'While nuff ah right and rahbit; we write and arrange': deejay lyricism and the transcendental use of the voice in alternative public spaces in the UK

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William 'Lez' Henry

Introduction

> Man tell me bout Remington weh put man in ah grave,
> the Remington me know my father use it fi shave,
> at school the teachers taught me things like how to use a lathe,
> couldah ask them any question bout when man live in ah cave,
> if me ask them bout when black man down in ah slave,
> them blush, turn red, them answer used to scathe,
> I'll give you an example of the answer they gave,
> bloody trouble maker, get out the class, until you learn to behave![1]

The above lyric became a focal point of discussion between myself and the Jamaican deejay Lone Ranger during the 'Reggae University' at the 16th Rototom Sunsplash in Italy in 2009, where we shared a panel with other commentators. It speaks to the manner in which deejay culture, created in Jamaica, profoundly impacted the consciousness of youth in the UK during the late 1970s to mid 1980s. Yet more importantly, one aspect of the discussion focused on 'yard-tapes',[2] which were the cassette recordings of Jamaican Sound System sessions that traversed the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1994) from around the mid 1970s. The suggestion was that a dependence on vinyl – on recorded releases – would never provide an accurate picture of the manner in which reggae music and Sound System culture impacted on communities far beyond the shores of Jamaica during this moment. For instance, I explained to Lone Ranger that the lyric was directly inspired by one of his performances on a Jamaican Sound System called 'Soul to Soul' in 1980, in which he dealt with the prevalence of gun crime in parts of Kingston, Jamaica. In his performance

1 Lezlee Lyrix, Diamonds The Girls Best Friend Sound System, Nettlefold Hall, London, 1984 (cited in Henry, 2012, p. 102).

2 See Henry (2006), ch. 3, for an in-depth analysis of yard-tape and the dissemination of the deejay voice.

' , in J.D. Webb, R. Westmaas, M. del Pilar Kaladeen and W. Tantam (eds.), *Memory, migration and (de)colonisation in the Caribbean and beyond* (London: University of London Press, 2019), pp. 59–.

he spoke to the popularity of the Remington hand gun and aspects of the lyric were later reworked into a track he released in 1982, on the Channel One label, called 'fist to fist days done'.

For us in the UK a Remington was an electric razor but in Jamaica it was the name of a popular handgun the 'bad-boys' would brandish in dancehalls etc., so to use it in the context of a firearm in the UK would have been mere fantasy on my part. Therefore, my usage of this contrast in world-views from gun to electric razor, speaks to the difference between being inspired to create ('my father use it fi shave'), as opposed to merely pirating/copying another deejay's style. The lyric from which the extract is drawn is over three minutes long and I used to chat it 'non-stop' (see below); and whilst being inspired by Lone Ranger's take on 'gun-play', it enabled me to jump off in another direction. It therefore empowered me to write about and subsequently deal with some of the issues we were facing and still face within the UK that were and are equally 'destructive' from an educational perspective. Why this is important to this chapter is the fact that the contents of the yard-tapes became the template that was used to establish the performative aspect of Sound System culture in the UK. Moreover, British deejays would evolve from merely copying the 'yard-style' in the first instance to creating a 'style and pattern' that were uniquely their own, based on the reality of life in the UK.

Hence what follows is an argument that locates the British deejay contribution to black cultural politics within the broader framework of cultural antagonism across the African diaspora. The evolution of the British deejay narrative is considered in order to fill in some of the gaps in the literature with regard to how black youth, during this historical moment, used this alternate voice to challenge whiteness across a range of contexts (Henry, 2007). Consideration is given to how this particular and unique voice became known outernationally, eventually becoming a crucial part of Africentric[3] cultural exchanges with reggae music and Sound System culture at their core, as '[t]his is not a place for individual heroes or hierarchies; instead, we are deeply immersed into the sonic space of bass and beats – the vibe of reggae and dub. Such an ephemeral event, fuelled by post-colonial social marginalization, is intensely powerful in producing a sense of togetherness' (Rietveld, 2013, p. 83). Consequently, this sense of 'post-colonial social marginalization' underpinned the usage of what was known as 'island talk', which served to eliminate many of the inter-island rivalries that would play out in other arenas. This meant that the various takes on the English language by people from the Caribbean morphed with local vernaculars like London 'cockney' to create a language that was owned and controlled by the partakers in the culture. Indeed, this form of 'directed

3 Paul Gilroy used the notion of an Afri-centric perspective in his book *The Black Atlantic* (1994); I first developed it in my undergraduate dissertation (1997) and then expanded upon it in my doctoral thesis (2002). I utilise this concept extensively in my book *What The Deejay Said; A Critique from the Street!* (2006).

defiance', which created a sense of 'togetherness', was aimed at white society, manifesting itself in the works of the conscious deejays who sought to 'write and arrange'. Therefore, the accounts of black youth irrationally distancing themselves from the mainstream white society will be challenged using their lyricism and narratives to counter such claims, similar to the metaphor of the seven-inch single I use as a framework (Henry, 1997, 2002, 2006), in which the A-side focuses on outsider arguments and the B-side presents the insider perspective. By doing so light will be shed on the importance of the black British contribution to the reggae world view, explaining how it had Rastafari, Garveyism and other forms of radical politics at its core and perhaps represented the most pro-black voice ever to come out of the UK.

Overstanding alterity and outernational cultural antagonism

Every time a griot4 dies it's like a library burning down.
Tunde Jedege[5]

> Art as a product of consciousness is also permeated by ideology, although it is not reducible to the ideology. And to that extent, too, what the author or artist says in the work of art is actually (or perhaps one should say also) the statement of the social group and its world-view (Wolff, 1993, p. 119).

Combatting the imposition of a Eurocentric 'alien' worldview on African peoples, by way of an analysis of British deejay culture in the late 1980s, is premised upon the fact that many subcultural and sociological accounts misrepresented the manner in which black youth countered, resisted and transcended racism through the medium of reggae music (Gilroy, 1987; Back, 1996; Henry, 2006).[6] These theorisations of what exactly motivated black youth to embrace many aspects of reggae-dancehall culture, especially the usage of patwa as a 'commonly agreed language' (Small, 1987), were largely inadequate as they failed to recognise the history behind these types of 'directed defiance' and thus lacked epistemological rigour and empirical depth. For example, the idea of black youth as a 'discrete social category' was given currency by suggestions like they were 'educated on words which they find irrelevant – and do not know how to spell anyway' (Cashmore and Troyna, 1982, p. 18). This type of thinking only makes sense because many social commentators had negative preconceptions regarding a highly visible black presence that obviously 'coloured' their 'findings' as these were a 'statement of the social group and its world-view' (Wolff, 1981, p. 119). For this reason there

4 A 'griot' or 'jali' is the title of a West African genealogist who uses stories, songs, music and other forms of oration to inform their communities of their complete histories, in the context of oral tradition, including births, deaths, marriages, etc.

5 Jedege (2012).

6 See Bourne (1980) and Hall et al. (1978) for critiques of this perspective.

is a rigidity affixed to black cultures that does not reflect the lived experience of 'real people', who have a history of countering white racism across a range of contexts. Consequently, such analyses are unable to present a more complete understanding of the pragmatic nature of black countercultural forms, which actually represent historical sites of transcendence and resistance. One reason for this occurrence is that academic interpretation, explanation or expectation tries to rid itself of the problems associated with representation, questioning how it can more accurately represent the 'other's' 'social reality', through a freeing of itself from the bias of 'ethnographic inscription'. Yet it cannot, for the 'social reality' it ultimately portrays is subject to the epistemological biases of the interpreter/author: '[A]s a result, social facts no longer need to attain or demonstrate authenticity; their authority derives from their status as an emanation of assumed intellectual, and actual political, power' (Rigby 1996, pp. 89–90).

In line with Rigby's perspective, a focus on giving voice to the voiceless, as a means of contributing to the current debates on overstanding[7] the history of black communities in the UK, is timely and necessary, for to grasp the relevance of an outernational consciousness that provides a means to think beyond social, racial and political constraints is central to this argument. Thus conversations about resistance are not enough as the expressive cultural forms, in this instance the recorded lyricism (on vinyl or cassettes) of the British-based deejays, are 'living' documents that enable the listener to experience a history that is premised on transcendence. In this way Jedege's thoughts on the passing of the *griot* are highly relevant when we consider that the deejay is a 'modern day griot' and the works in question here become the testimonies of those 'who mentally archived and disseminated traditional information to their respective audiences' (Webster-Prince, 2013, p. 80). If their words remain 'hidden' it is akin to a 'library burning down', forever losing the practical steps that are taken to maintain both one's liberty and one's sanity in a hostile environment. It is therefore incumbent upon the insider/interlocutor to make this history live on by constantly excavating these countercultural voices, which enable the downpressed to align themselves with discourses that are in a language they own and control. As the British deejay Bigga Monrose (Dr Kenneth Monrose) posits:

> Sound System and Sound System culture were everything for us in the early Eighties. Football or Sound System. The deejaying aspect of the Sound System enhanced our lives. My school books were covered in pictures of diagrams of pre-amps and speaker boxes. I had the names of the

7 The idea of 'overstanding' is taken from a Rastafari world-view within which the word 'understand' is taken to mean you 'stand under' the point you are discussing, and as such your view of it is limited by merely looking up. Consequently, Rastafari teaches us that to 'overstand' means to 'stand over' the point in question from the vantage point of seeing it from all possible angles. Therefore 'overstanding' is total awareness of the ramifications/permutations of a given situation.

> more prominent and well-known artists scrawled over my school books, and it wasn't just black kids like me, white kids and some Asians gravitated toward it as well. The deejays spoke to and documented our condition. We all sailed in the same boat during Thatcher's Britain at the time. We were poor, voiceless and occupied fringe status in British society (Bigga Monrose, personal communication, 2016; recorded interview took place on 26 May 2016 in London).

Bigga's testimony speaks to how alternative viewpoints can be rendered/received as valid/authentic historical documents that not only resonated with the disaffected youth in 'Thatcher's Britain' but also unified them across racial and linguistic lines because 'we all sailed in the same boat'. This is a telling point as according to Roach (1996), anything that can be 'performed' can be regarded as a document which speaks to those who 'occupied fringe status' and whose personal narratives are largely missing from the 'recognised' historical accounts. Nevertheless, Roach's notion of the 'monstrous double' exposes the manner in which just as 'things living or dead, real or imagined' can become 'cultural artefacts', 'literature can be used to (make us) forget' (Roach, 1996, p. 138). Consequently, in much the same way as the 'sounds' of the performance are 'hidden' once the lyrics become 'text', the more inclusive tales of 'real people' are hidden in many accounts of the black experience in Britain. Similarly, these accounts give little consideration to the value of a perspective which relocates the African as a conscious being 'in time and across time' (Gordon, 1998, p. 140) and also in place and across space, even more so when the British deejay voice is 'silenced' in many of the discussions of the history of reggae in the UK, where it is suggested: 'Last but not least, Jamaican reggae has obviously fathered British reggae whose emblematic figures remain Steel Pulse, Aswad, UB 40, Maxi Priest and Bitty McLean among others' (Dagnini, 2010, p. 5).

Dagnini's take on the 'emblematic' makes sense in the commercial world of reggae, for it is common knowledge that the bands that are mentioned appealed to, and were supported by, black and white audiences in line with what was known as the 'Two Tone' scene. However, for many African-centred youth during the late 1970s to early 1980s this scene represented a no-go area, as the main point for embracing was to use reggae music to distance oneself from white society. This means that Africentric subjectivities cannot be overlooked in these debates, as they often give rise to the 'self-generated concepts' (Lewis, cited in Henry, 2006) that allow the black downpressed to 'chant down Babylon' with no apology.[8] More importantly, whilst 'popularity' in an international sense explains who is 'known' within the reggae world as 'emblematic', this in and of itself is symptomatic of a perspective that is ultimately flawed because it

8 In Jamaican culture to 'chant down Babylon' is to speak out unapologetically against the corrupt social, cultural and political system in which we are living, whether locally or globally. Its first usage was by early Rastafari and is both biblical – as in 'Babylon' the place of great inequity – as well as meaning the 'police', the authorities and any aspect of racist European/white domination and subjugation of African/black people, historically and contemporaneously.

does not represent the 'hidden voices' that dominated alternative public spaces during this moment. For instance, mention is made of Maxi Priest, who made his name on Lewisham's 'Saxon Sound System' in the 1980s, but what is not often stated is that the song that made him a household name in Jamaica, 'Sensi' (1984), was featured on a double-A-side with Papa Levi's 'Mi God, Mi King'. It was Levi's version (which had already reached the number one spot in the UK Reggae Chart on seven-inch vinyl), in which he unleashed the 'rapid rappin/fast style',[9] that arguably caught the imagination of the Jamaican public:

> Indeed 'Mi God Mi King' was so successful that it was snapped up by Sly & Robbie in JA, who released it on their own Taxi label. Levi then made history once again when the tune became the first by a UK deejay to reach number one in the JA charts. Imagine the feelings of elation that must have unleashed in the reggae community in the UK and London, who had looked to Jamaica for inspiration since the very beginning (Eden, 2012 [n.p.]).

The very title of Levi's track 'Mi God, Mi King' speaks to the influences of Rastafari and how their teachings offered a framework to challenge, and overcome, white supremacist thought and action across a range of contexts in the UK (Gilroy, 1987; Bradley, 2001; Henry, 2006). Indeed, Rastafari advocated a 'social gospel' based on knowing one's enemy for it is not enough to pray to a transcendental being, who is generally portrayed as white, in one's hopes for salvation. That is why on the track Levi states:

> Mi God, Mi King, him name Jah-ov-yah,
> Him inspire me to be a mike chanter,
> Mi maas wid di mike round the amplifier,
> Mi fling way di slackness, cause now a culture,
> The conscious lyrics yuh a go hear me utter,
> …
> Soh if you are an adult or a teenager,
> Seh every day you wake you fi read a chapter
> …
> Not so long Jah walk pon di land,
> Di peaceful, righteous rastaman,
> Trod wid di Maccabee innah him hand,
> Preaching love to man an woman.

Levi's voice, coupled with the lyrical content of his track, demonstrates how for many reggae music was, and remains, a symbol of 'racial authenticity' that acknowledges a world beyond their peripheral placement in British society. The obvious mention of 'Jah' acknowledges the teachings of Rastafari, yet the fact that this track was so successful with a lyric that 'chants down Babylon' without apology needs consideration. A partial explanation runs in tandem

9 There has been much controversy around who originated the 'fast style' (Henry, 1997, 2002, 2006) but it was created and first chatted by the Saxon deejay Peterking in November 1982.

with the fact that Rastafari and its advocacy of Garveyism[10] provided black youth in the UK with a template to make their alternate claims known. Thus the words 'Mi fling way di slackness, cause now a culture | the conscious lyrics yuh a go hear me utter' are a phenomenological statement as they speak to a subjective experience that has resulted in a conscious choice to do 'Jah works'. No longer is it acceptable for deejays just to chat anything that comes to mind (as will be explored below): their contributions must speak to the reality of life in the UK, exposing the crowdah-people[11] to forms of knowledge that are both informed and transcendental. Hence doing Jah works means speaking truth to power, whilst exemplifying Garvey's notion that 'The white man's propaganda has made him the master of the world, and all those who have come in contact with it and accepted it have become his slaves' (Garvey, cited in Martin, 1976, p 89). Hence:

> Living in babylon as a black man,
> All me face is racialism,
> When mi weak dem seh dat me strong,
> When mi right dem seh dat me wrong,
> Tru mi no check fi politician,
> Noh care who win di election,[12]
> Pon di mike mi please everyone,
> Flashing down style and fashion.
>
> (Papa Levi, Ghetto-tone Sound System, Blues Dance (house party), London, March 1983)

Similarly, Papa Benji, a deejay from the West London sound system Diamonds The Girls Best Friend, suggests:

> Me born ah England, me know me black me nar seh me British,
> cau to some of de politician black man don't exist,
> me nuh care bout de liberal, tory or socialist,
> cau long time now blackman we ah fight prejudice,
> through some live good in them neighbourhood them lack awareness.
>
> (Papa Benji, Diamonds The Girls Best Friend Sound System, Club Willows, London, August 1984)

The above observations from these lyricists challenge the manner in which the influence of Rastafari and Garveyism were widely regarded as merely 'escapist', as advocated by social commentators who argued, 'Garvey was not interested in

10 A form of pan-African black nationalism inspired by the social, cultural, economic and political policies of the Jamaican Marcus Garvey, who founded the 'Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica – African Communities League' (UNIA-ACL). In 1916 he moved to Harlem, New York and the organisation became a global entity with 'Africa for the Africans' and 'Race First' as central points of its ideology. By 1919 the UNIA-ACL had over 30 branches with over 2 million members worldwide.

11 The amassed live audience who not only listen to the music but also partake in antiphonic exchanges with the deejay performance.

12 The 1983 General Election in the UK, won by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party.

modifications of the present society but sought only one objective: the return of black peoples to Africa' (Cashmore, 1979, p. 19). This interpretation runs counter to Levi's and Benji's suggestion that until black people in the UK 'close ranks' and reappraise the reality of their oppressed social status, from their own racial and cultural perspective, they will continuously be politically neutered within the open (white) society. Hence:

> I am pro Black in my thinking, in my actions and I try my best to support my own people, you know. It is not that I am opposing any other nation, but I feel that I must stand for my own first and then if I am able to, I will stretch out my hand to help others, but self first. So first and foremost Papa Levi sees himself as an African descendant, not a European, even though I was born here in this part of the world. I see myself as an African stolen from abroad, you know (Papa Levi, cited in Eden, 2012 [n.p.]).

The onus is therefore firmly placed on black people to rediscover their African heritage, to counter the 'white lies' that rob them of a knowledge of self, because 'me nuh care bout de liberal, tory or socialist | cau long time now blackman we ah fight prejudice'. Thus the spaces and places where this counterargument could be heard were where the deejays knew that their role was 'pon di mike mi please everyone | flashing down style and fashion' within the black community. Obviously, then, the inspiration these black youths received from Rastafari, who preached self-empowerment as biblical and Garveyite philosophies, as well as the alternative politics of Minister Louis Farrakhan,[13] expressed among other things the need for black people to be more pragmatic in their dealings with white society. Indeed, Farrakhan had a profound influence on black youth in the UK during this moment, including on Papa Levi's lyricism, exemplified in the highly controversial song 'Ram Jam Capitalism' (1986), in which Papa Levi argued:

> **Spoken intro:** I dare any MC in this whole wide world to chat ah lyric, such as this.
> **Chorus:** Ram Jam Capitalism, Papa Levi with chi Ram Jam capitalism, we cufn man, Ram Jam Capitalism, Papa Levi with chi Ram Jam Capitalism, well hear me man.
> Deejaying:
> Certain Deejay love fi boost rob an gaan,
> I Papa Levi am not one,
> the little baldhead Caucasian who believe him ah don,
> practise everyday fi talk Jamaican,
> ah bade aafah artist an musician,
> seh in ah Jamaica an England,
> all the money weh him skank him buy house an land,
> ungle [only] conscious people understand,

13 Louis Farrakhan is the African American leader of the Nation of Islam (NOI) who are commonly regarded as a black nationalist group, founded by the former NOI leader Elijah Muhammad, 4 July 1930 in Detroit, Michigan.

> rob an gaan ah deal with exploitation …
> The bwoy ah put himself in ah the position,
> fi capitalise aafah the black nation,
> cau who support Reggae? Nuh we same one,
> it coming like we brainbox nah function …
> Seh wah we need now is organisation,
> an conscious man like Louis Farrakan,
> fi tek control of the situation,
> an run-out the leeches like rob an gaan,
> an all ah the puppet pon string musician.
>
> (Papa Levi, cited in Henry, 2006, pp. 227–8)[14]

This author has dealt with this song and its impact on the reggae world in great depth (Henry, 2006), but what is telling is that Papa Levi begins the track with a challenge: 'I dare any MC in this whole wide world to chat ah lyric, such as this'. The challenge is recognition of the global reach of reggae music and how its potent voice draws on current as well as historical narratives in a pragmatic way to confront myriad forms of black exploitation. It is this notion of being more pragmatic that led to a reformulation of what it meant to be black in Britain, which was missed by many who failed to overstand the profundity of doing Jah works, works premised on the idea that 'we're not preaching to go out and kill anybody, we're just preaching about the injustices and trying to right certain wrongs that were done to Africans by racist Europeans' (Macka B, cited in Henry, 2006, p. 235).[15] For Macka B his mission as a deejay is simply:

> Me doing my little bit to help my people cau every time you hear a word it conjures up an image, therefore my mission is to fashion my words in a way that reflects the plight of the Afrikan and doesn't reinforce the negativity that is associated with the Motherland. If you look at the world and look for the poorest people, invariably they will be black, so my lyrics are like a stepping stone to help us get back to where we once were and Reggae music is the vehicle to carry the message (Macka B, cited in Henry 2006, pp. 168–9).

By suggesting that 'Reggae music is the vehicle to carry the message', Macka B demonstrates the relationship between the performer and the audience and the types of reasoning that are disseminated within the culture. He clearly recognises that people tune in to his lyrics to be uplifted/enlightened because he speaks to the types of problems black people encounter in a racist society. His 'message' is therefore 'consciously' constructed in a manner that is both easily digested and informative, the provider of the 'stepping stone' black people require to 'get back to where we once were'. Yet what is of even more significance is his mentioning of the associative power of words and their ability to 'conjure up images', thereby demonstrating how crucial the notion of overstanding original

14 Lyrics transcribed by the author, but otherwise unpublished.

15 Original source: recorded interview at Ariwa Studios, London, 8 April 1999.

wordplay, 'my lyrics', is within the culture, a topic which will be dealt with in the next section.

While nuff ah right and rahbit; we write and arrange

> Dancehall pirate ah dem deh mi fraid ah, tief San lyrics gwaan like originator, so when mi ah talk it them ah call mi imitator, when him talk it dem ah seh dat him greater (Papa San, cited in Henry, 2006, p. 184).
>
> Old pirates yes they rob I, yes they thief a-way my lyrics, run gaan ah studio, an put them pon plastic (Asher Senator, cited in Henry, 2006, p. 215).

The cultural sensibilities that allow the community to recognise a person who has created lyrics, as opposed to being a 'dancehall pirate' whom Papa San 'fraid ah', are similarly used to determine the merit of the deejay that is performing in the dancehall. Yet unlike in everyday interactions, when naturally occurring speech is utilised to ensure that effective communication is achieved and maintained, the deejay has to create a dialogue that makes sense in the present to a wider community of listeners while being able to entertain through original wordplay. The point is that whilst deejaying, words, sounds and gestures, the 'illocutionary' act, ensure that a meaningful dialogic exchange takes place between audience and the performer, who provides 'a stepping stone to help us get back to where we once were', according to Macka B. Thus the language used, patwa, was more than just Jamaican language, it was the language of the black experience in Britain, containing myriad words and phrases drawn from this crucible of black cultural knowledge. A form of black cultural knowledge that has antiphony at its core, because there is no physical distance in African musical cultures between audience and performer (Gilroy, 1987; Back, 1987, 1996; Stolzoff, 2000; Bradley, 2001; Liverpool, 2001; Henry, 2006). This usage of call and response, led through the mouth of the modern-day *griot* or *jali*, enables the community vicariously to voice their opinions, representing a functionally expressive part of a greater artistic whole. To embellish this point, the British deejay Culture Mark states:

> I first picked up the microphone in 1979 at the age of 10 years old at my cousin Wingey's house. Her husband was proper into sound tapes and I was always listening to the likes of Johnny Ringo, Lone Ranger, General Echo, Welton Ire, Jah Thomas, Buru Banton and many more.
>
> One of the Lyrics I used to chat back then (1981), which was a call and response song, was called Free Africa:
>
> If it's the truth Culture ah talk shout out free Africa,
> from poverty come mek we free Africa,
> from brutality come mek we free Africa,
> Africa ah we country come mek we free Africa,
> all gang and posse come mek we free Africa,

> Eddie Grant sing ah song name Give me Hope Joanna,
> nuff respect to Eddie Grant cause that deh song ah seller,
> but one record is not enough we want something more stronger,
> like a massive army of ragamuffin solider,
> nuff aeroplane, nuff submarine, nuff ship in ah di water,
> meck we fill them up of ragamuffin solider,
> tek one trip down to south Africa,
> fi sort out the bwoy weh dem call Botha.
>
> (Culture Mark, 2016)[16]

Hence consideration should be given to the notion that mass communication is achieved with the audience recognising the 'glocal' nature of language usage that has tangible links to various African 'oral traditions'. In this case antiphonic exchanges are fused with Europe's 'New World' polyglot cultures and utilised to deal with racial oppression in our endeavours to 'free Africa'. More importantly, Culture Mark further suggests that his love of reggae and deejaying, and the messages contained therein, were key factors in his continued social, cultural, political and Africentric development:

In 2007 my wife and I started our organisation called 'Black History Studies' and our mission statement is 'Educating the community to educate themselves'. We teach Black History and Black Studies, so from back then until now I have been informing the masses about our condition as a people all around the globe and recently recorded this tune, which was released in 2017 for our tenth anniversary:

> Black History studies, knowledge is our wealth,
> educating the community to educate themselves
> we're doing what we can to rebuild our nation,
> www.blackhistorystudies.com.
> We come fi tell you about ya history,
> fi make sure it doesn't remain ah mystery,
> and anything they have hidden we will try to reveal,
> no more legacies will we allow them to steal.
>
> (Culture Mark, 2016)[17]

This is a crucial point for us to consider because Culture Mark's narrative speaks to the transcendental nature of reggae musical culture, that which enables its conscious participants to continue the works, in line with the ongoing struggles for African liberation, across the diaspora. This point is endorsed by Veal, who suggests: '[T]he hybridized redeployment of European musical traits in an Africanized musical agenda is encoded with the self-determination at the heart of the nationalist and postcolonial projects' (Veal, 2007, p. 16).

The suggestion is that at the centre of this language usage is the promotion of a 'black aesthetic' to encourage an appreciation of the validity of a form of creativity and artistic expression which is in direct contrast to the 'European aesthetic' which dictated social, racial, cultural and political worth. Thus the

expression of group values, beliefs and consciousness, 'hybridised redeployment', through deejay lyricism is related to the position of the performer, whose ideas and beliefs are transmitted as a 'natural' counter to the dominant culture. That is why an 'Africanised musical agenda' must encode/promote a black aesthetic because 'beauty' is seldom in the 'eye of the beholder'. Rather, it is more often than not determined through the eye of the controller, in this sense as a by-product of the way black personalities are packaged, re-packaged and 'sold' to the British public, which is intrinsically linked to the problem of black 'acceptance' in the wider society. Consequently, 'postcolonial projects' in this sense are complicated by the fact that the language of 'acceptable' communication is standard English, that which is rejected by the deejay who directly challenges the 'white' aesthetic that underpins it. In fact, according to reggae deejay Reds: 'I always made sure that my lyrics reflected London themes, so that anyone who lived in London would instantly appreciate what I was dropping was original, whether it was what I said or just the way I said it. Like in one lyric I talked about driving me jam-jar [car] fi goh check me spar, down the frog an toad [road] before the dance overload' (Reds, cited in Henry, 2006, p. 191).[18] However, locked within these types of cultural expression of London themes is a wariness towards those on the outside who want to crossover and come inside during moments of border crossing with the white world. The wariness is heightened because of the reality of white appropriation and misrepresentation of black cultural forms, so the racialised 'other' is found to operate out of a hermeneutic of suspicion when dealing with white 'acceptance'. For instance, according to Papa Benji:

> Bredrin, we were educated in a certain way to make us think a certain way, so it mek good sense to think that the white people who hate us are victims as well. In fact in 1982 I worked in the private sector as a draughtsman and this white boy, Barry Jones, said to me, 'all you niggers should go to the Falklands first. Yeh they should out you lot first as you shouldn't fucking be here.' I am not really into fighting but this rankled me as I thought if I was in the wrong place he would have done me something. The next thing I knew we ended up fighting on the floor. I got the sack for that and I honestly don't know what happened to him, but I know that when I started to deejay these were the things I would chat about, what it's like to be hated in your own, ha ha, country (Papa Benji, cited in Henry, 2006, p. 134).[19]

Crucially, it is Benji's observation as to how we are 'educated' in the wider society to view alterity as problematic, even though we are speaking of individuals and communities that are subject to the same acculturation processes in the wider public arena. The point is that if Benji was Jamaican with an accent you could in some ways understand Barry Jones's reaction, as the differences,

18 Original source: recorded interview, MCS recording studio, Kent, 18 March 1999.

19 Diamonds The Girls Best Friend Sound System, Club Willows, London, August 1984.

while racialised, would also be linguistically evident. Yet this is not the case here, as for this racist the statement 'you shouldn't fucking be here' makes his position on this matter plain, while at the same time reminding Benji that shared language and culture are not enough to be 'accepted' in the country of your birth. Unsurprisingly, then, 'blacks and whites assume they are operating according to identical speech and cultural conventions and that these are the conventions the socially dominant white group has established as standard' (Kochman, 1981, p. 8). However, the said notions of identical speech and cultural conventions are ideologically based, which means these notions are subject to what we may believe is our own personal view or perspective, but our perceptions are influenced by our position within the ideology, which suggests the following response: 'The task of importance must be to construct a model or a framework that can deal with culture both as "becoming" and as "being": both as an evolution from a given cultural base, however much transformed, and as a creative response to and structural component of the social context' (Alleyne, 1988, p. 5).

The utilisation of other types of speech/language, especially the 'island talk' from the Caribbean, and British urban dialects like 'cockney' or 'Brummie', is an ultimate marker of difference from white society and perhaps the greatest claim for originality within the 'social context'. Therefore, no matter how much 'sharing' there is in the realm of language usage with white society, acknowledging the strengths of the stark differences between a black and a white mind-set and mentality is crucial to overstanding why 'acceptance' was sought amongst 'your own'. This is the reason why, especially as 'a creative response' in urban London, there was a proliferation of Cockney phraseology in both the deejay's written accounts, as well as during those moments of spontaneity as stated by Reds. Yet at their core was a critique of white racism, oftentimes in the 'common tongue' that now represented a morphing of various languages/vernaculars, creating novel ways of speaking that cannot be reduced to mere 'black talk' or 'London English'.[20] Furthermore, that this is the key stage in the deejay's development is given currency by the fact that within the wider black community people who have the 'gift of the gab', highly proficient orators, are said to have 'lyrics'. On Sound Systems such performers became known by the title of a 'lyric banton',[21] a title first associated with the Jamaican deejay Burro Banton and several others since that time who chatted original lyrics 'non-stop'. Such performers are the antithesis of Trevor Natch's[22] perspective as for him those who 'right an rahbit' are unable to 'write an arrange', which means they lack the natural skill or ability to be little more than 'extemporisers'

20 See Sebba (1993) for an interesting take on this theme.

21 See Henry (2006), chapter 5, for a more comprehensive take on what it means to be a lyrics banton.

22 Trevor Natch (deceased) was a deejay on West London's Diamonds The Girls Best Friend Sound System.

(Henriques, 2011, p. 188). In contrast, the iconographic importance of what it meant within the culture to be regarded as a lyric banton is captured in the following extract:

> Me ah the lyrics banton me no need no introduction,
> well ichi ni san is how them count in Japan,
> but hear me, fling weh the vocal make me ride the version,
> say people gather round me have the mic in ah me hand,
> say all pirate activate you walkman,
> and listen Lezlee Lyrix in origination,
> I gwine tell you why them call me the lyrics banton,
> cos me have the lyrics match any version,
> it could ah buck like bronco, wild like stallion,
> Lezlee, sit-down-in-the-saddle like a damn horse-man,
> but the difference with me and Willie Carson,
> well him ah use the whip me have the mic in ah me hand,
> me in ah, jockey fashion, me in ah jockey fashion, rihbitt,
> jockey fashion, me in ah jockey fashion,
> But how me ah go pass the gateman?
> Jah man, cause me say how me ah go pass the gateman?
> Well first thing I don't have no cash in ah me hand,
> cos I am Lezlee Lyrix true born lyric banton,
> him look me up and down say 'you no favour mic man,
> say where is the Chaplin, the buckers and the tam?'
> Me tell him 'me no wear them cause me born ah England,
> me dress fi suit me self, me no follow fashion.'
> Him say 'if you ah joke you better pull the other one.'
> Jah man, me give him one demonstration, hear weh me say.
> 'Say Lezlee no pirate, Lezlee no imitate, people appreciate, what I
> originate, some of them ah pirate, live pon dance tape, just like baby live
> pon Cow and Gate!' Ah murder hitch it up bow yah!
>
> (Lezlee Lyrix, cited in Henry, 2012, p. 22–3)[23]

The fact that amplified voices such as this drew on aspects of Jamaican deejay culture that went beyond mere imitation speaks to how these voices traversed virtual spaces and places for decades, long before the popularity of the internet, making their own unique presence known on vinyl and cassettes in alternative public arenas. We therefore need to regard these patterns of behaviour within these spaces as the types of conscious thought and action that produce meaning by being constantly reflective, whilst at the same time future-oriented in an outernational way. To illustrate this point, consider for a moment that the 'gateman' at a dance in Britain failed to recognise the British deejay presence due to the latter's not being suitably attired. This event is telling; and, according to the British deejay Reds, 'people were looking at it from the wrong angle'

23 Lezlee Lyrix, Diamonds The Girls Best Friend Sound System, Club Willows, London, August 1984.

(Henry, 2006, p. 192)[24] because uppermost in the minds of these originators were the lyrical content and rhythmic delivery – unlike, perhaps, the 'external' view of the 'gateman', who ended up having a 'demonstration' of the seismic shift within the culture from a British perspective. Moreover, the 'Chaplin' mentioned in the lyrics above are baggy trousers, 'buckers' are Clarks shoes and the 'tam' is the type of headwear associated with Rastafari, which speaks to how many 'British born deejays … thought you had to act/speak/dress a certain way to be "accepted" as a dancehall performer' (Henry, 2012, pp. 2–3). Unsurprisingly, then, not only did this unique presence in the reggae world disrupt the sensibilities of many within the black communities, it also had a wider, and perhaps equally telling, role to play in countering white racism as: 'Black speech, and refiguring of English and 'White' spaces transmits the power to trouble, re-formulate and re-define Eurocentric patriarchal constructions of a national past and present … it is through the music where Jamaican *patwa* has been best represented and disseminated throughout urban diasporic spaces outside of Jamaica' (Thomlinson, 2013, p. 63). Thomlinson makes known why the excavation of these voices is necessary to overstanding not just the global reach of 'patwa', Jamaican language, but crucially how the local (British/Canadian etc.) dialects take on its usage, and how this became central to black diasporic consciousness. The suggestion is that alterity becomes an organising principle whereby a unified countercultural voice is recognised, far beyond geo-political borders, by partakers in the cultural milieu with liberation at its core. Eurocentric ideas and philosophies are therefore resisted and the sites where that resistance takes place, which are the DNA of Africentric speech and social commentary. These constitute historical narratives that have an African provenance, especially when viewed as an authentic form of transcultural dialogue that manifests across Gilroy's 'Black Atlantic' (1994) as deejay lyricism. Authenticity in the case of the British deejay arguably occurred when performers decided to confront the social, cultural, racial and political issues head on during the early 1980s, whilst striving to be accepted for what they were: speakers of a *patwa* that differed from that spoken by our Jamaican counterparts. Sullivan explains this aspect of the culture through an interview with Sir Coxsone's Blacker Dread, suggesting that 'while Coxone was more like a Jamaican yard sound, Saxon had a different English vibe' (Sullivan, 2014, p. 116). Further, and of equal importance, the Saxon deejay Tippa Irie suggests: 'Saxon deejays began to write their lyrics down because they were becoming longer and longer. We used to pride ourselves on fulling up the riddim. While I was on Sounds like Tubby's before, we just made lyrics up … they were more repetitive in them days, not so much lyrical content, more on the hook' (Sullivan, 2014, p. 117):

24 Original source: personal communication, recorded interview, MCS recording studio, Kent, 18 March 1999.

> Now operator play the music,
> turn the vocal make me chat it,
> let me give them lyrics I've originated,
> nuff bwoy come in ah the dance run up them mouth pon Lezlee Lyrix,
> and it's my lyrics they chat they've incorporated.
>
> (Lezlee Lyrix, cited in Henry, 2012, p. 102)[25]

Tippa Irie explains why deejays had to step up their game and 'come original'; and this shift in emphasis is crucial to any overstanding of the significance of the written and spoken word, where 'extemporising' (Henriques, 2011) for many was no longer good enough. The crowdah-people had an expectation of being not only entertained but also educated/uplifted by lyrics that spoke to a lived reality of everyday life in the UK premised on a black experience. Added to this is the importance of being a composer, evidenced in 'let me give them lyrics I've originated', which unequivocally states that what the listener is about to experience is the product of the deejay's mind. Emphasising this distance between the originator and the pirate or 'incorporator' was expected and naturally enhanced the deejay's standing within the culture, the more so if what was chatted on the mic uplifted culturally, spiritually and politically, filling many significant gaps in their 'education'. Hence the deejay 'voice' is a manifestation of those traditional types of African resistance to European cultural hegemony that recognise why the battle for the African mind must also be fought on the terrain of knowledge-exchanges as forms of education. The suggestion is that British deejay lyricism is an exemplar of the practical nature of a black cultural production which focuses on where alternative world views can be exchanged as historical documents to educate the masses in the language used on the mic, because: 'I remember when I first started chatting an nuff people tell me seh me couldn't last because I was chatting so different, I was chatting about being a black youth in London. Later on me fine out seh nuff of who was saying that was just pirating the Yard-style and once everybody get the tape, yuh done know seh is them who couldn't last' (Champion, cited in Henry, 2006, p. 163).[26] Champion states that during this moment, when certain deejays were being 'rated' for 'their' lyrics, what they were actually doing was mimicking the Jamaican deejays, as is suggested above by Tippa Irie when he explains why the Saxon deejays began to compose their lyrics. For Champion, his detractors were uncritically accepting the pirated re-presentation of Jamaican lyricism as 'authentic', while largely ignoring the content of his rhymes, which related directly to the black experience in London. Champion's position leads us to consider how the process of writing and performing lyrics, in the British context, became accepted as sources of knowledge that allowed the listener to access original perspectives on a lived social reality. However,

25 Lezlee Lyrix, Diamonds The Girls Best Friend Sound System, Club Willows, London, August 1984.

26 Original source: personal communication, telephone interview, London, 21 March 1999.

recognising 'originality' is not always that straightforward when the form is largely associated with Jamaican performers, a perspective that fundamentally argues that reggae music can only be produced in Jamaica by Jamaicans, a point that is further endorsed in the following, where the realisation of the crucial role the original deejay played is evidenced:

> Me and Culture (Smiley) were in the dance and nuff deejays were just chatting Yard-style when we took the mic an started chatting our own ting. First is like them never know weh fi do, you wouldah thought that we came from another planet when all we was chatting was South (London) stuff. Anyway, after we 'juggled' and did a couple of combi's people came round the Set and started to beat down the place. It's funny but Jah know that was the first time I felt, yeh man you can do this ting (Asher Senator cited in Henry, 2006, p. 186).[27]

Asher makes known that the positive reaction of the crowd made him realise that he possessed the skill and ability to deliver original lyrics grounded in a black British experience. This led to Asher establishing himself as one of the conscious originators who were not expected to chat the yard-style, although the culture was dominated by Jamaican performers during this moment. Similarly, Champion gives further insight into this aspect of the culture of 'acceptance' that represented a key moment in the evolution of the British deejay scene:

> When I first took the mic, summer 81, I was round my bredrin's yard and I knew I couldn't sing so me just do ah ting. I had some rhymes that I made up pon spot, you know more humorous dan anything else, but the man them did love it cause I was chatting about what happens out ah-road. To me it was more like when you ah reason an mek two joke, so to me it wasn't a big deal and through me never really hear the Yard-tape too tough them time deh my flavour was different. Little later in October 81 I had a clash with ah deejay on 'Dub Natty' (a local Sound System) an me dust him, cau by this time I had started to build proper lyrics even though me never have nuh name. After me rough him up, which was no big deal cau the bwoy did ah pirate; every-ting was Jamdown this an Jamdown that, so me seh me ah goh show you wah gwaan in ah London. The man them [the audience] did quiet at first an then them start galang[28] bad when me run him out [his opponent ran out of lyrics]. Then them start call me the Champion and you done know how the rest ah it goh, the name just stick (Champion, cited in Henry, 2006, p. 185).[29]

Of crucial importance is the mentioning of the 'silence' Champion encountered, which sums up the collective experience of many British deejays, who were initially greeted with this reaction. The main reasons for this being

27 Original source: personal communication, Code 7 studio, recorded interview, London, 20 February 2006.

28 'Galang' or 'gwaan' means 'go along' or 'carry on'.

29 Original source: personal communication, telephone interview, London, 21 March 1999.

so was the obvious difference in the ways language was used, coupled with the themes being presented, which no longer mirrored a Jamaican world view but a uniquely British one. For many who came to dance halls to hear the yard style this was a shock to their system because what was being expressed differed from the pirated performances that dominated the early reggae dance hall scene. Similarly, Champion's explanation of how the British deejays won over the crowd centres on recognising that we were living in the UK and not in Jamaica. Moreover, by stating that he created his lyrics spontaneously, 'head top',[30] he demonstrates how 'self-reflection is often one of the key characteristics of […] extemporised performance' (Henriques, 2011, p. 188). However, Champion adds, 'I had some rhymes that I made up pon spot', thereby explaining that he also had compositions because 'I had started to build proper lyrics even though me never have nuh name'. Yet it was these 'proper lyrics' by the 'nameless' deejay that were used to 'dust out' the pirate, making known that the expectations within the culture had shifted and the emergent British deejay voice was coming to the fore, a vocal presence that was further established when many British deejays decided to re-create their own experiences in a more representative original voice, realising that 'yeh man you can do this ting'.

Conclusion

Black youth in Britain, by way of the deejay performance, created a living history that challenged their negative depiction across a range of contexts, a factor that was missed by many of the theorists who sought to explain their affiliations to reggae music and Sound System culture. As argued above, an explanation of this perspective is firmly rooted in a lack of knowledge and understanding of the alternative public spaces in which these claims were articulated. The point is that more consideration is needed when 'interpreting' resistant cultures due to the manner in which past experiences are appropriated and passed on in a 'performance' that outwardly masks an inner reality. Moreover, a space was created for alternative ideas of being black/African to be expressed in *patwa*, whereby the conscious, original deejay becomes the 'mouthpiece' for what are arguably outernational 'interpretive communities'. Of equal importance, by using the transcendental voice in this way the deejay continues a tradition of thinking oneself into being which is beyond the hegemonic scope of a dominant, racist society. That is why explanations that did not appreciate what it meant to be scorned and rejected in the land of your birth, constantly being told to 'fuck off back home', were inadequate and misleading. Similarly, a failure to consider why Standard English was rejected and *patwa* was embraced as the language of choice, within certain spaces and places, serves little more than to reinforce the well-documented idea that black youth were 'rebels without a cause'. Yet the profound nature of the 'rhyming skills' and intellectualised rendering of various social, cultural and political events, such as those featured

above, demonstrate the necessity for the inclusion of the 'undocumented' side to any viable discussion of the black-British experience as seen through the lens of deejay culture. Without the inclusion of the significant contributions presented above, a large part of the 'glocal' worth of reggae musical history and Sound System culture will stay hidden and hence the picture will remain incomplete.

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