Word, sound and power: Evaluating Dancehall hypocrisy or sincerity in its critique of Babylon

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Abstract

The peculiar history of Jamaica, the Caribbean and the Americas make for historical clashes that has manifested in diverse ways and through the agency of various mechanisms. When the indigenous peoples of the various New World European adventures were decimated with genocidal policies of deliberate overwork and killings upon disobedience, captured Africans were shipped into these locations to work on plantations as enslaved chattels with no human rights, human dignity and human historical connections to their past. Numerous wars were fought by the indigenous populations, albeit mostly loosing ones and by the enslaved Africans who were not used to such dehumanization. In many instances, these wars led to liberation, as in the case of the Maroons of Jamaica and Haiti, the first liberated republic in the Western Hemisphere. Many insurgences, rebellions and acts of sabotage were engaged in to make the local and absentee European plantation owners suffer losses and feel similar anxieties to the enslaved.

It is the cultural and artistic rebellions, revolutions and repulsion of enslavement, domination and dehumanization that is the subject of this discussion. And for a proper understanding of the issues at stake, we will use the lens of Dancehall, the popular musical genre that evolved in Jamaica, as a mechanism of critique of Babylon, the Biblical symbol of oppression, domination, expropriation and dehumanization of Jews as incorporated in Rastafari religions and scholarship.

The essay will proceed along the following sections, after this Introduction, which is Section 1. Section 2a will examine the “Word, Sound and Power” iconography, with a view to introducing the revolutionary foundations of Jamaican artistic traditions, in historical perspective; while Section 2b will examine “Word, Sound and Power” within the context of Jamaican musical performance. The Third section will examine the genre of Dancehall, its emergence and the place it has occupied in Jamaican culture of resistance and economic empowerment of artistes. The Fourth section will examine the traditions of resistance which have been the basis of art – dance, music, performance, cartoon, etc., primarily using “Blood Money” by Protoje as case study. The fifth section will evaluate the nature of the current Dancehall relative to socio-economic, religious, cultural and international representation. The final section will be a summary or conclusion derived from the discussion.
The methodology employed is critical interrogation of extant literature relating to issues treated, teasing out the philosophical and cultural foundations of relationship between the intersections of Reggae Music, as pioneered by the Wailing Wailers, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer and Bob Marley. The explication of the connections enable us to examine the extent to which contemporary Dance Hall has stayed true and sincere to the founding cultural traditions of protest, consciousness and the extent to which a Peter Tosh could have jettisoned the lucre of money to stand against the gale of oppression, thereby forming their own “Word, Sound, Power” foundational organizations to stand with the people against the forces of human inhumanity to other human beings which racism, plantation slavery, colonialism and oppression constituted in the annals of black humanity.

**Key words:** Dancehall, word, sound, power, sincerity, hypocrisy, blood money, elite, Babylon.
Word, Sound, Power in Historical Perspective

When Peter McIntosh (aka Peter Tosh) parted ways with “The Wailing Wailers”, which included Neville O’Riley Livingston, aka Bunny Wailer, Robert Nesta (aka Bob) Marley and Peter Hubert McIntosh (aka Peter Tosh), he formed the musical band named “Word, Sound and Power” in 1976. An avowed Rastafari, Peter Tosh grew up the hard way, having his parents leave him to the care of relatives in Westmorland and migrating to the rugged ghetto Trench Town in Kingston at the tender age of fifteen. He was a self-taught musician in a way, as he never had any formal musical education apart from watching persons play or sing or perform.

Peter Tosh was key to The Wailers, which he probably so named, to show how it was possible to represent the pains of black existence in Babylon through a mournful expression of feelings vocally. He was the epitome of true resistance to oppression, even to the end, as he died violently in the hands of alleged extortionists who wanted money after invading his home while he said he had no money at home to the disbelief of the thugs. What amazes one about the life and demise of Peter McIntosh (Tosh) is his commitment to his belief that the most critical component of one’s being is one’s voice; this was manifested in the title of the band he formed with his compatriots, the Wailing Wailers and thereafter the band that he formed – Word, Sound and Power.

The Rastafari believed in meditation and reasonings, using the human endowed capacity to apprehend reality. In disdainful intellectual insurgency and mockery, they would reverse or obverse the various enslaving concepts of Babylonian (that is, Western, Imperialist, Colonizing, Subjugating, Capitalist and Hegemonic) education, economics, politics, culture, etc., literally standing these concepts on their head: understand becomes “overstand”, coming back becomes “soon forward”, etc.

In essence, “Word, Sound and Power” are three concepts which interact and intersect to show the mystical and mythological connections between human creative genius, capacity for self-expression and ability to own reality, conserve reality, destroy and build reality in whatever ways humans may choose. Once that capacity is taken from one, once agency is denied, as happened to chattel slaves and colonized persons in the non-spaces of the Americas and Africa, what remains is a shell, and in many instances worse than shells, as the apparent human remains are totally denuded of humanity. And for Peter Tosh, the break with the Wailers was not unconnected with the loss of “Wailing” as the tool for individuality and identity construction, whereby the Record Label, the Producer, became the medium through which the word and the sound were bent to suit the audience in the name of pecuniary success. Peter Tosh could not fathom how success could cloud the message to the point of spiritual meaninglessness, harking back to another enslavement worse than chattel slavery: mental slavery.

After forming the “Word, Sound and Power” band in 1976, Peter Tosh went on to record such powerful musical collection that were globally relevant for the downtrodden of the world, and which spoke truth to power in his inimitable way. These included “Legalize It” (about the use of Rastafari Herbs or Ganja or Indian Hemp, “Equal Rights”, “Get Up, Stand Up”, “Mystic
Man”, “Wanted Dead and Alive”, “Mama Africa” and “No Nuclear War”. The last was probably the most dangerous as it spoke directly to the standoff between USA and USSR, with Cuba in the Caribbean as the potential midwife of the Armageddon which could have obliterated the Caribbean space and reduced the world into rubble in short order. The issue raised in the formation of “Word, Sound and Power” is greater than just the name of a musical band; it related to the belief that human beings are capable of using the word to communicate epistemologies of cognitive meaning and ontologies personal and group awareness, and through it produce sounds in variety of ways which transcend the limitations of cultural values to universalities of international media, and through the signification of word and sound, attain communication control, indeed, procure power over individuals, groups, spaces and places. This directly derives from the theology of the Rastafari, which incidentally and sadly is predicated on the Jewish Bible, a tool of global oppression and control of subaltern peoples of the world in no small measure. Through the agency of “words”, producing “sounds”, the conscious individual or group is able to attain the power of rupturing and destabilizing the oppressive controls of Babylon. This was the mantra of Peter Tosh from his early days to his very end – death through the violence of hoodlums who thought his hard-earned monies must be shared with them, even while he protested that he had no money at home.

**Word, Sound and Power in Contemporary Jamaican Musical Context**

The site of Dancehall Rastafari music is a curious one, because it connects Rastafari consciousness, manifested in Reggae music, with the popular style of Dancehall music. In this place of Dancehall culture, the Rastafari (the artistes who profess to be Rastafari) refashions art as a means of expressing elements of Rastafari protest traditions against the subjection of black people in colonial and post-colonial (nominal independence times). But the question that begs for serious consideration remains, does it maintain its rebellious structure? In other words, true to the traditions of Rastafari refusal to bow to the agents and instruments of oppression, including even opting out of the educational structures of Jamaica up to a period of time, does Dancehall remain committed to the use of “Word and Sound” to attain “Power” against oppression, or is it a means of negotiating for resources and joining in the oppression of the hapless Jamaican poor?

Formulated in those words, it is clear that whereas Rastafari remained a global phenomenon of protest that had meaning, voice and tenacity in the rejection of human subjugation of other humans in the form of complete material and spiritual dispossession, the inheritors of this tradition, in the form of Dancehall seem to have compromised principles, ideologies and spiritualities in order to attain global stardom, material wealth and cultural dislocation of the genuine struggles of post-plantation, colonial and post-colonial Caribbean, the Americas and continental Africa.

In the *Gleaner* newspaper article, “Is there Still Rebel Music”, Clyde McKenzie (July 10, 2011) commented on the structural power of musical representation in Jamaica popular musical space. According to him,
Marley defined himself as a soul rebel, a man who was definitely against the status quo and inequalities in the power structure. … if you are talking about people who speak truth to power in these ways we may have a paucity, who challenge the status quo in any substantial way. Most of these artists today are more concerned with their financial well-being and will not act in any way to jeopardize that.

What, for example, is the key difference between the song “Blood Money” by Protoje and its predecessors by Peter Tosh and those by The Wailing Wailers? Certainly, it comments on the status quo, highlighting recent inequality in the legal responses to criminal acts by the poor and the rich/politically connected persons through the symbolic luxury of the F6 vehicle. Every word of the song echoed familiar cultural symbolic signs and garnered the immediate popular reception of the public, such as the media houses – radio stations, television stations – which played the song feverishly. Beside its sweet melody, visual representation of social violence by those in authority, the poignant question begging for answer is, how has the song reflected or mirror the Rastafari legacy of word, sound and power? In other words, to what extent has the song been true to the consciousness that it espouses? Does the stringing of lyrics together on the borderline of consciousness constitute intersectional traversing of the morally and culturally imbued traditions of genuine Rastafari disengagement with Babylon, to protest and detest the general oppressive yoke that burdens the descendants of the plantation with poverty and crime?

The key difference between Rastafari site and other sub-categories in the Dancehall space can be located in the consciousness causation of rebel music, that uses the epistemological and ontological force of word, sound and power to wrought lasting tropes to contest the moral bankruptcy of global capitalism and their constantly chameleonlike mutations and intransigence in the global predatory practices of keeping the descendants of plantation slavery and colonialism in perpetual subjection. Thus, the lyrics of these songs have a reputation inherited from Rastafari Reggae to engage with the word. The word, in this space of Rastafari musical consciousness in reggae as well as in Dancehall space, is not merely aural – it carries the locution power of messaging and representing agency, encoding performative agency. It contrives to stand in that gap where a song needs to present its object not only in symbolic index and iconic signs, but also in instigating powerful responses from the audience and those to which the word and sound are directed.

Listening to the song “Blood Money”, besides its familiar symbolic signs, what response does it inspire in the listener? According to Barry Chevanness, in Rastafari Roots and Ideology (1994, 227), Rastafari have a slogan, and it is “Word, sound and power”, a trinity. To them the word is both sound and power. It is sound not only because its effect is aural, but also because it is capable of quality, capable of being “sweet”, of thrilling the hearer, and of evoking reflection and responsive action in the audience. We should not lose sight of the fact that one of the things prohibited on the plantation in the Americas was the use of sound, especially the use of talking drums and other musical instruments which are capable of being utilized to communicate ideas, instructions and messages across expanses of plantation boundaries. It was recognized that aesthetically attuned Africans are capable of using various codes, instruments and creative
devises to communicate across large tracts of space; and the plantation owners, being Europeans who have no innate capacity to understand rhythm and such things, were in the dark as to what the forcibly enslaved Africans were saying with the use of these devices. So, the only practical thing for the plantation owners to do was commit another terrible crime against the enslaved Africans, take away their voice – thereby curtailing their “Word, Sound and Power”.

It is power because it can inspire responses such as fear or anger or violence or love or submission or indifference. Songs and lyrics produced from the aesthetic fountain of Rastafari consciousness, often referred to as “conscious lyrics”, of the type by Peter Tosh, The Wailing Wailers, and utilized by Protoje, and similar genres such as are emanating from Dancehall Rastafari cultural sites, represent somatic, semantic and liminal signs that does not merely entertain, describe or gloss about popular issues; the power of words in this gene of musical lyrics have the force to evoke deep reaction from the listener, whether “fear, anger or submission”.

Ebo (2018) noted that the word in African ontology is more than mere expression of sounds. It is a being which is intra-mental and extra-mental. This alludes to the nature of word as the carrier of meaning, which in its potency it leads to agency and consequences. The relation of inner and external spaces, for the Caribbean mind, according to Nettleford, in “The Battle for Space,” conjures many ideas,

The dichotomy between his inner space and outer space is a function of his alienation, his alkanized consciousness, of a disparateness of elements which go to make the human whole, of an impotence that renders him all but totally out of control of his own destiny. The all-pervasive nature of this marginalization-the denial to the individual man and woman of the harmonization of inner and outer-space—is manifest in myriad and mutually reinforcing but dichotomous and discrete phenomena in social relationship (2013, 286).

The trajectory of Dancehall Rastafari space propels the movement of word, sound and power to always dilate on current issues that faces the society and especially the marginalized people, even at great risk to the artistes, as was common experience for The Wailing Wailers and Peter Tosh who was arrested for various farcical offences. For a long period of time, because of a variety of reasons, of which the conscious nature of content was paramount, Reggae music was not accorded the recognition it deserved in Jamaica, and in some instances, some of the songs were proscribed or censored.

The question which arise from this scenario is: How does Rastafari belief in “Word, Sound and Power”, which was the emblem of Peter Tosh’s musical band, a rebel iconography? And in recent times to what extent has the mutations of Rastafari Reggae evolved and expounded outside the site of Reggae music and into the Dancehall space? To what extent has the mutation retained fidelity to the protest ideology of its origin? Is Dancehall version of Reggae a poor and fake parody of its original parent – Rastafari Reggae?

There is no doubt that, for instance, the song “Blood Money” alludes to a representation of Rastafari consciousness and, in other words, on the face of it, that is emblematic of rebel music. There is no doubt that it is a genius of a popular song that recasts and chronicles the
corrupt system that elites and the state functionaries and their collaborators violently practice to the detriment of the entire society but especially the poor and vulnerable members of society. But to what extent does the song represent Rastafari movement and consciousness encapsulated in the ideological tropes of “Word, Sound, Power”?

According to Paulo Freire (1970), ‘word’ includes love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking as it is used to engage in a dialogue; it has the power to transform reality. In his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), Freire theorizes the movement of word, sound and power, which in my view can be seen as having a close similarity to how it is comparatively used in Rastafari reasonings concerning the relational power and constructive discourse of this global south philosophy in the symbolism of communication. Freire claims that, “…there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world” (1970, 87).

He explains praxis as the equation of word being equivalent to work, which represents the essence of action and reflection. One can deduce that the power of ‘word’ correlates the bipolar relations of cognitive reflection on issues and material or physical movement or action about those issues. But also, he conceives that words can be empty; this is profound insight, because it suggests that not all words are genuine and can generate the movement of call and response, sound and power as engraved in Rastafari slogan or trinity. Paulo Freire explains that,

…an unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well: and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienating blah. It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action (1970, 87).

The power relation of word in rebel music located within the Dancehall space under the category of Rastafari has the legacy to enforce Rastafari slogan of word, sound and power. And as Freire annotated clearly, a word can be true or empty, can have signification or mere utterance or sound. In its truth there are the dialectic relations of motion or reflection and action, while in its emptiness it mirrors verbalism. When we examine contemporary Dancehall music and the song “Blood Money” later on, we would explicate whether it is a Rastafari Dancehall music that imitates the representation of conscious rebel music, giving voice to the voiceless, and therefore not mere meaningless locutory expressions without the intersectional authorial power that goes with sound, or whether it is empty verbalism which is devoted to attention seeking and festering the personal nest of the artiste at the expense of community or group emancipation.

Freire also noted that “human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false word, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist humanly is to name the world, to change it” (1970, 88). On the one hand, it seems that the aesthetic of the words which seek to describe corruption and decadence as political and social phenomena is in itself a true word. At every general election cycle, the politician describes the social misfortune of the marginalized in terms of access to such basic necessities for modern
existence such as health, education and housing. Rebel music critiques the corruption of the authority and social misfortune of the marginalized people which such leadership deficit occasion. Protoje’s song, “Blood Money” presents in musical form which critiques the corruption of authority very skillfully, with unquestionable rhythm and unforgettable lyrics. But, on the other hand, if rebel music stops at retelling lived experiences, without calling for active response and without directing its listeners to reflect and act, then its cultural representation would be no more than an abuse of word, sound and power trinity.

In light of this, McKenzie noted that current musicians will give voice to words, but have no action, and word without action are no more than empty verbalism. The production of songs that critique Babylon seem to operate within the generic consciousness within the context of Rastafari reasoning and seem to call for the overthrow the pedagogy of oppression approach proposed by Brazilian Paulo Freire, often constituting a repudiation of ideological violence, as stated by Althusser and the representation of sign understood by Stuart Hall and Charles Pierce as well as in the theory of how space is reproduced as espoused by Lefebvre and Foucault. The challenge is whether Dancehall music is appropriating Reggae and Rastafari traditions for the selfish financial gain of artists who appear to mimic the protest ideology, philosophy and theology of genuine Reggae tradition. Should this last scenario be the case, it would tragedy of unimaginable proportions for the community of poor, vulnerable and voiceless subalterns.

There is no doubt that a lot of the Dancehall humanist songs are in the production space of Jamaica popular music genre. But it would seem that Dancehall is probably no more than a populist cover, in the sense of commercial or mass production site for pure financial reward, which is aimed at scamming the masses of the people and global consumers of Jamaican creativity. The place of the Dancehall humanist songs is similar to nostalgic reggae music with two aspects. First, the production of space is similar or same with Dancehall popular rhythms. Secondly, the critique shows that Dancehalls in probably no more than a system that mirrors pure mimicry with no ethical or ideological foundations to buffer it from shocks such as endured to become a global phenomenon.

Freire describe the dominant elites constantly contriving processes of influencing passivity and fear for freedom in the dominated by means of encroaching on their consciousness with slogans. Freire calls on the humanist to respond to those slogans by “presenting the oppressors slogans as a problem, helps the oppressed to ejects those slogans from within themselves…. The task of the humanist is to see that the oppressed become aware of the fact that as dual beings, housing the oppressors within themselves, they cannot be truly human” (1970, 88).

**Defining dancehall**

It is a good idea to understand the space and place of Dancehall music or Dancehall culture; this is especially important when the popular song “Blood Money” is only one representation or sign of dancehall music subcategories that is being used to illustrate the
question of sincerity/honesty or insincerity/dishonesty of the idea of artiste musical rebellion or critique of social ills in Jamaica or in any other societies. Even though we use the label “Dancehall” as medium of critique to appreciate sincerity or insincerity of musical tropes against the system, we recognize that there are several categories of Dancehall music. Instead of focusing the research on Dancehall music generally, which would be, in its very essence, commodiously extravagant and disorientated, the essay will view and concentrate on only one specific site of Dancehall music. Consequently, our effort here will not examine all categories of dancehall music and culture, but focus on the power relations of Projoe’s song, “Blood Money” within the philosophical, epistemological and ontological tradition of Rastafari Dancehall site.

Firstly, let us get a closer understanding of the term and culture of the word Dancehall. According to Stanley-Niaah in Dancehall From Slave Ship to Ghetto (2010, 1), dancehall representation in Jamaica popular music and cultural space is synonymous to the Caribbean island history and culture. She explains this propinquity by stating that “Dancehall is synonymous with Jamaica. It’s very identity is reflective of Jamaica’s motto, “out of many one people, unifying yet divisive and exclusionary.” Hope (2006), in Inna di Dancehall, Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica, elucidated among other essentials the definition of dancehall and its sub categorical sites, such as the popular music and cultural space and place in Jamaica’s culture.

According to Hope, “… the music labeled “dancehall” occupies a late-twentieth-century cultural, political, ideological and economic space in Jamaica and has definite point of disjuncture with preceding manifestations of popular Jamaica music culture” (2006, 27). The representation of dancehall, Stanley-Niaah signifies “an open-ended enactment of self and community or area. It is about the stylization of everyday life, a performance through the actions of the body” (2010, 116).

Within the popular music and cultural space, the label ‘Dancehall’ correlates with many sites; however, in order to understand the historical position or the place of dancehall, Hope said that, “In short, the label “dancehall” must remain positioned in and affixed to this late twentieth century space in Jamaican popular music and culture” (2006, 27). Furthermore, Hope describes Dancehall cultural space as, “… a space for the cultural creation and dissemination of symbols and ideologies that reflect and legitimize the lived realities of its adherents, particularly those from the inner cities of Jamaica” (2006, 27). This space provides, according to Stanely-Niaah, “process and means of connecting to a higher self, that which is elevated beyond the drudgery of survival. It also provides a mans through which patrons, especially marginalized youth within the Jamaican lower class, can connect with their communities” (2010, 116). This connection with the community is quite relevant to the Dancehall space; it is a connection that dancehall music uses, approximates, evaluates, call, response, elevation and critique, based in relation to site of the songs, events and personhood of the performer and the patrons.
Some of the key relations or elements of Dancehall, from Hope’s description of Dancehall culture, are the reflective engagement with spatiality and lived experiences and the legitimacy of the beliefs and practices of the marginalized people in the inner city communities. She classified these cultural practices as an “… outline some categories or typologies of heterogeneous actors (affectors and affectees) who operate within dancehall culture” (2006, 28). These affectors and affectees are both co-creators and co-consumers of the music and culture in Jamaica’s Dancehall space. Hope explains that,

I use the two broad terms “affectors” and “affectees” to outline the heterogenous nature of the actors within dancehall culture… Affectors are primarily creators of dancehall culture and affectees are primarily consumers of dancehall culture. However, because of the symbiotic nature of popular culture in general, and dancehall culture in particular, many affectors and affectees are simultaneously creators and consumers (2006, 28). In discussing these ideas further, Hope enunciates that “the composite categories or typologies of affectors that I have identified are songs creators, visual creators and deejays” (2006, 29). Hope claims that Deejays/DJs are engaged in the oral performance of dancehall music, include several subcategories, a few of which are enumerated as follows:

Sub-categories of DJs

1. Girls dem deejays
2. Slackness deejays
3. Bad-man deejays
4. Rastafari deejays
5. All-rounder deejays (2006, 31).

The particular interest of the research paper is the power relation from the songs produced by Dancehall Deejays under the Rastafari category. As was noted earlier, our interest is not concerned with all the Dancehall Deejays subcategories or all the popular Rastafari Deejays themselves. Rather, this examination seeks to concentrate on the lyrics of popular Rastafari Deejay, Protoje within the context of the aesthetics of word, sound and power in relation to the song he has produced, exemplified in “Blood Money” that sought to critically upbraided, condemn and evaluate the social and political system of Jamaica and the Caribbean; that is, the corrupt state apparatus, which Rastafari in other words describe as Babylon. The song that is textually analyzed in the paper are “Blood Money”, but we will also pay attention to another one, “Ardent”, by Buju Banton, even though we have only discussed “Blood Money” up to now. Including Buju Banton is important to our analysis, in order to avoid the charge that probably Protoje does not represent enough the genre that is the focus of attention in our discussion.

A careful further understanding of Rastafari deejay category and the impression of the type of songs they intended to produce was briefly identified by Donna Hope as follows, A Rastafari deejay overtly subscribes to the religious ideology and world view of Rastafari. This religious orientation is usually reflected in the content of the majority of
the songs which he or she performs and disseminates, the physical appearance of the subject (including his or her wearing of dreadlocks and Rastafari regalia) and the lifestyle of the deejay (2006, 32).

Consequently, songs that are produced in the dancehall Rastafari genre or site embodies critical consciousness, which does not necessarily reproduce Rastafari religion. However, the songs in this site profess to reflect and act the semantic relations of word, sound and power. Hope admitted that, “… while this category of deejay plays an important role in dancehall music and culture and is mentioned throughout this work, the category will not be discussed in great detail” (2006, 32). However, this research paper seeks to evaluate the power relation of this particular site of appropriation of Rastafari mystique, values, religions and political leanings to pursue what seemingly is only personal agenda of self-enrichment.

**Blood Money and Rastafari Consciousness**

It will come as no surprise that in this post-colonial era the struggle faced by many Afro-Caribbean people seemingly continue to range from social injustice to the relation of poverty demonstrated by lack of money, land, education, health care and even cultural fulfilment. At the advent of nominal emancipation and end of plantation chattel slavery, the criminal enslavers were compensated by Britain alone to the tune of Twenty Million Pounds, while the forcibly enslaved Africa professional engineers, agriculturists, medical doctors and artisans who were forcibly yanked from the native continent neither received any recompense for the hundreds of years of labour dispossession, nor were they granted landed rights over the spaces they had worked for hundreds of years to enrich the criminal enslavers. Thus, historically, the power struggle between social classes in Jamaica is often narrated through the economic and cultural expressions, such as religion, race, language, social-political state and music; a new voice have been added to this in the persistent and irrepressible call for reparations. Notwithstanding, new horizons of creative expressions that were once banned or suppressed by Jamaican government, for example, cultural practices have metaphorically crossed the Red Sea and transcended the peripheral boundaries that constitute the economic class lines of wealthy elite, middle class and peasant class. What seems to suffice in decimating the cultural battle for humanity in Jamaica popular culture has been the music space which has relegated all prejudices and limitations on the terms of artificial or superficial negotiation or comparison. Boxill claimed that,

… if, therefore, the culture of the mass of poor people confronts the culture of the dominant class, it means that the ideology and hence the hegemony of the dominant class will also be confronted.(to confront here refers to a situation in which the music openly challenges the prevailing ideas through lyrics or dress or other cultural acts). To the extent that this mass culture develops in opposition to the dominant culture and promotes self-reliance and social justice then culture may be considered as challenging the hegemony ruling class” (1994, 43).
From the moment Africans arrived in the capitalist plantation society, they entered a tremendous space of restless contestation against the hegemony of material and immaterial representation. While Haiti and Cuba have to various degrees profiled the cultural revolution of promoting self-reliance and social justice, according to their cultural interpretations, Jamaica has safely remained as a nominally independent country under the monarchical English state. Even so, unlike any other cultural expression, Rastafari music in Reggae and Dancehall confronts the dominant group ideology and material practices in novel and critical ways which often confound simplistic intellectual analysis or representation. For instance, Bob Marley and the Wailers’, “Zimbabwe” confronts the hegemony with “everyman have a right to decide his own destiny, and in this judgment, there is no partiality, so arm in arm in arms we will fight this little struggle” (1979).

However, the number of musicians who use music as a medium to challenge hegemony and inspire the consciousness of the marginalized people have dwindled over the years. Boxill indicated that, “it should be stated that with a few exceptions, musicians do not, generally, in their songs, suggest a transformation of the economic, social and political aspects of Caribbean society” (1994, 51). Furthermore, he insisted that “they attack aspects of the ideology of the ruling class, but not in any truly revolutionary way” (1994, 52).

In view of the above, and for our purpose in this paper, the question is not whether or not music can lead to revolution, but rather that music such as ‘Blood Money’ did not attack the ideology and culturally corrupted practices of the hegemony in any fundamental way, but mimics passively the verbatim historical monuments of consciousness lyrics, without seeming to have a soul that could imbue the “Word, Sound” with “Power”. While descriptive connotations are one form of participating in cultural struggle, in Dance Hall Rastafari musical sites, we find passive/mimic music, and in Freire’s view, can be interpreted as legitimizing the ideology of the dominant class, of how things happen around here without actually eventuating any desiderata for change.

Earlier on the point was made about the significance of the “word”; that is, word with power and word without power. While any poetic word added to melodies can canvass sites of confrontation, not all of these poetic words are meaningful to what image it signifies. Word without that critical component lack liminality required to transform the sound into a power accrediting conduit for the emancipation of the oppressed. This may have been the reason why McKenzie said,

there is no rebel with no cause anymore. All the rebel them no have no cause. There is no more apartheid to sing about … The kind of thing where people used to be more concerned about the morality of their practices, I think that era is perhaps going away or has gone. People tend to be lot more tolerant on a number of issues (Gleaner, 2011).

Contrary to the belief that if the dominant elites adopt in any form or measurement the material and the immaterial representation of the peasant class, then it spontaneously deflowers the masses, Boxill claims that,
… my view is that while reggae artistes are critical of ruling class hegemony, they are also “victims” of it. Their music, therefore, reflects a dualism in so far as it seeks to attack the ideology on the one hand but legitimizes the ideology by promoting nationalism, unity and peace in an environment which by its very structure breeds disunity, violence and loss of identity” (1994, 52-53).

While Boxill has a point in highlighting the doublespeak which inheres in the soul of Dancehall which has made its appropriation by the oppressor class possible, stemming from various considerations on the part of the artist, one may disagree with Boxill that the musicians legitimizes hegemony ideology by promoting, “nationalism, unity and peace”, because promoting nationalism, unity and peace and asking for “Equal Rights and Justice” are not mutually exclusive; the situation is indeed very nuanced and it would be hasty to see the canvass with one single pair of glasses. My position here is what is being demonstrated in the experiences of the black people’s effort as serious protest was viciously strangulated in the view of millions of human beings as if he is not a human being. How can we advocate nationalism, unity and peace where there is no equality and justice for all? The experience of the Wailing Wailers, Peter Tosh, and even of Jamaica’s neighbours to the north, Haiti, for seeking humanity and equality may have been responsible for the voiceless voice that infuse a Protoje kind of music, which claims the space of being revolutionary without understanding or intending any real revolution.

Theoretical and Aesthetic Discussion

Legitimization is an interesting word in relation to interface between the dominant elite and popular culture, in this case in Reggae music. The correlation within any philosophical analysis of the relationship will discover that is not so much what the musician or the dominant elite deliberately trades in; rather, the mythology of the song, in other words the relation between language and power remain a very interesting liminal trope. Barthes’ theory of myth elucidated that mythology is the study of a type of speech. For him, “a myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possible be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form” (1970, 107). Barthes explains that a myth is “the way in which it utters this message” (1970, 107). When one notes the cooptation of the Reggae music into the political platforms of both major political parties in Jamaica, one will get a better understanding of appropriations per excellence. The old Rebel soldier that is unmindful of the land and space-mines laid by Babylon can get easily disoriented and become complicit in the oppression of the masses of the people. And in a serious way, Rastafari itself is not immune to this danger, given its incapacity to transcend the imaginary of oppression which Zion signify to Palestinians.

Furthermore, as Barthes noted in his representation of the essential elements of myth, “mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possible evolve from ‘nature’ of things. (1970, 108). In the modern era, in the
Rastafari site of Reggae, which has mutated into the Dancehall space, songs that comment on the state and the dominant elites are no more than myths, because they use a particular form of speech that signifies empty connotation and they mimic a mythology that are linked to history and current issues but have no real resonance that can lead to change, rebellion or meaningful empowering action on the part of the masses; just as Rastafari lost its way, so has Reggae.

The song, “Blood Money”, for example, describes how many upper- and lower-class people illegally and corruptly gained or attained such state of wealth, status and power. The historical source of song project generates from the history of the island with slavery and classism and racism. What the song legitimized is then the dominant elite ideology, by naturalizing their behavior as a natural way of life, by not contesting, not showing any reflective or reaction in listeners to contest such base ideology. Barthes noted that, “the material of the myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them, while discounting their substance” (1970, 108). But in the song, “Blood Money”, beyond the pretend righteousness of the lyrics, there does not seem to be any soul that call for the kind of action that is the aftermath of the Floyd George situation in the USA, as the consciousness has been ingrained in the people for so long that “a so it go”, leading to what Seligman has described as learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975).

The hegemonies of plantation and post-plantation entrenched inequalities have legitimized partial creative cultural indolence and passivity toward the masses by economic cultural appropriation. Contemporary musicians have legitimized the hegemony ideology and cultural practices through the way they use words in their songs. Even though the song “Blood Money”, strongly calls out what is happening in the social, economy, political and religious system, it nevertheless made no effort to combat those issues in a fundamental way or empower struggle against oppression or instigate the masses of the oppressed to liberate themselves.

The power of free speech exercised in describing what the dominant ideology and cultural practice does without contesting and prescribing a response to these behaviours only seeks to reinforce the power of the hegemony, making the artiste complicit. In other words, the descriptive image of the corrupt lifestyle of the dominant class, demonstrates to the peasant class, the method of the system; this has the power of saying to the masses of the oppressed to bid their time, so that they also can “move up” and join the class of oppressors. According to Barthes “the signifier of the myth presents itself in an ambiguous way: it is at the same time meaning and form, full on one side and empty on the other” (1970, 116). Another way of viewing Rastafari Dancehall music is that it pretends to critique the state, as mere empty “metaphors”. We would note that a metaphor is a figure of speech that makes an implicit, implied, or hidden comparison between two things that are unrelated, but which share some common characteristic that the audience or reader can easily identify. Thus, metaphors are more or less a situation where a resemblance of two contradictory or different objects is made based on a single or some common characteristic.

After an interview with a “very old Rastafarian man”, Hall made this astonishing evaluation of the intention or meaning of Rastafari songs or language of Africa.
… you see, it was not the literal place that people wanted to return to, it was the language, the symbolic language for describing what suffering was like, it was a metaphor for where they were, as the metaphor of Moses and the metaphors of the train to the North, and the metaphors of freedom, and the metaphors of passing across the Promise land, have always been metaphors, a language with a double register, a literal and symbolic register … enable them to find a language in which they could describe and appropriate their own histories (2016, 588).

Seen in this light, it is easy to see how contemporary artistes see their trade not as instruments for education or validation of the humanity of their patrons, but merely as instruments for personal liberation from poverty. This accounts for why they would not allow their own children to listen to their own music, and why on the one hand they would sing what appears to be conscious lyrics yet, on the other hand, they engage in nefarious illegal activities that dehumanize even their own followers.

Framed in this way, there is nothing worse than pretend consciousness. It is what John Searle (1975) describes in the philosophy of mind as “as if intentionality”. Rastafari tradition itself emerged out of utter disdain for the inhumanity of Babylon. Granted that it hit a cul de sac in its effort to utilize the mythology of Zion in ignorance of what it meant for the oppressed, dispossessed and repressed Palestinians, there is absolutely no reason for any group seeking a wholesome exodus to adopt the imagery of captivity to attain the needed liberation. For this reason, it may not be too difficult to understand why pretend Rastafari Dancehall get lured into the stunting alley of glittering lights of personal self-aggrandizement in exchange for group and community emancipation.

**Conclusion**

The danger with songs like “Blood Money” is that they represent metaphor, presenting apparently conscious lyrics which aptly describe the “us against them” syndrome, in a cycle of struggle against economic and class system, with no solution but ideals of endurance of putting up with the way things run around here which, based on Rolland Barthes, is only a myth. The suggestion of this essay is not that songs under this category in the Dancehall space have a responsibility to transmit the tradition of word, sound and power. It is not prescriptive in any sense as to how artistes should see their roles in society. What we have done is to do an aesthetic critical content analysis of the song, to see the extent to which it constitutes honesty or hypocrisy in the true tradition of the Rastafari religion that the artiste adopts as persona and mantra for purely PR purposes. We would wish that Rastafari music would in true tradition of the religion and ideology to not only speak the word and sound, but to inspire in the consciousness of the listeners not merely agreement but ways of responding to the struggle with empowerment.

Many artistes may believe that era of struggle may have failed or ended with flow of money in the system, building and technology. They may even thing that the ones who are in control of mode of production have been there since 1962, and some of the new ones from the ghetto now
aspire to join the elite group through the same cultural and ideological mimicry of the dominant elite, exploitation, corruption and “Blood Money” now means they belong. This has translated into their relocation from their places of birth in the ghettos to uptown with the accumulation of wealth; this is in the false belief that merely accumulating money and moving out of the ghetto means you belong. Instead of improving the lot of those of their contemporaries in the ghetto, they even join the band of oppressors in committing worse atrocities against the poor in their previous communities.

This essay has tried to show that one way of looking at contemporary Dancehall music is through the prism of pretend consciousness, as if intentionality, vacuous use of word and sound without power; and we have argued that what is significant in word, sound and power is the dialectic of reflection and action. There definitely will be other ways of understanding Dancehall, but without paying attention to the underbelly of the culture of violence, poverty, racism, classism and colorism (with the bleached pale face disgrace of a popular artiste as example), society will continue to drift without leadership. And for this reason, it is not unexpected that the political directorate will conscript the artiste into the army of predators to do his/her dirty job of getting into and holding onto power.

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