artists and the music they play."⁶⁶ The latter includes "the genre ideal, performance conventions, technology, boundary work, codes of dress and speech, and the source of the genre name."⁶⁷ According to Lena, *genre ideal* refers to the community's target goals — subjective, but often widely held,

⁶² *Ibid.*, 73: emphasis added

⁶³ Gilroy, 74

⁶⁴ Gilroy, 57

⁶⁵ Lena, Jennifer C. "Banding Together." 2012: 6

⁶⁶ Lena, 15

⁶⁷ Lena, 15

notions of what genre productions should sound like, the music's intended impact, etc.⁶⁸ The genre, as Lena describes it, develops a subculture — a new *in-group*. Though these conventions are essential for the defining the 'boundaries' of a genre, it follows that they are in a constant state of flux; this quality of constant evolution means that genres must be dynamic or malleable enough to accustom changing tastes.⁶⁹

According to Lena, reggae did not cycle through first and last stages of genre development (Avant-Garde / Traditionalist), and instead began as a scene-based form before entering its Industry-based phase.⁷⁰ The Industry phase necessitates the construction and enforcement of genre-based conventions to aid in the commodification for national and global audiences. The concept of a 'genre' presupposes a relationship between different songs, potentially based around stylistic elements, musical structure, or lyricism. In the context of Jamaica, popular music has largely been essentialized under the label 'reggae' — a generalization complicates any popular conception of Jamaica's rich music history, whose development was nonlinear, sporadic and overlapping. To characterize the creative and cultural evolution ongoing in twentieth century Jamaica as all 'reggae' misrepresents the complex interplay of the social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual factors that informed the creation of new musical forms. Instead, Jamaican music's transformation reflects the intimate relationship between music production and a dynamic 'rhythm of the times' supported by sound system culture's community-based market, which ensured that this rhythm, at any given point, would be informed by and articulated for domestic listening audiences and sound system attendees.

⁶⁸ Lena, 15

⁶⁹ Lena, 7

⁷⁰ Lena, 68 ; table 3.1

The birth and development of ska, rocksteady, roots reggae, dub, and so on, were closely interrelated. The entire scene was also fundamentally shaped by U.S. jazz, R&B and soul musicians. Thus, it is beneficial to reinvolve Gilroy's conception of *rhizomatic cultures*. Jamaican popular music assumes a rhizomatic structure: each of its styles a different 'node,' simultaneously semi-independent and interdependent on one another; every node an autonomous point from which new connections (new sub-genres and styles) can develop. Variations and adaptations across time are conditioned by the influence of cultural, social, political, economic and spiritual factors. To conceive of these relations in greater detail and to illustrate the individual-to-individual dynamic of cultural transmission and interaction, we may also conceive of key figures in the Jamaican music scene (e.g., King Tubby, Duke Reid, Coxsone Dodd) as each comprising their own respective node. The sound system served as a vehicle through which these musicians and producers could craft their own styles. Motivated by subjective ambitions, they constructed identities and subcultures that were simultaneously a shared and a subjective experience. A *rhizomatic* structure of consideration also allows integration of the scene's implicit global dynamics; for example, in the stylistic influence of US radio deejays on the early development of 'toasting'; the role of American R&B and jazz on ska and rocksteady; and the monetary influence of UK consumers on the stability of the Jamaican industry, especially in the roots reggae era.

IV. SYSTEMS OF SOUND

The ‘sound-system,’ perhaps more than other institutions within West Indian life, was **the site at which blackness could be most thoroughly explored, most clearly and uncompromisingly expressed**. To a community hemmed in on all sides by discrimination, hostility, suspicion and blank incomprehension, **the sound system appeared to represent, particularly for the young, a precious inner sanctum**, uncontaminated by alien influences, a black heart beating back to Africa on a steady pulse of dub.⁷¹

Jamaican popular music culture provides a rich site for analysis of Henriques’ theory of *sonic logos*. Sound in Jamaica has always served as a social center. Drawing upon the tradition of *orality* — a subversive form of cultural expression that formed in direct response to the imposing colonial institutions — and the musical heritage of traditional African spiritualities, Jamaica developed a distinctive bass culture. This *bass culture* (Bradley 2002) is characterized by “high volumes, low frequencies” and “distinctive rhythmic patterning,” enabled and accentuated by the sonic dominance of the sound system.⁷² Further, it was a musical culture inherently embedded in technological innovation, as Jamaican sound culture draws upon a tradition that centers on sound re-presentation and re-production — i.e., the playing of records — rather than live band performances (Marshall & Manuel 2006). These sonic preferences also facilitated the construction of an intimate relationship between technology and music, which would later lend itself to the rapid development of a global commercial market for Jamaican musicians.

The ‘sound system’ organically arose among the ghettos of Kingston, originating in the mid-1940s as a way for local business owners to draw a crowd to their respective establishments. Throughout the ‘40s and into the early ‘50s, much of the music played was from imported American R&B and jazz records. According to Beth Lesser, “the early sound system was functioning as a kind of ‘live and direct’ radio program with the ‘selector’ in the role of the disc

⁷¹ Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. 1979: 38

⁷² Bradley, Lloyd. *Bass Culture*. 2000: 13

jockey [...] modeled on the radio stations in New Orleans that played the R&B Jamaicans loved.”⁷³ Thus, sound system culture emphasized the relationship between the object of sounding and its immediate audience. With the advent of ska in the 1960s, this format lent itself to an industry of ‘cover songs,’ reinterpreting American R&B into a Jamaican music sensibility, as exemplified in Millie Small’s cover of ‘My Boy Lollipop’ (1964). Small’s version includes the distinctive guitar stylings and horn accents of ska, reflecting both the global (*rhizomatic*) dynamics behind the popular music scene of Jamaica and the syncretic nature of cultural interaction in this domain. The influence of black American musical forms and technologies on the development of sound system culture in Jamaica reflects the fundamentally ‘hybrid’ (in the Caribbean context, ‘creole’) character of the music.

The Jamaican music scene would undergo a huge transformation with the development of toasting, reflecting the growing resonance of more overt socio-political and spiritual messages, articulating the experiences of black population: “by the mid ‘70s, deejays were not only talking in complete sentences, they were delivering a message. The roots era had begun and music was increasingly being used to impart a social, political and spiritual agenda.”⁷⁴ Lesser reflects the commentary of Dennis Alcapone on the change in sound:

Big Youth started working on the new drum and bass [style]. That’s when the music was changing. The rhythm change. The style change in Jamaica. And the rhythm keep changing. You have so much different deejays that come along and take over from another deejay cause the rhythm the deejay is working on change on him, and he cannot handle the other one as a new deejay [could] that come when that style change. There’s always changes.⁷⁵

As Alcapone reveals, Jamaica’s musical culture did not stagnate. The atmosphere of the 1970s contributed to new rhythms (both musical and social) that required sound system selectors to be ‘in tune’ with the changing tastes of their audience. If the selectors failed to speak to the

⁷³ Lesser. Beth. *Rub ‘a’ Dub Style*. 2012: 13

⁷⁴ Lesser, 19

⁷⁵ Dennis Alcapone ; qtd. in Lesser, 20

audience, a gap in the community (and therefore, the market) arose, enabling the upward growth of other local soundmen. Now, with the advent of toasting, a ‘sound’ could become more individualized, which in turn, allowed audiences’ tastes to diversify and specify. From this point, the musical styles of rocksteady, reggae, and dub would emerge, giving a voice to the people. When viewed through this framework, sound system culture is a dynamic, rhizomatic culture: dissonance creates the space for a new approach, a new relationship between music and audience. It is also constantly transformed by its immediate recipients and their tastes in that moment in time. Further, in the face of the social, economic and political fluctuations of the twentieth century, the number of Jamaicans moving abroad — specifically migrating to the UK — would grow astronomically, bringing with them the roots of a global sound system culture. As such, we must understand the various factors (social, political, economic, spiritual, etc.) that condition the changing ‘rhythm of the times.’

a. SOUNDCREW

The sound system became “the community’s heartbeat.”⁷⁶ It began as a way to draw a crowd in the mid-1940s, its attractiveness rooted in the fact that it “the only way for so many Jamaicans to hear any professionally produced music.”⁷⁷ Early sound systems would primarily play U.S. rhythm and blues and jazz records, but, as the sound system strengthened as a social institution, it established itself as much more than simply a space for listening. Bradley illustrates:

For the crowds that flocked to wherever the big beat boomed out, it was a lively dating agency, a fashion show, an information exchange, a street status parade ground, a political forum, a

⁷⁶ Bradley, 4

⁷⁷ Bradley, 4-5

centre for commerce, and, once the deejays began to chat on the mic about more than their sound systems, their records, their women or their selves, it was the ghetto's newspaper.⁷⁸

The sound system cultivated a unique relationship between the owners and operators of a 'sound' and its present audience. This dynamic will be articulated with greater nuance shortly, but at a minimum, it resembles the 'call-and-response' form, where the audience assumes an active role in evaluating the selector's choices. As such, Bradley reflects that "the dances became testing grounds for new styles of music as well as new records, and the people were always closely involved with how things developed."⁷⁹ Hence, sound system culture was intentionally built around qualities of interaction, exchange, fluidity and spontaneity — *rhizomatic*.

The stable growth of Jamaican sound system culture as a social institution is directly linked to its economic dimension; sound system culture facilitated the creation of a local market, and thereby, a homegrown music industry. As Leonardo Vidigal outlines, "those in the community who had a bit more purchasing power [...] sponsored these events, often in partnership with local liquor stores, teaching listeners that access to music and cultural inclusion was within their reach."⁸⁰ Interestingly, many sound systems were established around local, family-owned liquor stores: Coxsone Dodd's mother owned 'Nanny's Store' and Duke Reid's wife owned 'Treasure Isle Liquors.' It follows that the developing sound system culture provided soundmen with a sense of autonomy and ownership over both enjoyment and employment. The grassroots sound system 'set' was already transforming into a space of teaching and learning, of interaction, of exchange, of technical and cultural transmission, of community and, most importantly, of pride. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that the economic benefits of sound system culture were not solely concentrated in the hands of sound owners or their respective

⁷⁸ Bradley, 5

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 11

⁸⁰ Vidigal, Leonardo. "Each One Teach One." 2022: 4

soundcrew. Rather, Bradley relays that the sound system cultivated a local market around it, where refreshments, alcohol, and cigarettes (among other things) could be purchased. Few were making much of a profit, but in the context of widespread poverty, it was welcomed as a vehicle for circulating money through the community. The appeal of working with a soundcrew — an unprecedented, but viable career pathway — only grew in the face of high youth unemployment. CIA documents from the 1970 illustrate a retrospective on the issue:

Jamaican economic growth has averaged an impressive 64% annually since 1950, thanks mainly to bauxite development and expanding tourism. [...] In 1969 an estimated 175,000 persons, or 23% of the labor force of some 750,000, were unemployed. Since underemployment also is widespread, perhaps one-third of the labor force lacks adequate jobs.⁸¹

This social group, Bradley emphasizes, played an important role in the developing music scene. Young and able-bodied, yet un- or under-employed men, meant that there was a ready labor pool with much free time on their hands. As we will soon explore, high levels of youth unemployment would later contribute to a more violent, ‘rude-boy’ culture. The lack of opportunities for upward financial mobility also led to mass emigration, specifically to the U.S. (due to proximity) and, more importantly, to the U.K., as the Crown sought to expand their workforce and economic productivity by welcoming their ‘fellow subjects’ from the ‘West Indies.’⁸² The latter would experience more significant cultural exchange as a result of this, as will be detailed later. Unemployment also strengthened the convention of seasonal migrant work in the US; during their time in the South, many early sound men collected rare records and audio equipment.

⁸¹ CIA, Directorate of Intelligence. Jamaican Unemployment: A Growing Problem. 1970. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00875R001600030194-4.pdf>.

⁸² The ‘West Indies’ refers to former colonies in the Caribbean, including Bahama Islands, Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Leeward Islands, Windward Islands, Barbados, Trinidad, Tobago, Saint Martin, Aruba, among others. (“West Indies.” *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia*. 2018)

The conception of Jamaican music producers as self-employed entrepreneurs strengthened their social standing as, according to Henriques, “a skilled trade offers the potential of self-employment as your own boss.”⁸³ Early sound men (Tom Wong, Duke Reid, Coxsone Dodd, King Edwards) received the capital to cement their respective establishments as social centers, and would be fundamental in shaping the successive generations of Jamaican musicians. They were highly respected members of their community, justifiably, as their resolve would allow the homegrown music industry to operate relatively autonomously — independent of the financial support of foreign record labels or producers — and to develop a musical culture that resonated with the Jamaican masses. The respect of the community underlines an important consideration: though the economic incentive made joining a sound crew (*‘running with a sound’*) attractive to Jamaica’s black urban youth, equally important was the level of high self-worth attached to this involvement. Sound system culture was distinctive because it was not only a culture, but it was *cultural* – an expression of Jamaicanness that resonated with the majority of the population. It was a cultural phenomenon within which they could actively participate. As Beth Lesser illustrates:

The only requirement for these jobs was an ability to forgo immediate comforts and to dedicate oneself heart and soul to music, wherever it lead[s]. **The reward was the love and admiration of the community, the ability to bring a little money home to the family, the excitement of going around the island with the crew and being greeted by enthusiastic fans in every town.**⁸⁴

Derrick Harriott’s recollections on his upbringing in Kingston reflect a similar theme:

The musical thing was real widespread, but only among a certain sort of people. It was always a downtown thing. **But more than just hearing the music, the equipment was so powerful and the vibe so strong that we *feel* it.** Like when we were dancing **you were actually part of it. It was *ours*, and so many of us wanted to contribute to it.**⁸⁵

⁸³ Henriques, 41

⁸⁴ Lesser, 13

⁸⁵ Derrick Harriott ; qtd. in Bradley, 8-9

There were numerous roles crucial for the operation of the sound system. At times, all roles could be assumed by one individual, but any material success from the local industry meant that, more often than not, the sound system owner employed (to a varying degree in terms of wages) a host of others — almost always men. These roles include operators & selectors (who pick the tracks); deejays (‘MC’; vocalist chatting over mic – later, toasting); audio engineers (in charge of configuring the system); box men (who move the speakers and set up the system); and sound owners. Therefore, within these sessions exists a deeper pedagogical dimension: the dissemination of cultural knowledge and technical skills through the training of sound system apprentices. The pedagogical dimensions provide “a crucial vector of transmission for ... [sound system] culture, helping to create a sonic network that spans the entire planet.”⁸⁶ Thus, the sound system is not only a social institution, but a vehicle for autonomy and cultural identity within the context of globalization. When imbued with a Rastafari sociopolitical consciousness, the sound system creates a space for counter-hegemonic ideological exchange, and therefore subjective exploration of individual and collective identities. We will return to this concept in our concluding discussion of a sonic diaspora.

V. RIDDIMS & ROOTS

By the mid-50s, the exciting quality of American R&B records had significantly worn off. The earliest iteration of sound system culture, as a “rare-groove scene in its purest and most original form,” had constructed a competitive environment for rival sounds.”⁸⁷ A sound system ‘selector’ (the one who picks the records to be played) assumed the increasingly challenging role of surprising and impressing his audience with new sounds they had never heard before. To

⁸⁶ Vidigal, 14

⁸⁷ Bradley, 10

illustrate this point, we can look to the biggest rivalry of this early period, between Duke Reid's The Trojan and Sir Coxsone Dodd's Downbeat. Reid and Dodd occupy an important position in sound system history. Both men were revered as early selectors for their respective systems, and jockeyed to be the best. To do so, they sought the rarest musical gems, using seasonal migrant work in the U.S. to collect more American records and audio equipment — a practice trailblazer by Sir Coxsone that reiterates the important cultural exchange between the US and Jamaica in the constructing of the island's creative culture. When the selectors returned home, the most well-received of these records would be given a new identity: to keep other selectors from identifying the tune, any information on the label would be scratched out and (often) renamed. For example we may look at 'Coxsone Hop,' a Downbeat exclusive for years — the record is actually American tenor saxophonist Willis 'Gatortail' Jackson's 1950 'Later for 'Gator.' This process of renaming highlights the competitiveness culture surrounding Jamaican sound systems, as well as how the 'sonic sensibilities' of domestic audiences shaped the local music scene.

In the late-1950s, a shift occurred with the introduction of record producers. The rapid development of the sound system scene over the previous decade (perhaps non-intuitively) was not immediately matched with the construction of a recording industry. Dodd would later be the first black man in Jamaica to purchase his own recording studio, Studio One, in 1963. In the early sound system days, most owners were unconcerned with recording and commodifying their music for mass consumption. As Bradley states, these "sound-men-turned-record-producers were cutting discs exclusively for their own sound system [...] it simply didn't occur to them that anyone except another sound man would be interested."⁸⁸ Instead, they were producing *dub plates*, specific for exclusive use on their respective sound system to get an edge over the local competition; "winning sound clashes had a lot to do with finding, and naming, that key

⁸⁸ Bradley, 42

rhythm.”⁸⁹ Dub plates began as ‘versions’ in which audio engineers would strip a track of some elements of the existing instrumentation or vocals, making their rare tracks even more unique and impossible to duplicate, unless you were involved in the soundcrew. Lesser illustrates:

For a record that was going to be reproduced many times over, a mold was made. But, for a dubplate, the music was cut directly from the master tape into a thick, ten inch platter of acetate, usually two songs per side. As the tape was running, and the needle was etching the grooves into the pliable surface, the engineer would be calibrating the sound, bring[ing] in more treble or dropping out the bass and drums. Once the grooves were in place, nothing could be changed. But neither could the process be faithfully reproduced. Although a new dubplate could be cut from the same master tape many times over, each mix would be different because it [was] mixed [...] live, as the plate was being cut.⁹⁰

Ska, the first home-grown Jamaican music genre, would be born in the second half of the 1950s, in large part through the efforts of Downbeat’s own Clement Seymour ‘Sir Coxsone’ Dodd as he pursued a more Kingstonian sound to meet the changing preferences of his dancehall audience. Dodd was crucially assisted by the support of record producer and Harvard-trained anthropologist Edward Seaga, owner of W.I.R.L (West Indian Records Limited) and future prime minister of Jamaica. Before aspiring to political power, Seaga was respected among the Kingston community for his love and support for musical innovators creating a truly ‘Jamaican’ sound, to the point of being nicknamed ‘Ska-aga.’ As Bradley depicts, Seaga was already closely associated with the commercial recording industry, as “much of W.I.R.L.’s business involved licensing and distributing American records all over the island.”⁹¹

The success of Sang & Harriott’s 1956 single, ‘Lollipop Girl,’ inspired Dodd’s search to record more local musicians. Ernie Ranglin, Jamaican guitarist and musical arranger, recalls that Coxsone Dodd sought to maintain the American R&B sound but imbue it with a Jamaican rhythmic feel.⁹² To do so, Coxsone shifted the rhythmic emphasis to the second and fourth beats,

⁸⁹ Lesser, 201

⁹⁰ Lesser, 200

⁹¹ Lesser, 52

⁹² Lesser, 53

rather than the first and third. Despite highlighting Dodd in the creation of ska, Bradley notes that “this was a cultural movement. A wave of players, producers and performers between them created enough momentum to bring about change for a number of reasons, only some of which were strictly musical.”⁹³ In other words, though spearheaded or enabled by Dodd, Ska was a creation of the community. Bilby (2016) reflects, during these “critical formative years,” session musicians were the backbone of the industry, as they were “responsible for inventing the musical frameworks (and with the advent of multitrack recording, the backing tracks and fundamental “riddims”) upon which hit records (and later, dub versions and deejay tracks) were constructed.”⁹⁴ These ‘riddims’ would be re-employed and re-imagined throughout the evolution of Jamaican music, uniquely intertwining sonic past and present. Much of ska was strictly instrumental, making it a flexible resource for later innovation. Seminal artists in these early years of Studio One include Don Drummond, trombonist and bandleader of the Skatalites; Owen Grey & Blue Busters; and Delroy Wilson.

Around 1962, Coxsone Dodd became the first black man to open a recording studio in Jamaica: the Jamaican Recording & Publishing Studio Ltd, also known as Studio One. As Bradley states: “By the turn of the decade, the sound systems were so prolific they offered a viable alternative to [...] radio stations.”⁹⁵ This autonomy was crucial for the development of Jamaica’s music culture. When he opened his studio, Coxsone made the unprecedented decision to hire studio musicians on an hourly wage, providing himself with a reputable, hand-picked in-studio band and his musicians with the steady (though not sizable) income. Further, it helped solidify Studio One as a grassroots, community institution, as well as a space for exploration and assertion of cultural identity, i.e. a place for musical innovation. These structural foundations

⁹³ Bradley, 50

⁹⁴ Bilby, Kenneth. “Maroon Autonomy in Jamaica.” 2016: 1

⁹⁵ Bradley, 90

made Studio One a hotbed for creativity in the '60s. Many Jamaican musicians and producers were also raised on and influenced by American jazz music, especially Dodd. Jazz emphasized breaking convention, it was a countercultural creative scene in its own right, which influenced the foundations of Jamaican music in ska and rocksteady, and hence became the basis of the *dub plates* and *riddims* that composed newer musical styles in the 1970s and beyond. In close pursuit, Duke Reid shortly after opened his own studio, Treasure Isle, and assumed his position as the dominant producer of rocksteady's hits.

VI. ROCKSTEADY

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor [...] **It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity.**⁹⁶

Around 1963-4, a shift in popular music taste took place. Jamaica had been 'officially liberated' from British colonization in 1962, but its systems of exploitation and concentration of economic power would maintain lasting social inequality. As post-liberation anticipation wore off, the unmet promises and lack of material change experienced by the majority of Jamaicans began to take a psychological toll. Simultaneously, there was a corresponding change in musical influences — the rise of American soul — accompanied by a wave of new inspirations, notably including Otis Redding, Curtis Mayfield and Clarence Carter. In this space arose rocksteady, with its relaxed, cyclical beat demarcated by a slowed-down tempo and a rhythmic rearrangement that emphasized only the third beat, rather than the second and fourth of ska.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 1952: 2

⁹⁷ Bradley, 165

Bradley depicts a variety of factors to have conditioned this downshift in tempo. First and foremost, recalling the role of the sound systems in shaping local taste, Ska had simply grown stale after dominating the music scene for almost half a decade at this point. Furthermore, Ska's fast-paced, upbeat energy — which Bradley describes as reaching “a frenzied, galloping quality as a result of the radio-promoted, government-sponsored optimism” — no longer matched popular social sentiments. It no longer embodied the atmosphere of the dancehall, which was growing increasingly tense as street gangs began to assume a more active role, or the locally-determined ‘rhythm of the time.’ By 1966, a new sonic style would overtake ska. There were also a number of pragmatic reasons. The success of Jamaican ska musicians had deemed them inaccessible to small, local record labels that lacked the necessary capital to court such big names. Second, in the post-ska era, it was now an expected convention that music would include local Jamaican vernacular, which had begun to assume a unique rhetoric in the 1960s. Further, around 1960, Byron Lee had brought the first electric bass to Jamaica. The electric bass took over Jamaica's music scene, as it increased the cross-island mobility of bass players. Over the next few years, it would be cemented as the lead instrument — a convention that remained dominant for the next two decades. Bradley depicts this technique to be the innovation of the Skatalites' original bass player, Lloyd Brevett. Brevett, quickly taking to the new instrument, began “rebalancing arrangements” by altering emphasis and phrasing: “he marked out a more precise, syncopated rhythm (‘having a rest’ it was called) to create time and space for other players to insert counter rhythms, which meant they were able to carry the tune's swing and so give the bass player the opportunity to [...] show off a bit inside.”⁹⁸ Musicians could use the space created by the new bass arrangement to improvise in the style of mento (a folk music), calypso, and ska; increasing the perceived ‘Jamaicanness’ of the music.

⁹⁸ Bradley, 158

Rocksteady introduced lyricism to Jamaican music, primarily through vocal arrangements that structurally and stylistically channeled American soul. Therefore, rhetorically, the focus of this musical era was love and other (relatively positive) universal themes. Yet, behind the scenes, younger generations of Jamaican musicians were beginning to seek a new, more intentional style.

a. THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

In the period of liberation, let us look closer at the local pedagogical dimensions of the individual sound system through the legacy of Prince Buster. Cecil Bustamente ‘Prince Buster’ Campbell had grown up with Dodd and Reid but decided to split off and start his own sound, Voice of the People, around 1957. In Buster’s opinion, his system was distinct from both Downbeat and Trojan due to the soundman’s ideological involvement with Garveyism. He reflects:

My sound system was to be **the people’s radio** station by way of the dancehalls, **where their points of view would be heard**, for they were not being heard on the major radio stations. [...] To me it was important to name my sound system so, because **the music of the ghettos and the countryside was being created for the people, by the people.**⁹⁹

Thus, it is striking that the introduction of ‘toasting’ into the music scene was largely paralleled by the introduction of Rastafari themes. The importance of these coexisting and collaborating developments was intensified by, and closely related to, the ongoing process of colonial emancipation. Decolonization in Jamaica had begun with self-government in 1957 and culminated in independence from colonial authority in 1962. Throughout this period, the excitement of liberation contributed to a national mood of anticipation and celebration, as sonically manifested in ska. But post-liberation the national mood quickly shifted, as the paradox of liberation’s promises and its antithetical realities began to become more clear:

⁹⁹ Bradley, xvi

However, in the gullies of West Kingston or the remote rural hamlets where 70-odd per cent lived below the official poverty line, it had **raised expectations to somewhere approaching danger level**. During the years leading up to 1962, **the idea of independence had been sold to the people as the answer to so many of their problems**, with promises of prosperity, justice and, if not an end to, then at least a serious dent in the class divide.¹⁰⁰

So, within this overarching context, Prince Buster assumed a widely impactful position. Jimmy Cliff recalls arriving in Kingston in 1960 with singing aspirations, only twelve years old at the time. According to Cliff, Buster was the first producer to more comprehensively involve singers in the music-making process, in that he “taught singers to go in with the complete song written, melody and words and everything, then they could express how they wanted it at every stage.”¹⁰¹ Cliff’s recollections foreground how Buster helped ‘localize’ musical rhetoric by increasing the role of singers in the developing musical culture, disrupting the conventional emphasis on studio musicians and instrumentalists who had dominated in constructing the fundamental *riddims* of the Jamaican music scene. Most importantly, Buster enabled the musical development of Count Machuki, who is widely regarded as the first ‘toaster.’ Originally a dancer and then a selector with Tom the Great Sebastian’s system, Winston ‘Count Machuki’ Cooper began to scat over the music in his own, unique style. Tom Wong, despite owning the seminal sound system, had cultivated a “high-class” clientele who were not receptive to this new vocal style.¹⁰² Machuki’s early toasting was seen as too ‘low culture’ (aka too ‘ghetto’) for Wong’s audiences, catalyzing Machuki’s move to Downbeat, where “he worked hard to extend the role of the toaster, introducing more rhyming and jestering and remarks that were pertinent to that crowd on that particular night.”¹⁰³ Still feeling undervalued by Dodd, Machuki then defected to

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 92

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 97

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 293

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 293

the Voice of the People, where he was able to expand his craft. In Prince Buster's recollections, Machuki was the first to truly understand the relationship between the soundman and the crowd:

... he knew he had **control over the crowd**. He knew the **deejay could take them up** and, probably more importantly than that, **he could calm them down if there was any trouble**. So quite apart from him having a superior technique **he was the first to really understand the relationship the deejay have with the sound-system crowd**. Something you won't find in any other situation. ¹⁰⁴

Machuki would never record, but became an important inspiration for two of the first Jamaican deejays on wax — Sir Lord Comic and King Stitt. Further, Buster's statements accentuate a unique concept of energetic exchange between MC and dancers achieved through sound and embodiment. Henriques offers that "in order to have any influence on the crowd, the MC has to earn their respect, to establish a rapport with them." ¹⁰⁵ In other words, crucial to the success of a sound system is the relationship established between the MC and his crowd; their ability to connect to the crowd enables their 'control' over the crowd's experience. Henriques continues, the MC "guides them in the sociocultural vibrations of sounding — that is, their sonic imagination, with the idea of guidance on a sonic journey embedded in the culture, lingo and argot of the event, as both earthly and spiritual, or sacred and profane." ¹⁰⁶ Thus, the MC (or toaster) had to be adept at understanding the energy of each respective crowd, in its subjective moment in place and time.

b. DETOUR: 'STREET SOUNDS' & OPPOSITIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In discussing rocksteady, it is crucial to clarify some common misconceptions. The genre, the immediate predecessor of what would become known as 'roots reggae,' is often associated with the 'rude boy' culture that was developing among the streets of 1960s Kingston. As

¹⁰⁴ Prince Buster ; qtd. in Bradley, 294

¹⁰⁵ Henriques, 180

¹⁰⁶ Henriques, 180

mentioned, ska-era dancehalls had grown increasingly tense. Here, a more detailed understanding of the gang culture of the Kingston ghettos is necessary, contextualized within the dynamics of political autonomy, economic interdependence and local partisanship. Bradley claims “the modern ‘industrialized’ Jamaica that came into being in the 1950s institutionalized a kind of elitism that hadn’t been seen since slavery.”¹⁰⁷ A post-war economic boom, related to the success of tourism and the dominant bauxite industry, facilitated the creation of a new professional middle class. These workers — mainly light-skinned Jamaicans, due to lasting colorism, a consequence of the plantation foundation — eventually assumed positions of power in their respective trade unions and thus began to increasingly devote union energy and resources to this new “blue-collar elite.”¹⁰⁸

If we zoom out and place this dynamic within its political context, the role of street gangs only becomes more clear. Jamaica became self-governing in 1957. In April 1962, parliamentary elections gave the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) a majority over the People’s National Party (PNP). Both parties had been vying for control since the first General Election in 1944. As reaffirmed in the 1967 General Election, the JLP would remain the dominant party in Jamaican politics for the decade. Despite their ‘pragmatic’ platform, their initiatives mainly manifested in a burgeoning foreign-owned agricultural industry whose product, and therefore profit, was the property of (mainly) U.S. and U.K. companies. This only worsened the existing economic situation for Jamaica’s impoverished and under-employed masses.

Bradley details the dominant gangs of Kingston in the period and their respective territory: the Vikings of the Newport East waterfront; Park of Denham Town; the Spanglers of Charles Street; and Salt (later, Phoenix) City of Salt Lane. These primary groups were

¹⁰⁷ Bradley, 178

¹⁰⁸ Bradley, 175

augmented by a plethora of smaller, neighborhood-based gangs who aligned themselves variably. Despite beginning with little inter-gang violence in the early 1960s, these groups quickly came under the sway of local political patrons. Further, street gangs had customarily been instrumental ‘contractors’ in labor union disputes, where “a show of force” was held “to be the most effective bargaining tool.”¹⁰⁹ As such, it is not surprising that the JLP and PNP (with their respective labor unions, the Bustamente Industrial Trade Union and the Trades Union Congress) once again employed these same groups to achieve political ends. Politically-sanctioned violence, employed through these groups, first manifested in relatively inconsequential election-day intimidation tactics and disruption of the opposing party’s rallies.

But in April 1962, when the JLP came to power, a certain shift in political violence took place. Bradley offers an insight: in the period of Fidel Castro’s socialist Cuba, U.S. political authorities were keeping a close eye on the Caribbean and thus sought to quell the emergence of any other socialist-oriented regimes in the newly-independent nations of the former ‘West Indies.’ As such, the democratic socialist platform of the PNP would be kept at bay through US support for the JLP, “by providing whatever the party leaders felt they needed to maintain the status quo at the ballot box [...] which translated into a frightening tide of modern weaponry flowing into [...] the ghettos’ JLP-held areas.”¹¹⁰ Party officials maintained individual loyalty through systems of patronage. Bradley highlights that “the territorially precise nature of the gangs and the very specific nature of voting wards meant West, Central and Southside Kingston was divided into what amounted to a series of politically divided garrisons.”¹¹¹ This dynamic was only reaffirmed by the proliferation of party-sponsored housing developments to reward participants’ partisan loyalty. As Munroe & Blake (2017) depict, these “partisan politics became

¹⁰⁹ Bradley, 180

¹¹⁰ Bradley, 181

¹¹¹ Bradley, 182

a part of the identity of most garrison community residents, and the identifications those ties forged helped foster the development of political tribalism,” leaving a lasting legacy on the political climate of Jamaica.¹¹² In this atmosphere, lacking political representation but overrun with violence, “Rastafari offered the most viable avenue for self-respect and self-improvement.”¹¹³ Thus, we can situate the emergence of Rasta themes in Jamaican popular music, and its subsequent dominance in Reggae, within the history of liberation. Rastafari, though based in religious elements, cannot be essentialized as solely theological; in the eyes of its followers, it is not a religion at all, but a natural state.¹¹⁴ Kebede & Kottnerus (1998) posit that it should instead be understood as “a political movement with a very strong religious component [...] a collective enterprise whose political motivations and goals are intertwined with religious symbolism and interpretations.”¹¹⁵ Cashmore (1979) describes that in this atmosphere, black urban youth became “distressed at what they considered a lack of meaningful involvement in society,” which they concluded to be a result of wider society’s rejection of their blackness.¹¹⁶ In this perfect storm, the Rasta framework arose as a one of rebellion, resilience, self-worth and identity; a framework that allowed *oppositional consciousness* to manifest into its own *oppositional counterculture*.

The Rastafari movement emerged in 1930s Jamaica following the coronation of Haile Selassie I as Emperor of Ethiopia. In assuming the throne, Selassie, born Ras Tafari Makonnen, fulfilled the prophecy of Jamaican-born political thinker and activist Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who had proclaimed in 1916: “Look to Africa where a black king shall be crowned, for he shall be your Redeemer.” Garvey’s prophecy illuminates a number of fundamental aspects to the

¹¹² Munroe, M. A. & Blake, D. K. “Governance and Disorder.” 2017: 583

¹¹³ Bradley, 177

¹¹⁴ Taylor, Angus. ‘Interview: Big Youth in Kingston.’ Unitedreggae.com, 2019.

¹¹⁵ Kebede, A. & Kottnerus, J. D. “Beyond the Pales of Babylon: The Ideational Components and Social Psychological Foundations of Rastafari.” 1998: 502

¹¹⁶ Cashmore, Ernest. “More than a Version: A Study of Reality Creation.” 1979: 310

emerging Rastafari ideology. To the Rastafari, and the wider community of Garveyites, Selassie was received as the living incarnation of god — a black Messiah — and heaven on earth could be realized through repatriation with Africa — Ethiopia. Thus, Garvey built upon the existing religious and ideological legacy of Ethiopianism. *Ethiopianism* was a widespread religious movement among the enslaved populations of the Americas, rooted in its relationship with traditional (colonial) Christianity. As Bradley reflects, in the early colonial period the plantation and its neverending supply through the Transatlantic Slave Trade “kept Africa’s religions alive on the plantations as the strongest link with everything the displaced masses once were.”¹¹⁷

Thus, most slaves were resistant to the Christian scriptures being forced upon them by colonial authorities. According to Bradley, Christianity was only begrudgingly accepted as (the only) means of literacy, and scriptures would quickly be reinterpreted by black preachers to resonate with their audiences. Two important aspects would leave a lasting legacy on Ethiopianism. First, and foremost, within the King James Bible, published in 1611, the entire continent of Africa was referred to as ‘Ethiopia.’ Bonacci reflects some of the various implications of this Ethiopia-centric reinterpretation of scripture. For example, interpretation of Verse 31 of Psalm 68, “‘Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God’ [...] represented their aspirations: the promise of an imminent liberation and their active role in the prophetic destiny attributed to Ethiopia.”¹¹⁸ Ethiopia was a powerful metaphor because it was “both sacred and sovereign.”¹¹⁹

Biblically, it was posited as the motherland of the African diaspora. Politically, it was the only independent African nation to never be colonized. Thus, as a metaphor, Ethiopia was deeply effective.

¹¹⁷ Bradley, 67

¹¹⁸ Bonacci, Giulia. “From Pan-Africanism to Rastafari.” 2015: 149

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148

Second was the biblical enslavement and exodus of the Hebrews, which “offered [...] an archetype of deliverance and liberation.”¹²⁰ The resonance of this metaphor in Jamaican political consciousness is perhaps most evident in Rastafari rhetoric: Western systems of domination and exploitation are all referred to as ‘Babylon.’ To be more specific, the entire existing political system was ‘Babylon.’ Rastafari therefore advocated a rejection of the dominant Western social structure, “based on a secular interpretation of the prevailing socio-political condition of Jamaica and the belief that they are the reincarnation of the ancient tribes of Israel exiled to the West Indies for violating the Law of God.”¹²¹ References to Babylon and its systems of dehumanization are common in Rasta vernacular and thereby in the lyrical rhetoric of reggae.

Marcus Garvey was well aware of the spiritual and psychological power of Ethiopianism, and hoped to operationalize its ideological foundation to facilitate tangible changes for the members of the African diaspora. Before he became a seminal figure in the American black nationalist movement, Garvey was training as a printer, and his activism began through involvement with labor and trade union disputes. In 1914, he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Kingston, which he later moved to Harlem. Garvey attempted to make his platform of physical repatriation tangible through the Black Star Liner company. It is important to note that Rastafari’s message of exile from and repatriation with Ethiopia, a heaven-on-earth, operationalized in Garvey’s Back to Africa movement, lends itself to a misconception that the Rastafari were primarily focused on a physical return to Africa. Most pan-African theorists, including W.E.B. Du Bois, were ideologically opposed to this. Rather than a physical flight from Babylon, the Rastafari conceived of their framework as offering a collective path to enlightenment and the potential for mental liberation from the devaluating

¹²⁰ Bonacci, 148

¹²¹ Kebede & Knottnerus, 503

systems of Babylon. They held that many “had unwittingly internalized an image of themselves offered by whites,” and had “accepted willingly their lowly positions because they had no alternatives available.”¹²² In other words, they had internalized the *colonial mentality*, a *subordinate consciousness*.

With a philosophical basis rooted in opposition, the Jamaican government’s consistent and practiced disdain towards the island’s Rasta communities only served to reinforce their identity and reiterate the importance of their ideological rebellion. Their position on the peripheries of Jamaican society necessitated the construction of informal social pathways, which was subsequently facilitated by the rise of street gangs. Cashmore articulates that “regular, stable interaction between gang members generated interest in the somewhat obscure messages of Rastafarian reggae [...] which told of the imminent destruction of Babylon, the return of Rastas to their rightful homeland, Africa, the black man’s Zion, of the divinity of Jah, Ras Tafari and the importance of finding the real ‘roots’ of the black man.”¹²³ Viewed through this framework, the proliferation of street-based social networks was not only political, but heavily conditioned by factors that are simultaneously social, cultural, spiritual and ideological.

These informal street networks contributed to Rastafari’s relatively loose organizational structure, which allowed for a variety of interpretations of the ideology. Various Rasta institutions emerged, such as the Twelve Tribes of Israel, yet no specific sect became the dominant interpretation. There was, and remains, great variation in how followers of Rastafari practice their lividity, yet the emergence of different subdivisions of Rasta thought did not result in a fragmentation of the community. Rather, as Cashmore describes, the Rastas held that they were all unified, “linked by the existence of God in man.”¹²⁴ In the Rasta vernacular, this

¹²² Cashmore, 314-5

¹²³ Cashmore, 310

¹²⁴ Cashmore, 316

manifests in the dissolution of the distinction between subject and object when speaking, as in ‘I and I’ rather than ‘you and I.’ The concept that God is within every individual places the highest value on ‘I.’ This belief provided a basis for unification that was capable of overcoming the structural limitations of informal organization. Cashmore reflects the statements of one Rasta follower, in that:

I and I is an expression to totalize the concept of *oneness*. [...] when Ras Tafari speak of himself as ‘I’ he means it in **a sense of total uplifting of one’s self, total dignity of one’s self** and expresses that so **his fellow brethren is the same as himself**. He says ‘I and I’ as being the oneness of two persons. So, God is within all of us and we’re all one people, in fact.¹²⁵

The search for ‘roots’ would permeate early Reggae rhetoric, as we will explore shortly. The divinity of ‘I’ was central; Ras Tafari was not Haile Selassie “the first,” but Haile Selassie “I.” Thus, Rastafari integrated realities of racial subjugation into the tradition of Ethiopianism, and can be understood as an adapted reiteration of Jamaica’s tradition of marronage. It celebrated the self-worth of the descendants of Africa and made them consciously aware of the systems of subjugation forced upon them — it offered itself as a vehicle of *sociogenic marronage*.

James F. Tracy outlines that the movement “drew on and reestablished in the 20th century the early religious traditions of African origin practiced by Jamaica’s Maroons.”¹²⁶ Further, Goldson (2020) reveals the structural parallel between marronage and Rastafari thought: an organically occurring epistemological engagement and disengagement, arising from “... the maroons’ act of securing freedom from slavery through flight[, which] necessitated a commitment to thinking outside of the ideological framework of the plantation.”¹²⁷ Goldson emphasizes an important notion: the presence of a dominant ideological framework; that of the plantation as a social, economic, political, and ideological framework, as explored by Glissant.

¹²⁵ Cashmore, 316-7

¹²⁶ Tracy, James F. “Popular Communication and the Postcolonial Zeitgeist.” 2005: 23

¹²⁷ Goldson, 370

This concept of epistemological disengagement — perhaps epitomized in the Rasta saying ‘the half has never been told’ (Gunia 2000) — is also uniquely reminiscent of Roberts’ *sociogenic marronage*. According to Goldson, “the process of epistemological self-determination is maroonage in process.”¹²⁸

Social science research has begun to explore the relationship between group consciousness (such as the Rastafari) and collective action (Morris 1990). Collective identity is widely conceptualized as having three elements: (a) some shared characteristic that is made salient to the individual; (b) a ‘cognitive framework,’ that incorporates political consciousness and networks of social relation, as well as group aspirations and the instruments and means of achieving them; and, (c) a fundamental opposition to the existing order.¹²⁹

The development of a collective consciousness is a dynamic, continuous process of group reflection and reevaluation of “themselves, their subjective experiences, their opportunities, and their shared interests.”¹³⁰ More specifically, as articulated, *oppositional consciousness* (Morris 1990) arises when the group consciousness “provides socially and politically marginalized groups with an understanding of their structural position and establishes new expectations regarding treatment.”¹³¹ In the context of the Rastafari, self-transformation is conceived of as the necessary prerequisite for tangible change. The Rasta youth “came to look at the world through Rastafarian eyes and himself as a true Rastaman; he acquired a subjectively plausible self-identity, based firstly on the appropriation of significant others’ changing attitudes towards him, acquired through progressive reasoning, and, after acceptance, his own reformulation of the ‘true self.’”¹³² The Rasta defined himself through opposition of the dominant framework and this

¹²⁸ Goldson, 383

¹²⁹ Melucci 1989 ; Qtd. in Taylor & Whittier “Collective identity in social movement communities.” 1992

¹³⁰ Taylor & Whittier, 114

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 114

¹³² Cashmore, 318

perception of the world was reaffirmed by the social stigma that they collectively faced; he did not wish to work within the system, but called for the divinely-granted, autonomous existence outside of this structure, which he was being systematically deprived of. Cashmore articulates that this process facilitates “a congruence of subjective and objective realities, because in appropriating his true self-identity the Rasta, by implication, created his own specific location within an objective social world.”¹³³ To endure in this oppositional consciousness, where one may be rejected by their parents or peers, necessitates a strong sense of collective unity (‘I and I’) and group reinforcement of values (reasoning circles).

Sociogenic marronage through *epistemological disengagement* is also evident in Rasta reasoning sessions. According to Cashmore, the Rasta reasoning circle created a space for discussion and interrogation of the political, economic, and social issues impacting their community.¹³⁴ Onoura (2013) posits that the reasoning circle to be “a valid framework of meaning-making wherein orature and written text simultaneously serve as platforms for engendering critical thinking and for encouraging a rewriting of the dominant script.”¹³⁵ The ideological disengagement inherent to Rasta followers was imbued in the music of the late-Rocksteady and early-Reggae period through the stylistic technique of ‘toasting.’ Toasting, or talking over the mic, became a popular convention in the post-ska period, as Jamaican musicians and producers strove to articulate both an individual identity (for themselves) and a collective identity (for their audiences). Inspired by the energetic vocal interjections heard on New Orleans-based R&B radio stations, Jamaican deejays began to talk over the music variably. As the influence of Rastafari strengthened younger generations’ political consciousness, the rhetoric of sound system vocalists began to pursue a ‘rewriting’ of dominant scripts.

¹³³ Cashmore, 318

¹³⁴ Cashmore, 311-2

¹³⁵ Onoura, Adwoa Ntozake. “Critical Literacy: A Rastafari Perspective.” 2013: 41

VII. A TOAST TO THE SUFFERAHS

It is clear why early generations of MCs — U-Roy, then Big Youth — were focused on voicing the shared struggles, and the resultant lyrical rhetoric was based around the experiences, the plight, and the aspirations of the ‘sufferahs,’ as well as the pursuit of ‘roots.’ Ewart ‘U-Roy’ Beckford is widely held as a pioneer of the MC (Master of Ceremonies, Mic Chatter) style. After bouncing around smaller sound systems at the start of his career, he joined his friend Osbourne ‘King Tubby’ Ruddock’s new sound — Tubby’s Home Town HiFi — in 1968. King Tubby was employed by Reid as a disc-cutter and, Bradley claims, “had access to Treasure Isle master tapes, from which he’d cut discs for his personal use specifically tailored for U-Roy’s vocals.”¹³⁶ Tubby played an important role in shaping the sound, altering vocals and instrumentation of existing tracks to create space for U-Roy’s interjections. Further, he is considered one of the pioneers of Dub. Prior to his two hit Treasure Isle releases in 1970, U-Roy wasn’t concerned with recording; rather, he was solely focused on recording exclusive dub plates for Tubby’s HiFi.¹³⁷

But his eventual releases in 1970 — ‘Wake the Town’ and ‘Wear You to the Ball’ — were back-to-back, chart-topping hits that transformed the trajectory of Jamaican music. Inspired by Machuki, U Roy made his vocals ‘flow’ with the track,¹³⁸ and ‘rode the rhythm,’ i.e. “going with the tune, working inside and around it to embellish spectacularly what was there already.”¹³⁹ After U Roy entered the scene, there was no longer any contestation over the role of the MC. As Lesser puts it, “after U Roy’s success, everyone wanted to be a deejay [...] And a whole generation of young men had a new hero to emulate.”¹⁴⁰ U-Roy’s contemporary and biggest

¹³⁶ Bradley 2000: 295

¹³⁷ Lesser 2012: 17

¹³⁸ Lesser 2012: 15

¹³⁹ Bradley 2000: 295

¹⁴⁰ Lesser 2012: 15

competitor, Dennis Alcapone, was next on the scene. Inspired by U-Roy's approach, he developed his own style of toasting, with vocals that were less melodic and more spoken, starting on his own sound system, El Paso.¹⁴¹ His 1971 Studio LP *Forever Version* is widely regarded as seminal roots reggae.

a. YOUTH, ROOTS & POLITICS

By the mid-1970s, inspired by U Roy and Alcapone, a new generation of deejays (toasters, MCs) was taking over, increasingly using lyricism “to impart a social, political and spiritual agenda.”¹⁴² At the forefront was Big Youth. Dennis Alcapone emphasizes that this second wave of deejays were working with the newer rhythms, rather than the rocksteady ‘riddims’ he and U Roy had been toasting over. His first big hit came in 1972 with ‘S 90 Skank,’ produced by Keith Hudson, followed by ‘Screaming Target’ in 1973, produced by Gussie Clarke. Following these two hits, Manley Augustus ‘Big Youth’ Buchanan established his own label ‘Negusa Negast’ and began producing his own records. Lesser articulates that “Big Youth began to use his performances and his records to talk about the social and economic conditions for black people,” both in Jamaica and across the diaspora; further, “because his lyrics were complex and often beautiful, and his messages powerful and universal, Big Youth was one of the first deejays to appeal to a worldwide audience.”¹⁴³ In poetically protesting Kingston's political violence and the conditions of poverty, Big Youth catapulted the role of the MC into new levels of social, political and spiritual consciousness. One deejay recalls “I was inspired by Big Youth [...] Big Youth usually chant, and I love chanting, cause **chanting have a message**. U Roy only

¹⁴¹ Lesser, 18

¹⁴² Lesser, 19 ; Big Youth, Jah Stitch, Dillinger, Big Joe, Jah Woosh, Prince Jazzbo, Shorty the President, Jah Lloyd, Dr. Alimantado, Jah Lion

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21

have a sweet tone [...] but Big Youth usually have the **revolution** kind of style.”¹⁴⁴ A chanting, almost militant, revolutionary vocal style resonated with the younger musicians, and their perceived ‘rhythm of the time,’ thereby hinting at important ongoing shifts in the spiritual and political consciousness of the newer generations of Jamaican youth.

In 1972, Michael Manley of the People’s National Party had been elected Prime Minister of Jamaica, campaigning on a platform of empathy for and solidarity with the ‘sufferahs,’ going as far as commissioning artists — including Bob and Rita Marley, Derrick Harriott, Ken Boothe and Clancy Eccles — to write pro-PNP songs. Manley’s primary focus was on reforming the trade union system of relationships, which had largely retained its colonial foundation: a race-based social hierarchy (Bogues 1996). Through his earlier work with the Trades Union Congress, Manley had bared witness to the poor living conditions faced by Jamaica’s majority, and developed an acute awareness of their political and economic interests. Further, his involvement with the Jamaican Broadcasting Corporation (JBC) strike in 1964, popularized him as a staunch defender of human rights and facilitated his election as a parliamentary representative in 1967 and then leader of the PNP in 1969 (Bogues 2002).

Manley’s 1972 campaign co-opted the symbolism, musical traditions and philosophies of the Rastafari, who were traditionally opposed to participating in the ‘politricks’ of Babylon; Manley himself went as far as carrying around a ‘rod of correction,’ that he claimed to have received from Emperor Haile Selassie himself.¹⁴⁵ Through these appeals, Manley was able to secure electoral victory. While his intentions are worthy of question, Manley’s plans never materialized. As previously delineated, Manley’s democratic socialist platform placed him in direct opposition to US power in the Cold War. Manley’s alliance with Castro’s communist

¹⁴⁴ Lesser, 24

¹⁴⁵ Lesser, 27

Cuba, in the eyes of US foreign policy officials, served to reaffirm the growing danger of socialist thought in the Caribbean. To combat this potentially-devastating diplomatic relationship, Manley argued for the ideological distinction between democratic socialism and communism. His economic platform strove to nationalize (rather than privatize) companies, and focused on empowering local communities and addressing widespread unemployment and great economic disparity: “the rate of unemployment actually doubled during the decade of the ‘60s, from about 12.5% in 1960 to 25% in 1971.”¹⁴⁶ Further, income distribution was concentrated in the hands of a small elite, with the top 10% of income recipients receiving around 49% of total income given.¹⁴⁷

Manley increased the tax revenue paid by North American companies mining bauxite in Jamaica, the island’s biggest industry. The bauxite industry had been almost completely foreign-owned, due to the wide acceptance of foreign investment in the late 1950s through the 1960s in an attempt to reduce the existing economic dependence of the sugar industry.¹⁴⁸ Foreign companies grew to own expanses of mineable land, offering rural Jamaican farmers large sums for their land.¹⁴⁹ Mufuka (1978) outlines that, by 1975, “Manley achieved a 51 percent ownership [...] in Kaiser and Reynolds mining companies on behalf of the Jamaican government.”¹⁵⁰ Manley implemented tangible policies of free education and a national minimum wage.¹⁵¹ Despite these challenges, Manley remained in favor among the working classes of Jamaica, and would defeat JLP candidate (and former record producer) Edward Seaga in the 1976 election, winning the PNP 47 out of 60 seats in the House of Representatives. Yet in 1980, Seaga would reverse this trend, winning the JLP 51 out of 60 seats. Manley would

¹⁴⁶ James, Winston. “The Decline and Fall of Michael Manley: Jamaica 1972-1980.” 1983: 147

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 147

¹⁴⁸ Silberberg, Monica. “The Jamaican Bauxite Industry & Decolonization.” 2012: 94

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97

¹⁵⁰ Mufuka, K. Nyamayaro. “The Jamaican Experiment.” 1978: 74

¹⁵¹ Edmonds, Kevin. “Guns, Gangs and Garrison Communities in the Politics of Jamaica.” 2016: 54

eventually return to power in 1989, after almost a decade of JLP dominance. These fluctuations, seemingly (at least somewhat) populist in nature, accentuate the eccentricities of Jamaican political history. These dynamics reiterate systems of political patronage explored earlier, in reference to the 1962 election, demonstrating a consistent theme (if not a cyclical trend) dominant in Jamaican politics: the hope, excitement and aspirations of the impoverished, unemployed and systemically undervalued Jamaican majority, met with the stark consistency of their reality. Both Seaga and Manley were upper-class Jamaicans who both served as patrons in their community, and operationalized their understanding of working-class interests as a basis for their political platforms.

As a political figure, Michael N. Manley had strong appeal. He was the son of Norman Manley, Jamaica's first and only Premier (1959–64), who is regarded as one of the founders of Jamaican independence. Originally a journalist, Michael Manley became closely involved with trade unionism in 1952, mainly campaigning around the island for workers to join the National Workers Union. Manley outwardly opposed the systems of racial domination, and served as an advocate for the interests of the Jamaican people. Further, Manley's platform distinctly diverged from the American political course, pursuing democratic socialism within a globally capitalist context. Silberberg (2012) reflects "the 1974 policies that intended higher returns and greater Jamaican control of the bauxite-alumina industry were a powerful statement of national resistance against MNCs [multinational corporations] as a form of neocolonialism."¹⁵² Despite his popularity amongst the Jamaican populace and his outward intentions for success, the lack of tangible change for the majority facilitated Jamaica's eventual adherence to the growing trend of neoliberalism with the election of Edward Seaga in 1980.

¹⁵² Silberberg, Monica. "The Jamaican Bauxite Industry & Decolonization." 2012: 104

b. DUB: ROOTS of DANCEHALL

From roots reggae emerged a unique, electronic descendent: dub. Dub is unique in both sound and space. The experience of *sonic dominance*, as we discussed, was facilitated by the sound systems and their audio engineers; they were the vehicle through which ska, rocksteady, and roots reggae had emerged, a trend increasingly focused on the ‘explicit,’ i.e. articulated in lyricism. Dub musicians diverged from this path, through the role of the in-studio audio engineer and their ability to manipulate and stylize existing tracks, tailoring them to produce specific sounds – a fundamentally experimental style. Dub foregrounded the use of existing materials for the creation of new music, at least partially motivated by the economic hardships of the time. The audio engineers of the 1970s, from all studios, began to dig through the dub plate archives, judging them “on the originality and creativity of the mix,” and largely ignoring the vocals.¹⁵³ This practice was crucial in the emergence of U-Roy’s style of toasting and track style, which King Tubby achieved by utilizing his access to Treasure Isle’s master tapes.

Dub’s emergence was enabled by the international success of roots reggae. Foreign capital flow into the Jamaican music scene reinforced the relationship between the crowd and the music, as the sound system dancehall was seen as the perfect location for producers and audio engineers to test out new sounds. Hence, dub’s sonic experimentation quickly began to infiltrate the roots reggae popular both domestically and internationally. We can track dub’s evolution through King Tubby, its most pivotal figure, but other pioneers of Dub include Errol Thompson and Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry. Similarly, Lee Perry had been employed at a larger studio, working as Coxsone Dodd’s ‘right-hand man’ at Studio One, before branching out and creating his own sound system and recording studio. Osbourne ‘King Tubby’ Ruddock, an electrician and electronics repairman by trade, operated a seminal sound system in the Waterhouse

¹⁵³ Lesser, 202

neighborhood of West Kingston.¹⁵⁴ His skillful audio engineering made him a pioneer of sonic innovation. One of Tubby's contemporaries, Mikey 'Dread' Campbell, reflects:

[Tubby] would figure out an effect he wanted and then design and construct the circuit that would give him that ... if the man don't think a sound sound like he want it, he would go into the circuitry there and then and change it to create the particular effect he wanted ... **It's because he truly understood sound, in a scientific sense, that he was able to do what he did.**¹⁵⁵

Tubby's Home Town Hi-Fi began as a hobby around 1964 and evolved into a powerful social and creative institution in one of Kingston's roughest areas. We can reiterate Sebastian Clarke, in that "the sound man [that is, the sound system proprietor] carries his impoverished community with him."¹⁵⁶ Amid a context of great political violence, Tubby's was a space that transcended the tension of the social climate.¹⁵⁷ His sound was heavy and improvisational, speaking to the "sensibility and sensuality" of his community; the intended audience of all of his productions was always, first and foremost, local.¹⁵⁸ Heeding the recommendations of Bunny Lee and Rudolph 'Ruddy' Redwood to further his musical experimentation, Tubby upgraded his home studio in Waterhouse in 1972, which became the heart of his productions until his death in 1989.¹⁵⁹ Unlike Studio One or Treasure Isle, Tubby's was too small to accommodate recording live musicians, and instead "was used for remixing and adding vocals ('voicing') to basic rhythm tracks that had been recorded at other studios."¹⁶⁰ This focus on re-mixing and manipulating existing music, from the eras of musical creation we've discussed, facilitated dub's emergence. Veal depicts that Tubby's earliest mixes "were minimal in construction and often sounded stark, moody, and suspenseful," while his later work "extended this mood with corrosive-sounding passages of filtering, ominous trails of echoing voices, and jarring ruptures of the song

¹⁵⁴ Veal, Michael E. *Dub*. 2015: 108-09

¹⁵⁵ Campbell, Bradley 1996 ; qtd. in Veal, 116

¹⁵⁶ Clarke ; qtd. in Veal, 43

¹⁵⁷ Veal, 109

¹⁵⁸ Clarke ; qtd. in Veal, 43

¹⁵⁹ Veal, 112

¹⁶⁰ Veal, 116

surface.”¹⁶¹ As political violence heightened, these sounds were integrated into tracks as well, in the form of “overdubbed sounds of machine-gun fire, emergency sirens, screeching brake tires, the bracing sound of the engineer dropping his spring reverb unit, and the endless succession of gunplay-inspired ‘straight to the head’ titles.”¹⁶²

Tubby and his studio catalyzed a legacy of inventive audio engineers, those who served as his assistants and apprentices, including Philip ‘Prince Philip’ Smart, Lloyd ‘King Jammy’ James and Overton ‘Scientist’ Brown. Tubby’s apprentices expanded his impact, carrying on his spirit of electronic experimentation. Further, Tubby himself would collaborate with fellow dub pioneer Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry around 1974 and, together, they would usher in a ‘dub revolution’¹⁶³ memorialized in the seminal dub / roots reggae album, ‘King Tubby Meets The Upsetter.’

As we’ve explored, Tubby was crucial in the development of U-Roy’s sound because of his technical skills in altering sound, as well as his access to the Treasure Isle / Trojan archives. Tubby’s influence, through dub, would alter the trajectory of the next generation of MCs and vocalists. The sonic grit of dub fundamentally shaped Big Youth’s sound as well, supplementing and sonically embellishing his ‘revolutionary’ style with the echoes of Jamaican music past. Dub, based on remixing the roots of Jamaican music, only grew more attractive as the government turned towards neoliberalism in the beginning of the 1980s, as the Rastafari quest for identity and value reasserted itself as a stable path towards self-liberation in spite of material reality by centralizing a counter-hegemonic culture of rebellion and resilience. Big Youth’s 1975 album *Dread Locks Dread* exemplifies the integration of dub into roots reggae, as well as the thematic rhetoric relating Rastafari messages to the existing social, political and economic contexts. The album opens with ‘[Train to Rhodesia](#),’ providing an explicit illustration of the

¹⁶¹ Veal, 118

¹⁶² Veal, 118

¹⁶³ Veal, 148

tense atmosphere clouding the Kingston ghettos; articulating a Rastafari message of unity through Jah, and of violence as rooted in the Babylonian systems imposed upon them: “Is there always gonna be one more bridge to cross? / Black people, do we really have to fight?” A rhetorical invocation of unity is similarly implied in his use of ‘brother’ to refer to those he is addressing: “Yeah, can’t stand a brother against a brother / Let di brother try to live with one another (Yeah) / ’Cause every brother has a brother / Brothers, all you got to do is understand each other.”

VIII. CONCLUSION: insights from a sonic diaspora

For our purposes, the role of the sound system in Jamaican society has been comprehensively established. The story in Jamaica only continues, through the neoliberal reforms (and the cyclical trend of hope and let-down) of Edward Seaga’s administration until 1989, and then continued by the newly-reelected Manley. Through this period, Dancehall would develop from dub, delving deeper into the electronic sound. But here, we look outwards and across the Atlantic. Sound systems were not only significant in Jamaica, but also across the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, partially a result of the Windrush Generation (1948 – 1973). The Windrush Generation refers to immigration of individuals from ‘Commonwealth countries’ – aka the Caribbean colonies (formerly, the ‘West Indies’). Consistently high levels of unemployment made migration to mainland Britain a viable offer, with greater access to education, opportunity, and socioeconomic mobility. A 1955 British Pathé newsreel (‘Our Jamaican Problem’) articulates the popular sentiment across mainland Britain: “Already their coming has caused a national controversy, but one point must always be borne in mind: whatever our feelings, we cannot deny them entry, for all are British citizens and – as such – as entitled to identical rights

of any member of the Empire.”¹⁶⁴ Here, reinvoking *social identity theory*, critical media analysis would reveal a rhetorical alignment with an intended audience (*in-group*) of the mainland British population. The ‘out-group,’ in this case, refers to the Windrush Generation who were subjugated to constant racial discrimination and persecution. The growth of the Afro-Caribbean population across the UK resulted in what can be considered a *sonic diaspora* (Henriques 2008). As Ward describes, “a significant cultural response to racism and living in a hostile country was to listen to music, not passively, but actively as part of a group of likeminded people with a developing sense of common black identity.”¹⁶⁵ It follows that sound systems emerged in places with a more dense African-Caribbean population.¹⁶⁶ The development of sound systems in the UK (amongst other locations) exemplifies the *rhizomatic* structure of cultural relations depicted in Gilroy’s theory of the *black Atlantic*.

Rastafari provided a basis of defining Jamaican culture in the global context, made tangible through the trending popularity of Reggae. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall reflects his own experience growing up in Kingston, describing that the concept of an African-Caribbean identity only began to rise in the 1970s, a cultural discovering that “could only be made through the impact on popular life of the post-colonial revolution, the civil rights struggles, the culture of Rastafarianism and the music of reggae.”¹⁶⁷ The sentiments shared in Reggae lyricism were specific to the Jamaican experience, but capable of resonating with global audiences because of Rastafari’s explicit appeals to shared experiences of oppression and devaluation. Thus, it is not surprising that, relative to our timeline in Jamaica, a parallel sound system culture was developing across the United Kingdom. Across the Atlantic, sound systems were being

¹⁶⁴ British Pathé. “Our Jamaican Problem (1955).” 00:23 – 00:40

¹⁶⁵ Ward, Paul. “Sound System Culture.” 2018: 363

¹⁶⁶ Ward, 363

¹⁶⁷ Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” 1989: 231

employed by Jamaicans of the diaspora, building countercultural spaces of exploration and facilitating the assertion of a counter-hegemonic identity. The dynamics of race-based discrimination experienced by the Windrush Generation and their descendants — as well as the many others who made their way to mainland Britain in the twentieth century — in many ways parallel the social stigmatization faced by the Rastafari within Jamaican society. Thereby, Rastafari gave black urban youth both an *oppositional consciousness* through which they could define themselves, as well as a community that celebrated its own *oppositional culture*, creating a path for *sociogenic marronage* through *epistemological disengagement* from dominant ideological frameworks.

Thus, Jamaican culture became an attractive symbol of individual expression for black youth across the United Kingdom, offering both a worldview that empowered them ideologically, then reinforced and energized these values through a local community. Sound systems offer a subtle, but often unspoken, sense of a symbiotic social organization, achieved through the affective qualities of the environment's *sonic dominance*. The rhetoric imbued through roots reggae, emerging just around the start of the 1970s, compounded the sensory experience with an ideological framework (Rastafari) that provided the audience with a worldview that integrated cultural heritage (invoking *pan-Africanism & Ethiopianism*), self-worth (*black pride, black nationalism*) and unity (*oneness*). The strength and stability of the sound system as a countercultural institution was held in its triangulation of creative production, economic flow & ideological construction. These intertwining dynamics, and the communities constructed around them, lent themselves to the development of both group and political consciousness, which facilitated group action and enabled the resilience of communities and subcultures that refused to subscribe to imposed systems of inequality.

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