

ROUTES, RAP, REGGAE:
HEARING THE HISTORIES OF HIP-HOP AND REGGAE TOGETHER

by

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To Becca,
My Companion on Hope Road

Yellowman: “Reggae music is rap to the beat.”

Gertrude Stein: “What good are roots if you can’t take them with you?”

Stuart Hall: “If you think of culture always as a return to roots—R-O-O-T-S—you’re missing the point. I think of culture as routes—R-O-U-T-E-S—the various routes by which people travel, culture travels, culture moves, culture develops, culture changes, cultures migrate, etc.”

Rex Nettleford: “Jamaicans are a people who are constantly exposed to external influences, whose economic system traditionally depends on the caprice of other people’s palates, whose values are largely imported from an alien set of experiences, and whose dreams and hopes have, at one time or another, been rooted either in neighboring Panama, Cuba, or Costa Rica, in big brother America and sometimes in Canada, a Commonwealth cousin. Of late, they tend to be rooted in father Africa and mother England. The multi-focal nature of Jamaican life and history is often said to be the greatest obstacle to a real national identity.”

Peter Manuel: “Urban migrant cultures are now recognized as dynamic, syncretic entities in their own right, rather than derivative, transplanted outposts, miniature replicas of ancestral homeland models, or inherently marginal hybrids.”

Clifford Geertz: “For all the uprooting, the homelessness, the migrations, forced and voluntary, the dislocations of traditional relationships, the struggles over homelands, borders, and rights of recognition, for all the destructions of familiar landscapes and manufacturings of new ones, and for all the loss of local stabilities and local originalities, the sense of place, and of the specificities of place, seems, however tense and darkened, barely diminished in the modern world.”

Louise Bennett: “Our people, we feel like when we go to foreign, we have to bring back some foreign thing. And if you come back and you don’t have a little twang, dem laugh after you. But if you come back and you have too much twang, dem say ‘you a turn big now, don’t?’ . . . So you cyaan win. You better just come back how you went. Same way.”

Frantz Fanon: “In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.”

Alton Ellis: “It could drive you mad.”

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ABSTRACT:

This dissertation examines the translocal interplay of hip-hop and reggae, considering their myriad interactions during the late twentieth century as complex musical embodiments of the social flows and cultural politics in and between Jamaica and the United States. Employing a mix of historical, discographical, and ethnographic sources, the argument takes into account the global circulation of both genres while focusing on their local, historically-contingent meanings in Kingston, Jamaica and New York City. The text largely takes the form of a chronological social and cultural history of musical style in order to reflect on and challenge the forms of representation that have characterized the telling of hip-hop’s and reggae’s stories to date. A particular set of melodic figures—collectively heard as the *Mad Mad* complex—provides an audible thread with which to illuminate the roles that technology, migration, and mass media have played in the ongoing formation of hip-hop and reggae as transnationally constituted genres advancing an intertwined, overlapping, and at times incompatible cultural politics of blackness.

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PREFACE

I first traveled to Jamaica in the fall of 2001 as part of a team organized by Harvard Law School to observe a rehabilitation program in Kingston's prisons. Asked to play the role of "musicological consultant," I eagerly boarded a plane that took me to Norman Manley Airport, where we were picked up by a bus and driven straight into Tower Street, a.k.a., GP, or General Penitentiary—Kingston's largest, most overcrowded, and most violent prison. It was a unique introduction to Jamaican society and culture, *fi true*. As I sat in the van and looked around, I saw men in mesh-marinas milling about, smoking ganja, and looking just as curiously at me. We were treated that morning to a concert put on by a group of inmates who had earned themselves distinction as men devoted to the rehabilitation process and as accomplished musicians. A band comprising a drummer, bassist, guitarist, and keyboardist accompanied various singers and groups who performed in the vast array of styles that fill Jamaica's soundscape: roots reggae, dancehall, gospel, R&B, pop, rock, dub poetry, Rastafarian chants, syrupy ballads, and various hybrids. Introducing the rehabilitation program to a bunch of (presumably resource-rich) foreigners through music was clearly an explicit, and effective, strategy. I felt like yet another tourist being seduced by Jamaica's music, and in spite of my critical proclivities I found myself admiring the expression and emotion of the performances, even when a voice went out of tune or a Paul Simon cover failed to impress.

It was not the music at Tower Street, however, that drew me into what would become a serious engagement with Jamaican culture and society. It was the hip-hop playing in cars, clubs, and just about everywhere I turned. As someone with his ears tuned to hip-hop's global resonance, I was struck by the music's ubiquity in the land

where reggae is king. I was introduced to a young producer named Makonnen who, before I left, handed me a CD containing “underground” recordings by young Kingstonians who rapped in creole over the latest hip-hop beats—some of which had only been released in the US the week before. The CD also featured a number of songs by an upcoming DJ named Wayne Marshall, which explained why the customs officials were laughing at my passport. My namesake had been making a name for himself by recording witty, localized versions of popular hip-hop tracks. I laughed at his translation of Ludacris’s “Area Codes,” which substituted Jamaican phone numbers for American ones, and my head spun at the rapidity of circulation and the possibilities for appropriation and identification presented by hip-hop’s reception in Jamaica.

Shortly thereafter, I abandoned “hip-hop in Germany” as a dissertation topic for “hip-hop in Jamaica” and set about getting up to speed with the world of Jamaican music. Fortunately, I had a lifetime of encounters with reggae to provide me with reference points as I began to wade through the dense reggae literature, so full of names and dates and “big chunes” that I had never heard of. I *had* heard of Bob Marley, of course, and the usual suspects: Toots and the Maytals, Jimmy Cliff (via *The Harder They Come*), Burning Spear, Black Uhuru, etc. I had heard or heard of many of these acts through their regular tour-stops in Boston. I had been turned-off, however, by a Jimmy Cliff concert where the audience of drunk, white yuppies went wild for a less-than-rousing cover of “Hakuna Matata” from *The Lion King*. Of course, I revered Bob Marley as much as any music-lover, though my acquaintance with his work did not extend much beyond the *Legend* compilation. My familiarity with reggae was much stronger when it came to dancehall. I remembered fondly our high school dances at Cambridge Rindge and Latin,

where the student DJs inevitably segued from R&B and hip-hop to dancehall at a certain point in the evening. As Mad Cobra's "Flex" or Chaka Demus & Pliers' "Murder She Wrote" blasted across the cafeteria, my peers transformed into a mass of gyrating bodies, winin' and grindin' like they knew they were supposed to when reggae came on. As a devotee of hip-hop, I knew Shabba Ranks and Super Cat, having seen their videos during BET's "Rap City" and "Yo! MTV Raps." From the occasional coverage of contemporary dancehall in hip-hop magazines, I knew that Beenie Man and Bounty Killer were the big men of latter-day dancehall. And as I reached back further into memory, I became more and more aware of how much reggae had infused hip-hop over the years. I remembered the creole stylings of KRS-One, Shinehead, Das EFX, Fu-Schnickens, Smif'n'Wessun, and many more. The deeper I dug into Jamaican music, the more I realized that the links between hip-hop and reggae ran deep—deeper than Kool Herc's translation of sound-system style for his Bronx peers, deeper than the early 90s crossover moment, and deeper than the latest stateside successes of Shaggy and Sean Paul. I decided that Jamaica would make at least as interesting a place to study hip-hop outside the U.S. as Germany, and I made plans to spend some time there as soon as I could finish my coursework and take my exams.

The following summer, I returned to Kingston to spend a month conducting "preliminary research." I arranged to live with Makonnen and his mother, sleeping on a couch in the small room he used as a home studio. We were visited daily by a number of DJs and singers who came over to vibe with Mak's beats, to hear the latest hip-hop he had downloaded, and to record demo versions of their new tunes. In this way I met several young Kingstonians who had devoted their lives to music and who had grown up

as much with Tupac and Biggie as with Beenie and Bounty, never mind Bob. My entry into this scene was greatly facilitated by my ability to build reggae riddims and hip-hop beats, which I had been doing for the previous five years, and to rap, which I had been doing since about age 13. On many occasions I watched as my rapping worked a kind of social alchemy. It was clear that by rapping in what seemed to Jamaican observers to be an “authentic” and “original” manner that I was able to demonstrate a depth of engagement—not to mention cultural cachet, since many of these young men attempted, in vain, to sound like an American rapper—that immediately changed people’s perceptions of me. “The man sound real,” was a common response to one of my tirades of rhythmically-right-on syllables.

By rapping and producing riddims with Jamaican artists, I developed relationships that no mere observer could ever develop. Although I was often dismayed by my new collaborators’ affinity for lyrics that focused on violence, conspicuous consumption, and objectification of women, I attempted to work in sympathetic collaboration rather than passing judgment while maintaining in my own lyrics the critical-comical, self-reflective stance that I learned from “Golden Age” hip-hop. In some ways, I had less to prove as a white American rapper than these youths did as black Jamaican rappers. To many, it seemed more incongruous, and perhaps inauthentic, for them to be rapping in a Brooklyn accent than for me to be rapping at all. (I had not yet picked up enough creole to bother the purists, perhaps.) As an ethnographer, I had been steadily recording my collaborators’ tastes and “influences,” which were utterly catholic: from Bob Marley, of course (always first, even if not really an audible presence in contemporary Kingston), to Nat King Cole, Nas, Celine Dion, Admiral Bailey, and just about any other pop, rap, or reggae artist you

could name. For most Jamaicans, such an ecumenical approach to music comes rather easily—just flip the radio dial to behold a musical diversity unheard on the corporate-consolidated radio of the US.

At times, however, people draw stark lines of community around sound and sentiment. I witnessed these tensions firsthand when, along with Makonnen and a musician named Kazam, I visited the house of Buju Banton and participated in the following exchange, which I recorded in my blog (thus the lower-case letters, which I used to differentiate my blog posts from more formal modes of writing):

whereas mak was deep into hip-hop, kazam played guitar and spoke glowingly of sam cooke, nat king cole, whitney houston, and shakira. at one point, i was standing on the porch while kazam played guitar. buju, his back toward us, ate dinner. kazam got his courage up, made his quiet strumming more audible, and began to sing a song he had written. (he told me later that he had walked past buju's place many times as a youth and vowed that one day he would go in and sing for the dj.) when kazam finished the song, buju, who had yet to turn around, addressed him:

buju: "who are your influences?"

kazam: "influences?"

wayne : "that's the same question i asked him."

buju: [turning] "that's the same question you asked him?" ... [to kazam] "you sound like a white punk-rocker. who you like? green day?"

kazam: "i like everything. bob marley first."

buju: "you sound like you're from southern california."

wayne : "if he sounds like a white punk-rocker from california and makonnen sounds like a puerto-rican rapper from the bronx, what do you make of that?"

buju: "i'd say they're both pretty strange."

kazam was pretty devastated by the exchange and i was pretty annoyed at buju's lack of kindness. kazam muttered to himself for a while, including such phrases as, "music has color. yeah." i did my best to convince him that he'd laugh about it someday.

What most struck me about this exchange was the way that music could so powerfully represent one's community relationships. While Kazam sought to express a kind of universalism, no doubt inspired by Bob Marley, Buju sought to police the boundaries of Jamaican expression, invoking a racialized norm from which, at least in Buju's mind, Kazam and Mak both departed. From my perspective, the rift seemed to run along generational lines, with Jamaica's "hip-hop generation" embracing sounds and styles that, while foreign for older Jamaicans, constituted a familiar and compelling set of resources for the expression of a new kind of Jamaican-ness, one that did not abandon a stance of "modern blackness," as Deborah Thomas puts it, but expanded it through transnational articulations of sameness.

Having developed these relationships in the late summer of 2002, I returned in January of 2003 and spent a solid six months living on Hope Road (just a few blocks from the heavily commodified Marley museum), where I turned my apartment into a recording studio and invited my friends over for recording sessions. Here we would negotiate the very sonic signifiers that seemed to connote such things as Jamaicanness and Americanness, blackness and whiteness, reggae and hip-hop, a "local" sound and an "international" sound. I attempted to observe as I participated and to realize in good faith my collaborators' visions even as I attempted to bring my own creative and critical ideas to bear on our co-productions. I produced gal tunes and gun tunes, weed tunes and reality tunes, party songs and Rasta manifestos. And when it was time to collect all of these together, I presented the tracks alongside interview segments with the same artists, songs of my own that I composed upon returning to the US and reflecting on my experiences, and collages composed from recordings of Jamaica's varied soundscape, making riddim-

centric compositions out of stray dogs, taxi transmissions, radio fragments, waterfalls, crickets, and cocks. I invested hours and hours into making my collaborators sound as good as I could, and I attempted to make the riddims signify on the songs: a badman tune with a Spaghetti-Western backdrop, an ode to conspicuous consumption over beats that bling-bling with shiny timbres. In my own songs, I attempted to make jokes and wry observations about Jamaican mores, from fundamentalist Christianity to homophobia to the national love of KFC. I called the album *Boston Jerk* to pun on a Jamaican phrase and acknowledge my position as a critical outsider. When I shared the final product with my collaborators, I was relieved that they and their friends not only approved of the project but were surprised and impressed by its scope. They were, of course, also hopeful that it would bring them some recognition, some opportunities to advance their careers, and a shot at the mobility so sought after by so many Jamaicans.

Outside of Jamaica, the response to *Boston Jerk* has been more varied. I have witnessed, on the one hand, how the sound of Jamaican voices and dancehall riddims carry an aura of authenticity outside of Jamaica that is practically unrivaled by any other “national” music. Hip-hop heads dig it. Jungle DJs flip for it. World music enthusiasts find the syncopations and exotic sounds they seek. In a kind of funhouse-mirror manner, considering how my performance of (African-)Americanness worked wonders in Jamaica, I have accrued a kind of cultural cachet back home based on my ability to perform Jamaicanness. I have connected my collaborators to reggae selectors and record-label owners in the Boston area, who enjoyed the Boston-Kingston link-up and have helped to spread their names and their music. Having put the music, and a large amount of reflective text about it, on the Internet, I have been contacted by delighted listeners

from England, Germany, Australia and other far-flung spots with a love for reggae and hip-hop. I have also, however, encountered occasional resistance from certain reggae lovers—almost always non-Jamaicans—who disdain what they hear as an irreverent or impure version of the music they elevate to righteous heights. For me, they represent yet another audience whose assumptions I seek to challenge. Still, I am often struck by the irony of such a position. Anyone who spends a little time in Jamaica today should realize that it has little regard for such conceptions of purity, despite the roots'n'culture emphasis on *Ital* living.

Similarly seeking to challenge conceptions of cultural purity and the putatively “national” character of reggae and hip-hop alike, this dissertation takes as its subject the alchemy through which Jamaican engagements with the foreign—namely, the music of African-Americans—come to serve a local cultural politics. The flipside of this coin—i.e., the resonance of Jamaican cultural products in the United States—constitutes a related concern throughout the text. Proceeding largely as a history of musical style and hence an examination of the local (and global) connotations of particular musical figures, the chapters that follow attempt through a kind of thick description to offer a suggestive social and cultural history of a musical motive, a recurring theme that provides an audible thread through the intertwined histories of reggae and hip-hop, of late twentieth century Jamaica and the United States. As such, the text considers such crucial “extra-musical” factors as migration, mass media, and ideologies of race and nation. Following a decade-based structure, if somewhat playfully and self-consciously, I seek to signify on the established but unexamined chronological narratives that inform the reception of both genres for audiences at home and abroad. Although my ethnographic experience,

described above, informs my perspective throughout (especially, as revisited and interpreted in the epilogue), the principal objects of analysis here are recordings, interviews found in the reggae literature and online, and the stories that have been told about reggae and hip-hop by journalists, academics, government officials, performers and audiences. Ultimately, I contend that a full appreciation of these genres' power to inform and propel notions of self and community demands that we hear them together, as mutually constitutive constellations of sound and sentiment.

CHAPTER ONE

It's a Mad Mad Story: *The Migrations of Jamaican Music*

As reproduced in countless sources—academic and popular—the stories of hip-hop and reggae display a striking similarity: both genres emerge from a local synthesis of “foreign” influences, giving rise to new forms and creative forces that sustain decades of self-determined if not insular stylistic development, resulting in a musical style so powerful and distinctive that it ascends to global prominence. Describing with sweeping and powerful gestures the historical trajectories of hip-hop and reggae, these broad narrative contours also leave much out.¹ Too often such stories reaffirm the same nationalist myths and entrenched power structures they would seem to subvert in their celebration of such “rebel” musics. Though they may serve to counteract local, national, and international denigration or cooptation, by neglecting a history of mutual engagement the established narratives overlook hip-hop’s and reggae’s radical but foundational musical poetics. Foregrounding the interplay *between* hip-hop and reggae in an intertwined history of the two, I seek to shift the conversation in order to hear better how their cosmopolitan sounds continually redraw the lines of community. Quintessentially national(ist) and yet deeply transnational in character and constitution, reggae and hip-hop derive a great deal of affective force, of contemporary resonance, through their constant, ambivalent dialogue with the foreign.

Propelled by proliferating media technologies and postcolonial acceleration in migration and trade between Jamaica and the US, reggae and hip-hop articulate common

¹ The next chapter, “The Full Has Never Been Told,” features an extensive discussion of the hip-hop and reggae literatures, their strengths, and shortcomings.

experiences and aspirations across increasingly shared soundscapes. A vibrant, longstanding exchange of musical figures and practices, rhetorical and representational strategies, and notions of self and other, race and nation inevitably challenge and shape even as they affirm local realities in this regional circuit, this cultural cosmos. But the stories of hip-hop and reggae tend to frame these translocal figurations and practices, these imported strategies and ideologies in their local contexts only, overlooking the crucial intertextual and international relationships already in the air. As Caribbean infusions disappear into ubiquity, absorbed into lexicon, the hip-hop narrative's frequent omission of persistent engagements with Caribbean sounds and styles obscures profound changes in the fabric of US society—changes registered and engendered by such (inter)national forms as hip-hop—as enshrined American social categories, for all their enduring power, run up against “foreign” conceptions of race, nation, ethnicity, and community. Similarly, the nationalization of reggae's historical narrative obscures the longstanding transnational connections of what anthropologist Deborah Thomas calls “modern blackness,” a set of practices, including engagements with American music cast as black, which militate against as they circumvent the colonialist vestiges of Jamaica's official multiracial nationalism.² If we hear hip-hop and reggae together we can hear these projects and processes in contest, in conversation, in perpetual motion.

Of course, for all the links we may hear between hip-hop and reggae—for all the ways that “hearing together” connects to, for Paul Gilroy, “thinking and acting

² Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

together”—we hear breaks and tension, too.³ Hearing how Jamaican artists embrace as they reject African-/American styles, and vice versa, reveals self- and publicly-imposed limits, if pliable and contingent ones, around the appropriation of musically-mediated figures tied to the others among us.⁴ Hearing hip-hop and reggae together gives us the shifting shapes and forms of American postcolonial subjects and societies.

“That’s a Poco Song”: Hip-hop and Reggae as Postcolonial Music

When Jamaican poet and folklorist Louise Bennett introduces her performance of “Rugby Road” as “a poco song” (1999) or dancehall DJ Lord Sassafrass performs “Poco Jump” (1984), they refer unambiguously to pocomania (*alt.* pukumina), one of Jamaica’s more prominent Afro-Christian revivalisms.⁵ But heard alongside such works as Bennett’s poem “Colonization in Reverse” (1966) and the intertwined sonic histories of the US and Jamaica embodied in dancehall style, the resonance of that diminutive descriptor, *poco*, extends to a different, more recent meaning, one that describes the modern, mixed-up, urban, ubiquitous sounds of reggae and hip-hop: the postcolonial.⁶

³ Paul Gilroy, “Between the Blues and the Blues Dance: Some Soundscapes of the Black Atlantic,” in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2003), 385.

⁴ Awkward as it may appear, I use the designation *African-/American* here, and on occasion throughout the dissertation, not to marginalize the African side of the relation but to indicate that Jamaican engagements with all manner of things from the United States include both engagements with aspects of “mainstream” American values, products, and media as well as, and often especially, engagements with things marked specifically as African-American or black. Moreover, throughout this work I also employ the hyphenated form of African-American—even as a noun—in an effort to underscore the relationality and historical dimension of this dual identification. This latter strategy follows that of Ronald Radano in *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁵ “Poco Jump” is performed over a Black Scorpion re-lick of the *Mad Mad* riddim. The significance of this connection will soon become clear.

⁶ See also, “No Lickle Twang,” to which Bennett eludes in this chapter’s epigraph, for Miss Louise’s poetic elaboration on the challenges and conundrums of returning home “from foreign.” See Louise Bennett, *Selected Poems*, ed. Mervin Morris (Kingston: Sangster’s Book Stores Ltd., 2003), 2-4.

In that sense, the story I will tell here *is* a poco story—or, in reggae producers’ parlance, the song I will *version* here is a poco song.⁷ It is a story and song about movement and madness, race and nation, empire and diaspora, Jamaica and the US, and above all, about the stories we tell about ourselves and our neighbors and our music. Just as pocomania, despite its connections to Christianity, could serve in colonial times (and today) as a form of rebellion against a Eurocentric status quo, reggae and hip-hop both partake in the networks, ideologies, and discourses of Anglo-American imperialism even as they fashion—in such sensuous forms as to find sympathetic ears nearly everywhere—new ways for subjects in postcolonial circumstances to struggle against (and make use of) the asymmetrical forces of global exchange and geopolitics, to imagine and create alternative cartographies and communities, and to express a disavowal and critique of the very system we find ourselves, in various ways, shoring up and chanting down.⁸

This is not just a poco story, though; it is also a mad, mad story. Doubly outrageous, it angers as it shocks, for the narrative twists and turns over the rugged road of racialized injustice. As Alton Ellis croons, and as I imagine Carolyn Cooper, Paul Gilroy, and Sylvia Wynter to sing along, “It could drive you mad.”⁹ Vehicles of cultural

⁷ To *version* a song in reggae practice is, simply, to create a new version of it, either by remixing its elements (as on a dub version) or by re-recording it (as on a “re-lick” of a riddim or a cover version of a popular song). Versioning represents a cornerstone of Jamaican musical production, and this dissertation, by tracing various versions of a single riddim from Jamaica to the US and further afield, seeks to present a new version of the reggae and hip-hop narratives—a “dub history” in Jeff Chang’s words (*Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation* [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005], 3).

⁸ See the page on “Religion” at JamaicaHomecoming.com, a promotional website, which notes that Pocomania and other traditional religious forms served as “vehicles of rebellion in colonial times, and against the status quo.” <http://www.jamaicahomecoming.com/our_culture/religion.aspx> (accessed 4 June 2006).

⁹ Cooper adds to the resonance of “mad” with regard to Jamaican circumstances in noting the “insidious stereotype of the ‘mad’ Jamaican created by the alienating experience of migration” (*Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004], 55), including “the Jamaican interpretation of returnees from the United Kingdom, as ‘maddy maddy’” (306, note #21). Cooper also alludes to “a substantial literature discussing the violence that a racist Britain wreaks on the mental health of Caribbean migrants” (ibid.). Gilroy considers “deliberately going mad” among the survival

politics par excellence, reggae and hip-hop have worked to mobilize the righteous, indignant rage of the oppressed and disenfranchised—and frequently, the black and poor—in the New World and (often in tandem) around the world, amplifying the repressed voices of global capitalism, bourgeois nationalism, and neo-colonialism. That these voices speak through derivative as well as critical discourses calls attention to their enmeshment in imperial networks of language, culture, and commerce. The common perception of family ties between reggae and hip-hop—heard, in turn, as brothers, cousins, or parent and child—speaks to their overlapping projects and aesthetics and their intimately intertwined histories, as well as the desire on the part of those writing about these genres to support such projects and aesthetics. Postcolonial and national musics without peer, hip-hop and reggae give shape to the constitutive struggles and myths that continue to define selves and others along the imbricate lines of race and class, at home and abroad, *a yard* and *a farin*.

As exported cultural products—and, significantly, as forms commonly conflated by foreign artists and audiences—the two travel together even as they carry distinctive, if overlapping, forms and ideas. And yet, for all of their interaction, conflation, and symbolic resonance, hip-hop and reggae (and by extension the US and the Caribbean) remain rather separate in popular and established narratives—stories which inform, over and alongside the music, our sense of where hip-hop ends and reggae begins and all that follows. Thanks to this perpetuated, perceived separation, a bias often produced by

strategies that make “the truly modern person” (*The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993], 308). Wynter identifies the “mad” alongside the black as a foundational “ontological Other” of Western modernity’s centered self/subject (“Beyond the World of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles,” *World Literature Today* 63, no. 4 [1989]: 637-647). Of course, Ellis is ostensibly singing about gossip, not social justice, but we’ll address that distinction when we get to “The 60s.”

nationalist ideologies (or reactions against them), the story of hip-hop's and reggae's interplay—that is, the story of Jamaicans engaging with African-/American music and of African-/Americans embracing the sounds of Jamaica—remains an “untold story,” to invoke a resonant phrase from the reggae-Rasta lexicon. Hence our understanding of national borders, of subjects within and without such borders, of the workings of what some call “globalization,” and of the historical record itself, remains impoverished, despite the rich relations we can read from, if you will, the “musical record.”

As I hear it, music provides a way into the concretes and complexities of postcoloniality, diaspora, globalization, and transnationalism that no other medium, no other data, no resource or theory can offer. Whereas these overlapping discourses, processes, and projects are more typically defined in abstraction, inviting vague and unsubstantiated claims about dominance, resistance, homogenization and the like, music—and in particular, recorded music—offers an audible and often material body of evidence with which to make sense of significant shifts in social, political, and economic organization, patterns of identification and subject formation, and cultural work of various sorts. One can hear and trace influence and engagement, imagination and reflection. The musical record can thus contribute a special sort of information to ongoing sociological and anthropological interpretations of these recent, if long coming, changes in human society. Indeed, the body of hip-hop and reggae recordings and performances that constitute many of the primary texts of my study not only dispel a number of contentions about transnationalism and globalization, they reveal longstanding processes and interactions, giving shape and form to the experiences, dreams, and interventions of various actors making their way in a postcolonial world still marked by colonialist

hierarchies of value and structures of power. What emerges from a musically-informed study of the historical relationship between Jamaica and the United States is a deep, dynamic degree of interpenetration and interrelation, a set of interactions complexly contoured around class, race, ethnicity, and nation—social categories that can seem at once fluid and flexible, firm and fixed. Hearing the histories of hip-hop and reggae together, we better apprehend the significance of Jamaica's presence in the US (and what that means for African-/American subjects) as well as the effects and implications of American political, economic, and cultural dominance in the Caribbean (and what that means for various Caribbean subjects).

An intertwined history of hip-hop and reggae presents a picture of postcolonial subjects united—and divided—by music and race against the legacies of asymmetrical power relations, racialized class divisions, tenaciously racist institutions, and a prevailing uneven exchange of labor, capital, commodities, ideas, and practices. To hear how reggae informs hip-hop and how hip-hop, in turn, informs reggae (and, accordingly, how foreign and/or familiar sounds are marked and mobilized as such) is to hear a history of hemispheric circulation and its social repercussions. Circulating at once as a symbol of US power *and* a symbol of African-American opposition to (and, for some, triumph over) enduring structural inequalities, hip-hop resonates across the Caribbean and the Americas—and further abroad as well, of course—as a complexly charged cultural resource. In Jamaica, where music cast as African-American has long inspired local invention, hip-hop's resonance is invested with the added significance of its filial relationship to reggae, a closeness that grows with each new collaboration, each riff or rhythm that goes from one to the other, each foreign-but-familiar record played for

local ears, and each TV documentary that trots “founding father” Kool Herc onstage. Although the hip-hop narrative acknowledges this relationship—at least in its nods to Herc, a Jamaican immigrant to the Bronx, and to a few other “West Indian” luminaries—its representation of the degree to which reggae informed not simply the beginnings of hip-hop but, indeed, its development to date, remains distorted by its utter marginality. As a result, our understanding of hip-hop—and, consequently, of race and nation as imagined and produced in the United States and projected across the globe—fails to register some significant, subtle, but rather audible, shifts over the last few decades.

Tracing the migrations of Jamaican music can thus tell us a great deal not just about Jamaica, but about the US, the Caribbean, and the wider world. Hip-hop itself is part and parcel of Jamaican music’s migrations, emerging from reggae’s transmission to New York and carrying the sounds of Jamaica farther afield than they may have traveled on their own—and considering how well traveled reggae is, that’s saying something.¹⁰ Hearing hip-hop and reggae together thus challenges prevailing notions of nation, “national culture,” and race even as such an exercise demonstrates how these concepts, embodied in moments of musical production and reception, serve to affirm the “reality” of certain social formations and relations, not just as compelling ways—and I mean “compelling” in the *interpellative* sense as well—to understand one’s place in the world, but as occasionally useful tools for advancing oneself and/or one’s family or

¹⁰ It should be noted that one would be hard-pressed to identify many styles that have traveled further from home than reggae, especially when we consider it alongside genres originating from relatively “small” places, literally and figuratively (e.g., in proportion to geopolitical power). See Wallis and Malm, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1984) for more on the “Third World” recording industry. Reggae’s ability to travel so well is, as I will argue, inextricable from Jamaica’s place in imperial (and postcolonial) networks of language, culture, and power.

community.¹¹ For all the ways hip-hop and reggae support various actors and communities to mobilize via nationalist, racialist, or other identitarian commitments, one hears in the interplay between the two how these categories are also contextual and dynamic. What is important in all of this is not what is ultimately real or not, however; what is important is how music and (musically-mediated) narratives inform who we are, where we draw the lines of community, and how we relate to those on either side of the lines. The intertwined history of hip-hop and reggae offers an illuminating story about the complex circulation of “black music” outside of the US (e.g., in Jamaica), but it also suggests a narrative about the very constitution of the concept of “black music” in a society where, for all its one-drop rules and tenacious attitudes about racial difference (i.e., the US), the boundaries of race—overlying as they do the boundaries of nation—are constantly shifting, a dynamic illuminated and informed by the interplay of musical forms and their attendant (trans)nation-ness, among other connotations.

Despite, or rather *because of* its relatively recent status as something American as apple-pie, hip-hop offers a glaring example of the new Caribbeanness of American popular music. Much has been said about American music’s “Latin tinge,” as John Storm Roberts has called it (after Jelly Roll Morton’s “Spanish tinge”), but our appreciation of the incorporation of Latin-Caribbean musical features into the US musical mainstream seems to have hardly called attention to the similarly longstanding infusion of Anglo-

¹¹ Well before the anti- and anti-anti-essentialist debates of late 90s black cultural studies, Rex Nettleford made the following observation with regard to the “reality” of race in Jamaica: “On one thing there can be no disagreement: and that is, the reality of the factor of race and its use as basis for identity and cause for protest. Race may not be a guiding passion but it has nowhere yet disappeared from the core of Jamaican social reality and it is not likely so to do until genuine empowerment of the mass of the Jamaican population itself becomes a reality” (*Mirror, Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica* [Kingston: W. Collins and Sangster, 1998 (1970)], xlii).

Caribbean forms and practices into popular stateside styles.¹² Indeed, due in part to language barriers, Anglo-Caribbean styles such as calypso, ska, and reggae have had an advantage over son, salsa, and merengue in the musical marketplace. With regard to hip-hop, one would be hard-pressed to find a “foreign” musical style that has had more influence than reggae. And though I seek not to diminish the contributions of Latin-Caribbean and Latin-American musicians to hip-hop or reggae, this project requires the bracketing of that discussion, yet another version of the story.¹³ Hip-hop’s links to Latin- and Anglo-Caribbean styles and practices have not gone unaccounted, but the lion’s share of hip-hop’s story has focused on matters bordering on the provincial. This emphasis has served to validate and affirm what many hear as a distinctively African-American aesthetic, often against mass media and politically-motivated denigrations (see, e.g., Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise*), but it has also served to distort our understanding of urban cultural and social formations in the US, too often promoting reified racial and ethnic differences with far less nuance than the suggestive, dynamic representations we hear in the music.¹⁴

How might we hear hip-hop and reggae, race and ethnicity, differently? How might we hear, by hearing hip-hop and reggae together, how musically-mediated engagements with so-called “others” in contexts from Brooklyn to Kingston have informed seemingly stable, but shifting, notions of self and community? How is it that hip-hop’s “founding father” has been able to watch Jamaicans in New York change from

¹² John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1979]).

¹³ Moreover, the story of “Latin” contributions to hip-hop has already found some persuasive narrators. See, e.g., Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) and Raquel Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

¹⁴ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

social pariahs to “cool and deadly” gangsta idols to commercially-viable media stars over a thirty-year period? Hip-hop and reggae, on their own and in their interplay, provide a supportive soundtrack for what Orlando Patterson calls “Ecumenical America”—a regional network of emerging, Caribbeanized “cosmopolis” in the US, where people are likely to have dual or multiple senses of citizenship, to embrace a variety of cultural practices alongside “home” traditions, and to identify with as well as distinguish themselves from the African-/American communities in which they live.¹⁵ From New York to Miami, Atlanta to San Juan, hip-hop and reggae—and the localized, hybrid forms they inspire—resonate richly across our cities’ soundscapes. Perhaps, as I will suggest, the citizens of these Caribbean-American cosmopolis have learned to speak a common, cosmopolitan tongue. They have gotten “used to each other,” as Anthony Appiah might say, or perhaps “under each other’s skin,” as Jace Clayton (a.k.a., DJ /rupture) might say, precisely through such shared, related, urban/urbane, and popular forms as hip-hop and reggae, two genres marked by a consistent, creative engagement with each other and with “other” music more generally, often involving direct interaction with putative Others.¹⁶

That these two distinct but distinctly intertwined genres shape so many people’s sense of self and community, and that their changing forms reflect as they inform new socio-cultural circumstances, would seem to make their relationship essential to understand, and, moreover, to understand in terms other than those which the established

¹⁵ Orlando Patterson, “Ecumenical America: Global Culture and the American Cosmos,” *World Policy Journal* 11, no. 2 (1994):103-117.

¹⁶ Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); Jace Clayton, “Feedback Loops,” *NYFA Quarterly* <http://www.nyfa.org/nyfa_quarterly.asp?type=3&qid=191&id=109&fid=6&sid=16>. Although I am aware that either of these phrases might be interpreted as overlooking some of the complexities, especially with regard to power relations, of such exchanges, interactions, and struggles, I invoke them here because they speak nonetheless to an emerging poetics of cosmopolitanism which merit inclusion in the broader conversation, as much as they may deserve—and provoke—critique.

narratives have made possible—whether nationalist, racist, validationist, or otherwise circumscribed in perspective. Hip-hop and reggae, despite their detractors, are hardly in need of legitimization (especially by academics). As I write, the two genres are more centrally entwined in global culture and more audible and visible than ever. Rather than validate, my project attempts to explicate, with sufficient nuance, the cultural work these musics do—in particular, in relation to each other—and to advance a more transnational or international appreciation of their interplay, of the resonance of foreign (if familiar), “black” music in specific local and historical contexts. The story I seek to tell thus foregrounds the strong currents, too often represented as undercurrents, of circulation and articulation between hip-hop and reggae. Plumbing the depths of their intertwined history reveals at once the roots and routes—to mix metaphors a bit—that have produced no small amount of surface tension, despite longstanding waves of influence. Toward that end, my focus on the *Mad Mad*—on one particular current amid an ocean of interacting flows—is meant to serve as an explicitly arbitrary and audible story-among-stories.

It’s a *Mad Mad* Story (Dub Version)

You can hear the stories of reggae and hip-hop together in one riff, one remarkably resilient, resonant *riddim*.¹⁷ Blessed with a name that describes its mind-boggling circulation, the *Mad Mad* represents a flexible but memorable set of musical

¹⁷ I employ the Jamaican pronunciation, *riddim*, in order to underscore here that I am referring to more than simply rhythmic properties: similar to the term *beat* in hip-hop parlance, by *riddim*, I refer to all the elements in a musical composition aside from the vocals, i.e., the accompanimental track for a vocal recording. For more on what a *riddim* entails, see Peter Manuel and Wayne Marshall, “The Riddim Method: Aesthetics, Practice, and Ownership in Jamaican Dancehall,” *Popular Music* 25, no. 3 (2006): 447-470.

materials: a distinctive, propulsive bassline, a simple chord progression, and a few short melodic figures. Together they have inspired dozens of producers and engineers, instrumentalists and vocalists to create new versions *of* the riddim and new versions *on* the riddim—in homage, in allusion, in “counteraction,” and perhaps in unknowing debt.¹⁸ The *Mad Mad* has thus provided the backing for hundreds of performances and recordings since it first appeared in 1967.¹⁹ As such, like a number of other well-versioned riddims, the *Mad Mad* offers an amazingly audible path through the history of Jamaican popular music.²⁰ Moreover, especially for our intertwined history, the *Mad Mad* twists and turns through hip-hop, dance-pop, pop-rock, drum’n’bass, and reggaeton. Its familiar strains have represented Jamaicanness and blackness, Bronx- and Brooklyn-ness,

¹⁸ When I say “*of* the riddim,” I mean to indicate that producers have re-recorded the riddim (rather than simply using the original instrumental); when I say “*on* the riddim,” I refer to the individual songs, also sometimes called versions, that have been recorded on various versions (i.e., separately recorded backing tracks) of the *Mad Mad* riddim.

¹⁹ The number of officially, publicly released songs on the *Mad Mad* and associated/derived riddims—i.e., the *Diseases*, *Johnny Dollar*, *Golden Hen*, *Dutty Rub*, etc.—is somewhere between 100 and 200, and growing. When we consider the number of unofficial recordings, such as dubplates for the international soundssystem market or small-batch, white-label pressings, the number of “original” recordings based on the *Mad Mad* (i.e., the number of performances—by, say, a vocalist, instrumentalist, mixing engineer, etc.—recorded in real time, rather than based on splices, samples, or other forms of duplication), even by a conservative estimate, more likely approaches 1000.

For all the revelations they offer, however, the proliferations of the *Mad Mad* also present something of a research problem. Despite the detailed databases I have consulted and the additional examples I have discovered, it seems virtually impossible to ever hope to capture the full breadth and reach of the *Mad Mad*. (I am indebted in particular to the databases maintained at <<http://reggae-riddims.com>>, <<http://www.jamrid.com>>, and <<http://www.dancehallmusic.de/riddimbase.php>>, and to the assistance and archival resources of Boston-area selector Mad Skim (who maintains his own database, e.g., <http://madskim.com/ResultsRiddim.asp?Search_Riddim=Golden+Hen%2FMad+Mad%2FDiseases>). The former were instrumental in providing extensive, cross-checkable lists of appearances of the “Mad Mad,” while Skim, who maintains his own database, was able to provide me with dozens of audio samples from his record collection. Significantly, however, all these sources limit their data to reggae recordings. Thus all examples from outside of the reggae repertory constitute my own contributions to the growing list of *Mad Mad* “versions.”) I am aware that I may be missing some versions and connections, and I hope that these will come to light in subsequent studies. At any rate, the dictates of space and argument require some degree of selection. Although the following is a necessarily incomplete story, my aim is to give a sense—and make some sense—of the richness, complexity, and cultural politics of a migrating musical meme.

²⁰ The websites listed in the previous note provide data on the most versioned riddims, in some cases detailing over 200 recordings, for instance, on each of the five most popular riddims (as determined by incomplete, if detailed, data sets). It should be noted also that a number of other reggae riddims share the distinction with the *Mad Mad* of having made a number of appearances in hip-hop recordings, including the *Real Rock* and the *Stalag*.

Puerto-Ricanness and Chineseness, puritanical strains of Rastafari and utter moral “slackness,” the benefits of marijuana and the difficulties of traveling with it, love songs, battle songs, party songs, reflections on hip-hop’s past and future, and a panoply of other concerns, commitments, and trifles. The bassline, chords, and riffs have enjoyed a similarly striking degree of variation, as producers and performers continually reinvent the *Mad Mad*, employing the latest technologies and stylistic markers to put their stamp on the riddim and channel its resonance to say something new and/or—lest we overlook a crucial, underlying dimension in all of this—to sell some records.²¹

An inherently intertextual story emerges from the migrations of the *Mad Mad*, giving shape to social formations and cultural practices that have long exceeded the physical borders of such a relatively small island as Jamaica.²² The story of this single riddim calls attention to two dirty secrets hiding in the margins of well-rehearsed histories: hip-hop’s Jamaican accent and reggae’s “foreign mind.” Demonstrating rather directly the profound, sustained interplay between hip-hop and reggae, the *Mad Mad* disrupts established narratives—narratives which acknowledge origins in the local adaptation of foreign styles only to emphasize insular patterns of development, propping up the same national fictions that their hybrid, mutually-engaged sounds belie. What emerges from a careful consideration of so much musical movement is a historical, translocal circuit of allusion, innovation, and alignment, where familiar musical figures provide “feelingful” fodder for acts of identification and imagination, articulation and

²¹ Along these lines, we would do well to remember Robert Christgau’s pithy observation with regard to reggae’s re-use of its favorite forms: “As a style, not to mention an industry, of course its repetitive hooks are recycled endlessly” (“Ina Dancehall Groove—Finally,” *Village Voice*, 18 October 2000, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/music/0042,christgau,19062,22.html>> [accessed 8 February 2006]).

²² At just over 4100 square miles, Jamaica is smaller in land area than Connecticut and has almost one million fewer citizens. Of course, the Jamaican “nation,” at least in terms of self-identified citizens, now counts nearly as many Jamaicans in the diaspora as on the island, with a large percentage living, coincidentally, in Connecticut.

disarticulation, for drawing local and global lines of community amid the shifting social and cultural circumstances of the postcolonial Americas.²³

The canonical status conferred onto so many of the hip-hop tracks, producers, and vocalists that employ elements of the *Mad Mad* suggests a centrality of reggae to hip-hop's history that goes well beyond the perfunctory acknowledgment of Kool Herc as founding father or the naming of Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, Slick Rick, DJ Red Alert, Heavy D, KRS-One, Busta Rhymes, Biggie Smalls, and a few other usual suspects as notable but token "West Indians" in hip-hop.²⁴ Reggae's penetration into hip-hop's very vocabulary, as heard in numerous echoes of the *Mad Mad* and related musical memes in rap recordings, exceeds this small but significant group, providing suggestive forms and styles that resonate far more broadly than simply among performers of Jamaican descent (a number of whom, significantly, choose *not* to engage with reggae). In step with New York's increasingly Caribbean cultural profile (and the strong Jamaican influence on it), the *Mad Mad* gives voice to the polyglot sense of place inscribed in the city's motley soundscape.²⁵ Following the *Mad Mad* out of Jamaica and into the US, we

²³ I borrow *feelingful* from Steven Feld (who borrows it from Robert Plant Armstrong). Feld employs the term in various contexts to describe a distinctive dimension of musical experience: "The significant feature of musical communication is not that it is untranslatable and irreducible to the verbal mode but that its generality and multiplicity of possible messages and interpretations brings out a special kind of 'feelingful' activity and engagement on the part of the listener, a form of pleasure that unites the material and mental dimensions of musical experience as fully embodied" ("Communication, Music and Speech about Music," in *Music Grooves*, ed. Charles Keil and Steve Feld [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994], 91).

²⁴ Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (2005) proves the exception to this pattern, signaling and contributing to a growing awareness of the centrality of Caribbean music and migrants to the history of hip-hop. Rob Kenner's profile on "Dancehall" (in *The Vibe History of Hip-hop*, ed. Alan Light [New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999], 350-7) also explores the connections between hip-hop and reggae in greater than usual detail. As I will explore below, however, it only skims the surface of what I contend is a deeply significant interplay.

²⁵ Perhaps there is no better evidence, if anecdotal, for Jamaica's influence on New York's Caribbean character than Brooklyn's annual Caribbean carnival. Although a festival most strongly identified in the Caribbean with Trinidad, and although New York boasts a fair number of Trinidadians, the biggest, most popular floats and the greatest number of flags and paraphernalia tend to be marked as Jamaican. Of course, demographically speaking, Jamaica has long outnumbered arrivals from any other Anglo-Caribbean island

can examine the influence of Jamaican music in American culture, noting the community relationships reggae engenders outside of Jamaica. Conversely, considering the various versions of the *Mad Mad* in reggae's own recorded history, we can observe an enduring tension between Jamaican artists' engagement with the foreign—especially with the US as symbol and market—and their commitment to local aesthetics and audiences, frequently returning and alluding to what Kenneth Bilby calls Jamaica's "deep and distinctive cultural wellsprings."²⁶ Deborah Thomas, for example, identifies articulations of "modern blackness" in the ways that "black Jamaicans use 'America'" and points to the longstanding, creative embrace of African-/American music as an integral dimension of such a cultural politics.²⁷

Tracking the *Mad Mad* through time and space, we hear again and again how the foreign becomes, or is already, familiar. We get a sense of the cultural resources which not only are *available* to a performer in a particular time and place but which apparently are *appealing* in their affective force and symbolism. The stylistic shifts and salient themes that mark each new occurrence of the *Mad Mad* invite us to note and make sense of the ways that performers and producers engage, contest, and create using shared structures and technologies in diverse contexts. Understanding precisely which resources—e.g., which musical figures and connoted community alignments—become most compelling, and why they accrue such resonance in specific social contexts, can help us to make sense of the sonic-social circuitry underpinning the broader resonance of reggae and hip-hop in their centers of production and in the wider world, not to mention

(for a statistical breakdown, see, e.g., Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992], 28).

²⁶ Kenneth Bilby, "Jamaica," in *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, ed. Peter Manuel (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 145.

²⁷ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 14 (emphasis in original).

more general questions about music, communication, and the production of meaning and subjectivity in an age of “schizophonia,” as one ethnomusicologist provocatively put it.²⁸

My singular focus on the *Mad Mad*—though I will, of course, discuss related riddims and other relevant recordings—represents an attempt to offer up a new story of hip-hop and reggae but also to acknowledge explicitly that this is but one story among many. The histories of hip-hop and reggae have been in formation for some time now, constructed and revised by journalists, academics, performers, and enthusiasts (and detractors) of all stripes, and though I hope that the perspective I lay out here offers new ways of understanding these intertwined histories, I seek not to define but to disrupt, and to disrupt in order to provoke a reconsideration of the very boundaries of hip-hop and reggae, the US and Jamaica—boundaries which themselves have eroded the more I have listened and learned. Through a series of close readings and thick descriptions, in historical and ethnographic perspective, of the many migrations and manifestations of the *Mad Mad*, I intend to shed new light on the relationship between hip-hop and reggae, the US and Jamaica, illuminating the interplay between foreign and familiar in musically-mediated moments of meaning-making.

A Zoom of One’s Own: Historiography and Narrative Strategy

In an attempt to make my writing strategy transparent and reflexive—and in order to call the reader’s attention to and critique commonplace narrative devices—I offer here something of a cross between a history and a “meta-history,” a self-conscious text that

²⁸ Steven Feld, “pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (1996): 1-35. Feld borrows the notion of schizophonia from R. Murray Schafer (1977).

seeks to show its seams.²⁹ Rather than *taking* the form of a descriptive history, then, this dissertation is *aping* the form of a descriptive history, revealing at certain crucial moments a clear lack of concern with the sort of encyclopedic, linear style that has marked (and marred) so many hip-hop and reggae histories. I take my cue in this respect from the novelist Virginia Woolf, with particular reference to her 1927 work, *To the Lighthouse*.³⁰ For all its modernist qualities, including an intense preoccupation with—and in many ways an affirmation of—such established forms as the novel, Woolf’s text features a number of radical departures from the received narrative conventions of the day. The book’s omniscient narrator, for example, is accompanied and undercut by a certain heteroglossia. Ironically, Woolf’s subversion of novelistic realism, or what we might think of as a particular regime of “realistic” representation, stems in part from her attempt to achieve a “truer” verisimilitude: plot is secondary to philosophical introspection and “stream of consciousness” exposition; psychology and perspective intrude on omniscience; and—above all, at least for informing my approach here—time passes in an uneven, and often jarring, manner. Indeed, it is the “Time Passes” section in the middle of the book, in which one of the major characters, and arguably the text’s protagonist (if there is one), dies in a parenthetical aside, that inspires my decision to keep this dissertation’s chapter on the 1970s—arguably the most formative, or at least the most written-about, period for hip-hop and reggae—noticeably, radically brief. This is not to say that my coverage of this seminal period will be purposely, woefully, or “criminally” incomplete, but this is one way that I seek to call attention to the act of representation through the very structure of the work.

²⁹ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

³⁰ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Harcourt, 1927).

Rather than attempting any greater correspondence between my text and Woolf's, what I am most interested in is the way that such an explicit break from convention calls attention to the clichés of the form even as it advances and produces something recognizable within its confines. For Woolf, it was the novelistic depiction of the family, the pastoral, and the personal/psychological; for me, it is the historical description of musical genres, their socio-cultural contexts and meanings, and the policing of boundaries around these genres and their putative “peoples” (or the social formations they supposedly spring from and represent). Essentially, I seek to disrupt too casual a reading of this text as yet another history of hip-hop or reggae and to call attention to the act of representation itself, for despite my desire to produce an accurate and incisive account of my subject, this work is ultimately but another representation and one that is, moreover, rather explicitly engaged with other representations—in particular, with the previous tellings of the story that have consolidated something of a hegemonic discourse around hip-hop and reggae. My concern with narrative—and my desire not to lose the compelling character of a story that reads like a story—animates my writing strategy here as well, an approach as concerned with narrativity as it is with the sort of reflexive representation that can stand at once as an account of no little authority (with a recognition of all that such a stance involves) and as an anti-authoritative intervention.

So despite the seemingly straightforward appearance of this text's table of contents, one should not mistake the dissertation for a conventional re-telling of hip-hop and reggae history by a taxonomist posing as an ethnomusicologist. Toward that end, I offer over the course of the text a number of glaring edits, ruptures, and genre-mixes. The most obvious of such “edits” (to employ a term from contemporary remix culture—a

movement deeply informed by the techniques and technologies of hip-hop and reggae) is my explicit, but ultimately only partial, elision of the 1970s. In giving presentations based on this research, for example, I have occasionally, glibly, told audiences that as a corrective of sorts I would “skip the 70s entirely” in my discussion—a declaration often met with laughter. During other talks, I have made similarly iconoclastic remarks with regard to Bob Marley, who, for many good reasons (and some bad), has haunted the reggae literature from its inception. In the end, though, I will neither omit the 1970s nor Marley, though I will grant them much less space than typical accounts devote to them. Instead, I will keep the chapter on “The 70s” noticeably short, especially in comparison to the other decade-based chapters, and I will turn to such subjects in other places, as, for example, when it will be necessary to discuss Marley’s legacy into the 80s, 90s, and into the present. Also, in general, this text will mirror Woolf’s accordion-like approach to time by similarly shifting focus within each chapter, zooming in on particular moments while engaging a “big picture” perspective at other times. Unlike previous hip-hop or reggae histories, though, I will be training my lens not on the “canonical” but often on the marginal, seeking to shift the emphases of what have become somewhat settled stories in order to tease out an underlying, unremarked, and yet utterly remarkable thread running through them.

In this sense, I am interested in cultivating and promoting what we might think of, again alluding to Woolf, as “a zoom of one’s own”—an express acknowledgement, as structured in the representation itself, of one’s perspective, one’s narrative frame, and the relationship of these to one’s subject position (at least insofar as one is able to maintain awareness and candor about such things). Considering that Woolf’s 1929 essay, *A Room*

of *One's Own*, was largely a call for greater structural support for women working in arts and letters, I hope it is not too insensitive or ridiculous of me to pun on the phrase in support of my own position, a point of authority inextricable from my whiteness, my maleness, my educational and class background, etc.³¹ But part of my motivation in seeking to acknowledge the inextricability of my perspective from my subject position is precisely so as not to render invisible, as usual, the ways that authority so often articulates with socio-cultural markers of prestige and power. I recognize that it is a strange sort of conceit for me to re-signify a (proto-)feminist phrase here, but then, for many, it is a strange sort of conceit for someone in my position to attempt to write about “black music” in the first place. Thus I foreground my role as an (idiosyncratic) interpreter of the world—with a minimal amount of navel-gazing, I hope—in order to respond to, among others’, Guthrie Ramsey’s call for musicologists, in particular those writing about “black music,” to proceed with no little vigilance—if not outright disclosure—with regard to the ways one’s critical and authorial voice are bound up with race and subject position.³²

Echoes in the Field: Situating the Self in Recent Music Scholarship

Considering the various notions and workings of race we can observe between Jamaica and the US and between, for example, the 1970s and today, I see no reason to capitulate too easily to stateside orthodoxies around identity politics, though I recognize the importance of treading carefully here and recognizing that the knowledge I produce

³¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Vintage, 1996 [1929]).

³² Guthrie Ramsey, Jr., “Who Hears Here? Black Music, Critical Bias, and the Musicological Skin Trade,” *Musical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2001): 1-52.

emerges inextricably from my (racialized) subject position. In that sense, though, I would argue that whatever outsidership I might possess in various contexts—from Jamaican studio sessions to academic conferences—functions less as a liability than as part of the very dialectic of research and the production of knowledge. This is not to recuperate willy-nilly any and all approaches or orientations to research, or to blur in too cavalier a fashion emic/etic distinctions (which nonetheless, at least in my own research, are always rather blurry); rather, it is an attempt to recognize, as Kofi Agawu asserts, that

the disjunction between researcher’s world and that of the researched is not fortuitous; it is necessary, along with the asymmetry of power that such a distinction implies. Successful fieldworkers are not those who make token or pious gestures toward undermining the asymmetry but those who treat it openly as a condition for knowledge production.³³

The notion of “fieldwork” Agawu advances here also dovetails with my approach in this dissertation and my orientation on ethnomusicology and music research more generally. “If getting out of the field is a practical as well as a logical condition for producing an ethnography,” argues Agawu, “then we should be able to imagine ethnomusicological research that is not based on the normal kind of fieldwork.” Offering up “analytical or theoretical work” as examples of other types of “fieldwork,” Agawu attempts to subvert a lingering romanticism around the ethnographic venture by challenging conventional ethnomusicological notions of “the field.”

In this dissertation my “field” encompasses multiple, “traditional” ethnographic sites and soundscapes, historical texts, academic and journalistic representations, musical performances and recordings, and the realms of myth and ideology from which all these

³³ Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (London: Routledge, 2003), 45.

texts are inextricable. As evidenced in my nod to Woolf and my transparent narrative strategy, an overriding concern for me here is to call attention to the ways that texts—whether historical, analytical, ethnographic, etc.—are constructed, how knowledge is produced, and how ideologies speak through everyday forms of music and language. Though Woolf is typically identified as a modernist author, the self-consciousness of her prose seems at least one common connection between her work and that of authors more commonly associated with postmodernism, a movement that would intensify modernist experiments with perspective, time, form, and the reliability of the narrator’s voice and create a field of cultural production more commensurate with the decentering insights of poststructural linguistics and the shimmering surfaces of late 20th century society and culture. In addition to literary precedents, my concern with representation—both as a subject of study and as an inevitable consequence of expressing my ideas in some form—has been informed by an engagement with the anthropological literature of the late 80s and its so-called “crisis of representation.”³⁴ Most germane to the present discussion of musicological method are some “post-crisis” studies by ethnomusicologists and by anthropologists who concern themselves primarily with musical practice and meaning.

While a 1990 SEM symposium and collections such as *Shadows in the Field* offer examples, if lagging, of ethnomusicologists grappling with critiques of ethnographic

³⁴ Here I am thinking, for example, of Clifford and Marcus (*Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986]), Marcus and Fischer (*Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986]), and Clifford (*The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988]), which we might see as responding, at least in part, to the discussion initiated years earlier by the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), not to mention Michel Foucault’s “genealogical” approach to the study of culture and society and the critical, interdisciplinary approach to cultural studies most influentially advanced by scholars such as Raymond Williams, Dick Hebdige, and Stuart Hall at the Birmingham School (i.e., the University of Birmingham Centre of Cultural Studies). Moreover, it is worth adding to the list here the advent of fictional and semi-fictional approaches to “post-crisis” representations, among the more prominent, compelling examples of which are Michael Taussig’s *My Cocaine Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Richard and Sally Price’s *Enigma Variations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

authority, a couple recent monographs offer notable, suggestive examples of the ways that music research can take representation itself—as both a product and a subject of ethnography—as an overriding concern, critically shaping their own representation by integrating their argument directly into the structure of the work.³⁵ Although not a musical ethnography *per se*, music figures centrally in Deborah Thomas’s analyses of such articulations of “modern blackness” as the Rude Boy movement, Rastafari, and today’s hip-hop-inflected and media- and migration-propelled “amplification of a diasporic consciousness.” In order to “clarify the links between global processes, nationalist visions, and local practices,” Thomas explores the dialectical relationships among them by building the structure of her text around three pairs of interacting contexts: the global-national, national-local, and local-global.³⁶ Although its representational strategies are less apparent on a macro scale, Aaron Fox’s *Real Country* (2004), which bears a subtle mark of reflexive anthropology, also merits mention here for its careful, compelling approach to representing, as Fox calls it, “the poetics of speech and song.”³⁷ Employing simple but effective changes in font, arrangement, and the use of space, Fox takes representation seriously and hence communicates that he takes his subjects seriously as well. Moreover, Fox’s embrace of the web to offer musical examples, additional photographs, video clips, a portal to reviews and supporting

³⁵ See Christopher A. Waterman, “‘Our Tradition is a Very Modern Tradition’: Popular Music and the Construction of Pan-Yoruba Identity,” *Ethnomusicology* 34, no. 3 (1990): 367-379; Thomas Turino, “Structure, Context, and Strategy in Musical Ethnography,” *Ethnomusicology* 34, no. 3 (1990): 399-412; Line Grenier and Jocelyne Guilbault, “‘Authority’ Revisited: The ‘Other’ in Anthropology and Popular Music Studies,” *Ethnomusicology* 34, no. 3 (1990): 381-397; and Stephen Blum, “Response to the Symposium Papers. Commentary,” *Ethnomusicology* 34, no. 3 (1990): 413-21; also, Gregory Barz and Tim Cooley, ed. *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³⁶ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 12, 19.

³⁷ Aaron Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 214.

materials, and a blog for continuing the conversation around the book stands as a compelling model for contemporary ethnomusicology, bypassing many of the limitations and inherent problems of traditional textual representations.³⁸

Perhaps the most explicit and exciting example of a critical marriage of form and content in recent ethnomusicology is Louise Meintjes's *Sound of Africa!* (2003).³⁹ Meintjes's text is a multi-layered ethnography which examines the dialectical relationship between the social dimensions of sculpting sound and the sonic enactment of social categories, building the very form of the work around the practices and dynamics of contemporary studio craft. The most obvious and striking feature of Meintjes's text in this regard is its chapter structure, which borrows from the discourse of the recording studio for its forms and headings. Thus, where one might expect chapters and subchapters and sections and subsections, one instead finds cuts, tracks, takes, mixes, remixes, playbacks, rewinds, and rewind-agains. Far from simply renaming chapters and subchapters with clever analogues, Meintjes employs these terms in precise ways, calling attention to them as explicit interpretive and representational devices. *Sound of Africa!* thus advances the experimental formal structure as a hermeneutic tool, and I seek to follow Meintjes's bold example, allowing my subjects—i.e., the migrating musical materials of the *Mad Mad* and the accumulated histories of hip-hop and reggae—to inform the shapes my own representations take.

Finally, in addition to the various literary and academic examples guiding my study's quasi-/meta-narrative form, the aesthetics of hip-hop and reggae also contribute

³⁸ See <<http://www.music.columbia.edu/~cecenter/AF/index2.html>> (accessed 7 June 2006).

³⁹ Louise Meintjes, *The Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

some suggestive strategies for expressing the relationships I hope to tease out here.⁴⁰ My ethnomusicological training has proceeded in step with my autodidactic forays into the world of DJing and producing, and just as my academic studies have deepened my understanding of the ways that producers, engineers, and DJs practice their craft (and, importantly, the implications thereof), producing and performing hip-hop and reggae have provided me with a wealth of insights into the techniques and technologies through which artists and audiences alike (re)shape past and present performances and make them meaningful. Hence with nods to mixing and remixing, dubbing and versioning, sampling and re-licking, mashing-up and pulling-up (in order, of course, to “wheel and come again”), this text aspires to a correspondence between form and content that mirrors in its sonic-textual connections, its deliberate sequences and juxtapositions—the sort of mix that a history-conscious reggae selector or hip-hop DJ might put together in order to guide an audience through the myriad interconnections between songs and styles, places and times I explore in this dissertation. An intertextual history demands an intertextual text and so I attempt to bring together not simply a plethora of sources here, but a number of genres as well, among them ethnography, histor[iograph]y, and various forms of textual analysis—cutting back and forth between musical, filmic, and scholarly texts, among others. Although brimming with close readings, or moments when I allow some records to spin a little longer than others, the prevailing dynamic here is one of sequential and simultaneous mixing, of pulling a thematic thread through a constellation of texts and making an argument that works in sonic terms—by making audible connections—as well

⁴⁰ A self-produced CD, *Boston Jerk* (2004), recorded with my collaborators in Kingston and mixed in Cambridge offers a rather direct and suggestive example of how the aesthetics of hip-hop and reggae can be brought to bear directly on the act of ethnographic representation.

as via the various languages of theory and analysis that comprise the contemporary ethnomusicologist's toolkit.

At the heart of this dissertation is a perspective that emerges from my own sustained engagement with hip-hop and reggae—namely, that these musical forms themselves crystallize and change via sustained encounter with each other and through each other's embodiment of notions of the foreign and the familiar. Although such a perception accrues significance when one teases out the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of such notions, there is, I venture, no better way of apprehending and appreciating these connections, these sustained patterns of engagement, than to hear them in overwhelming overlap and interplay. As such, it is not only necessary but, for the sake of letting the argument emerge in its most compelling narrative form, crucial to present the musical texts of this dissertation in the same sort of rich, complex density that drives the resonance of an enduring riddim such as the *Mad Mad*. Since a great deal of my argument's force derives from the sheer heft of the corpus of examples that appear to bear it out, there are more musical examples in this study than one typically encounters in a work of ethnomusicology. Lest one mistake this profusion for some sort of positivist obsession, let me be clear: my aim here far surpasses (and, indeed, has little concern for) the purely discographical. Rather, I marshal these examples in order to explore the cultural work that music does in mediating our (shifting) sense of self and other. The accumulated interactions between hip-hop and reggae constitute a strong body of evidence—undeniable as it is audible—and so I embrace here the challenge of *juggling* so many tracks and texts. As a reggae selector might spin musically- or thematically-

related songs in order to draw the audience into a reverie of resonance, I employ the various versions of the *Mad Mad* riddim to help my analysis resound more broadly.

My attempts to fashion a “musical text,” if you will—and to produce (actual) musical texts to accompany my prose—also represent responses to the restrictions and sometimes stifling orthodoxies of formal scholarship, not to mention attempts to bridge the ineffable gulf between writing about music and experiencing or playing music.⁴¹

Although scholarly narratives can strongly shape our reception of music, stories about music’s role in society and culture can also be told sonically. Moreover, rather than necessarily sacrificing the nuance or complexity of an argument, a musically-embodied narrative may be able to communicate with even greater precision, playfulness, and commentary. The stable critical body has long been recognized as a conceit of sorts, and one way that I attempt to tell this story without resorting to forms of authorial closure is to provide (open) musical texts as complements to my prose.⁴² There are two supplementary (though crucially so) musical texts to which I will direct the reader: 1) a *Mad Mad* mix that sonically and thematically connects portions of the lion’s share of recordings discussed in this dissertation; and 2) an “ethnographic album,” *Boston Jerk*,

⁴¹ For a systematic discussion of this “gulf” or “juncture,” see Charles Seeger, “Speech, Music and Speech about Music,” in *Studies in Musicology 1935-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): 16-35.

⁴² As epistemological exercises, networked research techniques, and (relatively) accessible public expressions of my ideas, DJing and blogging about hip-hop and reggae have been enormously fruitful pursuits for me. Ultimately, I am more interested in communicating with a broad audience than a small group of expert peers. I recognize the challenges and limitations of such a goal. My desire to tell a compelling story without sacrificing rigor or complexity is yet another informing motivation for the quasi-/meta-narrative shape this dissertation takes. It is notable that conventional—and perhaps hegemonic—forms of contemporary scholarship often seem, for all their preoccupation with the public conversation, woefully out of step with any discourse outside the academy and its publishing outlets. My choice to represent my research in musical form and to share it publicly via a blog (or two) stems from my desire to participate in the public conversation as much as I observe it. Academics, especially in the humanities and social sciences, often appear stuck in a rut of alternately acknowledging (and exercising some vigilance around) their contributions to public knowledge and bemoaning their lack of influence. Why not assert an explicit position (and writing strategy), recognize the imbrication of our work in various public discourses, and embrace the value of putting our thoughts, our arguments, our research “out there”?

comprising interviews, songs, and soundscapes recorded in Kingston in 2003.⁴³ I would like to think of these more playful productions as attempts to respond to Guthrie Ramsey's call to "join other methods to my musicological toolbox."⁴⁴ Although he means other *disciplinary* approaches, we might go a step further and ask whether there are valid epistemological implications for "musicking" about music alongside our writing and talking about music.⁴⁵

Not only does a DJ-style mix or an album of (sometimes radically altered) field recordings and collaborations try the boundaries of conventional scholarship—not to mention notions of "fair use"—such expressions also rise to meet my subject(s) of study on their own terms. Hip-hop and reggae emerge from and have crucially shaped DJ culture, and to the extent that DJ culture—a broadly conceived field united by the practice of playing and manipulating pre-recorded music—is the nexus where much of this conversation is happening, I endeavor to make my arguments in that sphere as well. Indeed, we may read this text as an explication of the mix and album even as we hear the music as an expression or illustration of the meta-narrative, or "dub history," that follows.⁴⁶ "Thinking with our ears offers an opportunity to augment our critical imaginations," argue Michael Bull and Les Back, and this dissertation moves from the

⁴³ These can be found at the following URLs: <<http://www.wayneandwax.com/boston-jerk.html>> and <<http://www.wayneandwax.com/mad-mad.html>>.

⁴⁴ Ramsey, "Who Hears Here? Black Music, Critical Bias, and the Musicological Skin Trade," 20.

⁴⁵ Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1998. I should note that my invocation of Small's "musicking" here is not so much a commitment to the term in the broader sense of the various activities related to musical performance, but in the narrow sense of *making* music about music. I consider my attempts to *music* about music, or to find a musical meta-language for expressing ideas about music, to constitute one attempt to resolve, or respond to, Charles Seeger's "musicological juncture" (1987)—the problem of the ineffable distance between the "speech mode of discourse" and the "music mode of discourse." For further reflections on this dilemma and some possible, technologically-assisted remedies, see my paper, "Musically-Expressed Ideas about Music," as presented at NECSEM 2006 (Trinity College) and published online: <<http://wayneandwax.blogspot.com/2006/04/musically-expressed-ideas-about-music.html>> (accessed 4 June 2006).

⁴⁶ Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 3.

same conviction.⁴⁷ Seeking to make sense of the power of music to inform our social selves, the forms this work takes are intended to resound with the thinking my ears have done, hearing hip-hop and reggae together.

Why Jamaica? Hearing Hip-hop in Foreign and Familiar Contexts

Because hip-hop's interplay with reggae (and the specific story of the *Mad Mad*) represents but one thread with which to spin this yarn—one could imagine, for instance, a history of hip-hop (or reggae) that examines its relationship to Latin music, rock, techno, etc., each opening into a host of illuminating engagements—my focus on the music of Jamaica may, and should, seem somewhat arbitrary. Still, Jamaica stands as a significant—if not central—node in hip-hop's global network for a number of reasons, among them its claims to origins as well as reggae's and hip-hop's seemingly tandem global spread. Advanced both in Jamaican- and American-accented narratives, hip-hop's and reggae's popularly perceived familial connection calls attention to the longstanding interplay of these styles and to the sense of transnational community they reflect and engender—not to mention, given the various forms this relationship takes (e.g., parent/child, siblings, cousins), the trickiness of reconciling overlapping and sometimes contradictory identifications and feelings of attachment or belonging.

Initially, I did not set out to write a dissertation about reggae and hip-hop, or even about hip-hop in Jamaica. Pursuing my interest in “global hip-hop” and in what the music carried with it outside the US (not to mention what people brought *to* their engagements

⁴⁷ Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2003), 2.

with it), I planned to study hip-hop in Germany. It was somewhat serendipitous that I was invited to consult on a project in Jamaica at a crucial time during the formulation of my dissertation topic.⁴⁸ Hearing hip-hop all around me in a place—i.e., Kingston—where I expected reggae to resound (which it does), I realized Jamaica could serve as well as Germany for a study of the transnational circulation and significations of hip-hop. Once I began to consider Jamaica as such a site, however, the historical, socio-cultural, and narrative connections proved to be stronger than I had initially appreciated, and I found the scope of my project expanding beyond a simple ethnographic or interpretative look at “hip-hop in Jamaica.” Instead, my research began to open up into bigger questions about the fundamental interrelationship between reggae and hip-hop, Jamaica and the US, and the stories we tell about ourselves, our music, and our communities and societies. Not only is Jamaica, as Orlando Patterson phrases it, a “Third World society that has perhaps been more exposed to the full glare of American culture than nearly any other,” Jamaica also boasts a unique relationship to hip-hop via its myth of origins.⁴⁹

Pursuing their relationship further, it soon became evident that the interplay between hip-hop and reggae has been a rather consistent, crucial feature in the development of both genres as well as in the musically-mediated processes of racialization, Americanization, and Caribbeanization that have animated cultural politics and informed social formations and subject formation from New York to Kingston, Miami to London and beyond. Somewhat suddenly, Jamaica—a nation increasingly

⁴⁸ The project, a collaboration between Jamaica’s Department of Correctional Services and the Harvard Law School’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society, was an important source of support during my principal dates of field research and a rather fruitful partnership insofar as the digital music workshops I offered in Kingston’s schools and prisons on behalf of the Berkman Center put me in direct, musically-mediated conversation with a great many Kingstonians.

⁴⁹ Patterson, “Ecumenical America,” 104.

constituted as much by its diasporic citizenry as those living on the island—seemed not to lie at the margins so much as at the center of global culture.⁵⁰

Jamaica amplifies its “likkle but tallawah” voice (i.e., “small but powerful”) precisely via its connections to such postcolonial metropolises as New York and London and its enmeshment in imperial networks of language, culture, and commerce. Reggae’s “poco songs” thus partake in Anglo-American empire even as they critique it. No longer subjects of the British Crown, Jamaicans nevertheless remain subjects of the foreign imagination, the tourist imagination, and the Anglo-/American racial imagination, despite that Caribbean politics, social history, and cultural production have also strongly shaped outside perceptions of Jamaicanness or Caribbeanness, never mind blackness or the dangerous connotations of rhythm.⁵¹ Although, as Rex Nettleford points out, one might think of black power as a “re-export” to the Caribbean—considering the movement’s roots in the early 20th century speeches and organizing of the Jamaican-born pan-Africanist, Marcus Garvey—the US’s binary racial categories differ significantly from the shade-based conceptions (and lack of a one-drop rule, despite the love of “one-drop” rhythms) that still prevail in Jamaica.⁵² But increasingly, amid musically-propelled, mass media projections of American racial ideologies and stateside interpellations of Jamaican

⁵⁰ This ironic centering of the marginal resonates with Stuart Hall’s sense of finding his own experience to be rather representative in a world defined by movement and fracture: “Now that, in the postmodern age, you all feel so dispersed, I become centered. What I’ve thought of as dispersed and fragmented comes, paradoxically, to be *the* representative modern experience!” See Hall, “Minimal Selves,” in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1987]), 114.

⁵¹ This mirror/mirror relationship dates back at least to antebellum times, when images of rebellious Caribbean slaves informed American conversations about slavery, race, and music: “A realm with a long history of interracial contest and densely populated by blacks who were visibly perpetuating African-based musical practices, the Caribbean occupied an enduring place in the imagination of rhythm as a signifier of danger” (Radano, *Lying Up a Nation*, 245).

⁵² Nettleford, *Mirror, Mirror*, vii. The “one-drop” rhythm is the prevailing groove in roots reggae. Emerging out of ska and jazz drumming techniques, the one-drop typically accents beats 2 and 4 with a kick drum (and sometimes a snare), leaving the downbeat open, to be affirmed by the bass or simply by the underlying pulse.

migrants as “black,” Afro-/Jamaican notions of race and nation are being shaped by African-/American conceptions, even as stateside ideas are, in turn, re-shaped in cultural crucibles such as NY and Miami by a longstanding and expanding Caribbean presence.

Through reggae, Jamaican producers and performers project their own powerful, distinctive figurations of blackness and modernity. Reggae was, in fact, a globally popular music well before hip-hop was, though it inevitably traveled paths paved by African-/American genres such as jazz, funk, soul, and rock’n’roll. (And since the global rise of hip-hop in the mid- to late-80s, reggae—especially of the dancehall variety—has increasingly been heard alongside hip-hop, in some cases as a variation of the American style rather than vice versa.) Especially since the 1980s, when a critical mass of Jamaican immigrants and a spate of films and news reports of vicious, drug-running “posses” (re)introduced Jamaica to the American cultural mainstream, the sounds and images of Jamaica—from Rudie to Rasta to ragga—have served African-/American cultural politics by providing charged symbols of sameness and difference for the articulation of (racialized) community relationships, especially in such centers as New York and Miami. Hip-hop best expresses this creative engagement, and we can hear and see in its musical and sartorial styles how US-based performers employ Jamaicanness in their own assertions of sameness and difference, self and other. In the last decade, as Jamaica has amplified its voice by piggybacking on hip-hop’s ascension to global ubiquity—witness, say, Beenie Man’s or Sean Paul’s success on hip-hop-format radio, video, and retail channels worldwide—their interplay has only intensified. It is not without some ambivalence, however, that Jamaicans project their voices into the global marketplace with what sometimes sounds like too slight an accent and sometimes too heavy, or with

only “a little twang” versus “too much twang” as Louise Bennett phrases it in an epigraph to this chapter (referring, of course, to the adoption of American accents).

In the land of reggae—one of the world’s most popular musics and a significant source of national pride, not to mention profit—hip-hop’s current ubiquity is remarkable. Make no mistake: roots reggae’s distinctive “one-drop” and dancehall’s unmistakable 3+3+2 groove still resound around Kingston.⁵³ But the hip-hop beats blaring from car stereos, from the mini-soundsystems of roadside CD vendors, and in the dancehalls themselves indicate that Bounty Killer and Beenie Man, never mind Bob Marley, have met serious competition in Jay Z, Nelly, 50 Cent, and other Top 40 rappers. Some of dancehall’s biggest stars—in particular, Elephant Man and Wayne Marshall (not to be confused with the author)—routinely score local hits with their own versions of hip-hop favorites, while hip-hop-generation DJs such as Bling Dawg and Vybz Kartel have made names for themselves by seamlessly incorporating hip-hop slang and style into their dancehall-centric declamations. Sean Paul, who deftly weaves hip-hop parlance into his creole rhymes, became a national darling of sorts after his US chart successes, as well as the inroads he has made into the lucrative, globally popular hip-hop scene.⁵⁴ Even those critical of Sean Paul’s uptown background (which is to say, his upper-/middle-class-ness) express hope that the DJ’s wide exposure translates to greater access to the large, sought-after American market for other Jamaican artists. For others, especially the generation

⁵³ As mentioned in the previous note, in reggae parlance a “one drop” rhythm refers to the sparse, prevailing duple rhythm featured in, say, most Bob Marley songs, as well as roots and dub reggae recordings more generally. The “one drop” tends to mark beats 2 and 4 with a kick drum, using the rest of the kit (and ensemble for that matter) to provide polyrhythmic accents around the steady pulse. When I use the term “3+3+2” in this dissertation, I refer to a subdivision of the half-measure at the eighth-note level—a polyrhythmic pattern common to Caribbean music more generally and strongly associated with dancehall reggae, especially since the days of the early 90s and the “bomp bomp” minimalism that followed.

⁵⁴ From Sean Paul’s breakthrough album, *Dutty Rock* (2002), “Gimme the Light” peaked at number 7 on Billboard’s Hot 100 and the follow-up single, “Get Busy,” reached number 1.

that has grown up with American cable TV as a staple of their mediascape, questions of class and nation seem to matter less than the importance, or allure, of successful black (and brown) artists speaking in the language of global, urban cool and flaunting worldwide symbols of the good life. When I asked students at Tivoli Gardens High School in the spring of 2003 who their favorite artists were, the answers—Wayne Marshall, Sean Paul, and 50 Cent—seemed to say more about the excitement about seeing Jamaica on the world’s stage and the effects of global media on local perceptions than about traditional class conflicts and class-accented (and affirming) tastes. In the last several years BET and MTV have outshined local television offerings (though the recent advent of several Jamaican music video stations marks a possibly significant shift), while several radio stations now devote sizeable portions of their programming to American hip-hop and R&B. As has long been the case, the latest American dance hits are staples at dancehall events around the island, including dances in downtown Kingston where one might otherwise expect a more “hardcore” or “local” sound to dominate.⁵⁵

Son of Reggae, Brother of Hip-hop: Filial Metaphors and Genre Relationships

Jamaican artists and audiences engage hip-hop as style and as product, sometimes invoking well-worn narratives about the filial or familial relationship between hip-hop

⁵⁵ Interestingly, having become such a common feature of the Jamaican soundscape, hip-hop is no longer necessarily incommensurate with the Jamaican imagination of the “hardcore” and the “local”—especially since figures such as 50 Cent, Biggie Smalls, and Jay-Z, who tend to represent a familiar hustler/thug archetype (resonant with the rudeboy/gunman figure in Jamaica), have long stood as local favorites in Jamaica. The term *hardcore* not only operates in both hip-hop and reggae parlance but accrues meaning through their interplay. Thus Vybz Kartel describes himself as “hardcore like hip-hop” in “You Want Buddy” (2004), while for many people living in New York, London, and other urban centers of the Jamaican diaspora, *hardcore* (or *ardcore*, to give it a more Jamaican/Anglo pronunciation) has often functioned as an adjective to describe a kind of reggae-related, and race- and class-inflected authenticity (see, for example, Simon Reynolds’s discussion of hardcore/jungle in *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave* [New York: Routledge, 1999]).

and reggae, black Jamaicans and black Americans. Such stories serve to mediate and make sense of an embrace of what other Jamaicans might hear as “foreign” influence. Given the irresistible appeal of an international (i.e., US) market for musical goods—and the US as a site of gainful employment more generally—as well as the transnational dimensions of “modern blackness” as a contemporary cultural practice, narratives about the familial connections between hip-hop and reggae reconcile apparent contradictions in the Jamaican imagination as they bear witness to the perception of shared socio-cultural circumstances and shared “structures of feeling” among Afro-Jamaicans and African-Americans, to recall Raymond Williams.⁵⁶ Notably, the ways such familial relations are characterized—e.g., as parent/child, siblings, cousins—often establish particular lineages which may or may not affirm other identitarian possibilities, such as those around nation or ethnicity. At other times, despite what might be seen as pan-African articulations between the two, various actors and observers are careful to distinguish what is “foreign,” which “came first,” and where the limits of creative cross-cultural engagement might lie. The range of familial metaphors employed to make sense of the relationship between hip-hop and reggae thus demonstrates no little ambivalence around the very character of the relationship.

Not surprisingly, given relatively clear lines of historical precedence, hip-hop is frequently characterized as reggae’s offspring. In a BBC/Bravo documentary, *Reggae: The Story of Jamaican Music* (2004), the Jamaican-born, Bronx-based rapper/singer Shinehead, who has long pursued a fusion of hip-hop and reggae in his own recordings, offers a direct, “maternal” connection between the two: “Mother reggae passed it on to the child hip-hop.” Similarly, but without maternal/paternal signifiers (despite the

⁵⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

masculinity he ascribes to the genres), Sean Paul affirmed the same lineage in a radio interview on Jamaica's Zip 103 in early 2003, calling dancehall the "son of reggae music, brother of hip-hop."⁵⁷ Such a perspective also resonates with the way that Wasp, a young Kingston-based DJ and one of my primary collaborators, described the historical relations between dancehall, reggae, and hip-hop/rap: "Rap, 'pon a level now, come from reggae, seen? Dancehall now is a new ting weh come after rap, seen? So hip-hop get influence from reggae, but this what we a do now—what Dami D a do, Beenie Man a do, Bounty a do, y'know—a dancehall, and that come from rap."⁵⁸ Wasp's sense that dancehall reggae bears a marked, constitutive influence from hip-hop (as does hip-hop from reggae)

⁵⁷ I heard the interview on Zip 103 FM, a Kingston-based radio station specializing in dancehall, hip-hop, and other youth-oriented styles, on 30 January 2003. Zip's website's "intro" has a telling, mixed-up mission statement: "Zip FM is committed to playing excellent music and entertaining while educating and informing the public. We also realize the importance of our heritage and Jamaican culture and uphold that duty of nurturing it. Zip is the 'Mecca' of various music genres Reggae, Dancehall, Dance, Hip Hop, Techno, Latin, Rock, Alternative, Soca." <<http://www.zipfm.net/homepage.php>> [accessed 17 April 2006].

⁵⁸ Significantly, during our interview (on 18 June 2003), Wasp also described reggae as "the mother music of all music," further affirming familial narratives as well as centering reggae in its influence on global popular music. Such a perception, though not unusual (especially for proud Jamaicans), again calls attention to the ways stories about music can inform identitarian commitments—in this case, of a national or, depending on one's sense of reggae's blackness, a racial sort.

I employ the term collaborator here to signal a different sort of relationship between the researcher and the researched. It is an especially appropriate term, moreover, since most of my so-called "informants"—a term much too close to the dancehall denigration *informer*—were indeed collaborating with me in the recording studio: producing hip-hop and reggae recordings in Kingston constituted one of my primary ethnographic procedures.

Also, readers may note a consistent inconsistency in my transcriptions of Jamaican speech. The task of representing the distinctive sound of various forms of Jamaican English is fraught with challenges. On the one hand, I do not want to distort the sound or the meanings of my collaborators—a term I prefer over "informant" or "subject"—by imposing "standard" spellings on distinctive and often symbolic pronunciations. On the other, I am wary of obscuring my analysis via incomprehensible transcriptions, not to mention falling into the trap of employing a form of representation that smacks—at least in the US—of minstrel-ish mockery. I take a partial cue then from L. Emilie Adams, whose *Understanding Jamaican Patois* (Kingston: LMH Publishing Ltd., 1991) features a meditation on the task. For the majority of her text, Adams employs what she calls an "imperfect and incomplete system" (7), only partially phonetic. I find her explanation of the system rather sensible: "A true indication of pronunciation is given only in the spelling of peculiarly Afro-Jamaican words, or where the Afro-Jamaican pronunciation diverges appreciably from the standard English pronunciation, or where there is some danger of confusion between the two juxtaposed systems" (ibid.). In some cases, I provide a side-by-side "translation" in order to facilitate comprehension and bring into relief the distinctive and often significant qualities of certain speech acts.

indicates that despite narrative orthodoxies, a new generation of listeners not only hears hip-hop and reggae together but distinguishes one from the other in rather specific ways.

Whether one draws lines in the sand *between* genres (and social groups) or one draws lines which connect them represents another dimension of this project—one that, as I will show, depends heavily on context. In another telling moment of our conversation, Wasp described the difference between dancehall and hip-hop as a mere matter of accent, rather than style, seeing them as essentially one and the same. Indeed, noting this sort of unity, overlapping with a sense of familial relation, has become increasingly common in public discussions about hip-hop and reggae, especially in the wake of Sean Paul’s (and others’) recent crossover success. Maintaining that “[it] is a close ting between hip-hop and reggae,” Wasp argued that both genres employ “the same type of delivery” and that “the language [i.e., vocabulary, syntax, and accent] is the only difference.” Appearing to confirm Wasp’s articulation of reggae’s and hip-hop’s basic sameness, another aspiring dancehall DJ and collaborator, Raw-Raw, a young Kingstonian with ears attuned to hip-hop and dancehall alike, also sought to articulate a relationship between the two. Using the distinctive first-person plural of Rastafari to describe his dancehall brethren, Raw-Raw observed that NY-based rapper Jay-Z possessed or practiced “the same futuristic flow as I&I in Jamaica.”⁵⁹

Raw-Raw’s sense of sameness resonates with comments made by Elephant Man, a popular dancehall DJ and a frequent collaborator with stateside artists, who attempted

⁵⁹ The perception of a shared futurism is a fascinating dimension of the relationship between hip-hop and reggae, one that opens into discussions around Afro-Futurism, for instance, but, unfortunately, one that this dissertation will not be able to pursue in great detail. For discussions of Afro-Futurism and music, see Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1998); Alondra Nelson, “Introduction: Future Texts,” *Social Text* 71, no. 20/2 (2002): 1-16; Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

in a recent interview to clarify the relationship between the two genres. When the interviewer noted that Elephant Man had claimed in other interviews that “hip-hop comes from reggae,” the DJ demurred, asserting instead that both genres come “from the old school.”⁶⁰ In something of a diplomatic move, Ele emphasized their connectedness and shared history without positing that one begat the other: “When I say ‘come from it,’ it’s not like hip-hop was birthed from reggae. What I was trying to get across was back in the days it was the same thing, but it was just two different pronunciations.” And yet such statements about sameness also reveal their limits, as when the DJ was asked whether today’s dancehall reflected a strong hip-hop influence: “No, it’s straight dancehall man,” Ele replied, “We might turn the beats a little so you all up here can dance to and groove to it, but it’s *straight dancehall*” (my emphasis). Interestingly, in the *Germaican Observer* interview to which the Whudat.com interviewer referred, Elephant Man’s description of his new album appears to advance a contradictory (but not for him) sense of style and coherence: “It’s gonna be Pop, HipHop, R&B, Reggae. I got a little of everything on it, it is *straight Reggae* but I got a mixture for some of the fans” (my emphasis). Issues of musically-articulated community aside, contemporary dancehall artists such as Elephant Man would clearly like to have their cake and eat it too, and so savvy self-marketing must be taken into account here as another factor in the production of public perceptions of hip-hop and reggae.

Family metaphors advance a sense of musical and social sameness against persistent assertions of (crucial) cultural difference, sometimes by suggesting a degree of removal. Kool Herc, so often dubbed hip-hop’s “founding father” and thus no stranger to

⁶⁰ See <<http://www.whudat.com/interview/pages/elephantman.html>> and <http://www.germaica.net/observer/archiv/14/eng/interview_elephantman.html> (accessed 17 April 2006).

such characterizations, has been known to downplay the degree to which reggae informed hip-hop's emergence in the early- to mid-70s. And yet, in a 2004 interview with the *Jamaica Observer*, Herc noted matter-of-factly—while commenting on the degree to which dancehall and hip-hop both spring from reggae “talkover” practice—that “Hip-hop and reggae are cousins.”⁶¹ Writing in the *New York Times*, Ben Mapp makes a similar connection, but further complicates the genealogy, calling dancehall “a cousin of both reggae and rap.”⁶² For many, such metaphors may as well remain vague, representing a way to gesture—immediately and resonantly—to what rapper Pharoahe Monche described in less evocative terms when asked about the relationship between the two on Jamaica's RETV (Reggae Television): “Hip-hop has always embraced reggae music,” replied Monche, “You can hear the influence in both genres.”⁶³ And yet, despite what seems to be a broad and growing recognition among practitioners and audiences of such mutual influence, such an intimate if not familial relationship, there remain a number of crucial distinctions between the two that allow not only for mutual engagement but that provide suggestive, feelingful forms for musical articulations with (or disarticulations from) particular community formations, especially along national/transnational lines.

Within Jamaica and the United States a certain degree of nationalist pride or provincialism (even when running counter to official, state-sponsored nationalisms) tends to color the characterization of musical styles and practices as either belonging to one's local/imagined community or not, so it is telling that outside their primary, “originary” sites of production—i.e., beyond the shores of North America and the Caribbean—reggae

⁶¹ See <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/lifestyle/html/20041007T170000-0500_67281_OBS_DJ_KOOL_HERC__HIP_HOP_PIONEER_.asp> (accessed 17 April 2006).

⁶² Cited in Cooper, *Sound Clash*, 235; the original was published in the *New York Times* on June 21, 1992 under the title, resonant with Wasp's lineage quoted above, “First Reggae. Then Rap. Now It's Dancehall.”

⁶³ Interview with Pharoahe Monche, as broadcast on RETV, 31 April 2003.

and hip-hop appear to be perceived and practiced as if they constitute two stylistic approaches within one conflated genre. Such perceptions stem from as they affirm reggae's and hip-hop's circulation as forms of oppositional, "rebel music," speaking from the critical position of anti-imperialist, anti-racist New World blackness. Although one finds "purist" reggae scenes around the world (e.g., in Japan, Italy, Germany, the UK), where an ideal of "hardcore" or "roots" reggae informs musical engagements along genre-specific lines, in general it is striking to hear (and read) the degree to which "global hip-hop" almost always contains a strong infusion of reggae style, and vice versa. Documentary films such as *Hip-hop Colony* (re: Kenya), blogs such as "The Hiplife Complex" (re: Ghana), and DJ mixes such as Mago Bo's "DNA Brasileira Jamaicana" demonstrate the ways that hip-hop and (dancehall) reggae travel together.⁶⁴ Such representations bear witness, often—revealingly—without remarking on it, to the degree to which localized versions of global hip-hop invariably incorporate sonic markers of reggae style (from 3+3+2 rhythmic structures to the "flip-tongue" or double-time flows of "raggamuffin"-style DJ performance).

Volumes such as Tony Mitchell's *Global Noise* (2001), a collection of essays focusing on hip-hop outside the US, offer a litany of examples where scholars observe reggae-related musical features employed by performers who self-identify as hip-hop artists.⁶⁵ Andre Prevos notes, for instance, that in contrast to what he hears as only a handful of Jamaican-influenced US rappers, "there is a clearer tendency among French rappers to use stylistic devices associated with reggae and raggamuffin music," and that

⁶⁴ See, the *Hip-hop Colony* site <<http://www.hiphopcolony.com>>, "The Hiplife Complex" blog <<http://thehiplifecomplex.blogspot.com>>, and Mago Bo's "Sambacabana" series <<http://www.magabo.com/som.html>> (accessed 6 June 2006).

⁶⁵ *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

“[i]n France more rappers have branched out into the reggae-raggamuffin vein and have developed their own styles based on these Jamaican-inspired musics.”⁶⁶ Unsurprisingly, hip-hop in the U.K. is also, according to David Hesmondalgh and Caspar Melville, marked by such a fusion, as British MCs and producers “(re)import into the US rap framework styles and terms from Caribbean culture.” According to the authors, such articulations serve U.K. artists in crafting an authentic, local voice “by acknowledging that allegiance to an Afro-American form need not supersede or replace black British links to the Caribbean.”⁶⁷ The primacy of Jamaican style in the stylistic hodgepodge through which Mitchell describes Italian hip-hop is also telling: “Italian rap tends to combine the influences of Jamaican ragga and dancehall, traditional Mediterranean folk music (often featuring accordion and drums), ‘world music’ elements and vocal styles, and samples, scratches, and breakbeats derived from both African American and Latino rappers such as Kid Frost.” In addition, Mitchell describes the music of Italian group Mau Mau as “ragga-inflected” and notes the advent of a fusion of Genovese *trallallero* song and dancehall called “Trallamuffin.”⁶⁸ Affirming the simultaneous circulation of these styles further, Mir Wermuth reports that after an initially slow uptake, “Afro-Caribbean youth in Holland began to follow closely the latest developments in rap, ragga, jungle, and rapso.”⁶⁹ Jacqueline Urla describes a Basque group who “borrow liberally from rap, soul, ska, reggae, and raggamuffin,” calling attention yet again to the prominence of

⁶⁶ Andre Prevos, “Postcolonial Popular Music in France: Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture in the 1980s and 1990s,” in *Global Noise*, ed. Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 45.

⁶⁷ David Hesmondalgh and Caspar Melville, “Urban Breakbeat Culture: Repercussions of Hip-Hop in the United Kingdom,” in *Global Noise*, ed. Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 92.

⁶⁸ Mitchell, “Fightin’ the Faida: The Italian Posses and Hip-Hop in Italy,” in *Global Noise*, ed. Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 198, 204.

⁶⁹ Mir Wermuth, “Rap in the Low Countries: Global Dichotomies on a National Scale,” in *Global Noise*, ed. Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 151.

Jamaican styles among fusion-oriented, hip-hop-influenced groups.⁷⁰ Ian Maxwell discusses the “ragga-rap syllable ballistics” of an Australian MC.⁷¹ And in another revealing passage, Mitchell refers to the Maori hip-hop group Upper Hut Posse as “returning to their reggae roots” on an album recorded in 2000, demonstrating yet again the deep degree of overlap (and yet the persistence of stylistic distinctions) between reggae and hip-hop in the wider world.⁷²

One need not listen only to hip-hop produced outside the US to hear a great deal of reggae, however, one can hear these same stylistic borrowings and fusions—and no shortage of outright allusions—in hip-hop produced in New York and Miami, Los Angeles and New Orleans. Given that Jamaica is but one source of Caribbean (circular) migration to the US, reggae’s prominent stateside presence calls attention to Jamaica’s special place in the American, as well as global, imagination. And yet, reggae remains strangely circumscribed in popular and academic discourse alike: if it’s not an oddly-accented, exotic style heard via the occasional crossover hit and/or at perennial, post-hippie, patchouli-scented parties, it represents so broadly pervasive an influence that it disappears into ubiquity, subsumed by an omnivorous pop music industry. How, then, does one reconcile hip-hop’s and reggae’s travels together and a strong reggae/ragga

⁷⁰ Jacqueline Urla, “We Are All Malcolm X!: Negu Gorriak, Hip-Hop, and the Basque Political Imaginary,” in *Global Noise*, ed. Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 183.

⁷¹ Ian Maxwell, “Sydney Stylee: Hip-Hop Down Under Comin’ Up,” in *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*, ed. Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 272. Additionally, Maxwell offers a closer look at this hybrid engagement in his book-length study of Australian hip-hop, *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes: Hip Hop Down Under Comin’ Upper* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003) which, for example, describes an Australian MC as claiming to have been “influenced by London ragga rap rather than North American rap, conceding the Afro-Caribbean ‘roots’ of that scene, but carefully distancing himself from charges of imitation or of subjection to a putative American cultural imperialism” (203). Such self-conscious distinctions show, once again, that for all their complex overlap, hip-hop and reggae stand as significantly different stylistic resources in certain contexts and for actors in particular subject positions.

⁷² Mitchell, “Kia Kaha! (Be Strong!),” in *Global Noise*, ed. Mitchell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 296.

presence in global hip-hop with what is often also a discursive (but not musical) absence around reggae?

Listened to closely, reggae's strong, sustained presence in hip-hop and US pop more generally offers a suggestive sonic expression of what some see as the increasingly Caribbean character of American society and culture, especially in what Orlando Patterson calls the "West Atlantic system."⁷³ Mass migration of Jamaicans to US cities, especially to such media centers as New York and Miami, no doubt accounts for some of reggae's presence and stateside appeal (and, conversely, for some of hip-hop's popularity in Jamaica), but the widespread circulation—via Hollywood films, local and national news and TV, and reggae and hip-hop recordings and videos— of rather narrow representations of Jamaicanness serves to project contradictory images of Jamaica as at once a "cool and deadly" place and a center for sun and fun, ganja and rum. Over the course of the 1970s and especially the 80s and 90s, Jamaica emerged in US, and global, popular culture as a poignant symbol of the Caribbean's charms and problems. For many, Jamaica and Jamaicans—especially those rude-boy dancehall DJs with their badman talk and cowboy cool (a number of whom, including Josey Wales, Clint Eastwood, and Lone Ranger, took their names from characters from American Westerns)—came to embody a mirror/mirror version of New World blackness that proved utterly compelling in the US, overshadowing other West Indian expressions and exports and intensifying reggae's interaction with hip-hop in such centers of production as New York and Miami.

⁷³ Patterson, "The Emerging West Atlantic System: Migration, Culture, and Underdevelopment in the United States and the Circum-Caribbean Region," in *Population in an Interacting World*, ed. W. Alonso (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 227-260.

Dubbing the Histories of Hip-hop and Reggae Together: The Shape of the Text

Mimicking a staidly conventional history, the chapters of this dissertation follow, for the most part, a decade-based structure. Again, the intent here is to call attention to narrative strategy and forms of historical representation even I seek to advance a retelling of well-worn stories with new characters, new accents, and new constellations of texts and events. By focusing on one riddim, the “Mad Mad,” and the many meanings made from it, I seek to tell a story that, with its attention to particular historical, social, and cultural contexts, challenges dominant, nationalist, and often industry-promulgated narratives. In contrast to the now conventional stories of reggae and hip-hop, I propose to tell these two stories together and in relation to each other in order to tease out the ways that the music of Jamaica and the music of the United States, and by extension Jamaican and American cultural politics and social formations, have for some time been mutually constitutive.

After a review of the reggae and hip-hop literatures that seeks to put the present study into greater context (“The Full Has Never Been Told”), we begin in “The 60s,” always already *in medias res*, exploring transnationalism as a precondition and an enduring, if not increasing, feature of Caribbean music, culture, and society. Hearing social history in musical form (e.g., the legacies of migrant labor and the tourist industry), I tease out the American echoes in Alton Ellis’s “Mad, Mad, Mad,” the recording that first projects across the Jamaican soundscape a simple but catchy riff and a riddim soon to be crowned, and versioned as, the “Mad Mad.” Exploring the resonance of rocksteady’s soul-ful reverberations, the chapter offers an intervention into received

reggae history, examining Jamaica's pre-independence musical and social history, as well as early examples of Caribbean "crossover in the US, and thus challenging the nationalistic narratives that have come to provide commonsense stories about, say, ska's ebullient break from American antecedents and rocksteady's post-independence insularity.

In the subsequent chapter, the storied "70s" receive shockingly short shrift. Contrary to the prevailing focus on this decade as reggae's heyday and hip-hop's originary moment, I offer a brief, almost parenthetical acknowledgment of the growth of reggae and the birth of hip-hop. The intention here, as described above, is to forestall too facile a (mis)reading of this dissertation as an attempt to offer a new, authoritative history of hip-hop and/or reggae. Instead, I discuss the reappearance of the "Mad Mad," subtly versioned for a new recording in a new historical moment, while leaving any truly essential information bracketed for discussion in the following chapter, where the developments of the 1970s—musical, social, political, etc.—carry forward into the practices, the sounds and forms, and the shifting, contested sense of community expressed in the performances and myriad representations of the 1980s.

Although the "digital dancehall" days of the 80s have been routinely dismissed by reggae historians, the decade constitutes an era of crucial importance for understanding Jamaican musicians' continued creative engagements with music technologies and with African-/American styles. We hear the practice of versioning riddims take off with the relicks produced by Junjo Lawes for Channel One, including the seminal "do-over" of the *Mad Mad* which came to be called the "Diseases" riddim and which would help to project a number of dancehall's earliest, biggest hits from Kingston to Brooklyn. Of the

many versions explored in the Jamaican “side” of our overview of the decade, “The 80s (Side A),” it is the Channel One version of Studio One’s *Mad Mad* that propels its familiar riff, as well as a related melodic meme originally voiced by Yellowman, into hip-hop’s soundscape and, indeed, into its very lexicon. Before turning to story of the *Mad Mad* in the US during the 80s, the next chapter, “the Zunguzung Meme,” follows Yellowman’s meme, explicitly interrupting the decade-based narrative flow in order to provide an analysis that spans such chronological constraints. Following a secondary musical figure that emerges from the *Mad Mad*, this chapter considers the depth of penetration of reggae style into the hip-hop lexicon, examining subsequent appearances of the short, catchy melody on touchstone and obscure recordings alike. Tracing the figure’s increasing dissociation from its original referents and analyzing its multivalent manifestations, I argue that hip-hop’s very vocabulary—as employed by its biggest stars, its most stalwart supporters, and even a few unwitting “carriers”—embodies its creole roots and well-traveled routes.

Despite hip-hop historians’ persistent consigning of the Jamaican influence to the early 70s transmission of soundssystem practice, the 1980s represents the moment when hip-hop’s Jamaican accent truly becomes audible. In “The 80s (Side B”), we hear an explosion of engagements around what it means to be Jamaican, or not, in New York, including the odd practice of MCs defining themselves as “not Jamaican” bearing negative witness to a growing presence. Closely tied to new waves of Jamaican migration to the US, the expansion of Jamaica’s formerly political “posses” into the transnational cocaine trade, and the resulting representations—in turn, demonizing and lionizing—of Jamaicans in New York, the sound of mid-to-late 80s hip-hop registers some social

turmoil. Through the imbricate cultural logic of rap and reggae, MCs and producers make sense of the seismic social shifts in New York, giving rise to gangsta rap and infusing hip-hop with “patois” poetics on a series of seminal recordings.

In turning to “The 90s,” we continue our examination of the roles migration and media—and the *Mad Mad*—play in informing figurations of Jamaicanness in hip-hop and the continually shifting sense of what it means to be Jamaican in New York. By this point in time, New York’s soundscape—as projected (inter)nationally, let’s not forget—seems rather commensurate with its status as a Caribbean center, a cultural shift increasingly registered in musical fusions and hybrids, adopted accents, collaborations, and crossover hits. Reggae’s “patois presence” crops up in all sorts of places, approaching a kind of ubiquity, with appearances in seminal recordings, pop novelties, and “underground” productions alike, while a host of mainstream filmic representations cast Jamaicans as pathological others and aliens—albeit “cool” ones—or as docile servants of the tourist industry. I also consider the ways that dancehall reggae artists, in an era of unprecedented travel, communication, diasporic consciousness, and mass media penetration, grapple again and anew with notions of the foreign and the local. In 90s-era dancehall production, from Kingston to New York, producers and DJs balance an increasingly audible hip-hop influence with an embrace of Afro-Jamaican minimalism, making for an undeniably “Jamaican” sound despite some rather cosmopolitan flows. The decade also witnesses hip-hop and reggae traveling together outside the US and Jamaica, and I trace their mounting conflation in developing scenes worldwide.

The next chapter considers the predicament of hip-hop and reggae since the turn of the 21st century. Borrowing a phrase from the title of a recent hit by dancehall artists

Vybz Kartel and Wayne Marshall, I ask whether in the “New Millenium” there truly is “a different ting a gwaan.” Given an intense—and perhaps unprecedented—degree of circulation, appropriation, and mutual influence, to what extent should we hear reggae’s and hip-hop’s interaction in this new millennium as a historical continuity or as a rupture of sorts? What does the intertwined sound of contemporary Jamaican music and contemporary American music say about the relationships between the two places? As dancehall disappears into ubiquity—from Britney Spears backdrops to the sonic wallpaper of TV ads—does this signal another stage in the Caribbeanization of American culture? Does such cooptation express an enduring set of power relations or a shifting sense of American identity? Examining the frequency of dislocated “oriental(ist)” signifiers in recent dancehall/hip-hop hybrids and the ways such charged sounds (re)produce notions of nation and ethnicity, I propose that such articulations affirm contemporary geopolitical power relations and the exotic character of the Caribbean as well as the “East,” despite the contradictions and connections embodied by such examples of fascination and “engagement.” Finally, the chapter also considers the rise of Puerto Rican reggaeton, via a *Mad Mad* example, as another genre rooted in and routed through both reggae and hip-hop and offering yet another node in an international network of sound and sentiment.

Although my perspective throughout these chapters is no doubt deeply informed by the field research I conducted in Jamaica from 2002-04, it is not until the epilogue, following a brief summarizing conclusion, that I offer something resembling an ethnographic portrait and analysis. It is also the dissertation’s “closest” reading, if you will, of the complex significations and cultural politics of hip-hop in Jamaica and Jamaica

in hip-hop. Here I pose the provocative question, “Bling-bling for Rastafari?” Taking as texts a vignette (which I wrote), an interview (which I conducted), and a song (which I [co-]produced), I attempt to make sense of the apparent contradiction of a young Rastafarian extolling, in hybrid hip-hop style, the power of conspicuous consumption. Against the historical background provided in previous chapters, and looking to recent theoretical perspectives, I attempt to make sense of my collaborator’s performance, his own explanation of it, and my own perplexity around it.⁷⁴ The chapter considers in concrete and symbolic terms what might be at stake in young Kingstonians’ embrace of hip-hop style today: how these performers negotiate the foreign and familiar in order to respond to structural constraints, community dictates, family commitments, and personal aspirations. I thus end where I began: with vexing, perplexing questions about the significance of hip-hop’s presence in Kingston and what it means for someone to rap as if they’re from Brooklyn in the land where reggae is king.

With its mixed genres, explicit narrative devices, and analytical framework, it is my hope and intention that this dissertation stands not as an attempt at a definitive or comprehensive history, or even as a straightforward descriptive history at all, but as a reflection on—and an intervention into—how hip-hop’s and reggae’s histories have been told. Like Jeff Chang, I prefer to think of the work that follows as “dub history,” or perhaps, in Michael Taussig’s words, a “particular history,” or even, after Greil Marcus, a “secret history.”⁷⁵ This dissertation attempts to offer a “dub,” “secret,” and “particular”

⁷⁴ With regard to recent perspectives on consumerism and the notion of perplexity, see Priti Ramamurthy, “Material Consumers, Fabricating Subjects: Perplexity, Global Connectivity Discourses, and Transnational Feminist Research,” *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 4 (2003): 524-50.

⁷⁵ Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 3; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990 [1989]).

history of American and Jamaican music by pursuing an idiosyncratic, overlooked, and yet crucial path through them both. Arguing that the well-rehearsed histories of hip-hop and reggae could both stand to acknowledge the degree to which each genre reflects transnational realities, I seek to bring to light another way of understanding not just these musics but the community relationships they engender and the notions of race, nation, and self they so strongly shape. Hence, as dub producers do with drum and bass, guitar and vocals, background and foreground, I will mix and remix these histories here, teasing out the American resonances in the story of Jamaican music and vice versa, letting their echoes and reverberations help us to hear them together, to understand their intertwined stories, and to think of ourselves and our neighbors in such a way as to recognize our shared circumstances, spaces, sounds, and sentiments.

CHAPTER TWO

The Full Has Never Been Told: *Representing Reggae and Hip-hop*

Aside from early attempts by Dick Hebdige (1987) and Paul Gilroy (1993) little has been done to make systematic sense of the social and cultural connections so suggestively embodied by hip-hop's and reggae's interplay and travels together.¹ Although gestures of acknowledgment abound in the literature, they usually remain superficial, referring most often to murky origins and overlooking or denying the continual infusions of reggae into hip-hop and vice versa. Typically, contributions to the reggae literature focus on either the traditional or popular realm of Jamaican music, often at the expense of the other and without recognizing the relationship between the two—never mind Jamaican musicians' and audiences' crucial, constitutive engagement with the foreign. The hip-hop narrative displays a strikingly similar provincialism. One finds consistent recognition of the music's "Jamaican roots," but this part of the story tends to begin and end with Kool Herc's adaptations of soundsystem technologies and techniques in the early 70s South Bronx. There is practically no register of reggae's copious contributions to hip-hop's very vocabulary despite the increasing frequency of direct musical allusions to Jamaica over the course of hip-hop's three decade history.

Appraising the hip-hop and reggae literatures, I find myself drawn to the same Biblical-Rastafarian saying Ken Bilby employs to justify his emphasis on the traditional, "The half has never been told."² Indeed, given the distortions that arise from such

¹ Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'N' Mix: Culture, Identity, and Caribbean Music* (London: Comedia, 1987); Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

² Kenneth Bilby, "Jamaica," in *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, ed. Peter Manuel (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 151. It would appear that this resonant phrase, like

narrative strategies as have defined the genres to date, we might expand the saying to “the full has never been told,” as Buju Banton does in his hit song, “Untold Stories” (1995). As a result, the dominant narratives of hip-hop and reggae alike, in quintessentially nationalist form, distort the complicated stories of social and cultural flows between Jamaica and the US. In contrast, I seek to tease out and make sense of the myriad points of contact between hip-hop and reggae, representing them together as I have learned to hear them. Toward this end, I look not only to precedents in the hip-hop and reggae literatures, but to compelling, recent perspectives from ethno/musicology, anthropology, and other fields of inquiry pursuing questions about diaspora, migration, and globalization.

Celebration Into Cooptation: Reggae’s Repressed Routes

Accounts of the historical development and meanings of Jamaican popular music are inextricable from tellings of Jamaica’s post-independence political and social history, and vice versa. Revealingly, the story of Jamaican music typically proceeds as an unbroken narrative of “indigenous” development ever since ska, as the story goes, ebulliently turns its back on American R&B to affirm Jamaica’s independence in 1962. Hip-hop’s contemporary resonance in Jamaica, however, reminds us that an engagement with the “foreign” has long been central to Jamaican popular music: jazz and R&B

so many other phrases in Rastafarian parlance, comes originally from the Bible. Upon beholding the riches and piety of King Solomon, Queen Sheba says to the monarch: “Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, *the half was not told me*: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard” (1 Kings 10:7 [King James Version]). It is also possible that this particular phrasing owes more to the hymn penned by Frances Havergal in 1878 (see <<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/h/a/l/halfneto.htm>> [accessed 3 May 2006]). In “Untold Stories” (1995), reggae singer/DJ Buju Banton invokes the phrase, and calls attention to its true import, by singing, “I could go on and on / the full has never been told.”

continued to infuse ska even after it coalesced as a recognizably distinctive style; soul informed the shift to rocksteady; funk worked its way into roots reggae; disco inspired the popular, persistent “rockers” drum pattern; and hip-hop has influenced dancehall even as it has, in turn, borrowed heavily from Jamaican DJ poetics and reggae aesthetics.³

Despite this longstanding history of interplay, the established narrative of Jamaican music refuses much more than an originary nod to American musical influence, thus missing—among other dimensions and implications—the cultural politics that Deborah Thomas suggests one might hear in Jamaicans’ engagements with African-/American music.⁴

From Kenneth Bilby to Olive Lewin, Norman Stolzoff to Lloyd Bradley, scholars and journalists alike have consistently downplayed the so-called “outside” influence so audible in Jamaican music since the 1960s (if not well before).⁵ This omission creates a seamless, powerful narrative about local creativity and resistance and the unique cultural resources of Jamaica, but it also overlooks some significant cultural practices and social shifts. Jamaica’s diasporic citizenry, (post)colonial history, and geographic location make it a conduit for culture from the outside. Far from implying a “bow” to colonial power structures, taking account of Jamaica’s musical engagements with the foreign provides a richer picture of the ways music reflects as it informs ideas about race, nation, and community in Jamaica and in the Jamaican diaspora.

³ See David Katz’s *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2003) for a treasure-trove of examples detailing the various American artists and styles that have inspired Jamaican musicians to innovate *within* the reggae tradition. A number of these anecdotal pieces of evidence support this dissertation throughout, especially in “the 60s” chapter.

⁴ Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), *passim*.

⁵ Bilby, “Jamaica” (1995), 143-182; Olive Lewin, “Jamaica,” in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, vol.2: South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*, ed. Dale A. Olsen and Daniel E. Sheehy (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 896-913; Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000; Lloyd Bradley, *This Is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaica's Music* (New York: Grove Press, 2000).

The history of Jamaican music is marked by similar processes of appropriation, negotiation, incorporation, hybridization, localization, exoticization, etc., as one finds across the Americas and, arguably, nearly everywhere, though the Caribbean has been a particularly vibrant site of cultural exchange due to a number of factors unique to the region, from geography to political history to the more recent shift toward greater regional integration in economic, social, and cultural terms. These processes of cultural interaction—and their products—have always been accented, of course, according to Jamaica’s specific cultural, social, and political history. In many ways, the “story of Jamaican music”—a story that many books and CD box-sets have attempted to tell—is the story, again and again, of how the foreign becomes familiar. It is a story in which a Cuban- and Trinidadian-accented version of the European quadrille (i.e., mento) becomes just as Jamaican as a Japanese attempt to create a “reggae” beat for a Casio keyboard “pre-set” (i.e., the *Sleng Teng* riddim of 1985 and the digital dancehall style it bequeathed).

Even in such seemingly far-fetched scenarios and hybrid, cosmopolitan sounds, we can hear how Jamaican musicians express a particular, and often politicized, Afro-Jamaican aesthetic despite the polyglot yet pointed sources that have been claimed for what Kenneth Bilby, in reference to more traditional practices, calls Jamaica’s “deep and distinctive cultural wellsprings.” To be fair to Bilby, he does acknowledge that “the urban popular music of Jamaica, like mento before it, represents nothing less than a synthesis of many diverse stylistic influences, both Jamaican and foreign, the balance of which has continued to shift over time.”⁶ Nevertheless, I contend that an understanding of Jamaica’s “cultural wellsprings” should be broadened to include much more than the rural, Afro-

⁶ Bilby, 145, 158.

Jamaican practices to which Bilby understandably gives emphasis against a backdrop of journalistic amnesia. By expanding our conception of such, we can get a better sense of how people have been making music Jamaican, making Jamaican music, and musically making Jamaica.

Significantly, a number of reggae histories and collected recordings, in spite of their somewhat limited coverage, purport to tell nothing less than “the story of Jamaican music.”⁷ The Island Records box-set *Tougher Than Tough: The Story of Jamaican Music*, a four-disc compilation covering the years 1958-1993, bills itself in precisely these terms. The set’s second subtitle, however, “35 years of Jamaican hits,” indicates some self-consciousness about its limits. Even so, it is telling how frequently the history of recorded popular music in Jamaica is equated with the entire history of Jamaican music—a product of reggae’s international marketing as much as the popular imagination (in Jamaica and, especially, beyond). British journalist Lloyd Bradley’s *This Is Reggae Music* (formerly *Bass Culture*), a popular and deeply detailed history of reggae, boasts a similar subtitle, “The Story of Jamaica’s Music,” despite being a history similarly limited in scope. For Bradley, reggae rises from the ashes of American R&B via ska, giving distinctive voice to the Jamaican black lower-class’s creative energy and righteous perspective. As the text concludes, reggae music—a totalizing category that Bradley uses (like many Jamaicans, it should be noted) to smooth over stylistic and historical disjunctures—continues to resist the pull of America’s latest infecting agent, hip-hop, allowing the author to dismiss

⁷ Among the many texts and recordings that purport to tell “the story of Jamaica” are Kevin O’Brien Chang’s and Wayne Chen’s *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), Bradley’s *This Is Reggae Music*, Island Records’ 4 CD box-set *Tougher Than Tough: The Story of Jamaican Music* (1993), the BBC’s/Bravo’s and Bradley’s *Reggae: The Story of Jamaican Music* series <http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/features/reggae/storyof_jamaican_music.shtml> (2004), Chris Salewicz’s and Adrian Boot’s *Reggae Explosion: The Story of Jamaican Music* (New York: Harry N. Adams, 2003), et al.

the uglier side of dancehall as the fault of the US market and media and their effects on Jamaica.⁸ Bradley's narrative arc, mirrored in a number of similar, popular reggae histories, thus sets up a strong, quasi-nationalist case for reggae's return to roots, despite consistent testimony by reggae musicians that bear witness to steady infusions of rock, soul, and disco, among others. As with recent advertisements for Red Stripe—"One Beer, One People," read a billboard I spotted in Kingston in the summer of 2004—such stories raise suspicion in their mobilization of nationalist rhetoric (even if supporting a kind of alternative, Rastafarian and Afro-Jamaican nationalism), too often smoothing over the messy details that suggest more complex, and often conflict-laden, musical negotiations of social hierarchies and notions of nation or community.

Given such an emphasis on the mid- and late-twentieth century in popular and journalistic histories of Jamaican music, it is no surprise that most scholarly accounts emphasize exactly the opposite: the traditional (which is to say, pre-WWII) and rural sources that represent, for them, the "Jamaican" in "Jamaican music." They often do so in reactionary fashion, however, emphasizing the other half at the expense of the bigger picture. Take, for example, Olive Lewin's and Maurice Gordon's entry for "Jamaica" in *The New Grove* (2001).⁹ Their emphasis falls so squarely on the traditional that the term

⁸ As Scott DeVaux notes with regard to jazz scholarship, writers on reggae or hip-hop also tend to subsume a variety of practices under such general rubrics, smoothing over interesting ruptures, co-opting certain practices while marginalizing others, and sometimes creating a dangerously distorted picture of historically-situated performance and social significance. See, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525-560. It should be noted, however, that many Jamaican artists and audiences themselves employ the term reggae in such an overarching way, using it as a resonant, quasi-nationalist umbrella term for Jamaican popular music more generally, and thus see no contradiction in thinking of ska and rocksteady, two precursors to reggae, as forms of "reggae." As Stephen Davis notes in the entry for "Reggae" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell, [London: Macmillan, 2001], v.21), reggae can serve simply as a "term denoting the modern popular music of Jamaica and its diaspora" (100). Even so, histories of Jamaican music would do well to explicate how uses and understandings of the term relate to cultural politics and musical style.

⁹ Olive Lewin and Maurice Gordon, "Jamaica," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), v.12, 760-764.

“reggae” appears but once, in passing, making for a conspicuous absence.¹⁰ In another revealing passage, the authors note that ska “derives from [kumina] songs,” but they make no mention of the influence of American jazz or R&B—absolutely crucial inputs for the ska sound.¹¹ Over the course of the four-page entry, one finds descriptions of largely unused instruments, of the traditional social functions of music in Jamaican society (“ritual, ceremonial, social, work, and recreational”), as well as some social and religious history. Their discussion proceeds in the mode of mid-century ethnomusicology, offering a taxonomy of Jamaican rural traditions prior to the rise of Kingston as a center for hybrid, popular music. Presumably, the authors employ the term “indigenous” in order to explain their omission of popular practices, though the glaring omission of Jamaica’s popular music of the last half century prompts one to wonder how we are to define “indigenous” at this point in time and, considering Jamaica’s longstanding translocal engagements, how useful a category it is.

Lewin’s entry for “Jamaica” in the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (1998) provides a more balanced overview, including some attention to popular music and more contemporary practices, though her emphasis remains on the traditional and her framework might best be characterized as preservationist.¹² Lewin decries the influence of radio and television as having a “negative effect on the tapping of Jamaica’s rich store of traditional musical styles, with the notable exception of reggae.” Contradictions thus emerge between Lewin’s recognition of the vitality and undeniable “Jamaicanness” of the

¹⁰ As noted above, there is a separate entry for “Reggae,” written by Stephen Davis. That entry, however, is quite typical in its brief narrative arc, including typical omissions (especially with regard to dancehall style) and advancing some strange, unelaborated contentions (e.g., that dub “evolved in time into various forms of pop, including techno” [101], an odd—and telling—assertion despite the broad influence dub has no doubt exerted on electronic dance music and popular music more generally).

¹¹ Lewin and Gordon, “Jamaica,” 762.

¹² We learn, for instance, that there are idiophones, membranophones, aerophones, and chordophones “native” to Jamaica!

island's popular music and her bemoaning of the "unfortunate" disruption of "the continuity of Jamaican musical traditions."¹³ Like Linton Kwesi-Johnson, Lewin invokes dancehall's "folk-based rhythms" without recognizing the influence of hip-hop, though she notes that dancehall DJs are, tellingly, "called rappers in some countries."¹⁴ Lewin thus incorporates into her account the influence that the outside has had on Jamaican music, but in her efforts to emphasize the traditional she misses an opportunity to analyze the ways that Jamaican musicians have in fact made these foreign sounds their own. The process of reincorporation, of *versioning*, is central to Jamaican music (at least since WWII, if not before—after all, what is the Jamaican quadrille tradition if not an example of the foreign made familiar?). The reggae version, and its various precursors in mento, boogie, etc., stand not as misguided efforts to be marginalized in encyclopedia entries but as vibrant examples of choices made within the context of a vigorous dialogue between tradition and innovation, foreign and familiar, as products and practices that express new ideas about what it means for music to sound "Jamaican" and how one might express such a thing in the modern world.

Although Bilby's chapter on "Jamaica" in *Caribbean Currents* (1995) provides a detailed and more well-rounded overview of the island's music, he also comes out on the side of the traditionalists—"not to deny a long and close association between American pop music and reggae."¹⁵ He does so for good reason, arguing that popular representations of reggae decontextualize it in problematic ways, but Bilby's analysis falls short, I contend, when he runs into the kind of popular Jamaican music that he

¹³ Lewin, "Jamaica," 910-11.

¹⁴ Linton Kwesi Johnson, "Introduction," in *Tougher Than Tough: The Story of Jamaican Music* [liner notes] (London: Island Records Ltd., 1993), 5; Lewin, "Jamaica," 912.

¹⁵ Bilby, "Jamaica," 145.

claims “can no longer be considered reggae at all.” Attempting to fit dancehall reggae into his story, Bilby seems stymied. He prefers to note the resemblances of contemporary dancehall’s minimal riddims (and rhythms) to the “neo-African” music of rural Jamaica, overlooking hip-hop’s influence and instead drawing somewhat tenuous connections, including the following contention: “It could be argued that the more rhythmically innovative deejays function much like the missing lead drum.” Such statements preclude an understanding of DJ practice as informed not only by traditional vocal practice and the “talkover” style of late 60s reggae selectors, but by African-American vocalizing as well, from rappers themselves—in mobius-strip fashion—to the jive-talking radio disc-jockeys whose voices were heard on radio in Jamaica (and in such migrant work sites as Florida) alongside the jazz and R&B of the 40s and 50s. To Bilby’s credit, he does acknowledge that “the most obvious foreign influence on Jamaican music in recent years has been from hip-hop.” But if, as Bilby notes, “most of the music produced in Jamaica today continues to speak primarily to local concerns and to draw on the rich fund of *ancestral* cultural resources that Jamaicans can claim as uniquely their own,” should we not perhaps ask, at this juncture, what constitutes an “ancestral cultural resource” for Jamaicans in the first decade of the twenty-first century?¹⁶ Would hip-hop qualify? What about for a Jamaican living in Brooklyn? Or a deportee, who spent 20 years in Brooklyn, and now lives in Kingston? Or for his son, who hears as much hip-hop as dancehall and admires the way his father shifts seamlessly between yard creole and cool, New York slang? Where do we draw the lines of influence and what is “owned” by a community? Why? Hearing reggae and hip-hop together offers a number of answers to such perplexing questions.

¹⁶ Bilby, 177, 179, 146 (emphasis mine).

Against these authoritative, if skewed, overviews of Jamaican music, we should consider two others, both of which help to flesh out the history of Jamaican music—in particular by focusing on popular practices without losing sight of connections to the traditional—and yet both, tellingly, avoid much discussion of reggae’s interaction with the foreign, especially with regard to representing a continuity of engagement with African-/American music from the “blues dances” of the 1950s through the hip-hop infused parties of the present day. The first is Garth White’s two-part history, “The Development of Jamaican Popular Music” (1984).¹⁷ Part two of the essay (aptly titled for the present discussion), “Urbanization of the Folk: The Merger of the Traditional and Popular in Jamaican Music,” provides an exceptional overview of music in Kingston during the first half of the twentieth century, rich in sociological and musicological specifics. Of particular value is White’s attention to dance forms, an important but often overlooked aspect of Jamaican popular culture.¹⁸ Not only does he reconcile the question of “ancestral resources” with a firm focus on the resonance of recognizable—and by implication, diasporic—musical figures, White’s insightful description of the process through which Jamaicans make southern R&B their own would apply as well to hip-hop, calypso, or gospel. “One is most certainly aware,” writes White with the authority of a native observer, “of the susceptibility of the Jamaican populace to influence by outside forms especially when that ‘outside form’ had familiar elements or elements which could logically be added or developed out of its then present practice.”¹⁹ At the same time, adding nuance to his analysis, White notes that a closer look at the “proto-ska period,” as

¹⁷ Garth White, “The Development of Jamaican Popular Music, Part 2: The Urbanization of the Folk,” *ACIJ Research Review* 1 (1984): 47-80. Kingston: African-Caribbean Institute of Jamaica.

¹⁸ For more on the role that dance has played in the dancehall, see Sonjah Stanley-Niaah’s “Kingston’s Dancehall: A Story of Space and Celebration,” *Space and Culture* 7(1): 102-118, 2004.

¹⁹ White, “The Development of Jamaican Popular Music, Part 2,” 72.

he calls it, “does not support the position that Jamaican music in the late fifties was merely an imitation of R&B.”²⁰

The second is a more recent, and rather authoritative, academic monograph on Jamaican popular music—which makes its near omission of hip-hop all the more conspicuous. Norman Stolzoff’s *Wake the Town and Tell the People* (2000) offers one of the more comprehensive accounts of reggae’s social history and cultural politics. An expansive, anthropologically-framed study, beginning from plantation slavery and finishing with an ethnographic portrait of the mid-late 90s, Stolzoff’s text devotes precious little discussion to Jamaican musicians’ engagement with the outside. Following (if in greater detail) reggae’s well-traveled narrative arc, Stolzoff relegates Jamaicans’ engagements with, say, the music of African-Americans to the boogie-woogie soundsystems of the pre-ska era, before Jamaica gained independence and—presto!—its own voice. (In contrast, journalist David Katz’s *Solid Foundation* [2003], as an oral history, bears witness to a continuous, and often formative, engagement with “foreign” music, despite reproducing—by and large—the same old story.)²¹ By the mid-90s, however, when Stolzoff was conducting his field research, hip-hop had long enjoyed a presence in Jamaica. Welton Irie’s “Hotter Reggae Music” (1980), for example—a loose, awkward cover of the Sugar Hill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight” (1979)—appeared just months after the latter, the first commercial rap record, was released. Although it never supplanted reggae in popularity, hip-hop was heard in Jamaica alongside steady streams of contemporary American R&B and international pop and club hits throughout the 80s and 90s.

²⁰ White, “The Development of Jamaican Popular Music, Part 2,” 62.

²¹ David Katz, *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2003).

As a musical form that simultaneously subverts and affirms the same uptown/downtown schism that Stolzoff takes as a central axis in his analysis, hip-hop seems to offer an important window into the construction and maintenance of Kingston's class-based color line. And yet, the "Role of Hip-Hop in Dancehall," as a subheading announces, receives but two paragraphs of attention at the end of a lengthy chapter on "the dancehall in post-Independence Jamaica." A closer look at the passage reveals that Stolzoff discusses hip-hop only to acknowledge that recent dancehall stars, namely Beenie Man and Bounty Killer, have "incorporated hip-hop elements" and collaborated with high profile rappers.²² The analysis stops at this brief, descriptive note.²³ It stands as a token mention of a far more significant phenomenon than the author implies. Of course, given the time period of Stolzoff's research and the emphasis he employs, it may make sense that hip-hop appears more as an absence than a presence in his portrait of "dancehall culture." Stolzoff's study stops just short of the moment in the late 90s when dancehall and hip-hop seem to become more engaged and relational forms than ever—a interaction that appears to have intensified over time as Jamaicans move back and forth to the US and as American media projections, especially via cable TV and the internet, increasingly pervade everyday life in Jamaica.

Despite its shortcomings on this count, Stolzoff's *Wake the Town* provides a useful barometer of sorts, demonstrating that for all the continuity marking hip-hop's presence in Jamaica, there may indeed be something new "a gwaan" in recent years, a difference in the intensity and ubiquity of Jamaicans' embrace of hip-hop. This would

²² Stolzoff, 113-4.

²³ The lack of space devoted to an analysis of hip-hop's presence and significance in "dancehall culture" is made all the more acute by Stolzoff's description of Chapter 3 in his introduction: "The last section of the chapter discusses the rise of slackness, the Rasta Renaissance, and the influence of hip-hop music" (xxii). Two sentences hardly makes for a "discussion."

affirm the account of my collaborator, Dami D, who noted that—before hip-hop’s millennial turn toward dance-centric club music, concomitant with its commercial rise and ascent to global ubiquity—the genre was perceived by Jamaican audiences as that which might “cold up the vibe” at a dance, often undesirable in the foreignness of its too-cool, too-slow flows. Nonetheless, there’s something troubling about the downright miniscule role hip-hop plays in Stolzoff’s analysis of the “contemporary” (i.e., mid-late 90s) dancehall scene, especially given the author’s interest in Jamaica’s asymmetrical relationship to the US. Reading his text against the reggae literature, one wonders whether, in an attempt to represent the contemporary dancehall scene in all its complex, locally-focused, authentic splendor—an affirming, celebratory gesture and a familiar bias in reggae histories—Stolzoff precludes an analysis of performers who mix things up a little too much and do not fit so easily into his narrative.

Of course we all must bound our studies in some manner, but the question of where we draw the lines is an important one, especially if it is precisely what is happening at the borders that seems increasingly central to the shape of the whole. Given Jamaica’s ambivalent nationalism and its seemingly constitutive transnationalism, we might ask why so many accounts of reggae have sought to emphasize the former. One obvious reason is reggae’s resounding embodiment of lower-class Afro-Jamaicans’ struggle against an enduring system of racialized injustice and tenacious, colonialist hierarchies of value. Against the corrupt and corrupting forces, respectively, of the Jamaican government and foreign or transnational regimes (the US, the IMF, etc.), reggae stands as a proud symbol and vehicle of resistance, critique, opposition, and affirmation. The opening lines of the reggae documentary *Roots, Rock, Reggae* (1977) make this

equation quite clear, and such notions have never receded from the foreground of reggae myth: “Jamaican music, reggae music, is all about our island—and about our black culture.” Lines are drawn quite clearly here, bound, simply, by geography and race.

Hence, it is far from surprising that reggae historians appear to buttress the call of the radical Jamaican academic Brian Meeks, who argues that central to any project of social and political revival in the Caribbean “is the development of new modes of thought oriented towards recognizing and valorizing the social and political practice of the subaltern.”²⁴ It need not follow, however, that reggae (and other forms of so-called “subaltern” musical practice) be portrayed as some sort of inherently insular creation in order to “recognize and valorize” the social and political practice of, say, the Jamaican lower-class. Nor that every act need be conceived as an act of resistance, nor every story a “narrative of resistance.” Deborah Thomas’s crucial contribution in this area is her contention that a disavowal of national allegiance and an engagement with the foreign—particularly with African-American music and style—has, rather than undercutting or standing as peripheral to cultural politics in Jamaica, been a central component of lower-class, black cultural practice. Indeed, the musical record appears to support her thesis, as I intend to demonstrate in the pages that follow. My own approach to telling the story of reggae music is rather skewed in its own way, of course, but explicitly so. As such, it is intended to serve as an intervention, challenging the conventional contours of the reggae narrative and the hip-hop narrative alike by presenting presences where they typically appear as absences, mobilizing myth with musical evidence. Before positioning my telling of the story against the hip-hop literature, which has its own, often parallel, blind

²⁴ Brian Meeks, *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2000), ix.

spots, let us examine a little more closely, however, hip-hop's spectral place in the reggae literature.

On “Obvious Cousins”: The Reggae Literature Regarding Rap

One of the few articles to take as its subject the interaction and overlap between dancehall and hip-hop is a piece called “Hip-hopping Across Cultures: Reggae to Rap and Back” (2004) by Carolyn Cooper, professor of English and director of the Reggae Studies Unit at UWI-Mona.²⁵ Seeking to map out in broad strokes the back-and-forth exchange between reggae and hip-hop, Cooper's emphasis on song lyrics leads her to overlook myriad, and perhaps more meaningful, examples of musical engagement and influence. Her stated intent to “leave that task to the musicologists who possess the requisite expertise” is a nice invitation, but it serves to maintain a spurious separation, in writing about music, between scholars trained in literary analysis and those of us with ethno/musicological tools at our disposal. Unsurprisingly, this approach hinders an appreciation of the deep degree to which the “bridges of sound” or “rhythms of resistance” Cooper seeks to tease out actually exist. Although Cooper acutely notes a “depth of penetration of Jamaican words into hip-hop culture,” she fails to pick up on the converse: her admitted lack of acquaintance with hip-hop leads her to downplay the degree to which hip-hop slang has been taken up in Jamaica, often via dancehall lyrics,

²⁵ Cooper's piece, revised and reprinted for her 2004 volume *Sound Clash*, originally appeared under a slightly different title in *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture*, ed. Verene Shepherd and Glen Richards (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002), 265-282. It should be noted that the original publication of the piece was accompanied by a note claiming the paper “was completed in 1996” (278), and since the reprint seems to contain the slightest of revisions, we might grant Cooper the same benefit of the doubt we grant to Stolzoff, since the interplay between hip-hop and reggae seems to have increased in intensity of late. Even so, as I will show, the interaction of the last several years is consistent in many ways with the broader historical pattern.

though also more broadly diffused through everyday speech.²⁶ Cooper reduces the phenomenon to “a few hip-hop terms” that have “migrated into Jamaican dancehall culture.”²⁷ Moreover, in lieu of a critical reading of the hip-hop narrative, Cooper reproduces the standard representation of reggae as primarily an originary input into hip-hop, including (via Dick Hebdige [perhaps via David Toop]) the erroneous identification of the Incredible Bongo Band as a “Jamaican disco group.”²⁸ When she departs from the story’s well-worn contours, it is only to examine a “rap dictionary” as one of her primary texts and to highlight a couple commonly-remarked thematic similarities. Cooper’s attempt to represent hip-hop’s and reggae’s points of intersection is thus admirable but rather typical, articulating a number of important, if obvious, connections while overlooking a profound degree of interplay and mutual engagement.

The interplay between hip-hop and reggae stands as a stumbling block across the reggae literature. Tellingly, it is around hip-hop’s influence in Jamaica where both journalistic and scholarly accounts tend to become most evasive and pejorative. Here *dancehall*—referring to the digital technology-infused, hip-hop-era style of reggae—emerges as an ambivalent development: it is seen alternately, and sometimes at once, as a corruption of reggae style and Rastafarian values and/or a return to Jamaica’s neo-African musical traditions (e.g., kumina drumming) and pan-African connections (e.g.,

²⁶ Cooper, *Sound Clash*, 235, 267, 244.

²⁷ Cooper, *Sound Clash*, 243.

²⁸ Jeff Chang has provided some clarity on this apocryphal story: “While David Toop believed the Incredible Bongo Band was a Jamaican disco band, they were in fact a band put together by sometime film composer Michael Viner, featuring another soundtrack composer, Perry Botkin Jr., and the formidable bongo playing of King Errison, a Jamaican immigrant” (2005:502, note#7). The persistence of this erroneous “factoid” calls attention to the desire to find an originary Jamaican presence in hip-hop, even when it’s not there. Ironically, despite the hip-hop narrative’s consignment of reggae to pre-origins, one is likely to find more Jamaican presence in hip-hop in subsequent decades than in the 1970s, as this project will attempt to demonstrate. See David Toop, *Rap Attack 3: African Rap to Global Hip-hop* (London: Serpent’s Tale, 2000 [1984/1991]).

Bilby 1995). In this vein, Linton Kwesi Johnson emphasizes dancehall's return to Afro-Jamaican roots without examining hip-hop's influence or other Caribbean connections—a striking omission, considering dancehall's rhythmic similarities to Trinidadian calypso and soca, among other regional styles, and its broad borrowings from hip-hop production aesthetics and stylistic practices (from beats to vocal flows).²⁹ Many accounts simply stop short around the mid-80s, seemingly unsure how to bring latter dancehall style and practice into the larger narrative (e.g., Katz 2003), throwing off a couple facile insults (e.g., Bradley 2000), and missing important continuities as well as points of disjuncture.³⁰

Consider the following appraisal of the late 90s Jamaican soundscape from Chang and Chen's *Reggae Routes* (1998), a book that by its title would seem to be concerned with reggae's intersections with the foreign:

Today very few songs from the Billboard Top 100 or R&B charts become hits in Jamaica and those that do are always slow, syrupy, soul love ballads. Faster American dance tunes almost never appear on Jamaican charts. Rap and dancehall may be obvious cousins, and rap enjoys some popularity among Jamaican teenagers. But rap songs almost never crack the Jamaican Top 40.³¹

Among some familiar tropes (note the characterization of “rap and dancehall,” once again, as “cousins”), Chang and Chen advance the specious, if commonplace, contention that Jamaican music functions in a national vacuum. Their reliance on charts certainly represents a grave methodological problem. Because the charts in question derive from playlists gathered from two of Jamaica's major radio stations (220), such statistics

²⁹ Johnson, *Tougher Than Tough*, 1993.

³⁰ Lloyd Bradley's dismissal of “gangsta rap” is especially striking given its acknowledgement of hip-hop's influence and its use of some downright gleeful pejoratives, never mind its moralist tone: “Although taking a cue from records that weave stories of nightmarish ghetto violence with casual degradation of women is nothing to be proud of—the idea of a clever gansta [sic] couplet would be to rhyme *pokin' bitches* with *smokin' snitches*—gangsta's effect on dancehall is undeniable” (517).

³¹ Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 5.

overlook the degree to which American music has maintained a presence in more informal, and possibly more ubiquitous, spaces of the Jamaican soundscape—especially at live dancehall events attended by the very teenagers the authors reference above in an attempt to marginalize the phenomenon. Although, again, the authors’ perspective may support the idea that a significant shift has occurred only recently—for there is no doubt that American pop, hip-hop, and R&B songs now routinely “hit” in Jamaica—once again the musical record would seem to challenge a narrative whereby ska turns its back on R&B in the early 60s only to have dancehall embrace it again at the turn of the millennium. Just listen to the same reggae songs ruling the charts throughout the 80s and 90s and one hears strong echoes of R&B, hip-hop, and American pop more generally. Earlier periods provide similarly pervasive examples of engagement with African-/American music.

Although Chang and Chen’s perspective here, writing as reggae-centric nationalists from a particular post-independence generation, is a valuable one insofar as it draws our attention to certain prevailing attitudes, especially the ease with which many Jamaicans are able to reconcile reggae’s critique of Babylon with a sense of national belonging, the authors’ characterizations of the relationship between reggae and African-/American music reveal a kind of systemic shortcoming in the story of Jamaican music. Hip-hop’s contemporary presence and popularity in Jamaica creates a clear problem for such a story of national triumph and cultural resistance, a story that, we must remember, serves uphold the same colonialist power structure and hierarchies of value that reggae so frequently and vigorously assails. How peculiar! The story of Jamaican music, as it has been called again and again—national branding is good for the economy, of course—

reflexively and automatically brings what otherwise might be heard as pan-national, international, or transnational expressions and practices firmly into the fold of nation.

What's more, the same authorial position has no trouble recognizing and reconciling that reggae is informed by and engaged with hip-hop when such interplay serves as a symbol of the potency of Jamaican (national) culture:

But reggae and dancehall in the 1990s have made significant inroads into black and white American markets. Many Jamaican deejays have 'crossed over' with rap versions of local hits, and featured on remixes of rap hits. And the recent influx of cable TV into the island may well pull Jamaican musical tastes back towards those of black America. No one can predict what the future holds.³²

But dancehall DJs have not, for the most part, "crossed over" by adapting "rap versions" of their "local hits"; on the contrary, their local hits are, in some sense, already rap versions of local hits, which is part of the reason that such songs have found eager audiences in the US even with lyrics that are largely unintelligible for the majority of stateside listeners: dancehall appeals as a foreign yet familiar style. Indeed, dancehall's sonic, stylistic, and thematic connections to hip-hop have no doubt facilitated its success in the American mainstream (via top 40, "crossover" hits) and in various local US club scenes and hip-hop scenes, whereas roots reggae outside of Jamaica remains largely confined to purists, hippies, and Jamaican ex-pats.³³ Despite doing a decent job of predicting the future, at least with regard to the influence of cable TV, Chang and Chen maintain their stable storyline by framing any such contemporary practice as *pulling back* to previous patterns of engagement rather than intensifying what has been a continuous, if

³² Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 5.

³³ The irony that roots reggae is, in its utter hybridity and voluminous borrowings, far from the ideal of a "pure" style appears to be unappreciated by most roots aficionados.

changing, interaction—never mind defusing what might be understood as an articulation of class- and race-based commitments into the seemingly innocuous, apolitical category of “musical tastes.”³⁴

Reggae Routes is typical of the purist position—which, tellingly, seems to inform the majority of journalistic accounts of the music—in its suspicion of anything but *roots*. The authors describe Jamaica as “the source of inspiration” and of “instinctive vigor,” and they consider their book to be “a quest for the essence of reggae.” Their representation of reggae mixes romance and anxiety in a fashion that, similar to other accounts written by enthusiasts, especially by upper-middle-class Jamaicans such as Chang and Chen, seems derivative at once of anti-imperialist and nationalist discourses, not to mention the terms and frameworks propagated by the Jamaican tourist industry and culture ministry. The result is a celebratory cooptation, brimming with contradiction and romanticization and finding the “essence of reggae” exactly where one would expect them to find it: among the reified “folk,” the “people.” In this manner, the authors plainly put reggae in its place, downplaying the music’s “outernational” orientation. “Reggae is one of the world’s few living folk musics,” the authors propose: “It remains a genuinely popular sound spontaneously generated by a people’s experiences, emotions, and traditions without the outside interference of multinational marketers, press agents and spin doctors.”³⁵ But aren’t such caricatures as this precisely the stuff of multinational marketers and their ilk? And haven’t reggae performers and producers themselves long been “multinational marketers” of sorts? Chang and Chen posit a specious distinction

³⁴ See, of course, Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984) and Thomas’s *Modern Blackness* for elaboration on the class dimensions of “taste,” with the latter specifically considering Jamaican circumstances.

³⁵ Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 7, x, ix.

between the pure, rootsy, or authentic—with all the usual connotations of race and class and primitivism—and the (modern) “outside.” Employing such pernicious phrases as “spontaneously generated,” the authors recall and revive 18th and 19th century representations of black music as springing from a “natural” proclivity.³⁶ This sounds much more like ideologies of race, class, and nation speaking through the authors than, say, reggae sounds like “a people’s” experiences, emotions, and traditions speaking through the musicians who make it.³⁷ No doubt many reggae musicians, most of whom undertake years of study and apprenticeship, would scoff at such a romantic, infantilizing description of their craft.

Statements such as these register a deep anxiety over the local purity of reggae and the degree to which the music can be pressed into service for the promotion of a national identity that serves to attract foreign exchange as much as it serves to maintain colonial hierarchies around class and color. The packaging of reggae as folk art and reified resistance thus must be seen within and against the broader pattern of state-sponsored attempts—initiated in the 1960s by Harvard-trained folklorist and Minister of Culture (and eventual Prime Minister), Edward Seaga—to co-opt race-based concepts of nation for the broader political project of “creole nationalism.” Relegating Afro-Jamaican cultural practices to the realm of indigenous “heritage,” the state shaped public discourse by ignoring contemporary popular practices (from Rasta to Rudie) which drew on folk as

³⁶ See, Radano, *Lying Up a Nation*.

³⁷ The biases run deep here, and the Jamaican middle-class affinity for Western Culture (with a capital C) looms large over their narrative. Chang and Chen reveal their prejudices quite clearly with passages such as the following, which, tellingly, appears after the authors paraphrase modernist poets Ezra Pound and W.H. Auden: “Very little reggae, or pop music in general, stands up to textual analysis. Music is music and poetry is poetry, and rarely do the twain meet. The greatest music ever composed for the human voice came from the pens of Verdi and Mozart, but neither wrote a line of their librettos” (x). Despite my own overtures to modernist authors in this dissertation, I think it is clear that I deploy such devices in a rather different manner than Chang and Chen. And if ever there was an argument for musicological analysis of reggae, surely it is in the persistence of absurd truisms about the impossibility of such.

well as foreign forms, thus excluding racially-explicit mobilizations of community.³⁸ In some sense, though, the anxiety that bubbles up through the reggae literature undercuts as it affirms hegemonic attempts to appropriate, in the telling of the story, the music and cultural politics of black, lower-class Jamaicans. Significantly, it is (dancehall) reggae's explicit and undeniable interaction with hip-hop that appears to generate the greatest anxiety, undermining the authority of well-worn representations.

Decrying the loss of control over how reggae is understood and marketed, Chang and Chen lament that “dancehall is commonly referred to abroad as ‘Jamaican Reggae Rap,’ which is a little like calling rhythm and blues ‘black rock and roll.’”³⁹ Although the “commonness” of such a term is questionable, their express acknowledgment that reggae and rap are heard as relational products outside their contexts of production affirms their sonic/structural similarities as well as the general genealogical understanding of reggae as a precursor to rap, even as rap—here used as a synonym for hip-hop—has, in turn, informed reggae style. Dancehall's inherent rap-ness makes it an unwelcome part of the reggae lineage for most purists and roots reggae enthusiasts, who, ironically, are quick to acknowledge, for example, the influence of Curtis Mayfield and other soul artists on the music of Bob Marley and so many “foundational” reggae artists. For all of dancehall's connections and references to reggae style (including accented offbeats, versions of classic riddims, and the incorporation of Afro-Jamaican folk and religious traditions), many observers appear to hear dancehall as a very different thing, as a break from tradition signaled by the embrace of digital technologies and hip-hop style. “Jamaican Reggae Rap,” for all its awkwardness, does seem to embody the common perception of

³⁸ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, passim.

³⁹ Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 7-8.

relationality between reggae and hip-hop that the story of Jamaican music, paradoxically, seems both to recognize and to marginalize (often by stopping short). This discursive pattern produces a grave lacuna in the literature, missing the transnational articulations and significations which are part and parcel of Jamaican music.

The suppression of this important theme in the story of Jamaican music is especially peculiar considering that reggae's and hip-hop's oft-recognized relationality has served to increase the power of both. Each serves, for performers and audiences alike, as the other's (exotic) supplement, signifying at once or in turns: blackness, coolness, righteousness, opposition, urbanity, and a broader sense of community. David Katz pays tribute, perhaps unconsciously, to this accrual of affect when he nods to hip-hop as an affirmation of reggae's legacy: "Not only did the deejay's increased status inordinately change the shape of Jamaican popular music, but the revolution started by the innovations that U Roy voiced at Treasure Isle would ultimately help spawn rap in America—and rap, of course, is now one of the most popular music genres all over the world."⁴⁰

Although this sentence—but not Katz's book, I should note—leaves out the deep circularity of reggae DJ/talkover style, in particular their emulation of African-American radio disc jockeys, the degree to which reggae's and hip-hop's legacies are hitched together—indeed, the way they *articulate*, to recall Stuart Hall's etymology of the term—clearly emerges in this passage.⁴¹ Reggae is enriched, symbolically and sonically, by its connections to hip-hop and to African-/American music more generally, while the converse, as I shall explore below, holds true for hip-hop: reggae's putative originary

⁴⁰ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 163.

⁴¹ Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen [interview edited by Lawrence Grossberg] (New York: Routledge, 1996), 131-151.

input and consistent infusions into hip-hop style, and Jamaica's prominent, powerful place in the hip-hop imagination continue to inform hip-hop's reception, in the US and the wider world, as black, modern music par excellence. And yet, despite this recognition, hip-hop's and reggae's sustained interplay still constitutes as much of a critical absence in the hip-hop narrative as in the story of Jamaican music.

And It Don't Stop: Distortions and Lacunae in the Hip-hop Narrative

Like the reggae narrative, the story of hip-hop has suffered from critical lacunae even as it has offered no shortage of enthusiastic, interventionary, and illuminating perspectives on what has become a remarkable musical and cultural force. Surveying the literature, one encounters overlapping spheres of journalists, practitioners, and academics grappling with the music, its history, its social contexts, and the cultural work it does. While collected volumes by Perkins (1995), Forman and Neal (2004), Cepeda (2004), and Chang (2007) offer overviews of the history and scope of the hip-hop literature, from early attempts at documentary-style coverage to more academic analyses, such starts and fits of representation have been affirmed, revised, and expanded with the appearance, especially more recently, of oral histories and interview-based texts (e.g., Cross 1993, Fricke and Ahearn 2002, Chang 2005, Coleman 2005).⁴² Ambitious survey-style histories

⁴² William Eric Perkins, ed., *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, eds., *That's the Joint!: The Hip-hop Studies Reader* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004); Raquel Cepeda, ed., *And It Don't Stop: The Best American Hip-Hop Journalism of the Last 25 Years* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2004); Jeff Chang, ed., *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-hop* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2007); Brain Cross, *It's Not about a Salary: Rap, Race, and Resistance in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1993); Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn, *Yes Yes Y'all: The Experience Music Project Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade* (Cambridge: DaCapo Press, 2002); Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*; Brian Coleman, *Rakim Told Me: Hip-hop Wax Facts, Straight from the Original Artists* (Somerville, MA: Wax Facts Press, 2005).

have remained a popular genre of hip-hop writing (Toop 1984/2000, Hager 1984, Nelson and Gonzalez 1991, Light 1999, George 1999, etc.), while academic analyses have ranged from overarching attempts to outline and explicate hip-hop's socially-grounded aesthetics (Rose 1994, Potter 1995, Walser 1995, Kelley 1996, Krims 2000, Forman 2002, Keyes 2002, Schloss 2004) to the advent in recent years of more localized studies of hip-hop in and outside the US (Mitchell 2001, Rivera 2003, Maxwell 2003, Condry 2006).⁴³

The degree to which hip-hop's historians and observers have been avid supporters and participants has imbued their writings with verve, insider/emic perspectives, and often a critical edge that takes its cues more from Public Enemy and NWA than, say, the social and cultural theorists *du jour*. At the same time, this personal commitment to hip-hop's aesthetics and cultural critique—which I confess to sharing—has led, in its response to denigrating representations in mainstream media and dismissive attitudes in the academy, to a certain distortion in the way we write about hip-hop. Representations to date have been so preoccupied with validation and so pious with regard to certain artists,

⁴³ Toop, *Rap Attack*; Steven Hager, *Hip-hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); Havelock Nelson and Michael Gonzalez, *Bring the Noise: A Guide to Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture* (New York: Harmony Books, 1991); Alan Light, ed., *The Vibe History of Hip-hop* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999); Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999); Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995); Robert Walser, "Rhythm, Rhyme and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy," *Ethnomusicology* 39, no. 2 (1995): 193-218; Robin D.G. Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles," in *Droppin' Science*, ed. Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 117-158; Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002); Cheryl Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Joseph Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004); Tony Mitchell, ed., *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); Raquel Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Ian Maxwell, *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes: Hip Hop Down Under Comin' Upper* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003); Ian Condry, *Hip-hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

canons, and established narratives that the purview of the hip-hop literature appears, paradoxically, far more limited than the music's own omnivorous character and global ubiquity.⁴⁴ Given such a pattern, the picture painted, despite so many authors' strivings to represent hip-hop's power and reach, remains an impoverished one. All too frequently, the story of hip-hop is bound up with a certain sort of oppositional nationalism—derivative of and complicit with US state-sponsored nationalism and naturalized commonplaces about race, class, and nation—providing a striking parallel to the reggae narrative. The relationship between hip-hop and reggae has been consistently pushed to the margins of the story despite an arguably increasing and crucial, a foundational and continually formative, presence.

Recovering what has been written out of the hip-hop narrative is an ongoing project among scholars, journalists, and artists. Although racist representations continue to present degrading portraits of hip-hop, the sort of validation once thought necessary has largely been swept away by hip-hop's widespread embrace and enormous, worldwide success—an uptake, as Paul Gilroy notes, “built on transnational structures of circulation and intercultural exchange established long ago.”⁴⁵ Rather than defenders and promoters, then, hip-hop has long appeared in need of critics, especially since its ascension to global

⁴⁴ Indeed, reggae writers—and here Carolyn Cooper certainly comes to mind—often find themselves in the same bind, stuck in a mode of (often anti-racist) validation and embroiled in petty debates. Although I recognize that among one's primary interlocutors (whether in letters-to-the-editor or fights-with-the-advisor) there may be strong pressures to write in such a manner, it would seem more productive to take cultural or aesthetic “validity” as a starting point, as something that goes without saying, as something having more to do with class-position and ideology (e.g., Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [London: Routledge, 1984]) than with any “immanent” musical features (e.g., Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* [London: Athlone, 1999 (1970)]). I recognize that I am fortunate to be writing at a moment in time when many such validation debates have already taken place, to be writing in a space that was perhaps created by the authors who carved it out. But the worthiness of one's subject matter should be more-or-less evident in the engagement it engenders among a certain community (of practitioners and observers alike). It seems better to take the “value” of such subjects as given and to proceed to more critical analysis.

⁴⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 87.

prominence and market dominance. A need to expand our understanding of what constitutes hip-hop, its history, and the community relationships it engenders has animated a number of important interventions to which my own project owes no small debt. In the early 1990s, for example, Gilroy offered a critique of what he called “African-American particularity” for its elision of engagements with and appropriations from other Afrodiasporic forms in the hegemonic construction of the borders around “black music.” With specific regard to hip-hop, Gilroy posed a set of provocative questions:

Here we have to ask how a form which flaunts and glories in its own malleability as well as its transnational character becomes interpreted as an expression of some authentic African-American essence? How can rap be discussed as if it sprang intact from the entrails of the blues? . . . [W]hat is it about Afro-America’s writing elite which means that they need to claim this diasporic cultural form in such an assertively nationalist way?⁴⁶

And though we should perhaps take this celebration of hip-hop’s hybridity with some salt, Gilroy’s skepticism finds support in various pockets of the hip-hop literature.⁴⁷

Tricia Rose, for instance, whose *Black Noise* (1994) remains the definitive academic

⁴⁶ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 33-4. It is worth noting here as well that to buttress his analysis Gilroy turns to shifting representations of reggae and the tendency for stability to replace hybridity therein, with nationalisms of various sorts animating these discursive shifts: “Reggae, a supposedly stable and authentic category, provides a useful example here. Once its own hybrid origins in rhythm and blues were effectively concealed, it ceased, in Britain, to signify an exclusively ethnic, Jamaican style and derived a different kind of cultural legitimacy both from a new global status and from its expression of what might be termed a pan-Caribbean culture” (82). We might ask, however, whether hip-hop’s prominent presence in dancehall calls attention yet again to reggae’s hybridity as well as its ability to project a particular ethnic, Jamaican style. In this sense, Gilroy’s early 90s appraisal might best provide an interesting snapshot of a particular historical moment for (black) British, and Jamaican, cultural politics.

⁴⁷ Jacqueline Lo, for instance, provides an important critique of recent intellectual projects that celebrate hybridity without care for what it might mask. (Not to imply that Gilroy falls into this trap, for his work has always expressed a concern for underlying structural inequalities despite his focus on discourse and culture). Lo calls for greater nuance in discussions and determinations of what constitutes hybridity and for whom. See, for example, “Beyond Happy Hybridity,” in *Alter/Asians: Asian/Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture*, ed. Ien Ang, Sharon Chalmers, Lisa Law and Mandy Thomas (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2000), 152-68. Thanks to Tom Solomon for bringing Lo’s work to my attention.

study of hip-hop, is rather explicit about the importance of understanding rap and hip-hop in the context of “Afrodiasporic traditions” and “Afrodiasporic narratives” rather than simply as “a direct extension of African-American oral, poetic, and protest traditions.” The latter, she argues, should be seen as “only one facet of the context for rap’s emergence.” As Rose contends, “Rap’s primary context for development is hip-hop culture, the Afrodiasporic traditions it extends and revises, *and* the New York urban terrain in the 1970s.”⁴⁸

Pursuing hip-hop’s Afrodiasporic dimensions with regard to Puerto Rican participants, Raquel Rivera draws attention to the implications of the conventional hip-hop narrative: “The myth of hip hop being an African American realm and representing a rupture in Puerto Rican tradition has,” among other things, “prevented young African Americans, Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean folks from fully understanding their shared heritages; and it has also perpetuated frictions between these groups.” Rivera’s project, concerned as it is with explicating the “cultural realities that overflow past the limits assigned to them,” builds on the work of Juan Flores (2000), documenting the Puerto Rican contributions to hip-hop, especially in its formative years, and employing such evidence to ask similar questions about hip-hop’s absence in the story of Puerto Rican music.⁴⁹

Likewise, by hearing and representing hip-hop and reggae together, we can enrich our sense of how we draw boundaries with the stories we tell about music as well as how the musical record, if listened to closely, can provide another narrative, one which resists containment as much as it suggests connections and which provides audible examples of

⁴⁸ Rose, *Black Noise*, 25-26, emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ Rivera, *New York Ricans*, xi-xii, x. See also, Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

exchange and engagement, contact and contest. The hip-hop narrative's present shape (if always in formation) and its putative (American) blackness should not come as a surprise given the pervasive legacies of US racism and racialism, of the historical representation of "black music," and of economic exploitation in a context where the "playing field" remains unequal. At the same time, the African-/American-centric blackness that tends to emerge in accounts concerned with aesthetic validation—which continue to make up the lion's share of the hip-hop literature—serves in its stability to obscure the operation of racial ideologies in producing racial and ethnic subject positions. One can hear in the music, however, how such categories as race, ethnicity, and nation shift over time—how Jamaicanness, for example, becomes more easily reconciled with (American) blackness over the course of the 1980s after having been stigmatized in the 1970s—and yet, these same categories often appear utterly immutable in the hip-hop narrative.

Recognizing Reggae: Increasing Acknowledgement in the Hip-hop Literature

Although one finds a cursory—and perhaps growing—acknowledgment in the literature of the degree to which hip-hop emerges from and consistently engages with reggae style and practice, it remains a marginal strand in what has become a well-worn story. Significantly, the most overlooked part of the story is the most important: the continued and increasing socio-sonic circuitry, especially in the last two decades, between hip-hop and its foreign-but-familiar doppelganger, a relationship through which hip-hop derives no small resonance, especially in the Caribbeanized cities of the East Coast and outside the US and the Caribbean, where hip-hop and reggae tend to travel

together. Kool Herc's adaptation of soundsystem practice for his early 70s block parties still stands as the most frequently remarked connection between hip-hop and reggae, but such an acknowledgement is tantamount to lip-service in hip-hop's well-rehearsed narrative, often devoid of any detailed sense of what happened in that moment and *how* reggae practices were transmitted and translated for a predominantly African-American Bronx audience, never mind how the dynamic between reggae and rap has played out in the decades since. An influential and somewhat typical example is David Toop's popular overview, *Rap Attack* (now in its third edition), which recognizes hip-hop's connections to reggae fairly explicitly but limits the discussion to a small set of shared practices.⁵⁰ Moreover, Toop's account lessens the concrete significance of reggae's input by including it among a larger set of (vague) antecedents that extend "all the way to the griots of Nigeria and the Gambia."⁵¹

It is not surprising that a fuller account of reggae's presence throughout hip-hop's history remains to be written, since an investigation into the specific character of the Jamaican contribution to hip-hop's early mix—despite its frequent, if not perfunctory, appearance in the story of hip-hop—remains conspicuously absent from the literature, a conspicuousness made all the more acute by the commonplace acknowledgement of a deep connection between the two. As mentioned above, Dick Hebdige provides an important, early, if abridged, exploration of the connections between hip-hop and reggae, New York and London and Kingston, in *Cut 'n' Mix* (1987), and Paul Gilroy reiterates and expands on them in *The Black Atlantic* (1993). Russell Potter explores, if briefly, some of the "crossover" between reggae and rap, though he also, in somewhat typical

⁵⁰ See also in this regard, Steven Hager, *Hip-hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 45-6.

⁵¹ Toop, *Rap Attack* (1991), 19.

fashion, devotes the majority of his discussion of this intersection to the overlap in “rhetorical and narrative conventions” between the two.⁵² Significantly, despite the brief treatment the subject receives in his book, Potter gives voice to the paradoxical piety of the hip-hop literature when he argues that, “in many ways both the narrative and musical connection between hip-hop and Caribbean music are the most central to its musical identity.”⁵³ In his memoir of growing up within New York’s Guyanese community, hip-hop journalist and editor Selwyn Seyfu-Hinds has offered insights into the texture of life in an increasingly Caribbeanized and Jamaicanized New York.⁵⁴ Most significantly, Jeff Chang’s *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* (2005), especially the chapter on Kool Herc, presents no small number of revelations with regard to the complex ways that Clive Campbell negotiated his place in the early 70s South Bronx as a Jamaican immigrant teenager. Breaking from orthodoxy, Chang’s text also offers substantive context for—and superb storytelling about—reggae’s own emergence in Kingston in the late 60s and early 70s, including expositions on the innovations of the soundsystem, the dubplate, and the talkover DJ, and their resonance with related cultural practices emerging in the Bronx at the same time. Chang’s rich narrative, which has fast become the authoritative hip-hop history, foregrounds hip-hop’s connection to reggae and postcolonial Jamaica and explores their relationship in greater detail than any prior texts. Even so, Chang’s account of this relationship does not really extend beyond the 1970s, much like other histories, and thus leaves much to be done.

⁵² Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, 38.

⁵³ Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, 37.

⁵⁴ Selwyn Seyfu Hinds, *Gunshots In My Cook-Up: Bits and Bites From a Hip-hop Caribbean Life* (New York: Atria Books, 2002).

With regard to representing the last two decades of interplay, Rob Kenner's "Dancehall" chapter in the *Vibe History of Hip Hop* (1999) offers a more balanced look than one typically finds, offering myriad examples of "crossover" songs and collaborations to document the ways dancehall and hip-hop were heard together in the 1980s and 90s as two versions of the same thing, a perceived unity that continues into the present despite the tendency for histories of hip-hop and reggae to limit their scope according to implicit assumptions about national culture.⁵⁵ Moreover, Kenner observes reggae's curiously crucial but often unremarked place in hip-hop, as when he notes—in a nod to the *Mad Mad*—that "to return hip-hop to its essence" in 1998, the Brooklyn-based Black Star mobilized a reggae riff via a 1980s hip-hop hit. Kenner's contribution thus fills some gaping holes in the overlapping narrative, but as a brief overview it unveils but the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps not surprisingly, especially given space constraints, Kenner restricts his examples to the obvious and explicit, missing reggae's more subtle and overarching influence. Moreover, the framework for this recuperated history remains entrenched in questions of origins, as when Kenner draws the following conclusion from the Black Star example: "The time has come to respect the true architects."⁵⁶ Such a contention and rhetorical convention constitutes precisely the sort of provocation that has long animated writing about hip-hop and reggae alike, resulting in various commitments to tell their stories along rather strict, nationalistic lines. For all of Kenner's musical history, the transnational social history that underpins the interplay he describes is

⁵⁵ "Jamaican rap was very close to American rap," says producer Larry Smith, "They're very similar as far as performance, and they both express the plight of the people, and what is going on in the society around them" (Kenner: 355). In addition, the article ends with quotations from a 1994 interview with U-Roy in which the influential dancehall DJ not only underscores the genres' shared qualities but asserts a Jamaican-centric genealogy: "I really like rap—especially the more cultural side of hip-hop—it's still a form of DJ, but they call it rap" (357).

⁵⁶ Kenner, "Dancehall," 358. I will examine Black Star's use of the well-worn riddim in "The 90s" as well as "The Zunguzung Meme."

conspicuously absent. Thus, the role that migration has played in hip-hop's and reggae's mirror-mirror engagement remains left of out of the story, lost in rhetorical questions with only mythic answers. "Is it a coincidence," asks Kenner, "that so many remarkable rappers—Biggie Smalls, Busta Rhymes, Canibus, Doug E. Fresh, and Slick Rick, to name a few—trace their lineage to a single Caribbean island that's slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut?"⁵⁷ Well, is it?

The answer this dissertation vigorously proposes is "no." It is, in fact, far from a coincidence that reggae and hip-hop have enjoyed such a fruitful, intimate relationship, inspiring generations of young people in New York, Kingston, and elsewhere to embrace sounds both foreign and familiar in order to shape, sonically and suggestively, the subjectivities available to people in similar circumstances (regardless of whether such productions were "simply" done for fun or for money or for girls). Although works such as Jeff Chang's outstanding history have done much to elaborate on the shared conditions between, say, Kingston and the South Bronx in the early 1970s, a number of significant developments in the decades since are particularly relevant to the story, among them: massive out-migration from Jamaica (especially among the lower classes); the continued militarization of Kingston and the export of Jamaica's gangs to the metropolises; the explosion in cocaine trafficking through the Caribbean and the impact of crack on US cities; the advent of the Internet, the cellular phone, and other information and communication technologies; the growth and influence of cable television in Jamaica; the mass deportation of Jamaicans living in New York and other metropolitan cities; the effects of globally-enacted neo-liberal policy on the poor of Jamaica and the US; and,

⁵⁷ Kenner, "Dancehall," 355.

concomitant with all of these, hip-hop's and reggae's symbiotic rise to global cultural prominence.

The significations of such under-documented engagement—the reasons and meanings underlying all the musical and sartorial borrowings, adopted accents, sampled riffs, commercial collaborations, and rudeboy/gangsta stances—remain woefully unexplored. The (often implicit) nationalist frameworks that have informed the tellings of reggae's and hip-hop's stories fail to illuminate what may be the most striking thing that hip-hop and reggae express in their intertwined sonic-social history: that New York and Kingston alike have undergone seismic socio-cultural shifts in the last half century and that Jamaican and American music and culture and societies are more inseparable than ever. The ends that a reggae riff serves in the South Bronx in the late 80s may be rather different from the ends that a hip-hop flow serves in contemporary Kingston (and both will be explored in the pages that follow), but the critical issue here is the deep degree to which engagements with these foreign-but-familiar forms have become not simply commonplace but crucial to contemporary cultural practice the world over. Some crucial questions emerge. What does this international circulation of strongly marked musical figures tell us about changing conceptions of the borders around race and nation? How do such musical mobilizations articulate with (translocal) racial and national ideologies of the past, present, and future? Given that a strong (re)infusion of reggae style accompanies both the rise of gangsta rap *and* the mainstream arrival of hip-hop, and that the hip-hop literature has continually acknowledged as it has marginalized the integral place of Jamaica in the hip-hop imagination, what would a fuller picture of this intertwined

history do for our sense of where American or Jamaican culture begins or ends? What can we learn about ourselves and our neighbors by hearing hip-hop and reggae together?

In contrast to previous representations of the hip-hop narrative, I seek to re-appraise the music's aesthetics—its socio-sonic circuitry, if you will—in light of the longstanding and intensifying intersection of African-/American and Caribbean communities and cultural practices in the transnational spaces that the urban centers of the East Coast have come to constitute in the last half of the twentieth century.⁵⁸ This is a story not simply about origins but about constant interplay, about the intercultural texture and intertextual culture of modern urban life and the interconnected predicament of the world's societies. Until now, the history of Jamaica's presence in hip-hop, and vice versa, has been largely a hidden history—its shadowy status obscuring the social and cultural transformation that New York and other American urban centers have undergone in the last few decades. In order to get closer to this specter, dancing in the limbo space between roots and routes, it is imperative to bring to bear on hip-hop's and reggae's historical and musical record the incisive perspectives of recent work on diaspora, globalization, migration, the representation of place, and the phenomenology of belonging.

Toward a Fuller Telling: Critical Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Mix

With its high rates of migration, history of shifting sovereignty and international trade, island geography and well-worn routes of circulation, the Caribbean has long been

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Orlando Patterson, "Ecumenical America: Global Culture and the American Cosmos" (*World Policy Journal* 11, no. 2 [1994]: 103-117), as well as Ray Allen and Lois Wilcken, eds., *Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Popular Music and Identity in New York* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

defined by movement.⁵⁹ As globalization processes and projects continue apace, the predicament of Caribbean societies and subjects appears more and more to be the “representative modern experience.”⁶⁰ Making sense of the circuits of exchange, patterns of interpretation, and processes of subject formation that emerge from such suddenly “representative” movement has animated a great deal of research in the last two decades, as scholars across a variety of disciplines have turned their attention to the social formations and cultural practices that derive from, affirm, challenge, and complicate the increasingly interconnected networks of the modern world system.

Although in recent years ethnomusicologists have increasingly turned their attention to these questions (e.g., Slobin 1994, Sugarman 1997, Myers 1999, Allen and Wilcken 2001), many of the earliest and most persuasive studies on the social implications of late twentieth century migration, especially with regard to Caribbean-American circumstances, have been produced by sociologists (e.g., Sutton and Chaney 1987, Kasinitz 1992, Patterson 1987, Pessar 1996, Waters 1999, Foner 2001, Cordero-Guzmán, *et al.*, 2001, Kasinitz, *et al.*, 2004).⁶¹ Offering a wealth of demographically and

⁵⁹ Indeed, in his “Foreword” to Ransford Palmer’s *In Search of a Better Life: Perspectives on Migration from the Caribbean* (1990), Gordon Lewis goes so far as to contend that “the essence of Caribbean life has always been movement” (xiii).

⁶⁰ Hall, “Minimal Selves,” in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. Houston Baker, Manthia Diawara, and Ruth Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 [1987]), 114.

⁶¹ Mark Slobin, “Music in Diaspora: The View from Euro-America,” *Diaspora* 3, no. 3 (1994): 243-251; Jane Sugarman, *Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Helen Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad: Songs from the India Diaspora* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Allen and Wilcken, *Island Sounds*; Constance R. Sutton and Elsa M. Chaney, eds., *Caribbean Life in New York City: Sociocultural Dimensions* (New York: The Center for Migration Studies, 1987); Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Patterson, “The Emerging West Atlantic System”; Patricia R. Pessar, *Caribbean Circuits: New Directions in the Study of Caribbean Migration* (New York: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1996); Mary Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001 [1999]); Nancy Foner, *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Hector Cordero-Guzmán, Robert C. Smith, and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *Migration, Transnationalization, and Race in a Changing New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University

ethnographically informed analyses, this body of work illuminates not simply the scale and significance of Caribbean migration to the United States in the last four decades—“the largest emigration flow in West Indian history,” according to Nancy Foner—it also, often via ethnography, provides historically-grounded insights into the “enormous consequences” such migration has had “for the lives of individual migrants as well as for the societies they have left behind and the city they have entered.”⁶² These include: the racialization of migrants and their children, the (re)formation of ethnicity and nationality, the maintenance and transformation of cultural practices, and the economic and political effects on immigrants’ “host societies” and “home societies” (especially via remittances, circular migration, deportation, etc). The sociological literature on Caribbean migration to the US, especially to New York, thus contributes crucially to an understanding of how notions of Jamaicanness (and the degree to which it overlaps with American blackness) shift over time, and how Jamaican music comes to have such a strong presence in hip-hop, or, more broadly, how an American metropole can start to sound like, and serve as, a Caribbean “cosmopole.”⁶³

A salient concern among ethnomusicologists (and musically-inclined anthropologists) studying the effects of “global flows” is the interplay between cosmopolitan, nationalist, racialist, and other forms of identification and interpellation and, of course, how these notions are mediated by music (e.g., Turino 2000, Wade 2000).⁶⁴ In spite of the particular local focus of such studies, a number of suggestive

Press, 2001); Philip Kasinitz, John H. Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters, eds., *Becoming New Yorkers: Ethnographies of the New Second Generation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004).

⁶² Foner, *Islands in the City*, 1.

⁶³ Patterson, “Ecumenical America.”

⁶⁴ I borrow the term “global flows” from Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Thomas Turino, *Nationalists,*

similarities offer themselves to scholars of music and globalization more generally.

Turino's analysis of the function that forms marked as "indigenous" or "folk" serve in the construction of national identity, for example, applies as well to Jamaica as to Zimbabwe (especially as they are linked by histories of colonial rule and, more recently, by IMF and World Bank programs of "structural adjustment"). Exploring nationalism's paradoxical dependency on cosmopolitanism, Turino notes that,

Distinguishing emblems and discourses (e.g., of "national character") are thus required to circumscribe nations. When available, indigenous or "folk" arts and practices are often key emblems because they offer the sharpest contrast to cosmopolitan forms. Distinctly local indigenous practices and emblems are also crucial as indices of actual affective identities and bonds which can help imbue the rather abstract concept of the nation with sentiment.⁶⁵

With regard to Jamaica, the dynamic Turino describes here helps to make sense of the intersections between state-sponsored nationalism via, for instance, the culture ministry's elevation and reification of Afro-Jamaican "heritage" and various grassroots notions of nation, which can include the mobilization and transformation of "traditional" Afro-Jamaican forms and practices as well as engagements with and allusions to modern, international, and often African-/American forms.⁶⁶ The perspective Turino provides on such processes hence helps to explain how, say, dancehall reggae's prevailing 3+3+2 rhythm can be heard and felt as something inherently, "authentically" Jamaican despite how dressed up it may be in digital effects and North American accents or how much it relates to and derives from regional Caribbean styles. Understanding how musical figures

Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000); Peter Wade, *Music, Race, and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁶⁵ Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, 15.

⁶⁶ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 158-91.

thus articulate with various, overlapping, and competing notions and projects of national attachment comprises a principal theme in the “Mad Mad” story I seek to tell.

Complementing studies that focus on what we might call an “internal” dynamic of musical nationalism (which is, of course, always engaged with the external), other recent studies of music in an age of unprecedented global exchange call attention more specifically to the ideologies, connotations, and subjectivities which “foreign” music—and other expressive media—can transmit and produce in new localities, especially when certain signifiers circulate far from their original, local sites of production. The embrace of funk by Guinean youth in the 1970s (Diawara 1998) or the engagement with Bollywood films in contemporary Nigeria (Larkin 2002) again provide suggestive parallels for making sense of young Kingstonians’ embrace of forms marked as African-/American, not to mention young Americans’ embrace of musical and sartorial styles associated with Jamaica.⁶⁷ Hip-hop and reggae travel together as signifiers of New World and/or transnational blackness, serving as mirror-mirror versions of and for each other. Depending on the contexts in which they are received by audiences or remixed by producers, their connotations can serve to confirm commonplace (and often American) ideas about race and nation, sometimes appearing as ghostly, “schizophonic” (Feld 1996) presences in metropolitan music (e.g., jungle/drum’n’bass in London), and sometimes informing the latest expression of longstanding engagements (Erlmann 1999) between the “rest” and the West (e.g., hip-hop and reggae hybrids in Senegal, Ghana, Kenya, etc.).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 99-110; Brian Larkin, “Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities,” in *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 350-378.

⁶⁸ Feld, “pygmy POP!: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (1996): 1-35; Veit Erlmann, *Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

In such cases, musical representations of (New World/American) blackness emerge as key texts in the negotiation of racial and national ideologies and in the identification practices of what Alexander Weheliye has dubbed “the fragmented and at times contentious communities enabled by the global circulation of African American popular music.”⁶⁹

In order to understand better the construction, circulation, and resonance of musical figurations of blackness, Americanness, and Jamaicanness in various contexts—and the community relationships such figures engender—it is useful to turn again to the recent work of Louise Meintjes, whose analysis of sonic signifiers of Africanness draws attention to the ways such notions are emergent, performative, and historically and locally contingent. Bypassing entrenched debates around essentialism and anti-essentialism, Meintjes asks how Africanness comes to be associated with particular musical practices, figures, and timbres and what sort of cultural work it does:

How does Africanness come to be located in a single sound? While the idea of an Africanness is essentializing, ahistorical, and a gloss of a diverse geopolitical region, it takes on a particular form in the local context and performs in ways specific to its music-makers’ personal and social investments, ideas, and ambitions. Africanness emerges as an utterance out of a stylistic and social history and from a locally constituted consciousness concerned with race, national citizenship, and ethnicity.⁷⁰

Here, instead of seeking a core or the absence of one, Meintjes recognizes that people think about and feel Africanness in a variety of ways, often depending on context. As “constructed”—a term which Meintjes tellingly does not use—a thing as Africanness

⁶⁹ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 145.

⁷⁰ Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 110.

might be, it is also very real, for it works powerfully to mediate social relations, market transactions, the imagination of community, and the phenomenology of selfhood.

Building on Meintjes's reading of the production of Africanness in a South African studio, and bringing in Michael Taussig's notion of "mimetic excess" (i.e., "an excess creating reflexive awareness as to the mimetic faculty") this dissertation asks how various overlapping and sometimes contradictory forms of "locally constituted consciousness" interact—specifically, in the case of hip-hop's and reggae's interplay in Kingston, New York, and other sites of production/reception, to inform the range of subjectivities available to certain actors, the possible connotations of Jamaicanness, Americanness, blackness, etc.⁷¹

To put it another way, how do the dynamics of engagement, imitation, and invention embodied by hip-hop's and reggae's longstanding interaction illuminate music's role in supporting or subverting particular social categories and group identities? How does the performance of Jamaicanness in mid-80s or early 90s hip-hop, for example, work to revise popular conceptions of American blackness (never mind Jamaicanness)? How does the performance of American blackness in contemporary dancehall reggae challenge certain cultural mores and social hierarchies in Jamaica? Do these simultaneous performances of sameness and otherness affirm or upset (local and translocal) ideologies of race and nation? If we expand and complicate Rex Nettleford's figure of the "mirror/mirror" dialectic in Jamaica to take into account not simply well-worn Jamaican/English or African/European dyads but also an increasingly crucial Caribbean/(African-/)American axis, do we come away with a sense that—in their

⁷¹ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 254.

expression of an always already Caribbeanized US and Americanized Jamaica—such engagements, in their often obvious play with sonic-social signifiers, give the lie to stable conceptions of borders and wholes, peoples and selves? Do such performances, as Taussig might like to read them, cultivate as they express “an appreciation of mimesis as an end in itself that takes one into the magical power of the signifier to act as if it were indeed the real, to live in a different way with the understanding that artifice is natural, no less than that nature is historicized”?⁷²

This dissertation begins from the premise that the imbrication of Jamaica and the US, despite new points (and representations) of contact, is always already a constitutive feature of their distinctive expressions. In examining hip-hop’s and reggae’s rooted routes and routed roots, it seems more appropriate to pursue their tangled lines of translocal historical contact than to represent them as two discrete systems bumping against each other somewhere over the Black Atlantic. As James Clifford notes, “Contact approaches presuppose not sociocultural wholes subsequently brought into relationship but rather systems already constituted relationally, entering new relations through historical processes of displacement.” Hip-hop and reggae embody this sort of relational constitution in their overlapping aesthetic orientations and shared practices, not to mention the distinctive, hybrid expressions they engender in various historical and local contexts. In this sense, just as I argue for an appreciation of and a way of hearing hip-hop and reggae—and their interplay—as postcolonial music, we might also hear them, as many do, as (re)constituting a musical expression of diaspora. For Clifford, recent figurations of diaspora stand as “potential subversions of nationality—ways of sustaining

⁷² Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 255.

connections with more than one place while practicing non-absolutist forms of citizenship.”⁷³

Clifford configures the “history of diverse diasporas” as a “pre-history of postcolonialism,” noting an attendant shift from an emphasis on pre-given forms to “acts of relationship” and from identities to identifications.⁷⁴ Diaspora articulates roots and routes to offer new forms of community consciousness, though these can take antagonistic as well as allied forms. Notably, Clifford employs a familiar example of how notions of diasporic community can cut across each other:

Many Caribbeans in New York, for example, have maintained a sense of connection with their home islands, a distinct sense of cultural, and sometimes class, identity that sets them apart from African Americans, people with whom they share material conditions of racial and class subordination. . . . On the one hand, feelings of diasporic identity can encourage antagonism, a sense of superiority to other minorities and migrant populations. On the other, shared histories of colonization, displacement, and racialization can form the basis for coalitions . . . There is no guarantee of “postcolonial” solidarity. Interdiaspora politics proceeds by tactics of collective articulation *and* disarticulation.⁷⁵

Hip-hop’s and reggae’s interplay has produced myriad texts illustrating and informing the shifting ground of diasporic and postcolonial affiliation. It is thus not surprising, nor insignificant, how well Clifford’s description of “diaspora cultures” describes the crucial practices of both genres, including the use of the term *versioning* which itself most likely derives from reggae parlance (perhaps via Gilroy). “Diaspora cultures,” writes Clifford, “work to maintain community, selectively preserving and recovering traditions, ‘customizing’ and ‘versioning’ them in novel, hybrid, and often antagonistic

⁷³ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 7, 9.

⁷⁴ Clifford, *Routes*, 268.

⁷⁵ Clifford, *Routes*, 260-1 (emphasis in original).

situations.”⁷⁶ And yet, for all this overlap, it is imperative to sort out the articulations from the disarticulations, to understand how such engagements function in particular historical and social contexts, and to scrutinize the ways that invocations of diaspora might also reproduce nationalist ideologies even as they offer seemingly transcendent or transgressive possibilities.

Although Clifford argues that diaspora—by challenging binary models of minority communities and majority societies, assimilation and resistance—points toward “potential subversions of nationality,” it is nevertheless important to maintain some vigilance around the ways diasporic discourses can reaffirm the very categories they would seem to upset.⁷⁷ Ien Ang, for instance, has examined how diaspora can mask internal differences among migrant populations as well as, paradoxically, how it can serve to import the logic of the state into new circumstances, reifying the idea of a bounded population in its very transcendence of physical borders. “While the transnationalism of diasporas is often taken as an implicit point of critique of the territorial boundedness and internally homogenizing perspective of the nation-state,” argues Ang, “the limits of diaspora lie precisely in its own assumed boundedness, its inevitable tendency to stress its internal coherence and unity, logically set apart from ‘others.’”⁷⁸ Indeed, for the line of inquiry this dissertation pursues, it will prove essential to note the ways diaspora slides into as it transcends nationalism, in particular with regard to cultural practices marked either as African-/American or as Jamaican. “Far more than it expresses any exilic consciousness of Africa,” for example, Paul Gilroy contends that

⁷⁶ Clifford, *Routes*, 263.

⁷⁷ Clifford, *Routes*, 9.

⁷⁸ Ien Ang, “Together-in-Difference: Beyond Diaspora, into Hybridity,” *Asian Studies Review* 27, no. 2 (2003): 142. Thanks again to Tom Solomon for bringing this reference to my attention.

American Afrocentrism, “betrays a distinctively American understanding of ethnicity and cultural difference.”⁷⁹ It is against such proto-nationalist and ultimately racialist conceptions of community that Gilroy applauds the sentiment expressed by rapper Rakim’s famous line—“It ain’t where you’re from, / it’s where you’re at”—as “emphasizing a view of identity as an ongoing process of self-making at a time when myths of origins hold so much appeal.” Notably, Gilroy follows this point by linking such an outlook to Caribbean(ized) culture: “Sometimes that kind of idea is strongest where the Caribbean styles and forms, very often dominated by pan-African motifs, are most developed.”⁸⁰

Gilroy challenges us to hear hip-hop and reggae together in order to better hear the calls and responses ricocheting across the Black Atlantic and beyond. In this manner, he connects such acts of “hearing together” can connect to “the possibility of thinking and acting together as well as to the larger processes of solidarity that [in the 1970s] were in the process of networking different black communities from Johannesburg to South Carolina via London and Kingston.”⁸¹ Significantly, Gilroy expresses his wariness of African-American particularism through invocations of the Caribbean, the creole, the hybrid, and the diasporic, wondering “Can there be a blackness that connects, articulates, synchronizes experiences and histories across the diaspora space?”⁸² Thus, for all his

⁷⁹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 89. Dubwise, we might hear an anticipatory echo of Gilroy’s critique in Rex Nettleford’s analysis of American Black Power and its complex resonance outside the US: “The ‘imperialistic temper’ of many aspects of American Black Power is in this sense seen as little more than a black variation of the current global hegemony by Anglo-Saxon America and as such, invite the distrust of many Third World peoples (including black Africans and West Indians) who may wish to find solutions for themselves in their own way and beyond the dictates of American-style and American preoccupations, however praiseworthy and ‘universal’ these may seem to be” (*Mirror Mirror*, 119).

⁸⁰ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 91.

⁸¹ Gilroy, “Between the Blues and the Blues Dance: Some Soundscapes of the Black Atlantic,” in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Bull and Back (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2003), 385.

⁸² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 92.

engagement with hip-hop, Gilroy frequently reminds us that, as rappers dead prez have said, “it’s bigger than hip-hop.” Building on the work of Gilroy and other theorists of diaspora, race, and nation, as well as the often incisive perspectives and detailed research of the hip-hop and reggae literature—but most of all, the myriad examples provided by musicians, producers, DJs and MCs—this dissertation seeks to tease out the foundational, mutual, musical engagements between subjects and actors in Jamaica, the United States, and other crucial nodes in an increasingly articulated network of sound, style, and symbolism. The pages that follow spring from the insight that hearing hip-hop in Jamaica and hearing Jamaica in hip-hop calls our attention—feelingfully and critically—to the manifold ways hip-hop and reggae open into the wider world and offer rich, powerful texts for projects of self-making and community building.

CHAPTER THREE

The 60s: *Rocksteady and Jamaica's Transnational Nationalisms*

When it first appeared in 1967, before inspiring versions of versions from New York to San Juan, the riddim underlying Alton Ellis's "Mad Mad Mad" already embodied the transnational character of Jamaican music. Ellis's recordings in the late 60s defined the style known as rocksteady, a short-lived fusion of post-ska Jamaican pop and American soul that would yield to the advent of reggae style only a couple years after it first appeared. Ellis recorded "Mad, Mad, Mad" at Clement "Coxsone" Dodd's Studio One, the recording house responsible for the lion's share of reggae's foundational tracks. An active musical arbiter, Dodd spent time in Florida in the 1950s as a migrant farm-worker, where he had access to the latest American rhythm & blues records. Well acquainted with music from outside of Jamaica, Dodd encouraged the musicians at Studio One to draw not only from the American R&B repertory but also from Jamaican mento and Trinidadian calypso, Cuban son and bolero, Dominican merengue, and anything else that caught his ear.

Such an ecumenical approach came as second nature to the members of the Studio One house band, for the players already brought extensive transnational musical experience to every session. In addition to attracting many of Jamaica's finest freelance musicians, the Studio One band absorbed several of the Skatalites—Jamaica's most famous and influential, if short-lived, ska group—when the band broke up in 1965. About half of the players went to work for Dodd and half went to rival Arthur "Duke" Reid's Treasure Isle studio. All had extensive experience playing jazz. Many—including Rico

Rodriguez, Don Drummond, and Tommy McCook—learned to play at the Alpha School for Boys in Kingston, where musical instruction, with an emphasis on classical, march, and jazz techniques and repertoires, was an important element in a strictly disciplined education program. After honing their skills at the Alpha School, several played big band jazz and dance music with the Eric Deans Orchestra and other local swing bands. Many found work on the tourist circuit, playing at hotels and on cruise ships, drawing from a repertory consisting of songs and styles from across the Caribbean that provided a pan-island soundtrack for the tourist industry. Before joining up with the Skatalites, saxophonist Tommy McCook spent eight years leading a jazz group in the Bahamas. Several band members had direct, familial links to other islands. Rico Rodriguez, Tommy McCook, and Roland Alphonso were all born in Cuba of Cuban-Jamaican parentage. And, of course, these session musicians all had experience playing rhythm & blues, which made up the bulk of Jamaican popular music in the late 50s and early 60s.¹

All these influences maintain a presence in rocksteady, but significantly, it was the infusion of American soul music that seems to have given the genre its most definitive stylistic push away from ska. Although popular histories attempt to make sense of rocksteady's stylistic features—in particular its slower tempo—by drawing an analogy to the waning optimism of the post-independence era, such a reading is not necessarily the most persuasive account of this instance of musical change. Among other factors, as studio bands became smaller and technology changed (including, notably, the advent of the Fender electric bass), new instruments came to the fore and bandleaders composed

¹ David Katz, *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 57-8.

new arrangements to accommodate these reconfigurations.² Whereas the nationalist narrative claims that Jamaican music began looking inward at this point (and, in fact, had turned its back on outside influence since ska broke from boogie), anecdotal and musical evidence suggests otherwise.

Partly due to the power of US radio broadcasts, which reached Jamaica from as far north as Memphis and Cincinnati, American popular music—especially R&B—remained popular in Jamaica even after the innovations of ska, while Jamaican émigrés and migrant workers continued to provide links to the outside world. Indeed, with its prevaillingly duple rhythms, crooner singing style, and back-up harmonies, rocksteady seems to embody a rather northward-leaning moment for Jamaican popular music. It is of no little significance, considering this indebtedness to American musical style, that the *riddims* produced during the rocksteady era have informed Jamaican popular music for decades and remain foundational referents for reggae style.

² Some participants, such as Ken Stewart of the Skatalites, cite more mundane reasons for the change, connecting it to seasonal and generational factors: “The summers were getting particularly hot, people were getting a little older, so the dance pace was slowed down a little bit” (Jose Orozco, “Skatalites: The Best Music You Never Heard,” *All About Jazz* <<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=17919>> 21 June 2005 [accessed 14 July 2005]). This explanation appears to have circulated fairly widely, inspiring the following, typical account by Stephen Davis: “No one can really identify the point at which the Jamaican dance music called ska evolved into and was ultimately replaced by a new dance called ‘rock-steady.’ The prevailing theory is that the bitterly hot and dry summer of 1966 retarded the bouncy tempo of the ska dancers and necessitated what one observer has called a ‘slow, painful, almost sinister’ dance” (Stephen Davis and Peter Simon, *Reggae Bloodlines: In Search of the Music and Culture of Jamaica* [New York: Da Capo Press, 1992 (1977)], as excerpted at <<http://www.easystar.com/feature1.html> > [accessed 12 June 2006]).

The *Mad Mad* Riddim and Rocksteady Style

“Mad Mad Mad” is fairly typical of rocksteady style.³ The bass assumes prominence in the mix, and its quickly repeated notes—often at the level of steady sixteenth notes—represent one of rocksteady’s stylistic hallmarks and a feature that would carry forward into reggae. Ken Stewart, a keyboardist and manager for the Skatalites, ties this shift in style directly to technology: “Rocksteady was when the bass line started to get more repetitive . . . The acoustic bass was kind of out because the bass lines were so fast that they got kind of muddy with a string bass. So the electric bass was a lot clearer and, of course, more of a punch.”⁴ Complementing the punch and rhythmic drive of the bass is a drum pattern that would come to be called the one-drop. The one-drop derives from ska drumming patterns, which in turn take their inspiration from jazz and various Latin and Caribbean styles.⁵ A snare drum (in this case, as in many others, played as a “rim-shot”), and perhaps a lightly-played kick drum, accent beats 2 and 4, while other percussion—a hi-hat on the offbeat, bells around beat 3—fill out the texture, leaving plenty of space. The guitar and piano emphasize the offbeats as well, reinforcing a stylistic feature that spans decades of Jamaican pop, often called a “skank” rhythm, which retains currency from ska through dancehall, and which we can hear in early mento and calypso recordings as well. The absence of a strong attack on the downbeat is

³ It should be noted that at the time “Mad Mad Mad” was recorded the rotating cast of musicians at Studio One were calling themselves the Soul Vendors, featuring Brian Atkinson on bass, Joe Isaacs on drums, Harry Haughton and Hux Brown on guitars, Bobby Ellis on trumpet, Dennis “Ska” Campbell on tenor sax, and Jackie Mittoo—the primary arranger for Studio One—on keyboards.

⁴ Orozco, “Skatalites,” <<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=17919>> (accessed 14 July 2005).

⁵ For guitarist and singer Bobby Aitken, rock steady has even more mongrel roots: “It’s coming from calypso, with a *bolero* beat, then the ska came in from the blues” (Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 68). Bill Carbone’s unpublished paper on Lloyd Knibb and ska drumming (see bibliography) also brings to light the many “foreign” infusions in Knibb’s influential drumming style.

a common characteristic of post-Independence Jamaican music, creating some dynamism between the underlying pulse and the overarching offbeat accent, and differentiating the music from the increasingly downbeat-oriented rock and funk of the US (which do, however, eventually make inroads into reggae style). The horns provide color and contrast, outlining the main riff—a catchy, three-note figure and the most enduring aspect of what comes to be called the *Mad Mad* riddim—during the introduction and again at the end of the song:

Figure 1: The Mad Mad Riff



The riff, a fairly simple melody and perhaps an obvious one for musicians steeped in jazz or blues, is reinforced by Jackie Mittoo’s piano licks and Alton Ellis’s chorus melody, which, in an effective marriage of form and content, ascends on each of the thrice repeated calls of “hey” to descend, melismatically, on “you”: “Hey, hey, hey... you.”

Ellis’s singing style clearly derives, at least in part, from American soul and pop crooners, including Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, Curtis Mayfield, and Marvin Gaye—vocalists who have inspired a great many Jamaican singers since the 60s. His alternately smooth and gruff vocal timbres, “nonsensical” and “churchical” interjections (“mmmmm”), and use of vibrato and other expressive techniques (e.g., staccato, breathy elaborations on single syllables, as on “Everyba-ha-dee” or “they will fi-hi-hind you”), connect him sonically to the American soul singers who enjoyed as much popularity in Jamaica in the late 60s as their southern R&B forebears had enjoyed a decade earlier.

Moreover, the backup singers, anticipating Ellis’s lyrics and sometimes echoing him, sing in multi-part harmony, evoking the arrangements and call/response structures of the late 60s output from popular soul labels such as Motown, Stax, and Atlantic records.

The lyrics themselves recall American popular song conventions—not so much in the theme of gossip, a fairly common subject everywhere (if a frequent focus of such soul hits as “I Heard It Through the Grapevine”), as in their somewhat quaint, self-reflective admonition to “take heed to my song”—though one can also hear in this statement of music’s social function an echo of calypso’s and mento’s self-consciousness as potential forces of social change. The lyrics repeat over the course of the song and form a fairly straightforward message, at least on the surface:

They will talk, talk a lot about you (talk about you)
 Let them talk, there is nothing you can do (you can do)
 (They will say) say things so bad
 (It will drive) it will drive you mad
 (If you don’t take heed) to my song,
 They will find you,
 Find you mad, mad, mad as can be (mad as can be)
 Hey hey hey, you,
 Everybody,
 Hey hey hey, you,
 Hey hey hey...

Despite the obvious lexical meanings of the song text, however, the lyrics also suggest a kind of social allegory. Ellis recounts writing the song in response to Coxson Dodd’s irritation over “the large number of Ellis’s female fans waiting outside the studio.”⁶ Yet it would not be too far a stretch to suppose that the themes of gossip and madness would resonate more broadly with contemporary concerns about political rhetoric (and unfulfilled promises), social suffocation, economic stagnation, and a “young” nation’s

⁶ Liner notes, *Get Ready for Rock-Reggae-Steady* (Jamaican Gold, JMC 200.241).

struggle for identity and self-determination in the midst of enduring colonial hierarchies of value, status, and power. The psychological profile concomitant with colonialism, as explored most trenchantly by Caribbean scholars such as Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter, frequently connects the theme of madness—a recurring motif in Caribbean expressive culture—to the conditions created by global capital’s dehumanizing effects and institutionalized racism.⁷ The contrast between the stifling environs evoked in the lyrics to “Mad Mad Mad” and the outward-reaching, cosmopolitan sound underpinning them represents an enduring tension in Jamaican music and accounts, in part, for the powerful affect that a seemingly simple ballad can have depending on its contexts of production and reception. “Let them talk,” sings Ellis, but “take heed,” lest it “drive you mad.”

The same parallels to American pop song in the lyrics of “Mad Mad Mad” can also be observed in the song’s form. Although the song comprises a fairly simple chord structure, alternating between I, ii, and V chords, the form itself is somewhat more complicated, shifting the order of I and ii chords (though always using the V in “turnaround” measures at the end of the chorus) as the song moves between verse, chorus, and transitional sections. Influenced by jazz, R&B/soul, and their precursors in popular song form, notably the Tin Pan Alley repertory, many rocksteady songs display an approach to form that connects the style more directly to early- and mid-century compositional practices, with clear, often complex chord progressions and multiple measure cycles (e.g., 32 bars), than to the one- or two-bar ostinatos that would become so

⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952]); Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond the World of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles,” *World Literature Today* 63, no. 4 (1989): 637-647; Carolyn Cooper discusses this motif in *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 306.

popular with the emergence of funk and reggae alike.⁸ A number of classic riddims are indeed “versions” of American R&B songs, or “foreign tunes,” that were popular at the time.⁹ The pronounced movement of a chord progression and the use of distinct sections in “Mad Mad Mad” stands in contrast to subsequent directions in Jamaican pop, as we will hear in later versions of the *Mad Mad* riddim, where ostinatos, often on a single chord or alternating between two, assume compositional preeminence. In this context, it is notable that the bass essentially plays an ostinato riff here—if one that changes pitch in step with the chord progression—as opposed to the “walking” style basslines more common to the jazz- and boogie-woogie-influenced sound of ska. The bassline, whose repetition at the level of the sixteenth note would come to define “dubby” roots-reggae basslines of the 70s, points to the beginnings of funk’s influence on Jamaican music—a stylistic shift tied to technological as well as social and cultural changes. As Bob Marley once articulated, “People like I, we love James Brown and we dip into the American bag. We don’t want to stand around playing and singing that ska beat anymore. The young musicians, dem have a different beat. It was rocksteady now, eager to go!”¹⁰

So despite ska’s expression of a strong new nationalism, a younger generation of musicians used the soul-infused sounds of rocksteady (ironically, often represented as more Jamaican than ska) to advance an alternative, and some might say oppositional,

⁸ James Brown, the “Godfather of Soul” and “Father of Funk,” was instrumental in shifting American popular music, and ultimately pop music worldwide, away from these “ornate” forms and toward an emphasis on repetition and groove. In addition to the sheer sonic force of funk, its alignment with the Civil Rights and Black Power movements gave the music additional resonance, especially in the Caribbean and across the African diaspora (and in African countries as well: see Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998], 99-110). It is worth noting, for instance, that at a highpoint for reggae Toots Hibbert could title his album *Funky Kingston* (1972) with little sense of corruption or contradiction.

⁹ See, for example, the extensive list of covers in Jamaican music collected at “Skaville” <<http://www.skaville.de/index.html>> (accessed 10 June 2006).

¹⁰ Kevin O’Brien Chang and Wayne Chen, *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 38.

sense of nation—one less bound up with government projects and more closely linked to notions of Black Power and of a racially-mobilized sense of community, and one largely inspired by the transnational circulation of people, ideas, and music that have long animated cultural politics in Jamaica.¹¹ And yet, the critical absence of an accounting of rocksteady’s and ska’s transnational dimensions results in a shoring up of the nationalist myth through which *out of many, one people* continues to mask deep divisions and grave inequalities in Jamaican society. The remainder of this chapter seeks to challenge the typical nationalist contours of the story of Jamaican music, examining how representations of certain popular styles serve to repress the degree to which an engagement with the “foreign” has been downright constitutive of Jamaican music as well as how musicians’ discourse and musical structures themselves bear witness to a continuous interplay of Jamaican and Caribbean-/American styles. Taking into account the economic dictates of the tourist industry, the role of race and class in mediating musical taste in Jamaica, and the longstanding routed-ness of Jamaica’s musical roots, I examine how the nationalist projects of the 60s, and subsequent tellings of the story of Jamaican music, have served to consolidate an official notion of Jamaican nationhood that remains at odds with the mad, mad saga we can hear in the music.

¹¹ Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 45. Chang and Chen’s *Reggae Routes*, for example, does not even mention soul music in the rocksteady chapter, leaving one to wonder where are the “routes” to which their book’s title refers. Apparently, in this case, as in much of the reggae literature, *routes* is a term used to describe a largely “internal” development, the twists and turns of reggae *in Jamaica* through dub, DJ, dancehall, etc.

Routed Roots: Nationalist Narratives and the “Pre-History” of Jamaican Music

Between the English sailors and bureaucrats, the Irish and Scottish overseers, the African laborers, the “colored” managers and professionals, the motley pirates and buccaneers, and the Indian and Chinese indentures, colonial Jamaica was bestowed a diverse musical heritage to say the least. Jamaicans’ ecumenical approach toward music and culture is rooted in the myriad routes by which people and practices came to the island. European song forms, including sea chanteys, marches, hymns, jigs and reels, and social dances (the quadrille, waltz, polka, etc.), comprised much of the popular repertory prior to the advent of radio and the recording industry. Specific social contexts privileged some forms over others, of course, and colonial hierarchies of value no doubt structured musical meanings from an early date. African-derived instruments and practices were not as prohibited or discouraged as in the US, and so the European forms were often deeply transformed—*versioned* as they’d later call it—in the hands and voices of Afro-Jamaicans who brought their own approaches and sensibilities to bear on these “foreign” resources. At the same time, what John Storm Roberts calls “neo-African” musical forms also enjoyed currency across the island: the drumming and singing of Maroon communities and syncretic, “Afrocentric” religious groups (e.g., Kumina), work songs and ring games and other rural, “folk” traditions—all synthesizing a transnational mix of ethnic and cultural practices, informed as well by intra-Caribbean and pan-American circuits of travel and labor markets. This range of sustained traditions and hybrid forms—from “neo-African” to creole to “European”—carried forward into the twentieth century and the era of recorded music, which brought new sounds and styles to the island, from calypso and “rumba” to jazz and Tin Pan Alley pop. It is in this milieu that Jamaican

music as a shared set of resonant practices, an expression of the place's cultural wellsprings (all tributaries included), finds its "solid foundation"—especially as musical recordings, by Jamaicans and foreigners alike, increasingly came to infuse and redefine the national soundscape.¹²

As embodied in the island's distinctive creolizations, binary figurations of self and other, colony and metropole have long informed Jamaica's sense of itself, especially as theorized by Jamaican intellectuals with regard to cultural production. The eminent Jamaican scholar, Rex Nettleford, for example, employs the phrase "Melody of Europe, Rhythm of Africa" in his seminal work, *Mirror Mirror* (1970), to explore what he sees as Jamaica's sonically-constituted cultural identity: "And so it has been in the minds of generations of Jamaicans (as well as Europeans) that the European melody and the African rhythms have produced a harmony of a kind that maintains for Europe a superior and for Africa an inferior place in the composition of the [Jamaican cultural] complex." It is clear that Nettleford plays loosely with musical metaphors here (as in the equation whereby melody + rhythm = harmony), but it is significant all the same that he uses music so prominently and symbolically to figure Jamaicanness. And despite the old cliché which denies Europe rhythm and Africa melody (never mind affirming such continental monoliths), Nettleford's analysis nevertheless anticipates Deborah Thomas's notion of modern blackness at least insofar as he notes the tensions between official state discourse, colonialist racial ideologies, and contemporary cultural politics:

¹² I employ somewhat playfully the term *solid foundation*, which David Katz borrows for the title of his book from reggae parlance (see the Congos's "Solid Foundation" on *Heart of the Congos* [1977], or Bob Marley's "One Foundation" on *Burnin'* [1973]), since I seek to demonstrate here that the so-called "solid foundation" of reggae is full of historical contingencies and ironies, with plenty of fissures. Even so, that's not to say that it doesn't feel "solid" for participants and audiences.

‘Out of many, one people’ becomes, then, little more than a pithy epigram for speeches of exhortation and official brochures, when it was really intended to describe and inform the spirit of multi-racialism and cultural integration among the Jamaican people. The black majority may find little cause to feel that multi-racialism has anything to do with them when ‘multi’ conjures up a complex in which they hold an inferior position on grounds of class which in turn dovetails with race origin.¹³

Although perhaps appropriately expressing the mid-century Jamaican imagination, one thing that Nettleford seems to overlook, and which Thomas later calls attention to, is the role that the US, not to mention the wider Caribbean, has played in informing not just the sound of Jamaican music or the forms of Jamaican culture but the notion of Jamaicanness itself, a sense of national attachment that speaks through localized versions of foreign but familiar forms. For all their multivalence and their challenge to bourgeois notions of national culture, such forms—from ska through dancehall—have been consistently co-opted by nationalist narratives which mobilize the expressions of racialized class struggle toward shoring up the myth of a multiracial, modern nation, narratives which themselves feed back into the cultural crucible that produces Jamaica’s unique musical profile.

As the story goes, Jamaica’s new, postcolonial nationalism found a distinctive voice in the ebullient rhythms and soaring melodies of ska. Emerging in step with independence in 1962, the music seemed to give shape and form to new possibilities for Jamaican society. Ska took the upbeat emphasis of “Jamaican boogie”—a localized form of shuffling, boogie-woogie-inflected Southern American R&B and jump blues—and ran with it: while the bass and some light but complex drumming anchored the downbeat, entire horn sections emphasized the upbeat from which ska supposedly takes its name—*ska! ska! ska! ska!*—while melodies alluding to Latin dance hits and British film scores

¹³ Nettleford, *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica* (Kingston: W. Collins and Sangster, 1998 [1970]), 174, 178.

soared over the chugging rhythms. According to the dominant narrative, ska was thus the first “truly” Jamaican music—a distinction that glosses over mento and various church and folk forms, drawing the line at a rather convenient place. An early linkage between Jamaica’s music and tourist industries, and an obvious instrument of the Jamaican government’s Ministry of Culture, ska was used to promote Jamaica as a tourist destination and to consolidate a national identity at home even as it expressed, with its nods toward American and Caribbean popular music, a style that embraced and engaged Jamaica’s connections to the wider world. In order for it to serve as such, then and now, ska was co-opted for the government’s myth of multi-racial harmony, dressed up in middle-class clothes, and elevated as a national symbol in such a way as to repress its rootedness in local, black, lower-class culture and its routedness in transnational circuits of exchange.

In 1964, Minister of Culture and Development, Harvard-trained anthropologist, and future prime minister Edward Seaga assembled a band of musicians—not including, conspicuously, any of the Skatalites—and sent them as emissaries to the World’s Fair in New York and then to tour England.¹⁴ Seaga had been elected to parliament as the MP representing West Kingston, including some of the city’s poorest, blackest areas, the very “downtown” regions where ska had taken root and blossomed. Byron Lee, the middle-class, Chinese-Jamaican bandleader Seaga handpicked to front the tour, has repeatedly recounted how the tour fit into an explicit project of political gain and nation-building: “Eddie Seaga was the politician in whose constituency ska was. In 1962 he sent us down there to study the music, as he wanted to be the Minister of Culture who said, ‘I have

¹⁴ It is worth noting, to underscore the linkages between the government and the tourist industry, that what was previously called the Ministry of Culture and Development is now known as the Ministry of Tourism, Entertainment and Culture. See <http://www.jis.gov.jm/indus_tourism/index.asp> (accessed 14 June 2006).

given you a music from the ghettos of Kingston to celebrate our sovereignty of independence.’”¹⁵ The project’s nationalism was tightly bound up with ideologies of race and class and sought to “nationalize” ska by “cleaning it up” for middle-class Jamaicans and tourists and consumers abroad. Lee recalls being asked explicitly to “develop” the music for these new audiences. Allow me to quote at some length from another account Lee has provided in order, among other things, to underscore the way the story has been told:

One day, Eddie Seaga called me up. As Minister of Culture and Development, he said that Jamaica needed its own popular music as an independent nation. He had already asked Carlos Malcolm, who had this big hit “Rukumbine” at the time, to concentrate on promoting mento. He asked me to try and develop the music called ska being played in West Kingston, his constituency. . . . It was a very rough music, a lot of wrong chords and out of tune guitars. Foreigners called it too ethnic. But still, ska had this powerful feeling. So I had my band work on getting a feel for it, worked with the artists. About August 1962 we put on a show at Glass Bucket called “Ska Goes Uptown.” We had Monty Morris, Jimmy Cliff, The Blues Busters, Stranger and Patsy and The Maytals. Some high tones people criticized us for bringing such low class music uptown, but it was a big success. Radio picked-up on the sound and middle-class Jamaicans started buying ska records.¹⁶

As Lee elaborates, ska appeared to have an alchemical effect on the Jamaican imagination, giving suggestive shape to “national” (which is to say, elite and middle-class) structures of feeling. Ironically, an Afro-Jamaican articulation of transnational engagements provided feelingful fodder for new notions of Jamaicanness:

At one time we were playing only American music, but it gradually changed until it was a Jamaican sound we were playing. It went further than the music. Before this nobody supported anything local in Jamaica. They only respected something if it was foreign. But once ska became

¹⁵ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 56.

¹⁶ Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 32.

popular all over the island, Jamaicans started to respect other things Jamaican. The music really gave us national pride.¹⁷

Ska was thus received as a gift of sonic nationhood from Jamaica's black lower-class and submitted to the enduring, colonialist biases of elite and middle-class Jamaican society, denigrated as "rough" and consigned to the thinly veiled, racist category of music with "feeling," even as it was made palatable and pressed into service—sold locally and abroad—as the distinctive voice (and brand) of a young nation (and tourist destination).

Subsequent rehearsals of this nationalist myth, often unwitting in their complicity, have perpetuated its logic. Even historians and journalists seeking to represent the (often anti-Babylonian) perspective of reggae musicians have reproduced the rhetoric by which Jamaican music, and with it nationhood, emerge in 1962 never to look back to those dark days when African-American and pan-Caribbean styles expressed an articulation with transnational black communities rather than a local, Eurocentric elite. Beth Lesser, for example, offers the following, seemingly off-hand remark in describing an 80s dancehall song that alludes to an earlier local recording: "The lyrics [of Admiral Bailey's 'One Scotch'] play off an old R&B tune by Amos Milburn that was a huge hit in Jamaica before Jamaica had a music of its own."¹⁸ In this manner, Lesser subtly reinforces the nationalist narrative, affirming the commonplace that Jamaica only "had a music of its own" after abandoning previous patterns of intimate engagement with "foreign" music. Despite conducting myriad interviews testifying to Jamaican musicians' transnational engagements, David Katz also reproduces this well-worn storyline: "Ska was the excitement of the independence era personified . . . With the arrival of this uniquely

¹⁷ Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 37.

¹⁸ Beth Lesser, *King Jammy's* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2002 [1989]), 139.

Jamaican genre, the island's popular music had come of age."¹⁹ Although Katz certainly has some basis for this assessment, especially insofar as ska spurred the local music industry and subtly shifted musical signifiers to express what might be heard as a more distinctively local sound, it has become seemingly impossible to extricate ideologies of nation from the story of Jamaican music, which inevitably, all introductory gestures aside, begins with ska. But, as I will discuss below, ska is not so far from boogie, mento was a distinctively Jamaican form, and Jamaicans' pre-independence engagement with the outside has hardly abated since the early 60s.

On the contrary, as oral histories like Katz's demonstrate, Jamaican musicians have continued their engagement with the "foreign" since independence. Sustained if not intensified by continuing circuits of migration and media circulation, Jamaican music has continually embodied the routes Jamaicans travel even as it affirms its roots in the "deep and distinctive cultural wellsprings" that themselves embody old circuits of movement, exchange, contact, and contest.²⁰ Thus, despite being informed, in circular fashion, by certain sonic articulations of nationhood, it is misleading to reproduce the story in such a way as to imply that such significations affirm Jamaica's official creole multi-racialism, its putative nation-ness. So when authors such as Chang and Chen describe a rocksteady song as having "come straight from the collective Jamaican soul," they quite literally raise flags: black, gold, and green flags, specifically; rather than, say, the red, gold, and green of Rastafari.²¹ Although their totalizing nationalism would seem (of necessity) to incorporate Afro-Jamaican cultural practices, given the degree to which Rastafarians

¹⁹ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 29.

²⁰ Kenneth Bilby, "Jamaica," in *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, ed. Peter Manuel (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 145.

²¹ Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 62.

remain a stigmatized, marginalized, and exploited group and given the endurance of Jamaica's pigmentocracy, one has to wonder when this incorporation slides into cooptation.

Nationalizing the Foreign: From Ska Constructions to Calypso-Jazz Connections

The attempted (and partially successful) cooptation of ska is consistent with a broader pattern of initiatives through which “the symbols of Jamaica's independence and heritage offered up within the national public sphere,” as Deborah Thomas writes, have repeatedly failed to muster “the kind of pride and hope for the future envisioned by nationalist elites at the local level.”²² The representation of ska as quintessentially nationalist is part of the same ongoing project that Walter Rodney so trenchantly critiqued in Jamaica before being banned from returning to the island. Discussing the government's 1969 canonization of Marcus Garvey and Paul Bogle as “National Heroes,” Rodney accused the regime of “carrying out a crude manipulation of the symbols of national black pride.”²³ Even so, the myth of Jamaican nationhood, just like ska, remains a multivalent one, so although Jamaicans of all stripes have, to some extent, become enamored of this story of ska's break from previous musical forms, and although musicians have, so speak, played into it, lower-class Jamaicans have not let the government co-opt their own sense of nation.²⁴ Rather, as the musical record shows,

²² Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 227.

²³ Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with my Brothers* (London: Bogle-L'Overture, 1996 [1969]), 12.

²⁴ It was striking to me when one of my collaborators described ska as a form of reggae (as well as, for instance, dancehall and roots). In a sense, this articulation, even as it affirmed the idea that Jamaican music begins with ska, also brings ska more squarely into the Afro-Jamaican tradition and sense of cultural nationalism, considering the putative blackness (never mind “Africanness”)—at least for my collaborators—of reggae.

pervasive sonic and thematic alliances with black communities in the US and elsewhere, alongside the mobilization of what have become enshrined, often quite feelingfully, as symbols of (Afro-)Jamaicanness, stand as enduring tactics for subverting, and taking advantage of, the cooptation of musical (and sartorial) representations of nation by Jamaican elites and multinational marketers alike.

Indeed, despite ska's representation as something that springs directly from the "collective Jamaican soul" (a term which elides significant social divisions), ska itself bears witness to a steady engagement with "foreign" music, from Spaghetti Western themes to pop and dance songs from the US, the U.K., and the Latin Caribbean, among others. The musicians who innovated the ska style have often discussed its polyglot character. According to Chang and Chen, for instance, "Trumpeter Johnny 'Dizzy' Moore has a very interesting insight into the source of the 'ska' beat. He considered the European 'martial' drumming he encountered at Alpha Boys School and in the army as the strongest influence on his playing and one of the key influence on the development of ska."²⁵ Ethnomusicologist Bill Carbone has made similar observations with regard to the formative "foreign" influences on ska style: "Ska was not defined by a radical departure from Jamaica's musical output of bygone years; in fact the majority of its elements are directly traceable to external influences." As evidence for this contention, Carbone offers firsthand testimony from influential Skatalites drummer, Lloyd Knibb, who cites various jazz performers and Latin styles, as heard and played in the Jamaican soundscape, which contributed crucially to the ska sound:

You name the big bands—all of those big bands we used to hear. Cab Calloway, Teddy Heath, Count Basie, Glenn Miller, all those tunes. We

²⁵ Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 30.

used to play them in the hotels because we're starting at the hotels playing waltz and foxtrot and boleros and in Dean (Fraser)'s band you know we played a lot of Cha Cha and bolero—lot of Latin so I have that in my brain and I put it in the ska beat and it match. You listen to it and it matches with what's happening.²⁶

As Carbone elaborates, “Lloyd’s original beats are thick with the influence of ‘dance band’ Latin drumset patterns of the 1940’s and 50’s. These grooves, such as the foxtrot, mambo, bolero and rumba, were the essence of a whole percussion section boiled down to the parts that could be represented by one man on a drumset.”²⁷ Although I seek not to downplay the presence of Burru grooves and other Afro-Jamaican stylistic contributions to ska, as this example attests and as one can hear as well in Jamaica’s homegrown mid-century pop, mento, quite frequently it is the presence of Latin-Caribbean musical features, as opposed to strictly “Afro-Jamaican” antecedents, that has produced what many hear as, and what have been naturalized as, distinctive features of “authentic” (Afro-)Jamaican music.

Ska may indeed be a quintessential example of Jamaican music, but popular representations fail to register that the genre’s “foreign” infusions are crucial to what makes it so distinctively “Jamaican.”²⁸ For Knibb, ska contained a little bit of everything, from big band jazz and jump blues to calypso, rumba, and other staples of the pan-Caribbean tourist circuit. At least in retrospect, it seemed like an explicit fusion:

So with all those different beats, we used to play calypso, rumba—they're almost the same kind of sound. And we used to play quadrille, which is a

²⁶ Bill Carbone (Wesleyan University), unpublished paper on Lloyd Knibb and Ska drumming, 1, 3.

²⁷ Carbone, unpublished paper, 3.

²⁸ See, e.g., the long list of ska’s cover versions at < <http://www.skaville.de> > (accessed 15 July 2006).

mixture tune, pure calypso sound. So all those sound put in one with the jazz and everything that I know. I put everything in the ska music.²⁹

In speaking (metonymically) of the quadrille, Knibbs ties ska to mento, both of which have long been vying, with no small implications, for the title of Jamaica's first national music. Soul Jazz Records has gone so far as to say that mento is "in fact the first Jamaican music," while scholars such as Ken Bilby have been more measured, though not necessarily less far-reaching, in assessing the genre's significance for Jamaican music as a whole: "This ongoing tendency to absorb songs, melodies, and other stylistic elements from a variety of sources helped to make mento a sort of generic Jamaican folk music—a kind of synthesis of Jamaica's varied traditional musics."³⁰ It is significant, if somewhat unsurprising given his stated emphasis on Jamaica's "deep and distinctive cultural wellsprings," that Bilby downplays the incorporation of foreign forms into mento, for in this manner mento offers a fine, pre-ska example of Jamaican music's rather routed roots and, moreover, embodies circuits of travel and labor traversed by Jamaicans in the early 20th century.³¹ For while it drew from and built on Jamaican folk forms and European dances such as the quadrille, mento also borrowed heavily (and

²⁹ See <<http://incolor.inebraska.com/cvanpelt/knibb.html>> (accessed 16 July 2006). In the same interview, Knibb again discusses his incorporation of Burru rhythms into ska, though he puts the practice into an appropriately mixed up *mélange* of styles: "I play all three drums. The bass drum, the funde and the repeater. So I mix all that with the ska music and create a sound. *Every now and again I put in a piece of that*. Coming from jazz, we used to play a lot of jazz with Eric Dean's band. He used to play a lot of Latin tunes, Glen Miller stuff, cha-cha, bolero" (my emphasis).

³⁰ Bilby, "Jamaica," 154. The lavish *Studio One Story* liner notes issued by Soul Jazz Records defines calypso, and mento, in the following manner: "Calypso is West Indian folk music. Although originally describing music originating from Trinidad, it came to incorporate folk music from other Isles such as Mento from Jamaica, *which is in fact the first Jamaican music*" (*Studio One Story*, 2002: 79, emphasis mine). Depending, of course, on whether one describes mento or ska, or something else, as "the first Jamaican music" grounds the narrative in a very particular manner, implying a great deal about the origins, arc, and cultural profile of the Jamaican nation.

³¹ Though it may be true that such connections to foreign styles may have been less pronounced in "traditional," rural mento than in the music of "town" bands making records and playing for tourists, it is unlikely that these repertoires are so easily separable; moreover, such an omission of mento's foreign roots serves once again to uphold oddly isolationist notions of Jamaican culture.

increasingly) from foreign forms, such as Cuban son/rumba and Trinidadian calypso, thus Knibbs's otherwise odd qualification, "pure calypso sound."³² The circulation of these other Caribbean forms, and their uptake in Jamaica, were propelled by the New York-based recording industry and by a tourist market which served thus to diversify island repertoires even as it imposed a certain uniformity on what could be heard on a resort or a cruise. For all their modernism, Caribbean genres such as son, calypso, and mento—all of which drew on (early) American jazz as well as various local and regional practices—sounded somewhat quaint by the 1950s, embodying a sort of breezy, lightly exotic islandness. As such, the music served the tourist imagination well, but not necessarily the pre/post-independence Jamaican imagination.

The tension between playing to a foreign audience and a local one—especially when the former is more lucrative—is a longstanding one in Jamaica. One can hear in Jamaica's pre-ska music, as in its post-ska music, a sort of *schizophrenia*, to borrow another term from Steve Feld (borrowed, in turn, from Murray Schaefer), in which sounds associated with other islands (often explicitly, say, via song titles) are embraced, nationalized, and naturalized by Jamaican musicians, often in order to play to (and play with) foreign expectations around what Caribbean, never mind Jamaican, music should sound like.³³ Indeed, as evidenced in Lloyd Knibbs's statement above, mento was

³² The mento, as a form, developed in Jamaica as a local addition to the set of European social/ballroom dances introduced to the island during the colonial period. Thus, mento was yet another form to be played alongside the waltz, mazurka, polka, and schottische, though its local-ness—and perhaps its incorporation of other Caribbean forms—may have helped to assure its popularity well into the twentieth century. Of course, mento already had a great deal in common with calypso thanks to overlap in colonial, socio-cultural histories: mento's innuendo-laden social commentary, for example, although connected to various Jamaican traditions, also connects to calypso, and both spring from a tradition of adopting, adapting, and satirizing European forms. For more on mento, especially its relationship to national(ist) narratives, see Dan Neely's dissertation (NYU, ethnomusicology, forthcoming).

³³ Steven Feld, "pygmy POP!: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (1996): 1-35.

frequently confused and conflated with calypso, and mento musicians were as likely to be called “calypsonians” as their numbers titled “rumbas”—a mislabeled nod to Cuban son. The astounding success of Harry Belafonte’s and the Andrews Sisters’ calypso recordings in the 40s and 50s put increased pressure on Jamaican musicians to infuse their music with calypso features and to label it as such. An exceedingly popular record, with the distinction of being the first album to sell over one million copies, Belafonte’s *Calypso* (1956), which itself conflated a number of Anglo-Caribbean genres under the term, undoubtedly contributed to the discursive pressure toward labeling any English-language Caribbean music as such. For example, a collection of Jamaican mento songs recorded by Stanley Motta, one of the island’s first local record producers, was marketed in England in the 1950s as “Authentic Jamaican Calypsos.”³⁴ Similarly, mento bandleaders embraced such appellations as “Lord,” “Count,” and other regal titles borrowed from popular calypso singers of the day. And a number of mento recordings are attributed to the “Jamaican Calypsonians,” a name most likely describing a rotating cast of tourist-circuit musicians. Lord Flea, who often played and recorded with the Jamaican Calypsonians, discussed these pressures of labeling in an interview with *Calypso Magazine* in 1957: “In Jamaica, we call our music ‘mento’ until very recently. Today, calypso is beginning to be used for all kinds of West Indian music. This is because it’s become so commercialized there [in Jamaica]. . . . If the tourists want ‘calypso,’ that’s what we sell them.”³⁵

³⁴ See <<http://www.calypsworld.org/cla/jamaica-5.htm>> (accessed 21 July 2006).

³⁵ See <<http://www.mentomusic.com/flea.htm>> (accessed 28 July 2006). Moreover, Flea notes that calypso, despite its dominance at this time (and the consequent denigration leveled at mento), itself borrowed heavily from Jamaican traditions: “As for Trinidadians who look down at Jamaican calypso, well, how do they explain the fact that they’re singing so many of our traditional songs?” The article then names a number of Jamaican songs that had infused the calypso repertory, among them: “Hill ‘n’ Gully,” “Linstead Market,” “Fan Me Solja Man,” “No Body’s Business,” “Day Dah Light” and “Water Come A Me Y’eye.”

Although sometimes functioning merely at the level of marketing discourse, Jamaican musicians' engagement with contemporary non-Jamaican styles—especially from Trinidad and Cuba—is often audible as well as visible. Thus Count Lasher's Calypso Quintet, a Jamaican mento group despite their name, recorded a version of the mento classic "Sly Mongoose" (a song which itself traveled from Jamaica to Trinidad and back) in their "Slide Mongoose," which re-localizes the song's Trinidadian-ized sound—it had become a calypso classic via New York-based recordings—by arranging it for such "local" instruments as the rumba box and bamboo clarinet. As was common in mento, the rumba box here provides a bassline that recalls Cuban son and other Latin- and Anglo-Caribbean forms in its 3+3+2 rhythmic framework. And although it may seem too Cuban-centric an interpretation of the development of Caribbean musical style to hear such figures as affirming the influence of the so-called "habanera" rhythm, mento recordings frequently feature other musical practices and instruments associated with Cuba—including the rumba box, which, as its name suggests, is thought to be derived from the Cuban marimbula.³⁶ The common presence in mento recordings of maracas (which are, tellingly, also called "rumba shakers") again perhaps affirms a Cuban connection, though it also testifies to the broader diffusion of maracas across Latin America and the Caribbean, not to mention the broad, loose use of *rumba* to refer to various Latin American musical styles.

Indeed, *rumba* itself, like *calypso*, sometimes served as yet another outward-looking label for mento, no doubt as an attempt to appeal to the mid-century tourist imagination, which, thanks to pre-revolutionary Cuba's prominence as a destination,

³⁶ See Ned Sublette's *Cuba and Its Music* (2004) as well as John Storm Roberts's *The Latin Tinge* (1979) for persuasive—if at times overreaching—accounts of the wide influence of Cuban music.

often centered on Cuba. Such (mis)labels, and stylistic borrowings, often accompanied explicit connections to commercial concerns, to modes of marketing. Take, for example, a couple sides recorded by Lord Power and his Calypsonians—another tellingly titled Jamaican band. In their “Special Amber Calypso” (originally issued on the similarly suggestively titled Maracas record label), Lord Power calls the music, “Jamaican rumba,” setting a light-hearted scene of dance and drink, as he hocks a local rum brand to the tune of the nursery rhyme, “Have You Ever Seen a Lassie?”:

The more we drink Special Amber,
Special Amber, Special Amber,
The more we drink Special Amber,
The merrier we shall be.³⁷

Adding to the profusion of conflated terms used to market their music, Lord Power and his Calypsonians recorded a second number for the Maracas label, “Mambo La La,” thus referencing yet another popular Cuban genre, if more in name than style. Even so, stylistically speaking, we can hear some overlap between mento and mambo. For example, like many mento songs, “Mambo La La” employs a pronounced 3+3+2, especially in the bass, giving the song the same sway that marks a great deal of rumba, mambo, son, salsa, and other Cuban-derived genres (and, of course, a number of other Caribbean genres, from calypso to merengue to méringue, reflecting their shared roots as well as the routes through which shared regional stylistic features reinforce each other). “Mambo La La” is essentially an instrumental, save for a couple interjections by Lord Power—“Oh, mambo with special amber rum!” and “What a mambo!”—which,

³⁷ As we’ll see in later chapters, the practice of composing songs based on nursery rhymes and other well-worn tunes carries forward into the dancehall era, as famously practiced by Yellowman, and more recently, Elephant Man.

alongside the song title, serve as the only ostensible “markers” of mambo, without which the song would be heard and packaged, as it is today, as a mento number.

The use of *mambo* here demonstrates yet another thread of intra-Caribbean musical circulation, blurring national lines, though it also obviously brings us back to the question of marketing, of selling what sells, or at least packaging one’s wares in familiar boxes. The embrace at this time of Latin Caribbean musical styles reaches beyond the marketing of wares or services or performances, however, and into the realm of affirming particular notions of international, and in this case hemispheric, relations. As Deborah Pacini Hernandez notes: “Prior to and during World War 2, Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley heavily promoted Latin music as part of the nation’s Good Neighbor Policy, whose goal was to project friendly images of Latin Americans in order to strengthen intra-hemispheric solidarity.”³⁸ The promotion of Latin (Caribbean) music in the US dovetailed with the Caribbean’s emerging tourist industry, spurred by the advent of consumer-level air travel and the decline of the plantation economy.³⁹ And “calypso” music (a rubric under which a great deal of Anglo-Caribbean styles were classed), recorded primarily in New York from the 1910s through the late twentieth century, had long been packaged in the US not just as “race records” but often, tellingly, as “Spanish” records, reflecting both a lack of interest on the part of record labels in specific national markers and a not unfounded perception that what Jelly Roll Morton called the “Spanish tinge”—a set of syncopations often associated with the rumba or the “habanera” rhythm—appeared to be present across various Caribbean genres.

³⁸ Deborah Pacini Hernandez, “The Name Game: Locating Latinos, Latins and Latin Americans in the US Popular Music Landscape,” in *A Companion to Latino Studies*, ed. Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo (London: Blackwell’s Press, forthcoming).

³⁹ Polly Patullo, *Last Resorts: The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean* (Kingston, JA: Cassell, 1996), 6.

Given the conflation of Caribbean islands and music in the tourist imagination, playing “mambo” and “rumba” at mid-century allowed Anglo-Caribbean musicians to appeal to an audience that seemed to care little for national distinctions so long as fun, sun, and rum were part of the picture. Considering that many tourists would have been acquainted with mambo, rumba, and other Latin dances through their exposure to stateside mass culture, the existing overlap in rhythmic accent between calypso, mento, and “rumba” proved a convenient one for Jamaican musicians, for it enabled their lesser-known local genre to appeal, especially if labeled (in)correctly, to a dancing public eager for an exotic turn. Along these lines, we can hear Count Lasher and his Orchestra’s “Calypso Cha Cha Cha,” as capitalizing on yet another (rumba/mambo-derived) Latin dance craze, bearing witness both to the regional circulation of such subgenres as cha-cha-cha as well as the desire on the part of Jamaican musicians to make “foreign” pop their own, sometimes via rather explicit attempts at fusion and adaptation: “When first I heard the Cha Cha,” sings Lasher, “it thrilled me to the bone / then I thought that sweet Jamaica should have a Cha Cha of its own.”⁴⁰

One of the more audible examples of Jamaican musicians’ creative engagement with “foreign,” regional music in the pre-ska/pre-Independence era is the presence of what we might hear as a “sloppy,” “loose,” or “flexible” clave in a number of mento recordings. The common use by mento bands of wood blocks to play what Cuban musicians would call a 3:2 or 2:3 clave demonstrates an attempt on the part of Jamaican musicians to incorporate musical features they had encountered while working in Cuba (or via other Jamaican migrant workers) or which had reached the island via recordings

⁴⁰ Similarly, we can see and hear in such recordings as Lord Flea and his Calypsonians’ *Swingin’ Calypsos* (Capitol 1957) that gesturing to other popular musical styles, especially in explicit fusion, was a common technique for reaching the market.

and radio broadcasts. These performances also, however, seem to indicate at the same time a patent lack of concern for the formal conventions of Cuban music, as the clave seems to serve more of a decorative than structural function. Mento's "sloppy clave"—in which the blocks are played with less attention to a strict, crisp demarcation of the clave than one finds in most Cuban music or in later derivatives such as salsa—can thus be heard as an embodiment of the process by which foreign musical materials were transmitted to and transmuted in local Jamaican performance practice. Unsurprisingly, a similarly "loose" embrace of the clave's sound and role can be heard in contemporary genres from other islands, such as Trinidadian calypso or Haitian méringue.⁴¹

With regard to mento recordings, one finds a great number of examples. On the compilation, *Mento Madness* (V2 Music 2004), for instance, which collects 18 mento recordings produced by Stanley Motta from 1951-6, around half the selections feature a clave figure of some sort, with a fair range of fidelity—depending on the performance—to the traditional role the clave plays in Cuban music. Thus Hubert Porter's "Dry Weather House" employs a pretty steady but somewhat playful 2:3 clave, occasionally departing from the pattern to shift the accent or add repeated attacks, and a similar approach can be heard on "Me Dog Can't Bark" by Monty Reynolds and the Shaw Park Calypso Band. Foregrounding the "foreign" but clearly common musical feature, Lord Fly's "Manassa with the Tight Foot Pants" and "Big Big Sambo Gal" both begin with a solo 3:2 clave

⁴¹ For example, as early as 1938, calypso recordings such as the Lion's "Ba Boo La La" (*Calypso Carnival* [Rounder 1993]) augment jazz-tinged clarinet solos with an unmistakable, but far from strict, 3:2 clave. (It should also be noted that the rhythm section on this recording, as in much early jazz and rhythm & blues, emphasizes the backbeat, creating a groove that would later be embraced and affirmed by Jamaican musicians as the distinctive "skanking" rhythm of ska, rocksteady, and reggae.) For méringue examples, see for instance "Mizisen," "Panamam Tombe," or "Haïti Chérie" as performed in 1983 by Ti Band L'avenir (on the album *Méringue* [Musica Tradicional/Corason 1989]), on which a player often strikes a bottle in a manner recalling, without exactly reproducing, Cuba's predominant clave patterns. (Demonstrating further instance of interplay, another track on the *Méringue* compilation, "Ti Zwazo," was adapted by Harry Belafonte in the 50s and subsequently passed into the mento repertory.)

figure, while his “Blu-Lu-Lup” and “Swine Lane Gal” also feature a prominent 3:2 pattern. Harold Richardson and the Ticklers’ “Healing in the Balmyard” features a fairly strict 3:2 clave, as does “She Pon Top” by Baba Motta and His Jamaicans and “Hill and Gully / Mandeville Road,” a medley of Jamaican folk songs performed by the tellingly titled Lord Composer and the Silver Seas Hotel Orchestra, also known as the Silver Seas Calypso Band. Richardson and the Ticklers’ “Glamour Gal” is a particularly striking example of the less-than-structural function the clave often plays in mento: not only does the percussionist play fairly loose with 3:2 and 2:3 figures throughout the song, he flips the figure over from a 2:3 in the beginning of the song to a 3:2 about halfway through, revealing a concept of clave in mento performance which departs starkly from Cuban notions and which is ultimately more ornamental, if adding to the polyrhythmic texture, than structural.

Even after Jamaicans had stopped playing “sloppy clave” over mento tracks, their engagement with the music of Cuba continued apace, especially during the ska era. A list maintained at <http://www.skaville.de/> (accessed 30 July 2006) names some 28 discrete ska cover versions of “Latin” tunes—most of them based on recordings by Cuban musicians such as Xavier Cugat, Perez Prado, and the overwhelming favorite, Mongo Santamaria. Ken Stewart, the present keyboardist and manager for the Skatalites, claims that, “Almost the entire *Watermelon Man* album by Mongo Santamaria has been covered by the Skatalites.” And bandmembers Lloyd Knibb, Lloyd Brevett, and Roland Alphonso explained to David Katz that the explicit practice of “versioning” Cuban songs—of (re)arranging them into local style—was a common practice at Studio One:

“‘El Pussy Cat’ come from Cuba,” Roland noted. “It’s a Cuban song. Coxson give it to me and say, ‘Rolie, write this tune now,’ and I wrote it.” “Coxson used to use a lot of Cuban tunes and we would write the tune in ska form,” Lloyd Knibb recalls. “We would generally get those tunes, because a staccato thing was happening in ska.” Lloyd Brevett adds, “Mongo Santamaria did have an LP at that time, and all those tunes like ‘Prince Duke,’ ‘Pussy Cat,’ and ‘Christine Keeler’ . . .” “We play the songs as it had been played,” Roland cut in, “but we arrange it and play the ska thing our style. We don’t copy the solos.”⁴²

While on the one hand we can see this sustained engagement as but one example of Jamaican musicians’ embrace of “foreign” music, the relationship to Cuba is, of course, a special one. The presence of Cuban musical features in Jamaican music emerges from shrewd decisions to play to tourists’ expectations and crowds in Jamaica as well as strong social ties to the island via circuits of labor migration (which also sent large numbers of Jamaicans back and forth to Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua—not to mention, of course, the United States). A large neighbor directly to the north with a strong cultural and musical profile, Cuba had long served as a major site of migrant farm work for Jamaicans. Indeed, a number of Jamaica’s most influential musicians—the innovators of ska and the studio hands who would develop the reggae sound—were either born in Cuba or came from mixed Jamaican and Cuban parentage, including Rico Rodriguez, Laurel Aitken, Tommy McCook, and Roland Alphonso. Moreover, that trombonist and composer Don Drummond’s wife, Anita “Margarita” Mahfood, was known as the “Rhumba Queen” indicates that Cuban dance styles, or at least gestures to them, had also attained some currency in Jamaica. Among other connections, reggae vocalists Slim Smith and Joe Gibbs became friends while working at Guantanamo Bay.⁴³

⁴² Christopher Porter, “Jazz to Ska-Mania,” *JazzTimes* (July/Aug 2004): 71, 60.

⁴³ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 73.

These same seminal musicians, however, tend to emphasize, above all other “foreign” influences, their love of jazz—which extended to such jazz-infused genres as boogie-woogie, jump-blues, and southern R&B, despite a preference among the instrumentalists (in opinion if not practice) for beboppers over teenyboppers. Jazz had been a staple in Jamaica since at least the twenties, especially at hotels where the music embodied a sort of cosmopolitan verve and was played by big bands such as those led by Eric Deans and Val Bennett. And in yet another instance of circuitous interplay, jazz in Jamaica was also mediated by Latin Caribbean music and by Cuban jazz in particular: Panamanian-born bandleader Carlos Malcolm, who founded the Afro-Jamaican Rhythms in 1962, did so “after conversations with Machito and Mongo Santamaria,” and Malcolm’s father, one of many Jamaicans who moved to Panama to work on the Canal, had taken his own group, the Jazz Aristocrats, to Jamaica in 1936 for a competition with a local jazz band at Liberty Hall.⁴⁴ But beyond its hotel patronage and aristocratic airs, jazz also resonated more broadly across Jamaican society in its projection of African-American modernity, of modern blackness. A cadre of aspiring Jamaican musicians, many of whom received formal training at the Alpha Boys’ School, embraced jazz in the pre-ska days—and well into the reggae era—as an expression of black urbanity as well as a strategy for employment.⁴⁵

Circulating on records and via radio, jazz had long informed Jamaican popular music—from dance bands to mento groups—just as it influenced music across the

⁴⁴ Porter, “Jazz to Ska-Mania,” 69.

⁴⁵ Notably, some musicians received their instruction outside Jamaica. Cecil Lloyd, for instance, one of Jamaica’s top pianists in the 1950s and leader of the Cecil Lloyd Quintet, undertook musical training at New York’s Juilliard School of Music (Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 58).

Caribbean and the wider world, from Trinidadian calypso and Cuban mambo to South African jive. As Katz writes:

Jazz was always the biggest source of inspiration for the Skatalites and members covered songs that moved them, such as Roland's take on Horace Silver's "Forest Flowers" [sic] or his adaptation of Duke Ellington's "Caravan" as "Skaravan." Alphonso spoke of his joy at sharing the stage with Count Basie's band in Nassau, and gave John Coltrane his utmost admiration. . . . Lester Sterling named Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, and Sonny Stitt as musicians he was thrilled to see performing.⁴⁶

In addition, the Skatalites' trombonist, Rico Rodriguez, attests to jazz's influence on his own musical development: "Listening to people like Clifford Brown, the Modern Jazz Quartet and Charlie Parker at that early stage was like magic."⁴⁷ Music journalist Christopher Porter quotes Dermott Hussey, a longtime Jamaican radio DJ, as recalling that "Don Drummond was apparently very fond of Benny Green. Tommy McCook was a great admirer of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane. . . . And Johnny 'Dizzy' Moore was influenced by Dizzy Gillespie."⁴⁸ Jazz also influenced Jamaican musical style via the consumption and emulation of recordings, especially by vocalists. Donald Manning of the Abyssinians names Nat King Cole (a common favorite), Billy Eckstine, and Bing Crosby as influences.⁴⁹ Winston "Count Matchukie" Cooper, one of Jamaica's first soundsystem DJs, counts among his formative favorites an array of jazz singers and bandleaders: "I listened to records from Ella Fitzgerald, Harry James, Lena Horne, Eddie Arnold, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Barnett," he recounts, adding "Don't

⁴⁶ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 60. "Roland" here is, of course, Roland Alphonso. And, presumably, it is Charles Lloyd's "Forest Flower" (1966), a hugely popular jazz record, to which he refers.

⁴⁷ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 39.

⁴⁸ Porter, "Jazz to Ska-Mania," 70.

⁴⁹ Though it should be noted that he also names Chubby Checker, Chuck Berry, and Smokey Robinson (see <<http://www.jahworks.org/music/interview/abyssn.html>> [accessed 30 July 2006]).

ask me where my mother got those records.”⁵⁰ Several Jamaican jazz players, most prominently saxophonists Sonny Bradshaw and Cedric Brooks, guitarist Ernest Ranglin, and pianist Monty Alexander, continued to play jazz as their primary style, sometimes substituting reggae rhythms and forms for the swing- or blues-based accompaniments of American jazz but also riding the currents of contemporary US jazz practice. Trumpeter Dizzy Reece found no little fame playing in Europe, while instrumentalists such as Joe Harriot, Bertie King, Wilton “Bogey” Gaynair, and Harold McNair continued to play jazz in traditional/bop styles on the island and abroad.⁵¹ The departure of a number of these major players allowed for a younger generation of instrumentalists, including McCook, Alphonso, Rodriguez, Drummond, bassist Cluett Johnson, and keyboardist Jackie Mittoo, to reshape the band scene. Incorporating R&B and jump blues, contemporary currents in Latin Caribbean dance music, calypso and mento, burru and other Afro-Jamaican drum traditions, and hard/post-bop into their arrangements, these insurgent instrumentalists—most of them with formal training in military and classic styles and longtime extracurricular commitments to playing jazz—would soon develop a distinctive sound, just as a nationalist movement needed a soundtrack and a budding industry needed a name.

⁵⁰ Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 67.

⁵¹ See *Alpha Boys' School: Music in Education* (Trojan 2006), for a collection largely comprising Jamaican jazz recordings—or at least focusing on the work of Alpha School graduates. Ranging from utterly “straight ahead” (and sometimes unremarkable) hard-bop to tracks which are, more or less, ska and reggae instrumentals—an important genre in Jamaican pop, inspired in part by the jazz tradition and informing what ultimately became “the riddim method” (Manuel and Marshall 2006)—the collection offers an often unheard, and unimagined, musical profile of Jamaica.

A Foreign, Familiar Foundation: The Resonance of R&B

The shift from jazz to ska in the Jamaican soundscape was facilitated by the widespread embrace—and eventual adaptation—of African-American rhythm & blues, especially the Southern variety, and R&B has remained a staple in Jamaica ever since its heyday there in the mid- to late-1950s. The sounds of New Orleans and Miami, of boogie-woogie and jump blues, reached the island via radio transmissions and through the recordings that migrant workers, such as seminal soundman Coxsone Dodd, brought home from their stints on the fruit farms of Florida. The late 50s saw the rise of the soundsystem in downtown Kingston, as entrepreneurs such as Dodd and his main rival, Duke Reid, competed for the biggest crowds. This competition led to an “arms race” in technology (which has been central to Jamaican popular music since the 1950s), as each “sound” commissioned or built custom-made and extremely powerful speakers.

Aside from the volume and clarity of sound, though, what drew the patrons was selection—the repertory of records which a particular “sound” would be known to play. Having the latest, greatest R&B hit—or even better, an exciting but obscure imprint—soon became a primary means, alongside the emerging role of the live DJ, for soundsystems to distinguish themselves and accrue status. These early soundsystems became live jukeboxes of sorts, with curatorial selectors, charismatic DJs, and signature songs. Coxsone’s theme was known as the “Coxsone Hop,” which was not only a way of personalizing the record but of obscuring its identity from competitors. In reality, the “Coxsone Hop” was “Later for the Gator,” a gritty, horn-heavy, hand-clap-on-the-

backbeat blues by Floridian saxophonist Willis Jackson, who had played with Cootie Williams' band as a teenager.

As a signature song, "Later for the Gator" is a telling tune: apparently, there was little cognitive, or cultural, dissonance in Coxson's elevation of and identification with utterly American-sounding song. Despite its 12/8 shuffle, an uncommon groove in Jamaican music before the late 50s, Jackson's recording was embraced as Downbeat's own, projecting and amplifying the soundsystem's modern, black profile.⁵² Once Duke Reid got the scoop on the "Coxson Hop"—so the story goes—having sent a spy into Coxson's camp, he publicly humiliated his rival at a dance, playing what had supposedly been Coxson's "exclusive" tune and allegedly causing Dodd to faint on the spot. The market for exclusives that emerged from the competitive character of soundsystem practice soon led Dodd and Reid to begin recording their own "specials," some of which were localized covers of American R&B hits and some of which were new compositions inspired by African-American style. Eventually, they opened up their own studios, becoming the first black entrepreneurs to enter that realm of the music industry in Jamaica. They customized and sought out state-of-the-art equipment and the island's best engineers while paying Kingston's top musicians daily wages to work as house bands, arrangers, and developers of (mostly vocal) local talent. Jamaica's jazz-steeped studio hands were thus pressed into service, reshaping Jamaican popular music as they "versioned" the swinging, shuffling sounds of the American South. Dodd's characterization of his early recordings confirms their US-centric orientation: "At that

⁵² Dodd's soundsystem was known as Sir Coxson's Downbeat.

time, my main emphasis was on rhythm and blues, boogie-woogie, rhythm with a shuffle, and some slow pop music.”⁵³

Of course, the Southern American music so resonant in Jamaica during the 40s and 50s appealed not just symbolically, i.e., as modern and black, its foreignness was further mitigated by a musically embodied familiarity. Southern cities such as New Orleans had long been a part of the Caribbean/Gulf of Mexico port system and had played host to a consistent infusion of Caribbean people and practices via sailors, migrant workers, refugees, and other travelers. The socially-grounded interplay between Caribbean music and the music of the Southern US produced shared forms and sensibilities which resonate across the region. Marked by the same patterns of labor and political migration that informed Jamaica’s own cultural cosmopolitanism, the music of New Orleans, from jazz to R&B, often bears witness to these social intersections. Just as we can hear the influence of jazz in calypso, mento, and ska, we can hear Caribbean musical features in jazz. The presence of clave, “rumba” basslines, and other features that Jelly Roll Morton, a seminal jazz composer and New Orleans-based pianist, heard as part of jazz’s crucial “Spanish tinge” are abundant in the nevertheless quintessentially American genres that Jamaicans would, in turn, embrace as their own.

Morton’s pianist peers and heirs continued to infuse New Orleans’s distinctive synthesis of regional styles with the sounds and forms of the Caribbean. Professor Longhair, whose music embodied the city’s diverse cultural heritage, sometimes called his piano-style “rumba-boogie,” referring to the heavy, syncopated left-hand parts he would play and suggesting a direct link to Cuban styles. Longhair’s recordings, such as “Go to the Mardi Gras,” sometimes fused rumba/habanera-associated basslines (which

⁵³ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 23.

later came to mark a great deal of pop and R&B, as on, say, the Drifters' "Under the Boardwalk") with blues forms and tonalities. Longhair is especially significant, though, because his admirers and followers, including Fats Domino, bequeathed much of this rhythmic language to the R&B, rock'n'roll, and American mainstream. Domino is a particularly important figure given his popularity in the South, the greater US, and the wider world. Needless to say, he was rather popular in Jamaica as well. As on Longhair's recordings, Domino's music often engages with Cuban-/Caribbean-associated rhythms and percussion, though the 3:2 clave on tracks such as "Mardi Gras In New Orleans" displays a looseness reminiscent of mento musicians' incorporation of such sounds. Domino's refinement and popularization of New Orleans-style piano playing leaned more toward the blues than the rumba, however, and many of his most popular songs feature the sort of shuffling, 12/8 groove that would soon undercut, if temporarily, Jamaica's longtime penchant for 3+3+2 rhythms.

Another influential, and instructive, figure in all of this is Louis Jordan, the Arkansas-born singer and saxophonist whose recordings and performances, synthesizing jazz, blues, vaudevillian traditions, and other styles, would lay a partial foundation for the emerging genres of R&B, "jump" and urban blues, and rock'n'roll. Known as "the father of rhythm and blues" as well as "the king of the jukebox," Jordan got a strong start upon moving to New York and joining Chick Webb's swing group. Later, translating swing jazz for his smaller ensemble, the Tympany Five, Jordan "made the blues jump," as he allegedly once put it, and in a manner that captivated audiences and made no small impression on the "pop" and "race" charts.⁵⁴ Although his earliest and biggest hits

⁵⁴ Although the quotation, "I made the blues jump," is widely attributed to Jordan, I have been unable to locate its original publication. Internet searches reveal a consistent reportage of the phrase, however,

employed the same quintessentially American “boogie shuffle” that would be adopted and adapted for late-50s “Jamaican boogie,” the direct stylistic precursor to ska, many of Jordan’s recordings feature similar borrowings from Caribbean styles as we hear in other early- to mid-century American popular music. “Early in the Morning” (1947), for instance, which hit #3 on the “race” or R&B charts, features the kind of 3+3+2 bassline (at the level of the 8th note) that Professor Longhair associated with “rumba,” adding a 3:2 clave played on woodblocks as well.

Significantly, Jordan recorded a number of calypso songs over the course of his career, including compositions by Trinidadian luminary, Houdini, which underscores yet again the crucial role played by the NY-based recording industry in fostering such international interplay. “Push-Ka Pee-Shee Pie” (1949), positioned explicitly (in the lyrics) as a “calypso bebop” hybrid, tells the story of a hapless, abused Trinidadian immigrant named Saga Boy, complete with (an attempt at) a lilting accent and a stock calypso melody. It is unclear whether the song offers a sympathetic or mocking portrait of the main character, who arrives in “New York town, dressed up like a circus clown,” though the nonsensical chorus, of which Saga Boy himself claims not to know the meaning, could easily be heard as an exoticizing, if not infantilizing, gesture. Another of Jordan’s calypsos, “Run Joe” (1948), which hit #1 on the race charts, occasionally employs the 3+3+2 bassline reminiscent of so many Caribbean styles and features a couple unnamed musicians, listed as “The Calypso Boys,” on maracas and claves. Jordan’s best known calypso may be “Stone Cold Dead in the Market” (1946), a duet with Ella Fitzgerald. Featuring awkward, if endearing, attempts at West Indian accents by

including the site at <<http://louisjordan.com>>. For information regarding the chart positions of Jordan’s releases, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Jordan> (accessed 7 August 2006).

the two singers—complete with interjections of “mon!”—the song stayed at #1 on the race/R&B charts for five weeks and hit #7 on the national pop charts, seemingly affirming a love of such mirror/mirror cultural politics, albeit on a different side of the asymmetry, among Americans and African-Americans alike. Many of the calypso sides Jordan recorded, including all three mentioned here, feature a 3:2 clave pattern played on woodblocks, showing again how much calypso had absorbed Cuban style and how these Caribbean genres traveled together and were conflated in imagination as well as practice.

Similar to American attempts at calypso or “rumba,” local Jamaican endeavors to reproduce the shuffle and boogie of Southern R&B resulted in odd hybrids and strangely accented versions, though it did not take long for the music to develop in its own way in Kingston’s cultural crucible, paving the way for ska’s distinctive, and timely, synthesis. In addition to their 12/8 grooves, a good number of Jamaican boogie’s greatest hits, including Laurel Aitken’s “Boogie in My Bones” and Theophilus Beckford’s “Easy Snappin’,” both released in 1959, also gesture to their stateside models in the 12-bar blues forms and blues tonalities they employ. Even when drawing heavily on African-American styles, however, Jamaican performers consistently added their own local touches. Embracing the “upbeat” emphasis that performers such as Fats Domino had used to give their R&B a certain rhythmic dynamism, Jamaican musicians forged a distinctive style by placing even greater emphasis on offbeat accents. Whereas performers such as Domino often played accompanimental figures that emphasized the offbeat between each downbeat or the final eighth note of each three-note grouping in a 12/8 measure, Jamaican boogie recordings gave these accents even greater weight in the arrangement,

initially with pianos and guitars and later, especially in ska, with horn sections punctuating each measure with four “upbeat” blasts.

Another important example of such localization is the Folkes Brothers’ “Oh Carolina” (1960), a huge hit and a seminal song for Jamaica’s emergent local music industry. Despite directly borrowing the introduction from Carla & Rufus Thomas’s R&B hit, “Cause I Love You,” released the same year on Stax records, “Oh Carolina” distinguished itself as undeniably Jamaican by adding the Rastafarian-associated drumming techniques of Count Ossie. The track thus served as an audible affirmation of Afro-Jamaican aesthetics as it infused Kingston’s boogie-based soundscape with the familiar sounds of Burru drumming. The combination of sounds signifying Africanness and African-American modernity, filtered through local voices and musical practices, proved a winning combination and pushed Jamaican popular music further toward fusions which embodied at once an engagement with the outside and a commitment to local values. Thus, by the early 60s, as it had in preceding decades, Jamaican popular music seemed to fit well Peter Manuel’s wider observation that, “Caribbean music now involves combining international sounds and Caribbean cross-fertilizations, while often reaching deep into local traditions for inspiration” (243).

Although the nationalist-tinged narrative would have it differently, ska seems to emerge rather seamlessly from Jamaican boogie, its most definitive break coming in a snappy, onomatopoeic name that would serve to market the sound—and the new nation and its music—at home and abroad. Ska’s emphasis on the offbeat and its localized modernity, its cosmopolitan flair, seemed to give the music a buoyancy commensurate with the high hopes around Jamaica’s independence in 1962, and reggae myth has

embraced a nationalistic narrative ever since, often at the expense of accounting for a cultural politics in Jamaica which can reconcile the production of local styles with an intimate engagement with the foreign. Tellingly, the ska repertory shifted from boogie's predominantly 12/8 structures to a more familiar 4/4, moving the sound back toward Jamaica's traditional and previously popular genres and allowing again for an infusion of Caribbean styles and Afro-Jamaican folk songs and sensibilities. This re-Caribbeanization of Jamaican pop, especially the increasing presence of musical and extra-musical features associated with Rastafari, would set the stage for reggae's putative "African-ness," and yet it was perhaps the engagement with American soul music in the late 60s which, more than anything else, shifted the sound away from uptempo, dance band numbers and toward sparer ensembles, increasingly mediated by studio technologies, playing slower, heavier music. For all of Jamaica's "inward" oriented cultural activity during the 1960s, the island's music continued to embody its people's roots and routes alike.

Using America, Producing Jamaica: The Alchemy of Transnational Nationalism

Consulting Katz's *Solid Foundation* (2003), an extensive oral history of reggae, as well as other interviews scattered across liner notes and the reggae literature, one encounters copious evidence of Jamaican musicians finding inspiration and modeling their individual and group styles on American artists—and foreign music more generally. The commonness of such acknowledgment by Jamaican artists and the preponderance of African-/American acts in their pantheon of influence bear witness to the deep degree to

which American music has informed, and continues to inform, Jamaican music. An informal survey of some of these foreign, and usually African-American, influences, drawn largely from Katz's oral history, will help to illustrate the depth of this longstanding interplay. Consistent with one of the overarching strategies of this study, I offer what may seem like a glut of evidence in order to counteract an established narrative—in this case, the story of Jamaica's post-independence insularity, a story that, in its effort to advance an image of an independent and proud Jamaica, represses the symbolic and real connections between Jamaica and the United States, including some important race- and class-accented articulations embodied by the island's increasingly nationalized music.

We might begin by noting again, consistent with radio transmissions and migration patterns, the ecumenical nature of musical consumption in Jamaica. This is partly due to a certain cosmopolitanism, sometimes imposed from the metropole with its Eurocentric value system, sometimes representing a simple yearning to travel beyond one's home, and sometimes connected to the actual travels and migrations that Jamaicans had been engaging in for some time. One of the first soundsystem operators to captivate Kingston, Tom the Great Sebastian appears to have projected a cosmopolitan (if class-accented) orientation with his selections, and Katz argues that the very variety of his repertory of records allowed the pioneering DJ to dominate the competition:

Tom the Great Sebastian reigned supreme through a varied selection, which included merengue and Latin music as well as the more standard rhythm and blues. [Sebastian's selector, Duke] Vin recalls that Tom varied his music so as to reach the upper-class sections of his audience, who were less enamoured of the harder rhythm and blues styles favored by ghetto folk. "Tom play everything, because the uptown people like those things

like ‘Mockingbird Hill’ [as popularized by Patti Page]. We also play calypso, like ‘She ‘Pon Top.’”⁵⁵

Similarly, Edward Seaga, an early and active participant in the Jamaican music industry prior to his political career, describes the success he had importing American popular music to Jamaica after record store owners showed little interest in his recordings of folk music issued by Smithsonian Folkways: “They then asked me if I could import other types of music for them, which I did. They wanted stuff like Pat Boone and Nat King Cole, but there was also a very strong interest in rhythm and blues music, like [Marvin and Johnny’s] ‘Cherry Pie,’ Professor Longhair, people like those. I found a source for that kind of music: Savoy Records, up in the northern part of Manhattan, and I brought them in, artists like Fats Domino, Stevie Wonder, Wilbert Harrison’s ‘Kansas City,’ in lots of fifty or one hundred—if it was a big hit, two hundred and fifty.”⁵⁶

The same vogue for foreign music of all sorts, with a preference for Caribbean and American styles, continued into the early days of the local recording industry and was informed as much by cultural politics as market dictates. Catering both to a bisected local market—i.e., separated by the imbricate race/class lines of the uptown/downtown divide—and to a predominantly North American and European tourist market, Jamaican musicians embraced versatility as a means of finding work. Alton Ellis describes the variety and search for marketability of the emerging local recording industry: “There was no set pattern then [i.e., the early 60s], so we recorded anything that was marketable: calypso, soft music, ballads, with many foreign—especially American—influences. At

⁵⁵ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 7.

⁵⁶ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 18-19.

that time the people in the music business were still searching for a direction.”⁵⁷ Guitarist Ernest Ranglin insured his demand as a session player by becoming versatile in a number of foreign styles, ranging, according to Katz, “from Hawaiian music to merengue, mambo and boogie.”⁵⁸ Laurel Aitken, who notes that one of his first recordings was a “merengue,” gives a good sense of the repertoires with which he was expected to be familiar:

I used to sing from [when I was] a little boy in Cuba, and when I came to Jamaica there was nothing like ska. You had to sing jazz and calypso, which come from Trinidad. I sang “Blue Moon,” “Embraceable You,” and I won three big contests in Kingston with “Pennies from Heaven.” At the time, I used to work with the Jamaica Tourist Board, welcoming people with a big broad hat at the wharf when the ships come in, singing calypsos: “Welcome to Jamaica,” “Jamaica Farewell,” “Coconut Woman,” and they fling money and give me.⁵⁹

Justin Hinds reports a similar demand for American music in his performances: “I used to sing for tourists on the beach, sing B.B. King, Chuck Jackson, Louis Jordan, Smiley Lewis, Fats Domino—that’s why I name my group the Dominoes.”⁶⁰ Of course, such a significant gesture as naming his band suggests that such musical modeling was not always done merely to please foreign audiences, but also served as a way to appeal to one’s peers and to project one’s own voice as modern, urbane, black. Vocalist Earl Sixteen, who names Chuck Jackson, James Brown, the Jackson 5, and “even the Beatles” as “big stars of my early days,”⁶¹ elaborates on the stylistic range demanded of a band seeking opportunities to play: “You had to do all the current songs in the charts—

⁵⁷ In liner notes (with interview by Aad van der Hoek) to *Get Ready For Rock-Reggae-Steady!* (Jamaican Gold JMC 200.241), 5.

⁵⁸ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 32.

⁵⁹ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 13-14.

⁶⁰ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 51.

⁶¹ See the biography at Earl Sixteen’s website: <<http://www.earlsixteen.com/bio1.html>> (accessed 8 August 2006).

calypso, soul, reggae—because a road band is like cabaret.”⁶² And Freddy McGregor affirms the relationship between exchange value (or “work”), class tastes, and a versatile (if northern/uptown leaning) repertory:

One evening I hear a horn blow outside: Horsemouth say, “Me have some uptown boy, them have band, and a you me come for, because you are my little grassroots ghetto singer.” Me jump in the van with him, and this is my audition with some uptown youths who are really university—that’s a different scene for me again. Me do some Stylistics, “Black Magic,” “Me and Mrs. Jones,” Lou Rawls, anything within the top forty.... We play every place across Jamaica, uptown, downtown, midtown. We became the most famous band performing on night clubs, office parties, school graduations. Singing in the dance band was creating a difference for me, ’cause then I was becoming more versatile, singing soca, soul, calypso, you name it.”⁶³

This dynamic—recruiting vocalists from downtown to play with uptown bands—has remained something of a constant in the Jamaican music industry, and such cross-class collaborations continue to inform the character of Jamaican pop, especially with the founding of the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in 1970.

A survey of the foreign acts that served as influences and contributed to the repertory for Jamaican performers thus reveals an important preponderance: they are mostly American—and African-American at that—spanning styles from blues to jazz to boogie-woogie, through soul, R&B, funk, and hip-hop, with occasional ventures into pop ballads, rock, disco, and other related forms. Of course, in addition to its marketability, especially for tourists and uptown patrons, African-American music has long been embraced by Jamaican artists and audiences because of its (ironically, imperially-projected) embodiment of racialized cultural politics. Nevertheless, this embrace of the

⁶² Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 317.

⁶³ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 313.

foreign is not unambivalent, and so the stories of engaging with music of the US reflect a tension to be navigated between playing to local tastes for the foreign (among uptown and downtown audiences alike) and maintaining a strong, locally-grounded sense of self and community.

The “blues,” for instance, which refers in Jamaican discourse to everything from electric and country styles, jump-blues and jazz and soul, serves as a popular reference point for many reggae singers, appearing as a formative influence even as it indexes a foreign approach, a Yankee twang. The seemingly indiscriminate use of the term would seem to signal a perception of continuity across disparate genres. “Blues” thus serves as a kind of shorthand for a broad range of African-American musical practices, from a sense of swing to the use of blue-notes, melismas, and distinctive timbral qualities in vocal and instrumental performance. Chenley Duffus, for instance, one of the first singers to record for Coxson Dodd in the late 50s, was known for what Katz calls a “Yankee-twanged baritone” and enjoyed some success in the US, with a single called “Million Dollar Baby,” precisely because of his ability to sound American. Recounting his musical upbringing, Duffus acknowledges this debt to northern idols:

Every day they [some neighbors] ask me to sing the blues, so I discover myself singing the blues at eight years old. One of my main songs was by Jackie Brenston [Mississippi-born saxophonist/singer for Ike Turner’s band], “Independent Woman,” a bad blues. Approaching twelve, I make my stage debut at the Crystal Theatre in Spanish Town, then I move right into the Vere Johns’ thing, went all over Jamaica singing rhythm and blues: Joe Turner, Louis Jordan, Ben E. King, James Brown. All the inspiration came definitely from the American music, but we were putting our own thing in.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 44.

Notably, Duffus spans several decades and styles in the artists he lists, again speaking to the perception of these singers as somehow united by the “blues.” His acknowledgement of “inspiration” and assertion of Jamaica’s “own thing” resonates with Orlando Patterson’s somewhat disparaging, if celebratory, description of the emergence of a Jamaican voice out of its American models. Demonstrating “how complex the dialectics between local and foreign influences” can be, Patterson notes that “the imitations [of American songs by Jamaicans] were so bad that they were unwittingly original.” Thus he argues that Jamaican creative mis-use of American music resulted in a vibrant local musical culture. He marshals the evidence of poorly sung cover songs in order to dispel the common notion that globalization necessarily results in homogenization or “cultural grey-out.” Rather, he insists, “Western-American cultural influence has generated enormous cultural production, in some cases amounting to near hypercreativity in the popular cultures of the world.”⁶⁵ While it would be a mistake to see such “imitation” as nothing more than a symptom of imperialism, it would also be problematic to miss the full implications of such mirror/mirror dialectics.

Some additional examples will serve to affirm the deep degree to which African/American music has been woven into the fabric of Jamaican musical experience. Toots Hibbert, vocalist for Toots and the Maytals, cites African-American soul and gospel singers as inspiration for his decision to enter the music business: “I used to listen to Ray Charles, Mahalia Jackson, Wilson Pickett and James Brown on the radio.” Junior Murvin’s distinctive falsetto is, according to Katz, “largely patterned on Curtis Mayfield,” as were a number of other reggae singer’s styles, notably Bob Marley, according to Murvin: “From six years old I usually imitate Billy Eckstine, Wilfred

⁶⁵ Patterson, “Ecumenical America,” 106, 104.

Edwards, Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Sam Cooke.” Vocalist Pablo Moses describes his own musical upbringing in a similar manner: “It just happened that from [when] I was a kid I can sing falsetto in a certain way, and I can sing natural baritone, so I usually practice along with Ray Charles and Sam Cooke.” Gregory Isaacs, despite coming on the scene a decade later than the musicians quoted above, echoes their love for soul crooners, “Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, those were my favourites.” Beres Hammond affirms a number of these influential figures and adds more names to the list: “Marvin Gaye, he stood out in my mind. Stevie Wonder, I thought he was brilliant. My American inspiration was shared too between Sam Cooke and Otis Redding. I used them to test out how well I could sing.”⁶⁶ Garth Dennis of Black Uhuru cites the Impressions and the Temptations as inspirations for their group sound.⁶⁷ Johnny Osbourne connects his singing style to his American influences in the late 70s: “That time I used to love to sing Earth, Wind and Fire, the Delfonics, the Temptations, the Miracles, and the Stylistics, so I had to learn that sort of falsetto.” Born Paul Blake, Frankie Paul earned his nickname through his infatuation with Frankie Beverly and Frank Sinatra and recalls singing Tom Jones and Frankie Valle songs as a youth. Katz also reports that vocalist Carl Dawkins “drew from the style of Otis Redding,” while the vocal group, the Chantells, “styled themselves after the soul acts of Philadelphia and Chicago.” The recording debut of Aston “Family Man” Barrett, who played bass for Bob Marley as well as on hundreds of other sessions, “came on a single that adapted two American hits, Buffalo Springfield’s ‘For What It’s Worth’ (as ‘Watch This Sound’) and the Manhattans’ ‘I’m the One That Love Forgot’ (as ‘Out of Love’).” And Big Youth acknowledges, among other American

⁶⁶ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 48, 244, 248, 114, 261.

⁶⁷ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 280.

models, female soul singers as representing particularly important influences on his vocal technique: “Though Big Youth’s singing technique seems largely inspired by the jazz tradition, he reveals that he takes his greatest inspiration from female soul vocalists: ‘Me practice off of the woman them, like Diana Ross, and Dionne Warwick was my favourite, from early until now.’”⁶⁸

In addition to circulating commodities (i.e., records) and the movements of touring musicians and migrant workers, radio signals from abroad have represented another crucial means through which Jamaicans have been exposed to foreign music, especially music from the US and the Latin Caribbean. Olive Lewin notes that Jamaicans could tune in to stations broadcasting from as far as Ecuador, Venezuela, Cuba, North America, and the Dutch Antilles, while various reggae historians have named such American cities as Miami, New Orleans, Memphis, and even Cincinnati as transmitting signals strong enough to be heard on the island, especially given ideal conditions.⁶⁹ Producer Winston Blake recalls hearing signals from Tennessee, Florida, and Cuba. And while foreign radio stations were an important source of foreign music in Jamaica, the island’s own radio stations—operated by the middle-class and displaying a penchant for Eurocentric pop—also projected no small amount of foreign fare into the Jamaican soundscape, especially prior to the relatively recent introduction of reggae-centric radio stations such as Irie FM (which only began transmitting in 1990). Beres Hammond, for instance, notes that, “On the radio stations here we were flooded with foreign music: the Beatles, Engelbert Humperdink and Gilbert O’Sullivan, and I used to try to imitate

⁶⁸ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 316, 339-40, 144, 258, 108, 200.

⁶⁹ Lewin, “Jamaica,” in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, vol. 2: *South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean*, ed. Dale A. Olsen and Daniel E. Sheehy (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 910.

them.” Lloyd “Bread” McDonald of the Wailing Souls recounts his own radio-mediated exposure to a range of American models: “Listening to the music on the radio, I start mimicking singers like the Temptations, the Impressions, Sam Cooke. You also used to get Elvis Presley and even country and western.” And Carlton “Santa” Davis, drummer for the the Soul Syndicate, recalls that the Jamaican soundscape of his youth featured, “a lot of American music like the Impressions, the Platters, Brook Benton.”⁷⁰

Radio signals not only brought African-/American music to JA, they also carried the seminal influence of African-American disc-jockey style—in particular the catchy cadences and jive-laden stylings of such DJs as Douglas “Jocko” Henderson, Vernon “Dr. Daddy-O” Winslow, Tommy “Dr. Jive” Smalls, and Clarence “Poppa Stoppa” Heyman. In a clear nod to such forbears, Charlie Babcock, a DJ on RJR (Radio Jamaica and Rediffusion), referred to himself as “CB, the cool fool with the live jive.”⁷¹ And vocalist Dave Barker made a name for himself by being able to imitate African-American disc-jockeys and singers well enough to fool his fellows. As Barker recalls, “The whole buzz about me is that I am an American star . . . We would go to bars where you have jukeboxes—people would punch ‘Prisoner of Love’ or ‘Shocks of Mighty’ and my fellow Jamaican I-dren [brothers] them say, ‘Bwoi, is who sing that tune there?’ And a next one say, ‘A some Yankee bwoi.’”⁷² Barker’s “soul man,” disc-jockey-patterned introduction on “Double Barrel” (a hit by Dave and Ansel Collins) offers a classic example of his mimetic powers:

⁷⁰ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 4, 261, 151, 137.

⁷¹ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 51. In an interesting footnote to Charlie Babcock’s legacy, his son, Charlie Babcock Jr. has enjoyed some success as an Elvis impersonator in Boca Raton, Florida. See “Caribbean Immigrant Among Elvis Impersonators,” *Caribbean Media Exchange*, 26 January 2005 <<http://www.hardbeatnews.com/details304.htm>> (Google cache accessed 16 June 2005).

⁷² Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 132 (brackets in original).

I . . . am the magnificent!
 I'm back with the shock of a soul boss,
 the most thundering, storming, sounds of soul!
 I am double O-O-O ... (133)⁷³

The adoption and adaptation of black disc-jockey style—and the transposition of the practice to live soundsystem practice—would have far-reaching implications for Jamaican popular music, especially once producers such as Dodd and Reid discovered that soundsystem DJs (as led by the chart-topping U-Roy) could themselves serve as popular recording artists, translating their live routines to vinyl.⁷⁴ The seed thus planted by American radio disc-jockeys blossomed into what became the talkover style of such early soundmen as Count Matchukie, King Stitt, U-Roy, Dennis Alcapone, and Big Youth and later developed into the record-ready toasting of the Lone Ranger, Yellowman, Papa San, Brigadier Jerry, and others. More recent representatives of the style such as Shabba Ranks, Buju Banton, Beenie Man, Bounty Killer and the most popular dancehall DJs of today have in turn built on these earlier localizations of African-American radio DJ style, incorporating along the way, in circuitous a fashion as ever, the cadences of rap/hip-hop. Indeed, Jamaican DJs' localization of these practices in the late 60s would themselves prove seminal in shaping the vocal practices of hip-hop innovators such as Kool Herc, who, having lived in Kingston throughout his adolescence, was well familiar with “yard” style DJing.

⁷³ Significantly, as will be discussed in “The 80s (Side B),” the introduction to “Double Barrel,” along with a guitar-riff from Desmond Dekker’s “007 (Shanty Town),” was sampled decades later for Brooklyn-born Jamaican rapper Special Ed’s “The Magnificent” (1989), once again demonstrating the complex circularity of such borrowings.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., the *Studio One Story* (Soul Jazz CD/DVD68 [2002]), which vividly illustrates this process of transformation, recounting Coxsone’s formative experiences in Florida.

Modern Blackness and “Real Cultural Roots”: Ambivalence for the Outernational

Engaging with styles marked as African-/American has long been a resonant, if ambivalent, undertaking in Jamaica, and local cultural politics—including those practices Deborah Thomas sees as articulating modern blackness—have shifted around the significance of such gestures. On the one hand, the ability to evoke the sounds of the mighty North, path to prosperity and host to some powerfully projected Afrodiasporic brethren, can bestow on Jamaican performers an ultimate sense of cool, urbanity, mobility, and Black Power, especially if one is careful enough to embrace African-/American style without complete deracination. On the other, the US is seen as simply the latest colonialist power seeking to dominate Jamaican affairs; for some Rastafarians, it is the belly of the beast of Babylon, and this is a sentiment more broadly, if less figuratively, held by Jamaicans, especially those with little access to the opportunity and resources of the US. Thus, especially since the 1970s—a decade of great political turmoil and deadly local strife, much of it blamed on US/C.I.A.-sponsored destabilization of the democratic-socialist regime—the figure of Americanness has been a deeply ambivalent one in Jamaica. Reggae’s figurations of African-/Americanness—which is to say, Jamaicans’ symbolic engagements with the US since the rocksteady era (ca. 1968)—thus depart in some ways from earlier patterns of engagement with the “foreign.” Certain fissures, many of which carry forward into the present, begin to show themselves by the 1970s.

Given the continued projection of African-/American figures onto the world stage and the sustained engagement with contemporary African-/American music in Jamaica,

modeling oneself on American style remained a deliberate practice and an assertion of personal (and group) style within Jamaica's crowded musical field and cultural-political terrain through the rocksteady era and into reggae's "heavy" 70s heyday. As described by Guinea-born scholar Manthia Diawara, a similar embrace of African-American music and style, in the wake of the civil rights and Black Power movements, was underway in other parts of the world. For Diawara and his peers,

to be liberated was to be exposed to more R&B songs and to be up on the latest news about Muhammad Ali, George Jackson, Angela Davis, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr., all of whom were becoming an alternative source of cultural capital for African youth and were creating within us new structures of feeling, which enabled us to subvert the hegemony of Francité after independence.⁷⁵

Again, it is worth noting that American blackness offered a strong alternative in Jamaica—and one which dovetailed with contemporaneous Rastafarian recuperations of Afro-Jamaican heritage—to the Eurocentric bias still enshrined in "national" culture by Jamaica's elites and middle-class. As it stood for Diawara, "the black American civil rights struggle was the most advanced form of black modernity, because it successfully deployed race to change laws on the subject of belonging, citizenship, and national identity."⁷⁶ And so he and friends, like their Jamaican peers, dressed themselves in bell-bottoms and Afros and embraced the sounds of black America. Winston Watson of the Meditations, for example, places his American-patterned singing discipline in the broader context of his emulation of "soul" style: "Ansel [Cridland, also of the Meditations] was a 'face-boy,' bell-foot pants and soul hair and t'ing. I guess I was about the same. I hear a lot of singers and everything I heard I sing—female singers too, like Diana Ross." And

⁷⁵ Diawara, *In Search of Africa*, 103-4.

⁷⁶ Diawara, *In Search of Africa*, 117.

singer Freddy McGregor confesses to similar vocal and sartorial stylings: “I was always a youth with Afro, my bell-foot pants and my soul comb, ’cause I wasn’t in it for badness, I was in for music.”⁷⁷ As we will see in later chapters, in many ways this same approach to cultural politics continues into the present, in Jamaica and the various states of Africa alike, with hip-hop as the latest manifestation of black modernity.

And yet, increasingly, the Winston Watsons and Freddie McGregors of reggae were counterbalanced by performers who embraced a homegrown politics of blackness which disavowed, at least nominally, American models and looked instead to an idealized, mythological Africa for inspiration—even when the musical style was still seemingly as indebted to African-/American R&B or English hymnody as it was any “African” influences, which were, however, quite suggestively embodied by the strong infusion of Burru and other Afro-Jamaican drumming techniques. While on the one hand singers such as Johnny Osbourne point simply and vaguely to their “American” models—“There was a band called the Wildcats I used to sing with ... We used to come together in the evening time, practice these American songs and learn the harmony”—performers such as Sugar Minott, an influential vocalist whose first group called themselves the African Brothers, grew frustrated at the market for American-style groups and the disdain he and his groups faced from prospective record labels: “We were singing Rasta, we sound like the Abyssinians, that’s our kind of sound—real cultural roots, and they didn’t like it. It was American [style] music they was promoting, like Beres Hammond, Cynthia Schloss, Rudy Thomas, and they was all singing Stylistics”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 226, 313.

⁷⁸ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 117-8, 229 (brackets in original). The Abyssinians are a Rastafarian reggae group best known for their well-worn, Amharic-employing hit, “Satta Massa Gana” (1969).

Regardless of these internal fissures, however, what emerges from a study of engagement with the “foreign” in Jamaican music is a sustained pattern—beginning well before independence and continuing into the present—of embracing (and versioning) the music of the US and the wider Caribbean in order to advance a locally-grounded racial politics that militates against the enduring hierarchies enshrined in the colonial and post-independence governments as well as social norms around Eurocentric value systems and middle-class politeness. Producing Jamaica by using America, Jamaican performers and producers have articulated a sort of transnational nationalism that reconciles longstanding local practices and “outernational” connections and aspirations. Somewhat ironically, they have often embraced the reggae narrative’s putative nationalism, just as they have embraced (black) contemporary musical styles with the greatest currency, as way to amplify reggae’s critiques of the status quo and visions of a modern, just Jamaica. Hence, out of a continued, intimate engagement with the foreign, what has emerged is a style marked as utterly, radically (culturally) nationalist, shifting public discourse, subtly but profoundly, around notions of belonging in Jamaica and ideas about Jamaicanness itself.

Enmeshed in imperial networks and markets, increasingly consumed and projected from the twin metropolises of London and New York, Jamaican music finds itself on the precipice of global ubiquity at the end of the 60s. And as Jamaican society slides into the “sipple” (or slippery) 70s, creative tensions between expressions of the local and foreign continue apace. New versions of and new songs recorded on the *Mad Mad* riddim embody the shifting terrain of Jamaican cultural politics, especially as new technologies, new global and African-/American styles (e.g., rock and funk), new relationships to state power (e.g., in the wake of the PNP’s embrace of Rastafari and

reggae), and new centers of migration develop.⁷⁹ Reggae's socio-sonic circuitry continues to make sense of the mad, mad stories mediating people's connections to their homes and their neighbors, old and new. The routed roots and rooted routes of Jamaican music, as embodied by the soul-infused sounds of Alton Ellis's rocksteady recordings, find new paths to travel, back to the future and forward to the past.

As reggae emerges from rocksteady in the late 60s, Jamaican producers, vocalists, and musicians continued to look inward and outward, forward and back, for inspiration. Just as we can hear in Ellis's "Mad Mad Mad" a contemporary confluence of social issues reflected and informed by musical figures, we can hear in later versions and uses of the *Mad Mad* riddim a meaningful mediation of the social in the sonic and an important articulation of a cultural politics around notions of race and nation. In particular, we hear both the increasing interaction with and influence of the music of the United States and the desire on the part of Jamaican artists and audiences to cultivate a local, "national" aesthetic that neither bows to foreign influence nor capitulates to the state's relegation of Afro-Jamaican culture to the static category of "heritage."⁸⁰ Instead, what we hear, rather audibly at that, is a dynamic process of revision and imagination, conservatism and innovation, with each new version signifying on musical memory and contemporary circumstance.

⁷⁹ With regard to technologies, as Coxson tells it: "I had been in England and came back with quite a few gadgets, like a delay, and we made 'Nanny Goat' [a seminal instrumental track]. After that we had a series of recordings with the same sound. It was like the guitar on the delay meshed with the organ shuffle. That is where the change came from rocksteady to reggae" (Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 42). See also, *Studio One Story* (Soul Jazz 2002) for a lively recounting of the effect that the Echoplex, a tape-loop machine, had on reggae recording and performance practice.

⁸⁰ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 159.

CHAPTER FOUR

The 70s: (Reggae's "Golden Age" and the Origins of Hip-hop)¹

The *Mad Mad* lived on during the 70s, routinely providing accompaniment for Jamaican singers and DJs in live performances and on recordings. Informed by a soundsystem-based performance practice which relied on the repeated playing of popular songs (in the form of vinyl and acetate records), as well as the impromptu performance by DJs over instrumental “specials” or “dubplates” of those songs’ underlying riddims, a distinctively Jamaican notion of riddims and “voicings” as autonomous entities arose. The concept of the “riddim system,” whereby producers reuse or reinvent classic backing tracks for vocalists to record new songs over them, would prove foundational to reggae aesthetics, and it continues to inform the creation of Jamaican popular music and, increasingly, popular music worldwide, engendering among other modern musical phenomena, the remix.²

Although “toasting” over records had been a staple at soundsystem dances since the 50s, by 1970—heralded by U-Roy’s string of chart-topping singles, “Wake the Town,” “Rule the Nation,” and “Wear You to the Ball”—several DJs, including Dennis

¹ As I described in the introduction, in an attempt both to foreground my own narrative strategies and to counteract an overarching imbalance in the reggae and hip-hop literature, my treatment of the 1970s will here be unusually—and I hope, strikingly—brief. My stark departure from convention is meant to underscore that this dissertation is but another telling of these stories, and by no means a comprehensive one; rather it is a “dub history,” to borrow a phrase from Jeff Chang (*Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005], 3)—a version in which I make explicit my role as a creative agent, a producer pulling apart layers in the texture in order to bring them more meaningfully back together, triggering echoes and calling attention to certain reverberations, highlighting unnoticed details amid familiar strains. Beyond the sheer brevity of this chapter, I also put the headings in parentheses to emphasize my strategy and to gesture to Virginia Woolf, whose innovative approach to narrative in *To the Lighthouse*, as discussed in the introduction, serves as inspiration for this maneuver.

² For a more elaborate discussion of the riddim system and its implications for popular music worldwide, see Peter Manuel and Wayne Marshall. “The Riddim Method: Aesthetics, Practice, and Ownership in Jamaican Dancehall,” *Popular Music* 25, no. 3 (2006): 447-470.

Alcapone and Big Youth, had earned distinction as recording artists in their own right. Ironically, DJs came to rival singers such as Alton Ellis in popularity, recording their own locally-inflected, jive-heavy, spoken-word vocals over the same popular riddims or backing tracks that propelled hit songs such as “Mad Mad Mad.” Once producers such as Coxson Dodd and Duke Reid recognized the value of recording new songs over pre-recorded backing tracks (and, notably, the Studio One catalog provided the vast majority of such instrumentals), riddims such as the *Mad Mad* were increasingly understood by artists and audiences to constitute a sort of stock repertory—not unlike Tin Pan Alley compositions for beboppers—through which producers, musicians, and vocalists could invoke collective musical memory while expressing new ideas and embracing new styles and technologies. The *Mad Mad* thus joined other late-60s Studio One favorites such as the *Real Rock*, *Answer*, *Satta*, and *Nanny Goat* as well as newer productions such as Winston Riley’s massive *Stalag* (1974) as some of reggae’s most frequently versioned riddims. With each new version or voicing, these well-worn riddims accrued additional affective resonance for artists and audiences.

In this context, we can compare Ellis’s “Mad Mad Mad” to subsequent songs performed on the *Mad Mad* riddim, such as Jennifer Lara’s bittersweet love song, “Hurt So Good” (1974). Lara’s recording was also produced by Coxson Dodd at Studio One and it bears a close resemblance to the version sung over by Alton Ellis. While the version’s form is nearly identical—if shorter in duration—to the Ellis accompaniment, including the setting of verses and choruses, the sound of the riddim on “Hurt So Good” is noticeably different from “Mad Mad Mad.” Rather than simply relying on the original tapes from the Ellis recording, some instruments have been re-recorded and overdubbed.

A new bass takes the place of the old, for instance, while a second piano part is performed over the previous one (which was more sparse and thus left room for new embellishment). The drums and bells and the guitar and horns all appear to be the same as on the Ellis recording, but they are treated rather differently in terms of their place in the mix (e.g., the bells are pushed into the background while the bass assumes greater prominence), the amount of reverb applied to them, and the degree to which they are “equalized” or, more commonly, “EQ’d” (i.e., a process wherein certain frequency bands are emphasized and others muted). Indeed, the entire production has been re-mixed, making it sound brighter and clearer, especially the drums and guitar—a result of better technologies and better facility with them.

Engineer-producers such as Lee “Scratch” Perry, Osbourne “King Tubby” Ruddock, and Sylvan Morris (Studio One’s house engineer) had become crucial, creative contributors to reggae production by the late 60s. Carefully EQing each of the various tracks (and, presumably, using separate and better microphones and a newer multi-track recording console), the engineer for the Lara session brings out the signature frequencies of every voice in the texture, making each of the instruments more distinct in the overall mix.³ The percussion appears “crisp,” the bass “punchy,” the piano and guitar—as well as the lead and back-up vocals—mainly occupy the mid- and high-frequencies, leaving the “lows” for the bass. The *Mad Mad* version that supports Lara’s lovelorn voice thus distinguishes itself from the “muddier” mix that propelled Ellis’s crooning.

The overdubbed performances on this subtle *re-lick* of the 1967 *Mad Mad* are almost identical to those on the original, though subtle differences underscore the degree

³ Unfortunately, it is often difficult to ascertain who the engineer was on a particular recording date, thus they often remain anonymous and undervalued as creators or artists in their own right.

to which such classic riddims constantly remain in revision even as they are reincarnated.⁴ While the bassist plays essentially the same line as on the '67 version, there is a more marked emphasis on the ii chord during the introduction and transitional sections: whereas the original let the rest of the ensemble imply or play the chord, here we hear a distinct bass attack on A on beat 3 of the measures in question. Moreover, though they generally stick to the “skanking” pattern, or offbeat emphasis, that has defined Jamaican popular music since ska, the piano occasionally plays a 3+3+2 syncopation against the prevailing duple emphasis of the track, often on the fourth or eighth measure of a section, thus providing a kind of rhythmic “turnaround” as it anticipates the downbeat. This (re)assertation of a 3+3+2 pattern becomes an increasingly common feature in reggae over the course of the 70s, connecting back to earlier Afro-Jamaican and pan-Caribbean styles, from mento and calypso to son, salsa, merengue, merengue, konpa, soca, and other folk and popular forms, and foreshadowing the 3+3+2 minimalism which comes to define the sound of 90s dancehall.

“Hurt So Good” not only distinguishes itself through its new vocal and instrumental performances and the different prominence and equalization of each voice in the texture, it also differs from “Mad Mad Mad” in key and tempo, though again only slightly: both songs could be said to be in the key of G, though the Lara version is noticeably sharper and closer to standard tuning; accompanying its sharper pitch, the Lara version is also faintly faster, if only by a few bpm, than the Ellis. (Hovering around 75-80 beats-per-minute, both songs have typical tempos for their respective styles of rocksteady

⁴ *Re-lick* is reggae parlance describing the process (*v.*) or product (*n.*) of re-recording a riddim with a new band, often with an arrangement that differs, subtly or radically, from the original. Re-licks tend to describe band- and keyboard-based reproductions. Although some re-licks involve samples from the original or subsequent versions, a heavily sample-based “re-lick” would likely not deserve that distinction and be considered a “loop.” Such loops circulate on the dub-plate and white label markets.

and early reggae.) Common to the reggae repertory and riddim system, these slight discrepancies in key and tempo are as related to the contingencies of bands' collective tunings as to the particular properties of analog musical technology: that is, once the instrumental performances have been committed to tape, slightly altering the playback speed—often a deliberate procedure—will produce concomitant changes in key. This represents yet another manner in which new versions of a riddim, or several tracks on the same version, come to have idiosyncratic characteristics that differentiate them from their counterparts. As we turn to various versions of the *Mad Mad* created in the 1980s, these technical-musical issues will assume even greater prominence.

(Reggae's Heyday)

The 1970s constituted a heyday for reggae, as the focus on that decade in the reggae literature would seem to confirm. For such a small, geopolitically powerless island, Jamaica suddenly saw its music rise to global prominence, finding huge audiences in the First and Third World alike and joining the elite, US-dominated ranks of global pop genres. As with the development of Jamaican music in the first half of the twentieth century, reggae's ascension to worldwide popularity was fueled in part by the movement of people and the circulation of media, of musical commodities. By the early 70s, the Jamaican "diaspora" was taking, and changing, shape: in the wake of changes in immigration policy, longtime sites of migration such as London were increasingly replaced by other metropolitan destinations, notably North American cities such as New York, Miami, and Toronto. Critical masses of Jamaicans in all of these places facilitated

the movement of music and other cultural practices to such major cities and media centers. Reggae's circulation via popular media also went beyond these sites of migration, bringing the sounds and images of Jamaica to the wider world. *The Harder They Come* (1972), a blaxploitation-inspired film depicting the rise and fall of a ganja-dealing, cop-killing, reggae-singing people's hero, served—along with its stellar soundtrack—to introduce mass audiences (especially in the US) to a romanticized vision of reggae as racy, rebel music *par excellence*. And, of course, the immense success of Bob Marley, especially his rock- and college-audience directed debut, *Catch a Fire* (1973), put a (light-skinned) face on the music and gave it a worthy icon. Around the same time, a *Rolling Stone* cover story (Michael Thomas's "The Wild Side of Paradise"), a chart-topping cover version of Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff" by Eric Clapton (1974), and self-conscious reggae experiments by groups such as Led Zeppelin ("D'yer Mak'er" [1973]) whet rock-audience appetites even further while opening ears and minds to the putative "real thing" coming out of Kingston.⁵

Reggae's commercial success and its adoption and popularization by rock and pop acts also served to shore up certain ideas about the authenticity of Jamaican-based productions from that time, especially those marketed less to mass audiences and more to Jamaica's diaspora and a small but growing number of metropolitan connoisseurs. Having emerged from rocksteady as a slower, heavier (with its emphasis on low frequencies), re-Caribbeanized style, especially with the continued infusion of drumming styles, song texts, and beliefs associated with Rastafarians (thus the emergence of the "roots" tag), reggae musicians and producers distinguished their music as powerful,

⁵ Also worth noting are the Rolling Stones' cover of Donaldson's "Cherry Oh Baby" on *Black and Blue* (1976), the earlier attempts at engagement in the Beatles' "Ob La Di, Ob La Da" (1968).

prolific, and innovative. “Dubwise” and “dreadful,” reggae’s less commercialized output resonated widely as a foreign-but-familiar, a righteous, and even as a psychedelic music and “culture”—a term frequently employed by Rastafarians and reggae musicians alike, signifying African-associated beliefs and practices and a disavowal of politics qua politics. Given the music’s cultural resonance and commercial success at this time, it is of little surprise that so many have referred to the 70s as reggae’s “Golden Age”⁶ and that so many reggae histories have emphasized and idealized the music of that decade, often at the expense of other eras and other dimensions of reggae aesthetics. Moreover, representations of reggae during the 70s often suggest that, despite longstanding patterns of engagement with “foreign” music, the decade represented an inward turn for the music, thus constructing an implied insularity which overlooks the crucial cultural politics articulated in Jamaican musicians’ ongoing embrace of African-/American style, as can be heard, for example, in the many soul covers collected on such compilations as *Darker Than Blue: Soul from Jamdown* (2001) or in the seminal funk and disco adaptations to be discussed in the following chapter, or as can be seen in the Mighty Diamonds’ spot-on James Brown impersonation in the film *Roots, Rock, Reggae* (1977).

⁶ See, for instance, the abstract for Tracey Bobbs’s paper “Reggae Representations,” presented at the 2003 Experience Music Project conference: <<http://www.emplive.org/education/index.asp?categoryID=26&ccID=127&xPopConfBioID=23&year=2003>> (accessed 10 August 2006). Mark Harris’s *Popmatters* review of an Anthony B record also employs this trope, if in quotation marks (<<http://www.popmatters.com/music/reviews/a/anthonyb-myhope.shtml>> [accessed same day]). A review of Reggae Gold (Hip-O Records/Universal 2005) at World Music Central begins with this (unqualified) affirmation of the common perception: “The songs on this 2 CD set will take you back to the Golden Age of reggae in the 1970s” (<<http://www.worldmusiccentral.org/article.php/20051101184847331>> [accessed same day]). Other connoisseurs and marketers, however, expand the period back into the 60s: for example, a Trojan Records boxset, *This Is Reggae Music* (2004), explicitly compiling music from reggae’s “Golden Era,” challenges the consensus on dates somewhat by glorifying the period from 1960-75.

(The Birth of Hip-hop)

In the Bronx, a young Jamaican immigrant named Kool Herc adapted reggae soundsystem practice for his African-American, West Indian, and Latin Caribbean peers, and, as the story goes, hip-hop was born.⁷

⁷ For more on the story of Kool Herc, see my forthcoming biographical essay in Mickey Hess, ed., *Icons of Hip-hop: An Encyclopedia of the Music, from Kool Herc to Kanye West* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007).

CHAPTER FIVE

The 80s (Side A): *A Dangerous Riddim's Viral Spread*

In 1981, rather than recycle the same Studio One version that had been circulating for over a decade, Henry “Junjo” Lawes produced a new version of the *Mad Mad* riddim. For the production, Lawes recruited the talent of the Roots Radics, one of Jamaica’s premier session bands at the time, and recorded them at Joseph Hoo-Kim’s Channel One studio, the band’s home-base and a place known for its “crisp” sound, innovative engineers, and winning re-licks of Studio One favorites. Junjo’s re-recording of the *Mad Mad*, voiced and mixed at King Tubby’s studio by dub-prodigy Overton “Scientist” Brown, was at once recognizable and recognizably different.¹ Stark and minimal, at the edge of late dub and early dancehall, Junjo’s version proved wildly popular, accelerating the trend for re-licked, or “do-over,” riddims—a practice which became the basis for reggae composition in the 1980s and which continues today with little sign of abating.²

Under Junjo’s guiding hand and courtesy of his “deep pockets,” some of early dancehall’s finest DJs, including Michigan & Smiley, Yellowman, Josie Wales, Nicodemus, Toyman, and Cocoa Tea, all released hit songs over individually-tailored versions (via Scientist’s dub mixing) of the Radics’ reinterpretation of the *Mad Mad*. Thus, with the *Diseases* riddim, as it came to be known after Michigan & Smiley’s hit, we hear Jamaican riddim practice expand. The *Mad Mad* changes in the early 80s, along

¹ In reggae parlance, to “voice” is to record vocals, whether from the standpoint of the performer or the recording engineer or producer.

² Indeed, recent years (2004-6) have seen yet another resurgence of classic riddims, dressed up in the latest digital splendor. It should be noted as well that since the advent of “digital” riddims in the 80s—whether produced on keyboards, drum machines, or computers—a great many “new” compositions have been added to the riddim repertory. Moreover, re-licked riddims, although always in the air, tend to cycle through phases of popularity. Such cycles, for all their play with nostalgia and the socio-cultural zeitgeist, typically follow stylistic or technological innovations which open new avenues of interpretation and expression.

with the sound of reggae itself. Jamaica, of course, had changed as well at this point, and rather radically.³ Part of that change concerns the mass movement of Jamaicans out of Jamaica and into urban centers in North America, in particular the boroughs of New York. The movement of Jamaicans back and forth from the island to the metropole served to intensify the longstanding interplay between Jamaican music and that from the “outside,” and the tension between foreign and local influences remained a constitutive force in reggae style. Revealing shifts in form and content, practice and performance, and in sonic as well as social organization, the *Mad Mad* migrations of the 1980s offer an audible way to make sense of the increasingly criss-crossed worlds of Jamaica and the United States.

The (International) Sound of Revolution and the Rise of Channel One

When Channel One was making a name for itself in the 70s with “revolutionized” riddims and rocksteady re-licks, expressing and appealing to, as the story goes, a more “hardcore” Jamaican aesthetic, it did so paradoxically: via a continued engagement with African-/American music and culture.⁴ The Revolutionaries, a rotating cast of musicians who worked as session players at Channel One in the 1970s, emerged from club bands such as Skin Flesh and Bones, whose name and sound were inspired by disco-era soul group Earth, Wind and Fire. The primary drummer for the Revolutionaries and for Skin Flesh and Bones was Lowell “Sly” Dunbar—“the backbone of the sound of Channel

³ By 1980, which witnessed a particularly bloody election, the P.N.P.’s democratic socialist regime had been dumped in favor of the J.L.P.’s neo-liberal policies and re-alignment with the US

⁴ *Hardcore* is a common, usually positive adjective in both hip-hop and reggae parlance and typically describes a commitment to local circumstances and tastes, in particular to such sites of authenticity as the ghetto, the “streets,” downtown, etc.

One”—who earned his nickname as a young man because he was, in his own words, “a great fanatic of Sly and the Family Stone.”⁵ Sly and his musical brethren, like their jazz- and-jive predecessors in the 50s and 60s, expressed their deep interest in American music through performances, arrangements, and compositions. The sound of Channel One reflected this creative engagement in the funk-, rock-, and disco-derived drum patterns that came to (re)define reggae and helped drive the transition from “roots” to “dancehall” style. In particular, many of the new rhythmic styles, including “flyers” and “rockers” drumming techniques, pointed away from the “traditional” one-drop with its heavy accent on beats 2 and 4, and favored instead a downbeat-oriented pattern with syncopated snares—closer to the rhythmic patterns in African-American styles, especially funk, which had long shifted the US’s collective beat to the *one*, an emphasis that funk-infused soul and disco would carry forward with their four-to-the-floor kick-drum patterns.

The “flyers” style—a hi-hat oriented style popularized by drummer Santa Davis with the Aggrovators (one of the more popular backing bands of the mid-70s)—took the inspiration for its “flying cymbal” (i.e., accenting the offbeats) from the soul-derived, proto-disco “Philly Bump” of MFSB as heard on songs such as “TSOP (The Sound of Philadelphia)” (1974), which circulated widely as the theme to the popular television show *Soul Train*.⁶ The style which came to supplant the “flyers” hegemony, Sly Dunbar’s “rockers” style, is similarly based on a rhythmic pattern inspired by funk and disco with its busy, relatively dense patterns of kicks and hi-hats and frequent snare-drum

⁵ Katz, *Solid Foundation* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 300, 218.

⁶ Davis describes how the “flyers” style emerged from an explicit attempt at stylistic incorporation: “MFSB, with ‘The Sound of Philadelphia,’ they use a lot of that [cymbal style]. The drummer was a favorite drummer of mine, and I said, ‘Damn, let’s try that in a reggae sound’” (Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 210). For an example of Davis playing in “flyers” style, see Johnny Clarke’s “None Shall Escape the Judgement” (1974).

syncopations. For all the resonance with local styles, such engagements with the music of black America essentially realigned reggae's rhythmic drive.

The embrace of African-American musical style was accompanied by an infusion of US Black Power politics. Noting its seeds in Marcus Garvey's transnational racial politics, scholar Rex Nettleford has called Black Power a "United States re-export to the Caribbean."⁷ Through their global resonance and media projection, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the US thus served as additional inspiration for Jamaica's own longstanding, local tradition of racially-mobilized (cultural) politics.⁸ Moreover, the "Yankee" accent of Afros and raised fists, bellbottoms and funk, presented compelling symbols to Jamaicans who, alienated by the enduring colonial hierarchies enshrined in the island's national(ist) politics and social structure, embraced a pan-Africanist sense of self and community. The "rockers" style, for instance, became synonymous with "militancy" as its syncopated snares suggest a martial orientation for many listeners.⁹ Band names such as the Revolutionaries and the Roots Radics, as well as the titles they gave to their instrumentals, also affirm the militant, "ouernational" orientation of the mid- to late-70s. Before Sly and bassist Robbie Shakespeare embarked on their production efforts for their own Taxi label, leaving behind the core of players who would eventually reconfigure as the Roots Radics, the Revolutionaries recorded a number of instrumental tributes to international, anti-imperialist struggles, giving them symbolic

⁷ Nettleford, *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica* (Kingston: W. Collins and Sangster, 1998 [1970]), xii.

⁸ See Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), for a detailed genealogy.

⁹ It is truly remarkable how frequently the adjective "militant" is associated with the "rockers" style. It seems to have become something of a perfunctory gesture in the reggae literature to describe the "rockers" style in this manner. David Katz, for instance, notes that Sly's "precision timing marked a 'militant' time on the snare" (*Solid Foundation*, 217).

names like “M.P.L.A.,” “I.R.A.,” “Angola,” and “Leftist.”¹⁰ In the midst of the “cultural turn” in Jamaica, as the masses became increasingly dismayed by the unfulfilled promise of independence, “roots and culture” became the rallying cry for “socially conscious” artists, and reggae became increasingly infused with Rastafarian sounds and sentiments.

Thus, as the 1980s approached, reggae musicians demonstrated a simultaneous awareness of the outside world and a primary engagement with local concerns. This orientation both outward and inward has always played a formative role in Jamaican music and culture. Nevertheless, the dominant reggae narrative, reproduced in various ways, tends to emphasize reggae’s insularity in the late 70s and early 80s, seeing dancehall’s “stark” riddims as a musical reflection of the bleakness of Jamaica’s political crises and social problems much as it sees rocksteady’s slowing tempos reflecting disenchantment with a post-independence status quo. Not only does such a narrative arc, in complicity with the nationalist story, downplay the complexities of reggae’s articulation of race- and class-based protest, it misses the music’s many meanings at such crucial moments.

As reggae re-shaped itself and its sound once again according to local and foreign forces, Channel One emerged as the reigning, contemporary sound of Jamaica. Despite Channel One’s reputation for promoting a new and modern sound, however, the music produced there maintained a close connection to older sounds—namely, the “foundational” riddims produced in the late 60s. At the same time, the influence was cyclical, for Channel One’s re-licks of Studio One classics prompted Coxsone Dodd to overdub new, “rockers”-style drum tracks on his well-worn riddims. Notably, Channel One distinguished itself not primarily through its artists or producers or image but

¹⁰ See Dave Hendley (2003), liner notes to *The Channel One Story*, VP Records (VPCD 1678).

through its *sound*, a product of both Sly's peerless drumming (and of the contributions by other members of the studio's cadre of top instrumentalists and engineers) and the "crisp," powerful sonics enabled by the studio's cutting-edge technology. Entrepreneur Joseph Hoo-Kim, the founder of Channel One, ensured his studio's competitive advantage by investing in state-of-the-art equipment (including an API mixing console and new tape machines) which allowed for clear separation of each instrument and thus opened up new possibilities for mixing while achieving a striking distinctness for each voice in the texture. Channel One's advanced technology, and the able talent Hoo-Kim recruited to utilize it, attracted Jamaica's finest producers and artists, who sought out the "punch" and the drum-centric aesthetic associated with the studio. Joseph's brother, Ernest Hoo-Kim, "would often spend all day working with Sly in order to perfect Channel One's signature drum sound."¹¹ By the late 70s, the combination of this technologically-crafted sound with the stripped-down arrangements of the Roots Radics—a blessing for dub-style producers looking for malleable materials—gave the studio a leading reputation for its "sparse" and "stark" sound.

Before cohering as a group with a unique sonic signature, the Roots Radics, like other session bands in Kingston, comprised a loose assortment of musicians. According to bassist and core member Flabba Holt, "Like the Revolutionaries, man just come in."¹² By the turn of the decade, however, the group's membership had solidified: in addition to Holt on bass, the Radics added rhythm guitarist Bingy Bunny, drummer Lincoln "Style" Scott, keyboardist Wycliffe "Steelie" Johnson, and lead guitarist, Noel "Sowell" Bailey. Bailey's trebly treatment of the *Mad Mad* riff—that three-note ascending-descending line

¹¹ Hendley, "The Channel One Story," 3.

¹² Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 303.

that reaches back to Ellis's "Mad Mad Mad"—would become one of the most salient markers of the *Mad Mad* and carries forward in some instances, namely hip-hop's sampled *Mad Mad* versions, more than any of the riddim's other component features. Flabba Holt remembers Bailey's technology-assisted style as distinguishing him from other guitarists at the time, "He come with a different sound, like him put a pipe inna him mouth [due to liberal use of wah wah and fuzz box effects pedals]. It sound different and people like that."¹³ The Roots Radics earned admiration for their "tight" playing—"in-the-pocket," as funk musicians would say—and minimal arrangements. Their emphasis on simple, repetitive drum patterns and basslines and sparse harmonic accompaniment moved reggae style further away from its foundations in jazz- and pop-song chordal harmony and toward the percussive ostinatos that would come to define the new style of reggae: "dancehall," which took its name from the music's resonance in local performance spaces, where Channel One's riddims were outshining Studio One's originals as well as the increasingly internationally-focused "roots" reggae performed by Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Toots and the Maytals, and other stalwarts of the 60s and 70s.

With the oversight of producer/promoter Henry "Junjo" Lawes, "whose harnessing of the Roots Radics as a platform for new dancehall artists saw him rapidly emerge as the leading producer of the early 80s," the Radics put their stamp on a great many of the classic reggae riddims, cementing the status of a number of them in the process. By many accounts, Lawes was a known "thug"—involved with Jamaica's politicized gangs—who elbowed his way into the music business. Fellow producer Linval Thompson, an associate of Junjo's, notes that, "He wasn't no musician, he was a guy on

¹³ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 304 (brackets in original).

the street, working for the politician, if you understand what I'm trying to say."¹⁴

Although it is said that Lawes not only paid for the recording sessions and the daily wages of the performers but offered critical input as well, Junjo's contributions to the recording sessions, aside from the crucial task of gathering the talent, remain unclear, and his murder in 1999 confounds any further attempts to get a first-hand account.

Nevertheless, despite Junjo's contested artistic contributions, his savvy as a promoter is undeniable, evident in the success of his own Volcano label as well as his international licensing agreements with London's Greensleeves records. Junjo's work as a "producer," putting his name on a slew of hits in the early 80s, thus constitutes a real legacy regardless of his actual contributions to the music being made: reggae music, and riddims such as the *Mad Mad*, have not been the same since.

Radical Revisions: From *Mad Mad* to *Diseases*

Junjo's version of the *Mad Mad*, with all its recognizable connections to the Studio One original, represents a creative departure to be sure. Consistent with the other re-licks of classic riddims being produced at Channel One, Junjo's *Mad Mad* boils down the original to a kind of "dancehall" essence, reducing the rocksteady chord progression to an ostinato on the I, the bubbling bassline to a spare alternation between the root and the fifth, and the drum pattern to a kick-snare backbeat closer to rock and funk drumming than to reggae's one-drop. The other instruments in the mix—rhythm guitar and piano, lead guitar and an occasional horn—serve to ornament the drum-and-bass foundation, adding skanking chords on the offbeats and playing the distinctive three-note riff at select

¹⁴ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 305.

moments. Typically, the band would record such performances to tape at Channel One, employing a range of engineers, including Lancelor “Maxie” McKenzie, Stanley “Barnabas” Bryan, and “Crucial” Bunny Graham. Then Junjo would “voice” various DJs and singers over the riddims at King Tubby’s studio, with Prince Jammy and later, Scientist, as his mixing engineers. Under Scientist’s skilled, knob-twisting, slider-pushing hands, the Radics’ *Mad Mad* takes various shapes, depending on the song or “voicing” in question. The Radics’ performances are thus treated as pliable source materials, and the mixing engineer would take advantage of their separate tracking in order to add or remove instrumental layers over the course of a song as well as to apply echo/delay, reverb, and other effects to particular channels and particular “attacks”—especially on the occasional crackling snare drum or tumbling riff.

Dub’s formal preoccupation with layering and effects comes to the fore in this 80s incarnation of the *Mad Mad*: the bass drops out of the mix only to return with force; kicks, snares, and guitars unexpectedly erupt in reverb and echo; the familiar *Mad Mad* riff, sometimes played on a horn, appears to collapse in on itself, the echoes of its attack overshadowing the tail of the riff (which is itself truncated, thus never resolving), while a crisper version, played on Bailey’s pedal-effected guitar and mixed “bright” and loud, jumps out of the texture at crucial moments. Frequently, mixing engineers such as Scientist were forced to manipulate the layers of a track rather heavily in order to accommodate the asymmetrical song forms performed by early dancehall DJs. Because of their grounding in live soundsystem performance, in which a DJ must nimbly navigate the variety of riddims a selector might provide, the DJs voicing over new riddims in the early 80s rarely trace a conventional or predictable song form. Their performances more

closely resemble improvisations from a set of stock phrases, verse and chorus fragments, and so forth. Moreover, the tendency since the 60s to separate riddims from voicings, in concept and in practice, makes for some rather unconventional combinations, especially in terms of key or tonality. Because musicians such as the Roots Radics received their training in a slightly different musical arena (i.e., in studios and clubs rather than soundsystem dances), they were generally sensitive to such things as introductions, verses, and choruses—not to mention keys—and implied generic song forms, if open ones (especially with the rise of the ostinato), in their recordings. Thus, in order to avoid harmonic or formal dissonance, mixing engineers at this time would often drop such “determining” elements as basslines or guitar chords, leaving the drums alone as accompaniment during particularly “deviant” passages in a DJ’s performance. The degree of song-craft in any of these early dancehall tracks is therefore often arguably more a product of the engineer than the musicians or the vocalists.

Turning our attention to the specific mix employed for Michigan & Smiley’s “Diseases” (1981), the first hit produced on Junjo’s *Mad Mad*, we can hear these techniques and technologies at work. After the introductory drum-roll, which announces Junjo’s *Mad Mad* as it connects to a tradition of syncopated, tom-heavy reggae intros, we hear the familiar riff, played by both a phased-out guitar and an organ. It is accompanied by Flabba Holt’s sparse bassline, which provides the only “tonal” accompaniment until the organ’s skanking, “shuffling” chords make an entrance, if a fleeting one, during the first chorus (at around 0:44). The bassline, which remains one of the more distinctive features of subsequent *Mad Mad* versions, serves as a kind of anchor in this arrangement where the other sounds seem to float in and out of the mix. Interestingly, and

influentially, the bass occasionally alternates between the root and minor third—in particular, during the first four bars of the song, again after the first 16, and again after another 16, demonstrating the more “regular” workings of the riddim underneath Michigan & Smiley’s fairly “flexible” form. Despite the emphasis on the minor third in both the *Mad Mad* riff and in Flabba’s bassline, Michigan & Smiley sing on the major third during the chorus, at which points Scientist usually (but not always) mutes the minor third in the accompaniment in order to maintain some semblance of form and harmony. (Their singing during the verses focuses on the root and the fifth below, which fits well against the generally “open” tonality of the riddim.) The presence of the minor third evokes the blues tonality of the original, as pronounced in the *Mad Mad* riff, even as it changes the Studio One version’s play between I and ii chords to an ostinato-based form with an occasional “pull” away from the I (albeit within a single measure). Another element that stands out immediately is a swooping syn-drum mirroring the snare on beats 2 and 4—a feature that further sets Michigan & Smiley’s version apart from those that accompany the rest of the batch of songs recorded on Junjo’s *Mad Mad*. Significantly, the syn-drum drops out just after the 1:00 mark and does not return, suggesting that novelty and differentiation, especially as the song begins, are its main functions.¹⁵ The riddim is rounded out as the guitar riff, or a more subdued version played on organ, enters on occasion, punctuating Michigan & Smiley’s verses, while a piano chord, drenched in

¹⁵ Consistent with Jamaican musicians’ and producers’ embrace of technology, drum machines and syn-drums appeared relatively early on in reggae with respect to their advent more broadly in worldwide popular music production. Lee “Scratch” Perry had employed a drum machine on tracks such as “Dub Revolution” (1976), and Sly Dunbar had begun adding syn-drums into his productions from the late 70s. Even so, by the early 80s, syn-drums—and synthesized accompaniment more generally—remained rare in reggae and thus retained a kind of novelty quality. It was not until the synth-explosion heralded by Jammy’s “Sleng Teng” riddim (1985) that synths became ubiquitous in reggae production.

reverb, infrequently (but increasingly as the song progresses) interjects itself into the riddim providing a kind of grounding, if an unsettling, offbeat one, for the DJs' chants.

And chant they do. "Diseases" is firmly in the Rastafarian tradition of "chanting down Babylon"—of using music, or the trinity of word-sound-power more generally, to rail against "Western political and economic domination and cultural imperialism."¹⁶ Such a strategy is but one embodiment of the "cultural turn" in Jamaica, the move from politics qua politics to cultural politics that has marked a great deal of political activity, especially in Jamaica, since the mid-twentieth century. Michigan & Smiley's chant also draws attention to the degree to which reggae and Rastafari had become integrated by the end of the 70s. They employ the distinctive argot of Rastafarians, as in their self-identification as "I-man." They also conflate Rastafari's opposition to national and global regimes of domination with a conservative, patriarchal code, drawn in some part from Leviticus, which, despite its own forms of local domination, similarly seeks to mobilize against the forces of corruption. Giving voice to a locally resonant, if complex, critique, the vocal duo—a classic combo in both early dancehall and early hip-hop—wax puritanical on "Diseases," raining down apocalyptic visions on a modern world that, with its women in trousers, weapon proliferation, and vanity worship, calls for Jah's vengeance:

[intro]

All give thanks and praise unto the Most High...

Because all these things are abominations to the Lord, God, yeah

[verse]

Cause everyday the girls dress up inna trousers

I say, what happen to your skirts and blouses?

Why can't I-man see you in your dresses?

¹⁶ Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Introduction: The Rastafari Phenomenon," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Murrell, et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 1.

Cause these things unto Jah Jah nuh pleases
 And everyday them a worship vanities
 And your greatest lust is jewelries,
 [chorus]
 Mind Jah lick you with diseases, hey
 Mind Jah lick you with diseases, hey
 The most dangerous diseases
 I say, the most dangerous diseases
 I talking like the elephantitis
 The other one is the poliomyelitis
 Arthritis and the one, diabetes
 [verse]
 You see, cause every day that I turn the Bible pages
 From Proverbs forward to Genesis
 Ca' Revelations to Ecclesiastes
 Ca' let me tell you say me wisdom increases
 And the lust of the world it decreases
 While everyday man a build explosives
 The corruption of the world it exposes
 [chorus, etc.]

Michigan & Smiley's critique is both mitigated and propelled by the odd, if not comical, array of diseases they enumerate, beginning with the frightening but rare case of elephantitis—not to mention the mix of serious viruses and other common afflictions, some fairly mundane (e.g., arthritis). Later in the song they change their rhetorical frame: their public warning, “Mind Jah lick you with diseases,” becomes a direct entreaty to God, “Jah, you fi lick them with diseases.” It would be another 20 years before the duo could muster some serious evidence for their earlier call, finding affirmation in a seemingly increasingly diseased world. On “Jah Lick We”—a past-tense confirmation of their warning—the two update their early 80s hit over a 2002 re-lick of the *Mad* *Mad/Diseases* riddim, asking, “Have you heard about the anthrax diseases? / Not to mention the A.I.D.S. and the herpes?”

Driven more by message and by the repetitive, internal logic of their chants, the duo's verses, choruses, and transitional sections on “Diseases” vary widely, and oddly, in

length. Although the six bar verse following the four bar introduction mirrors the form of Ellis's "Mad Mad Mad," the seven bar choruses depart significantly from any semblance of symmetry, aside from an idiosyncratic, (somewhat) internally consistent one. They interrupt the third verse, for instance, by repeating a two-bar refrain on the same melody of the chorus, "Jah, we need your advices, hey / Help us out of the crisis," before launching into a modified version of the first verse, creating a fourteen bar section in the middle of the song.¹⁷ The mid-song refrain is further set apart, or perhaps made possible, by Scientist's "knob-twisting" mix—a technique common to reggae mixing (and later adopted by hip-hop producers) in which the volume knob/slider, often the master volume though sometimes for particular channels (see, for example, the bass just before the 2:00 mark), is rhythmically manipulated so that the riddim drops out, highlighting the song's text as it provides short, typically syncopated bursts of accompaniment.¹⁸ This style of mixing represents yet another facet of the creative contributions of the engineer, which, of course, always occur in sympathetic dialogue with the musicians and vocalists.

Inna di Local Connection: A Musical Germ Catches On

Resonant in both form and content with the dancehall massive, Michigan & Smiley's "Diseases" was so popular song that its accompaniment became a definitive and influential version, or riddim, in its own right, and various elements of the song appeared

¹⁷ Although repeating the first verse as the third verse has become a dancehall convention, it usually follows a second chorus rather than the half-verse we hear here. At any rate, these latter verses are typically given less emphasis, for selectors rarely play a song in a soundsystem/dancehall setting beyond the second chorus, often moving to a next selection well before that.

¹⁸ Notably, engineers throughout the 80s (and since) frequently choose to mark out a 3+3+2 pulse with such knob-twisting accents. Serving as breaks in otherwise prevalingly duple songs, these syncopations connect to popular, traditional Caribbean rhythmic traditions and anticipate dancehall's shift by the early 90s to a strongly-marked 3+3+2 rhythm.

in subsequent dancehall songs by other artists. Thus the “*Diseases* riddim” now identifies the classic strains of the *Mad Mad*, whether in subsequent or prior recordings, for a good many selectors, artists, and aficionados.¹⁹ The chorus melody became a traveling musical meme of its own, as various contemporaries of Michigan & Smiley employed its familiar contours to connect with audiences as well as to comment, directly or indirectly, on “Diseases.” Nicodemus, for example, who also voiced over the *Mad Mad/Diseases* for Junjo, adapts Michigan & Smiley’s chorus for his own, maintaining the melodic contour while changing the words to “Boneman Connection” (1982), which continues as a quasi-mystical, semi-nonsensical, and yet rather catchy chant, riffing on the enduringly popular spiritual, “Dem (Dry) Bones”:

Inna di Boneman Connection,
Believe me tell you, dis ya Boneman Connection...
Me skullbone connected to me jawbone,
Me jawbone connected to me collarbone,
Me collarbone connected to me chest bone,
Me chest bone connected to me ribs bone,
Me ribs bone connected to me spine bone...
What a whole heap o’ bone!

Another early dancehall DJ, Lord Sassafrass, who shortly thereafter recorded a song called “Horse Man Connection” (1982) over producer Bunny Lee’s *Mad Mad*, also makes reference to the “Diseases” melody, if via Nicodemus. Singing the same descending melody that Nicodemus applies to “Boneman Connection” on the words “Horse Man Connection,” Sassafrass changes the thematic focus to local racehorses:

¹⁹ Named after other noteworthy re-licks (see below), the *Johnny Dollar* and *Golden Hen* also refer to the *Mad Mad* riddim-complex more generally. In the case of the *Golden Hen*, however, discriminating listeners associate a particular feature that stems not from the original riddim: a bubbling horn-riff alternating between a root tone and the minor third above, landing on the minor third on beats 2 and 4.

Inna di Horse Man Connection,
 Dis a Horse Man Connection...
 Say Sinbad connected to Nomad,
 Say Nomad connected to Baghdad...
 What a whole heap o' dad and lad!

The version that accompanies Sassafrass's lyrics, despite being noticeably slower (ca. 5 bpm) and somehow—in the irreducible, often indescribable realm of timbre—less “punchy” than the Junjo-produced track, represents one of many versions of the *Mad Mad* to follow the Volcano re-lick.²⁰

Junjo's and the Radics' re-interpretation of the *Mad Mad* thus embodied a new direction for the versioning of well-worn riddims, and emergent and established producers alike followed their lead. Subsequent local hits on the *Diseases* re-lick voiced for Junjo by popular DJs such as Toyah, Cocoa Tea, Josie Wales, Clint Eastwood & General Degree, Yellowman, et al., increased the riddim's allure for contemporary artists and producers. Although riddim re-licks had become rather common by this point, the profusion of *Mad Mad* versions in the early 80s are no doubt related to the immense popularity of “Diseases.” The *Mad Mad* thus accrued resonance multiply and cyclically during the early 80s as a number of other contemporary re-licks of the *Mad Mad*—all inspired by the success of the *Diseases* version—served to reinforce the riddim's stature among the pool of frequently versioned classics. Other contemporary re-licks of the *Mad Mad* thus merit some mention and analysis in order to appreciate the way that these

²⁰ A difference of 5 bpm can make a big difference in a world where vinyl recordings provide the basis for performance. Despite being on the “same” riddim in some sense, Sassafrass's “Horse Man Connection” and Nicodemus's “Boneman Connection” would be difficult to “juggle” as one would have to be significantly slowed down or sped up to mix easily into the other. On the other hand, reggae selectors generally display less concern for “smooth mixing” (compared to, say, hip-hop or techno DJs), so a simple pull-up might suffice as a segue. Even so, the difference of the Bunny Lee version in this regard is remarkable considering the degree to which other *Mad Mad* versions from this era, including Junjo's, Sly and Robbie's, and George Phang's, align with each other in terms of tempo.

materials not only stayed pliant throughout the early 80s but maintained a significant presence in the reggae soundscape (both in Jamaica and in the diaspora, as we will hear).

As heard on Sassafrass’s “Horse Man Connection,” veteran producer Bunny Lee attempted to put his own mark on the *Mad Mad*, recording with the Aggrovators, a popular session band since the mid-70s (and the innovators of the “flyers” style), and hiring Prince Jammy to mix the record at Tubby’s studio. Lee’s *Mad Mad* is fairly unremarkable in comparisons to other versions of the classic riddim and has been all but forgotten. While it borrows a number of features from Junjo’s version, it also departs in significant ways. The bassline is essentially the same in rhythmic terms, playing the root tone on each beat with a pick-up on the fifth arriving on the offbeat just before the 1. Rather than staying on the tonic with an occasional jump, halfway through the measure, to the minor third (as Flabba Holt does), the bass on Lee’s version moves around a fair amount, spending an occasional measure on ii, iii, and sometimes V, and at times outlining a two-bar chord progression that moves from I to iii to ii to V. Sassafrass seems unaffected by the changes, maintaining a fairly independent melody for his voicing—albeit one clearly indebted to Michigan & Smiley, Nicodemus, and, among other sources, “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” (perhaps via Yellowman, who made a regular practice of using melodies from children’s songs and other “traditional” fare in his performances).²¹ The drumming essentially follows the kick-snare backbeat of the Roots Radics’ version, save for a different intro and new fills. The *Mad Mad* riff, played on a guitar in a manner

²¹ Of course, it should be noted that borrowed melodies are a staple of Caribbean popular song (and of musical practice more generally)—and of the reggae tradition in particular. Tracing melodies across time and space in this manner reveals all sorts of sonic and social connections. See, e.g., the discussion of the *Zunguzung* meme below.

clearly reminiscent of Noel Bailey's performance, makes an appearance early in the song, identifying the classic riddim immediately for local listeners.

Various Versions of the Virus: From Johnny Dollar to Golden Hen

Sly and Robbie also produced a version of the *Mad Mad*, and a tune on it—Roland Burrell's "Johnny Dollar" (1982)—which proved strong enough that, like the *Diseases*, it became yet another name to describe the *Mad Mad* as well as a unique expression of the well-worn riddim. As with Bunny Lee's version, Sly and Robbie's *Johnny Dollar* clearly borrows a number of features from the Roots Radics' stark interpretation of the Studio One original. We hear a spare, kick-snare drum pattern, treated with a Channel One-like, "crisp" equalization. Robbie plays a rather similar bassline as well, hammering on the root up to the 4th beat of each measure, adding an accent on the octave to Holt's fifth on the turnaround; moreover, he sometimes plays the turnaround portion of the phrase, in an improvisational manner, on the first half of the measure. In another departure, the bass migrates to ii for a measure at around 1:48. A horn section plays the *Mad Mad* riff during the introduction and again after the chorus. It is thus reminiscent, despite being subtly re-syncopated, of the Studio One version as of Junjo's; unlike later versionists, industry veterans Sly and Robbie would have been familiar with the Ellis original. The syn-drum intro recalls the oddly piercing sound effect that mirrors the snare drum in "Diseases." At the same time, no stranger to syn-drums himself (and, indeed, a major proponent and early adopter), Sly demonstrates a kind of virtuosity on the instrument, delivering a distinctive and disorienting syn-drumroll that

would announce the version immediately at any dance. Internationalist in their outlook and sound, Sly and Robbie add some unusual touches to the arrangement, including a harmonica (in the style of Stevie Wonder) and a cowbell.²² They also apply to the version their own dub-style mixes, with snares and guitar chords exploding in reverb, and different layering styles depending on the version in question. Whereas the Riddim Twins' mix of the same re-lick for Yellowman's "Soldier Take Over" frequently leaves only the bass, drums, and percussion as accompaniment, on "Johnny Dollar," the other instruments in the arrangement—especially the guitars and harmonica—have a more constant presence. It may lack the Channel One "punch" of *Diseases* (not to mention the array of "big tunes" or compelling voicings), but *Johnny Dollar* stands among the more well-known versions of the *Mad Mad*.

Ever the in-demand studio hands, Sly and Robbie also contributed to a re-lick of the *Mad Mad* which underlies what may be the closest homage to Ellis's original of all subsequent versions, Cornell Campbell's "Chatty Chatty Too Much." Like "Mad Mad Mad," Campbell's song takes gossip as its subject. Moreover, the main melody—accentuated by a soul-infused, melismatic falsetto—mirrors Ellis's vocal line quite closely, while a reverberant backup vocal offers the same sort of echoed response to each line's call as heard on the 1967 original. Campbell's version explores more explicitly, and darkly, the relationship between hearsay and danger: "I wouldn't want you for my wife, oh no / else someday, you might stab me with a knife." Toward the end of the song, as Campbell riffs extemporaneously over the riddim, he ties his stance on gossip to his righteousness as a Rastafarian: "I'm a man who don't love to fight and make fuss, no /

²² Sly and Robbie were among the most sought after of Jamaican producers in the 1980s and 90s, working with such "international" acts as Grace Jones, Joe Cocker, Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan, and Cyndi Lauper.

I'm a righteous dread, yeah / I'm a righteous Rastaman, yeah / I don't love backbiters, no / I don't love hypocrite, no." Despite its connections to the Ellis original, as on other 80s-era re-licks of the *Mad Mad*, here a condensed chordal harmony takes the place of the more baroque form of "Mad Mad Mad." Additionally, newer studio technology and the engineering wizardry of Prince Jammy and Scientist make the individual instrument lines stand out: the kick is dry and punchy, the snare bathed in subtle reverb; a crisp, steady hi-hat sits in the left channel while the bass, fat and warm, is centered; the organ, piano, guitar, and horns are balanced and panned in such a way as to create a sense of space, underscoring the band's interplay around the riddim's major memes.

The flurry of activity swirling around the *Mad Mad* and related musical materials in the early 80s is part and parcel of reggae's foundational, and intensifying, practice of "versioning," a practice which includes paying tribute to, crassly appropriating, and variously signifying on previous recordings and other familiar elements of the Jamaican soundscape. Keeping the riddim in the ears of artists and audiences, dancehall reggae's most influential producers continued to version and to project its familiar riff, bassline, and attendant melodies. But at least as central to the spread of the *Mad Mad* are the melodies and texts delivered by singers, DJs, singjays, and, later, rappers or MCs. As we follow the *Mad Mad* into the mid- and late-80s and to places beyond Jamaica's shores, we will hear that the story told in the movement of such musical materials grows increasingly complicated and intertwined, with allusions both close and distant testifying at once to reggae's powerful projection outside of Jamaica and to its paradoxical disappearance into urban ubiquity.

Another important contemporary version of the *Mad Mad* served to underlie a series of George Phang productions for his Powerhouse label from 1984, including Michael Palmer's "Lick Shot," Toyan's "Hot Bubble Gum," and Winston Hussey's "Body No Ready." Notably, although Phang's *Mad Mad* also featured Sly and Robbie as musicians, the version sounds markedly different from *Johnny Dollar*, reflecting changes in technology and in dancehall style. To the familiar features of the *Mad Mad*, including the syn-drums that appeared on both *Diseases* and *Johnny Dollar*, Phang's version adds synth-claps, a pronounced (and somewhat chintzy) electric keyboard, and some occasionally "busier" drumming, including a 3+3+2 kick-drum pattern. Additionally, the various instrumental tracks are, once again, given the dub treatment: pulled in and out of the mix, treated with heavy reverb and delay, and, when desirable (as on the bass), pushed "into the red" creating a "warm," heavy analog distortion. Phang's version, although never earning its own name, is especially significant for this discussion, as the songs produced on it found favor in the metropolitan areas where Jamaicans were increasingly settling during the 1980s. As a result, as we will hear, several melodies associated with the Phang productions turn up in a number of NY-based hip-hop songs.

Phillip Fraser's "Please Stay" (1983) is a fairly obscure and unremarkable recording (if a local hit in its day) but nonetheless demonstrates the persistence and ubiquity of the *Mad Mad* in the early 80s. Fraser recorded at both Channel One and King Tubby's studio and worked with various producers, including Junjo, and several house bands, from the Soul Syndicate to the Roots Radics to the High Times Band. The *Mad Mad* version for "Please Stay" hardly strays from the ones we have considered to this point: the Radics' bassline and drum pattern are an audible influence (though the bass

also recalls Robbie's variation on *Johnny Dollar* and the drums add, with both kicks and snares, additional accents creating 3:2 cross-rhythms); the familiar riff appears immediately after the introductory drum-roll, played on a sole saxophone (rather than a horn section or guitar, as on other versions); a bubbling guitar line provides melodic counterpoint throughout the song; and a piano chord heavy with reverb erupts into the texture, in dub fashion, on the occasional pick-up to the downbeat. Occasionally the vocals are also treated in this manner, as on the phrase "all night long," which reverberates in suggestive sympathy with the sentiment. Fraser's lyrics address a typical love song theme: "Girl, I love you and I don't want you to leave me, please stay." Demonstrating that the *Mad Mad* could support "old fashioned" love songs as well as suspicious indictments of gossip, Fraser's recording helped as well to amplify the pliant, familiar strains of the *Mad Mad* in the reggae imagination.

Like *Diseases* and *Johnny Dollar*, another contemporary version worth our consideration also earned itself the distinction of crowning yet another variation on the *Mad Mad*. The riddim underlying Tenor Saw's "Golden Hen," which gave its name to the version, stands out among other versions through its memorable horn line. Announcing itself from the opening measure, the horns trace a movement, much like the original riff and the *Diseases* bassline, from the root to the minor third. Significantly, perhaps in deference to the strong horn line, the familiar *Mad Mad* riff is absent on "Goldern Hen." Nevertheless, the version's chordal structure, drum pattern, and bassline—in particular, Flabba Holt's recognizable riff—signal that the *Golden Hen* is indeed a version of the *Mad Mad*. Aside from the horn riff, though, what made the *Golden Hen* a notable version is, undoubtedly, the prominence it gained as an accompaniment to Tenor Saw's haunting

voice, quasi-proverbial lyrics, and strangely mundane subject—an attempt to clear his name after a female acquaintance, upon leaving his house, fainted in public. A rising star in the mid-80s, and a dancehall favorite across the Jamaican diaspora, Tenor Saw, who recorded his debut for George Phang’s Powerhouse label, voiced a number of “big tunes” before his untimely death amid mysterious circumstances in Houston, Texas in 1988. Produced by Keith “Gorgon” Wignal in Kingston in 1985, *Golden Hen* is additionally noteworthy since the mix of the riddim (for Tenor Saw’s song) that circulated most widely was issued by the London-based Uptempo Records run by British-Jamaican Steve King, the former owner of the aptly-named Exile label. Thus the *Mad Mad* connects, via the *Golden Hen*, yet another postcolonial node in this story of musical (and social) migration. Adding to its allure, the *Golden Hen* has been re-versioned a number of times by other producers, lending its unmistakable horn riff to subsequent versions of the *Mad Mad* and further intertwining the riddim’s various strands.²³

Here Come the Counteraction Tune: Musical Allusions and (Dis)Articulations

As we have heard, the riddim underlying Michigan & Smiley’s “Diseases” and the sing-song melodies they chant over it served as particularly powerful vehicles for the transmission of the *Mad Mad*. The power of these sounds to inspire new versions has, in turn, added to the riddim’s resonance even as subsequent performers have sought to signify on and distinguish their songs from “Diseases.” Just as often, however, vocalists have employed these materials in symbolic alignment with Michigan & Smiley.

²³ Among these subsequent versions that nod to the *Golden Hen* are King Jammy’s 1994 re-lick and Downsound Records’ 2005 version, the *Dutty Rub* (produced by Black and White). We will consider these riddims’ connections to the *Golden Hen*, and the *Mad Mad* more generally, below.

Yellowman invokes the descending chorus-melody of “Diseases” in his first major hit, “Soldier Take Over,” produced by Sly and Robbie on the Riddim Twins’ own version of the *Mad Mad*, the *Johnny Dollar*.²⁴ The albino DJ’s invocation of Michigan & Smiley’s social critique on “Soldier Take Over” should come as little surprise in a song so frankly critical of *Babylon*—a term which indicts local police, including soldiers of the Jamaica Defence Force, as frequently as it refers to the corruption of the West more generally. The resonance of Michigan & Smiley’s Rastafarian opposition undoubtedly would have bolstered the affective force of Yellowman’s critique, especially for listeners hearing the tracks side-by-side. Sly and Robbie employ dub’s layering techniques to highlight the military themes of the song, at times pulling out all layers save for Sly’s Radic-ally minimal drumming, making the music resemble a march while Yellowman chants, “Leff, Right, Leff, Right.”

Yellowman would soon employ the “Diseases” melody yet again, including the verse melodies, but this time in order to critique Michigan & Smiley’s Rastafarian conservatism with regard to sexual mores (and he does so over a different riddim entirely, demonstrating again the separation between riddims and voicings). Such a position, endorsing what became considered a “slack” attitude toward morals, was consistent with Yellowman’s focus on himself as an ironic sex object—a strategy confronting his pariah status as an albino—as well as with a tradition of bawdiness in Caribbean song more generally. Employing musical and textual allusions to “Diseases,” Yellowman’s

²⁴ More accurately, perhaps, Yellowman connects Michigan and Smiley’s melody to a similar one employed by Bobby Aitken, who sings the same phrase as Yellowman—“when the soldier take over”—with a similar melody, on the rocksteady protest number, “Curfew” (1966). There is little doubt, however, that singing this melody over a version of the *Mad Mad* would evoke “Diseases” for a good many listeners, especially since Yellowman’s tune is, in fact, closer to Michigan and Smiley’s sing-songy recitation than to Aitken’s melody, which covers a wider range of pitches.

“Shorties” thus constitutes a classic act of “counteraction,” as they say in reggae parlance, roasting Michigan & Smiley as well as a number of other targets:

[intro]
 Now here come the counteraction tune...
 [verse]
 Ca’ Michigan tell you bout skirts and blouses
 Me a go tell you why the girls wear shorts
 They want Yellowman to see their legses
 The other time I see those creases
 But when the breeze blow it exposes
 The other time me haffi cork up me noses
 [chorus]
 Cause it full of diseases
 Man, it full of diseases
 Most the time a pink-eye diseases
 [verse, etc.]

Later in the recording, mirroring Michigan & Smiley’s mid-song refrain and entreaty to Jah, Yellowman warns, repeatedly: “You fi mind your own business / Before me wet you with a Guinness.” The DJ thus comically downplays Michigan & Smiley’s warnings, reducing polio to pink-eye (or conjunctivitis), even as he accepts that, at least in a pre-A.I.D.S. world, disease is a social nuisance. In acknowledging this reality, Yellowman confronts the Rastafarian position on the issue by noting that although promiscuous sex “sometimes gives us diseases,” it is possible to seek out a “cure by doctors and nurses”—thus endorsing a secular institution, modern medicine, which a number of Rastafarians disavow. His critique is made that much more effective because of its musical terms of engagement. It becomes, in essence, a counteraction *tune*.²⁵

The migrations of the “Diseases” melody, not to mention the re-licked riddim that so often accompanies it, thus demonstrate some of the ways that musical materials

²⁵ Yellowman was notoriously savvy about counteraction tunes. Perhaps most famously, and humorously, he recorded the counteraction to his own “I’m Getting Married,” recording the follow-up, “I’m Getting Divorced,” before anyone else could attempt the obvious.

circulate as meaningful resources for re-invention *within* reggae's aesthetic system, a practice of intertextuality that extends into hip-hop and continues back and forth between the US and Jamaica. It is precisely this audible intertextuality that creates meaning in specific listening contexts and moments of reception and allows us to trace the often mystified transnational circulation of music. Along these lines, it is worth noting that a "Diseases" meme turns up in 1994 on Queens-based rapper Nas's debut album, *Illmatic*. Toward the end of "Memory Lane"—a nostalgic number, weaving reminiscent rhymes over a similarly-inflected beat, a DJ Premier-produced two-bar loop of a soul-jazz sample—we hear echoes of Michigan & Smiley in Nas's outgoing boasts.²⁶ "The most dangerous MC is," raps Nas, followed by the scratched rhyme (which appeared in the chorus and now takes on different resonance), "coming out of Queensbridge." After four passes through this call and response, as if to confirm the connection, Nas delivers a rare, and not inept, line in Jamaican creole: "Me number 1, and you know where me from." Tellingly, Nas's words are treated with a good amount of echo, a dub marker and reggae signifier to many.²⁷ It is notable that Nas's Jamaican-ized chants at the end of the song are the only vocals to receive such treatment, suggesting a pointed attempt to evoke the

²⁶ According to the-breaks.com, the sample comes from organist Rueben Wilson's "We're in Love" from the Blue Note album, *Set Us Free* (1971).

²⁷ Studio One engineer Sylvan Morris was among the first reggae engineers to explore echo effects, both through devices such as the Echoplex (which Coxson purchased in the late 60s [see, e.g., Soul Jazz's *The Studio One Story* DVD]) as well as by inventing their own modules. "Echo wasn't that prevalent as now," Morris told David Katz while explaining how he created his own echo effects in the studio (*Solid Foundation*, 120). The work of reggae engineers, especially dub innovators such as Lee Perry and King Tubby, would influence reggae performance as it was informed by live soundsystem practice, where DJs quickly coveted the ability to project their voices so powerfully. Kool Herc's own embrace of echo at his early parties reflects this proclivity in soundsystem style. As Jeff Chang characterizes it, "Herc hooked up his mics to a Space Echo box, yard dance style" (*Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 78). And hip-hop producer Erick Sermon confirms echo's foundational importance to hip-hop, noting again its connections to live, informal, improvisational events, telling Brian Coleman: "The echo was heavy on that track [i.e., EPMD's "You Gots to Chill"]. We brought that from the street. If you went to any type of house party or block party, the Echo Chamber was the main attraction. . . . It was the essence of hip-hop. It was important" (*Rakim Told Me: Hip-hop Wax Facts, Straight from the Original Artists* [Somerville, MA: Wax Facts Press, 2005], 208).

sounds of Jamaica—a marriage of form and content. Moreover, the amount of echo approaches overkill, sounding more like an amateur attempt at dub than anything else. That the degree of delay creates more of a muddiness than a polyrhythm differentiates it from the more typically rhythmic uses of echo by reggae producers, perhaps demonstrating the irreducible distance between these scenes (despite their interpenetration) as well as, like a laughable attempt at creole, the inherent difficulties of translation or appropriation.

Hearing Nas's easily overlooked allusion provides us with yet another example—we will examine others shortly—of an American rapper representing a very local NY borough through the sounds of Jamaica, testifying to reggae's persistent presence and currency in New York's soundscape, as Nas's allusion appears some dozen years after "Diseases" first gained popularity. The invocation of Michigan & Smiley demonstrates reggae's resonance as a cultural resource, expressing a sense of place for various New Yorkers, not simply those of Jamaican or West Indian descent, but those who find such a subjectivity compelling (for various reasons, which we will explore below). As we will hear in the many movements of the *Mad Mad* through hip-hop and across the American soundscape, the meanings of Jamaicanness and reggae in New York have changed along with shifts in New York's population and its mediascape, its public representations of self and otherness.

CHAPTER SIX

**The “Zunguzung” Meme:
A Reggae Melody Hip-hopping, Criss-crossing, and Disappearing into Lexicon**

Despite the seemingly viral spread of “Diseases,” it was another voicing on Junjo’s re-lick of the *Mad Mad*, Yellowman’s “Zunguzung” (sometimes “Zunguzungunguzunguzeng”), which would project perhaps the most enduring and influential melody associated with the well-worn riddim. Yellowman’s chorus melody for “Zunguzung” has appeared, in slight and wide variation, rather consistently in reggae and hip-hop recordings since its climb up the dancehall charts in 1982.¹ As it has offered a compelling aural allusion for vocalists of all kinds, the tune’s simple but memorable contour provides, parallel to the *Mad Mad*, another alluringly audible set of sonic connections across time and space:

Figure 2: The “Zunguzung” Meme (AA version)²



¹ The melody possibly has origins elsewhere, as Yellowman routinely borrowed melodies from a wide range of sources (e.g., nursery rhymes, *My Fair Lady*, “The Candy Man” and other old pop fare)—a practice that he may have bequeathed to hip-hop, as it routinely turns up in the performances of artists such as Slick Rick and KRS-One, two MCs with West Indian heritage who regularly incorporate reggae style into their beats and rhymes (or flows—i.e., their rhythmic, timbral, and tonal performances of song texts).

² This transcription, and the one that follows (see Fig. 3), hew closely to the original key and specific contour of Yellowman’s performances, though it should be noted that the allusions to these melodies often depart from their exact shapes despite providing audible connections. As we shall hear, variation is part and parcel of the movement of the “Zunguzung” meme. Indeed, subsequent performances have even revised the general shape of the melodies, affirming the AA’ form depicted in Fig. 3, and beginning the phrase on a clear C#, whereas Yellowman’s original performance blurs the pitch toward C natural. I have chosen to depict the C# version here in a nod to the melody’s powerful afterlife. Thanks again to Nate Bakkum for assistance with the transcriptions.

Yellowman's mix of familiar and catchy melodies, disarming braggadocio, and creole poetics proved quite popular with the so-called "dancehall massive." His style was not only indicative of a return to local language that emerged as an increasingly popular alternative to the international success of reggae artists such as Bob Marley, it was also deeply influential, cementing for dancehall reggae such stylistic features as sing-song (or sung-spoken) delivery, snatches of folk melodies and pop tunes, self-referential lyrics, and a focus on sex and exceedingly local topics (e.g., marijuana eradication, the Jamaican police and military, black-Chinese relations, soundsystem practice, etc.).³

Like the familiar arc of the *Mad Mad* riff, King Yellow's chorus melody has become a musical meme of sorts, taking on a life of its own (if, significantly, often circulating along with other features of the *Mad Mad* riddim). The "Zunguzung" melody has become a true touchstone in reggae and hip-hop. Indeed, at this point, the tune's familiar contour has been so deeply absorbed into dancehall's and hip-hop's vocabularies that it is unclear whether subsequent performers and audiences, especially those unfamiliar with the early 80s reggae repertory, make an explicit connection to Yellowman in their invocation of his melody. Though some hip-hop vocalists, notably those of West Indian descent, demonstrate a clear engagement with reggae music, others more likely understand the allusion as one connecting only to previous hip-hop performances. The "Zunguzung" melody's appearance in such seminal hip-hop albums as BDP's *Criminal Minded* (1987), and in such watershed moments as the Biggie-Tupac feud, has imprinted the tune's familiar contour on the memories of generations of artists

³ See Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 242, for a discussion of dancehall's insularity, or its "nontranslatability" across social classes in Jamaica or other sectors of the African diaspora, including among African-Americans.

and audiences, many of whom have never heard (or heard of) Yellowman. The following is an undoubtedly incomplete, though suggestive, list of performances that audibly reference the “Zunguzung” tune, knowingly or not:

- 1982 – Yellowman, “Zunguzung”
- 1984 – Frankie Paul, “Alesha”
- 1984 – Toyan, “Hot Bubble Gum”
- 1985 – Super Cat, “Boops”
- 1987 – BDP, “Remix For P Is Free”
- 1988 – BDP, “Tcha Tcha”
- 1993 – K7, “Zunga Zeng”
- 1993 – KRS-One, “P Is Still Free”
- 1993 – Buju Banton, “Big It Up”
- 1994 – Bounty Killer, “Kill Or Be Killed”
- 1995 – Buju Banton “Man a Look Yu”
- 1995 – Junior M.A.F.I.A. (feat. Biggie Smalls), “Player’s Anthem”
- 1996 – Tupac, “Hit ‘Em Up”
- 1998 – Black Star, “Definition”
- 2000 – Dead Prez, “It’s Bigger than Hip-Hop”
- 2001 – Nejo, track 14, DJ Joe’s *Fatal Fantasy 1*
- 2003 – Joe Budden, “Pump It Up”
- 2004 – Jin, “Learn Chinese”
- 2004 – Vybz Kartel, “Tight Pussy Gyal”
- 2006 – POD, featuring Matisyahu, “Roots in Stereo”

Although the “Zunguzung” melody is clearly present in all of the examples above, some of these instances more closely resemble Yellowman’s tune than others. The proximity to the original in these subsequent recordings thus offers some indication of paths of circulation and degrees of removal. For that reason, before considering the list above as a constellation of locally-situated, meaningful moments of intertextuality, we should take a close, careful listen to Yellowman’s influential performance(s).

The “Zunguzung” melody first appeared in recorded form as an AA phrase (see Figure 2 above), but on a popular live recording released the same year (and presumably in other performances during this period) Yellowman changed the melodic contour on the

repetition of the phrase, singing the melody higher and creating an AA' structure.⁴

Significantly, it has tended to appear in this modified form ever since:

Figure 3: The “Zunguzung” Meme (AA' version)



Constituting yet another example of musical circuitry between Jamaica and the US, the live version of “Zunguzung” also features an adaptation of a popular, contemporary American song from that time, the ubiquitous “(Let’s Get) Physical” (1981) as sung by Olivia Newton John. Yellowman performs a Jamaican-ized version of the tune—“Unu haffi get physycyal, physycyal”—before he and his oink-ing, ribbit-ing sidekick, Fathead, call for a “pull-up” and launch into “Zunguzung” together, much to the crowd’s delight. For all their incongruousness, such borrowings from and localizations of American pop remained a staple of dancehall performance in the 1980s, as reflected on other contemporary recordings for Junjo’s Volcano label, such as Michael Prophet’s re-working of Diana Ross’s late-disco hit, “Upside Down.”

The riddim underlying Yellowman’s performances is Junjo’s *Mad Mad* re-lick, but although recognizably related to the version underlying “Diseases,” upon close inspection it reveals some clear variations in shape and sound. Despite employing the same instrumental tracks laid down by the Roots Radics, Scientist makes Yellowman’s version distinct in several ways, highlighting again the work of the engineer in wringing out “original” versions from well-worn materials. Indeed, it is almost as striking to note

⁴ Yellowman and Fathead, *Live at Aces: Feeding in the Dancehall* (1982).

the differences between the respective versions underlying two different voicings on Junjo's *Mad Mad* as to compare Junjo's *Mad Mad* and versions by contemporary producers such as Sly and Robbie, Bunny Lee, and George Phang. For example, the version of Junjo's *Mad Mad* underlying Josie Wales's "Leggo Mi Hand" foregrounds the organ more than any other, isolating it at points and "brightening" it in the overall equalization by amplifying the high- and mid-range frequencies. The version for Nicodemus's "Boneman Connection," on the other hand, seems to emphasize the guitar, applying a greater degree of reverb to it than other versions and making it cut through the texture with some sharp EQ. The Toyan version is noticeably faster (clocking in at almost 10 bpm more than "Diseases"), features regular passages of volume-slider "stop-time," and adds a sound effect to the snare drum that sounds like the tape slowing to a quick halt. Moreover, each of these versions has a form suited to the vocal performance, with the layers muted or brought out at the appropriate moments and knob-twist "breaks" applied at the right moments. Tailoring a version for a particular voicing had been, of course, a common practice from the days of Studio One's soundsystem "specials" in the late 60s.⁵

In true dub form, Scientist creates a subtly but profoundly different version of the Junjo's *Mad Mad* for Yellowman's voicing. He adds and removes instrumental layers and effects at different points in the song, highlighting particular passages and adapting the fairly regular song form recorded by the Roots Radics to Yellowman's rather idiosyncratic performance. "Zunguzung" contains verses of five, seven, and eighteen bars

⁵ The practice continues among the most prominent dancehall producers today, notably Stephen "Lenky" Marsden, whose versions of the *Diwali* riddim—in particular, the distinctive arrangements for Wayne Wonder's "No Letting Go" and Sean Paul's "Get Busy"—sounded sufficiently different, such that several songs on the same riddim could appeal simultaneously to American consumers unaccustomed to the "riddim method" of recording multiple vocalists on the same backing tracks.

and inserts a one-bar chorus in the middle of the song. In order to shape the riddim around such an improvisatory song form, Scientist pulls out various layers, especially bass and chordal elements, at crucial moments in the DJ's departure from the pre-arranged form. Performing such edits in a real-time mix-down, often rehearsed beforehand, the engineers thus "versions" the riddim in an improvisational and sensitive manner. Perhaps more noticeably, the version underlying King Yellow's quasi-proverbial toasts is faster (ca. 5 bpm) and higher pitched (by a half-step) than the version for "Diseases"—an effect produced by manipulating the playback speed of the analog tape to which the Radics recorded their performances at Channel One. Varying tape speed from version to version was a common practice in the analog era and represented a relatively easy way of manipulating pre-recorded materials in order to suit a vocalist's range, to make the bass sound "heavier" (as in cases where the tape was slowed for such an effect), or simply to provide some variety.⁶ One can hear the same practice in Sly and Robbie's versions of the *Mad Mad*: Yellowman's "Soldier Take Over" is slower and lower in pitch than Roland Burrell's "Johnny Dollar." Although the same drum-roll heard on "Diseases" introduces "Zunguzung," here it is drenched in reverb and echo and lacks the synthesized percussion of Michigan and Smiley's version. The distinctive guitar riff enters immediately, although here, as with the drums and vocals, it is more heavily treated with delay than on "Diseases." Moreover, a brassy version of the *Mad Mad* riff, first appearing at around 1:00 and often truncated and treated with a good amount of echo, further adds to the song's distinctive character.

⁶ Thanks to Michael Veal for confirming this as a common practice—indeed a "very common practice in the analog era"—for reggae producers and engineers (email correspondence, July 2005).

From Kingston to the Bronx: A Catchy Contour Crosses Over

“Zunguzung” was an immensely popular song—in Kingston, as well as in London, New York, and other sites of Jamaican migration. Confirming Yellowman’s popularity in New York in the early 80s, not to mention the already intertwined relationship between hip-hop and reggae, Daryl McDaniels (i.e., DMC of Run DMC) reports: “We grew up worshipping Yellowman, loving him, loving all of his records; what he said, how he sounded, how he looked, he was just cool. The Roxy, Harlem World, Union Square, Latin Quarter—they were all playing hip-hop and they were all playing Yellowman.”⁷ Accordingly, Yellowman’s catchy chorus-melody has resurfaced in reggae and hip-hop songs every few years or so since its release. The penetration of Yellowman’s melody into hip-hop’s lexicon is so deep at this point that it is unclear how many artists reference it as a knowing allusion to “Zunguzung.” It thus provides, like other elements related to the *Mad Mad*, an intensely audible path through the intertextual worlds of hip-hop and reggae.

The earliest echoes of Yellowman’s melody appear in several dancehall songs from about the same time period. Frankie Paul reproduces the AA' contour of Yellowman’s live version of “Zunguzung” on his song, “Alesha” (over the same George Phang re-lick of the *Heavenless* riddim that would underpin Half-Pint’s smash hit, “Greetings”). At the beginning of the first verse, Frankie Paul sings “hungry belly, di gal a hungry belly” to the tune of “zunguzungunguzunguzeng.” Notably, Frankie Paul begins

⁷ Liner notes, Yellowman, *Look How Me Sexy: Reggae Anthology* (VP Records, 2002). Yellowman’s popularity in clubs from NY to LA finds a kind of second-hand expression in later appearances, from original voicings to sampled phrases, on recordings from Run DMC (“Roots, Rap, Reggae”), Eazy-E (“Nobody Move”), and others. See “The 80s (Side B)” for an elaboration of these occurrences.

the track by dedicating the tune to “all girl name Alesha” and locates some of them “between Bedford and Flatbush,” thus registering—or even foregrounding—an awareness of the areas in Brooklyn that would increasingly constitute part of the Jamaican “nation” over the course of the 1980s. Furthering this connection, Frankie Paul’s scat-like “buddy-bye-bye-bye,” sung toward the end of the song, would, like Yellowman’s melody, also turn up in a number of late 80s hip-hop songs, especially in recordings by KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions, to which we will turn shortly.

Another contemporary instance can be found in Toyan’s voicing over Phang’s version of the *Mad Mad*. In “Hot Bubble Gum,” the DJ implores, adapting the familiar strains for his own chorus, “bubble for me, gal, bubble for me.” And in yet another example of multiple allusions in a single song, Toyan also adapts Yellowman’s chorus from “Body Moves”—“body move, body move”—which also appears in Barrington Levy’s contemporary song, “Money Move” (another Phang production) for his call to “bubble-gum, bubble-gum, say, do the bubble-gum.” Moreover, in another instance of foreshadowing, Toyan begins the song with a nonsensical chant, “wa-da-da-dang, wa-da-da-dang-dang,” which KRS-One later employs on “9mm Goes Bang” from *Criminal Minded* (1987). The degree of overlap and intersection here boggles the mind (and challenges the linearity of the narrative), but, as this *Mad Mad* story shows, such intertextuality is part and parcel of both reggae and hip-hop. As we can hear in Toyan’s and Frankie Paul’s borrowings, Yellowman’s “Zunguzung” was a resonant figure for early 80s dancehall. Their uses signify multiply, of course—nodding to Yellowman, seeking to connect with an audience familiar with such favorite tunes, and adapting the

phrase toward rather divergent ends, demonstrating the ways that the same materials could be used to evoke different meanings.

Yellowman's irrepressible melody resurfaced the next year in Super Cat's "Boops" (1985), a hit song exploring the phenomenon of men—the "boops" in question—who are easy marks for women in search of money. The appearance of the melody here is significant because Super Cat, as a migrant to NY, established a crossover audience (and an alliance to hip-hop) that perhaps even Yellowman had not attained. As we will see, Super Cat's music often served as a bridge between his dancehall predecessors and his hip-hop admirers. The "Zunguzung" melody's appearance in "Boops" is even more noteworthy because it is such a brief, fleeting allusion. Like other DJs of his time, Super Cat employs the short melodic contour of "Zunguzung" as he does a number of other "stock," sing-song melodies. Like a jazz saxophonist quoting a fragment of an old standard, the DJ makes an immediate connection to past performances and places himself firmly within an emerging dancehall tradition (and longstanding reggae practice). On the heels of Yellowman, Frankie Paul, Toyah, and other contemporary performers singing the same tune, Super Cat's musical gesture would have resonated with the listening public—or at least some female members of the audience—at precisely the moment (1:03) that the DJ calls for their participation: "Put up your one-ah if you wuv your boopsie..."

Up in the Boogie-Down Bronx, KRS-One and Scott La Rock of BDP (Boogie Down Productions) were clearly listening to Super Cat and versioning his versions. The bassline to "Boops" reappears as a stark piano riff in "The Bridge Is Over" (1987)—a classic hip-hop battle anthem which posits the Bronx as hip-hop's true place of origin, as

opposed to the rival Juice Crew's home, Queens[bridge]. The bassline underlying "Boops," replayed on a synthesizer, is itself derived from a Studio One classic with a long, very versioned history. Appearing in Marcia Griffiths's hit, "Feel Like Jumping" (1968), and Toots and the Maytals' "54-46 (That's My Number)" (1968), and closely resembling the bassline in the Ethiopians' influential "Train to Skaville" (1967), the bassline used in "Boops" has appeared in upwards of 100 different recordings.⁸ Speaking to hip-hop journalist Brian Coleman, KRS-One identifies "Boops" as the inspiration for the piano-riff in "Bridge is Over": "At that time there was a record by Super Cat called 'Boops' and it had the bassline I wanted, so I had the piano that was free in the studio. It was a real piano, and I played it live, one take, for the whole song."⁹ Ironically, BDP make their point about hip-hop's origins with a deeply Jamaican-inflected song, featuring not just a re-played reggae bassline but creole-peppered lyrics and common dancehall interjections (including "biddy-bye-bye" and "gwaan!").

Apparently (and audibly), by the mid-80s Bronx identity could be tied to Jamaican-ness rather unproblematically. "The Bridge is Over" appeared on *Criminal Minded* (1987), an album which many consider the first shot fired in the gangsta rap revolution and a blueprint for classic hip-hop. It is doubly ironic that BDP's gangsta stance comes filtered through the images of the infamous Jamaican "posses," drug- and gun-running gangs that came to dominate the trades up and down the Eastern seaboard during the 1980s. The gangsta pose of the posses is itself a product of international media

⁸ See <<http://www.dancehallmusic.de/riddimbase.php>> for a partial listing under the retroactively titled *Boops* riddim (also listed as *54/46* after the Toots and the Maytals song). The actual number, like that of the number of *Mad Mad* recordings, is likely much higher, especially when we take into account dubplates and other, less documented releases. In yet another example of intertextuality, Yellowman interpolates the melody from Toots's "54-46 (That's My Number)" on his track, "Nobody Move, Nobody Get Hurt," but he changes the phrase to "64-46 BMW."

⁹ Brian Coleman, *Rakim Told Me: Hip-hop Wax Facts, Straight from the Original Artists* (Somerville, MA: Wax Facts Press, 2005), 231.

circulation, as Jamaica's longtime infatuation with rebel gunslingers has been deeply informed by Hollywood's shoot-em-up cowboy flicks.¹⁰ A similar kind of "mirror/mirror" relationship, to borrow a phrase from Rex Nettleford, continues to inform the circuitous exchange of ideas between hip-hop and reggae. Since the 80s, however, the exchange has revolved around the gritty gangster imagery of contemporary ghetto hustlers and gunmen, informed more by Blaxploitation films and music videos than by Westerns.¹¹

Unsurprisingly, the *Boops* riddim is not the only reggae reference that one hears in the music of BDP: the *Mad Mad* riddim also makes an appearance on *Criminal Minded*, and, significantly, it is coupled with yet another interpolation of Yellowman's enduring tune. On "Remix for P Is Free" KRS-One invokes the "Zunguzung" melody in order to boast about his and his crew's dominance: "Yes, Scott La Rock, you know you rule hip-hop, / and, yes, Mr. Lee, a you fi rule hip-hop, / and, 357, you fi rule hip-hop, / but ah, KRS a rule it non-stop." More than Yellowman's or Super Cat's performances, it is this particular voicing of the "Zunguzung" melody that would prove to be the most influential with regard to future appearances in hip-hop recordings. KRS-One would reinforce further this figure's resonance for hip-hop listeners by invoking it yet again on "Tcha Tcha," a track on *By All Means Necessary* (1988) which juxtaposes dancehall's distinctive 3+3+2 drive and hip-hop's breakbeat-derived "boom bap."¹² On "Tcha Tcha"

¹⁰ See the theater scene in *The Harder They Come* (1972) for a vivid representation of Jamaican audiences' active and lively engagement with Hollywood Westerns.

¹¹ Films such as the Steven Segal vehicle, *Marked for Death* (1990), and hip-hop music video director Hype Williams's *Belly* (1999) have advanced the mythology of the "cool and deadly" Jamaican gangster for the hip-hop generation. These will be discussed in greater detail below.

¹² "Boom bap" is hip-hop parlance describing a particularly "hard" and often spare approach to drum programming: one that focuses on heavy kicks and crisp snares and typically marks a more even, if often subtly syncopated, subdivision of the meter. The "boom-bap" style defines the NY-based "true school" sound that certain hip-hop purists have elevated to the pinnacle of authenticity. KRS-One, who has become

BDP thus continue the practice of using Jamaican style as further fodder in hip-hop's braggadocio wedge-politics, and the "Zunguzung" meme continues to inform, if not structure, hip-hop composition. "Push up your hands if you're out here getting paid, / push up your hands if you don't have AIDS," KRS sings on the familiar tune, throwing in a "biddy-bye-bye" for good measure. Rather than providing a chorus melody, as on "Remix for P," Yellowman's tune on "Tcha Tcha" provides but one of several rotating melodies (including a hip-hop style monotone) used, in a nod to dancehall practice, to propel KRS's verses with familiar, resonant musical figures.

From Reggae Melody to Hip-hop Meme

As will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, Scott La Rock and KRS-One put their stamp on the *Mad Mad* as much as Junjo did, and the familiar *Mad Mad* riff, as sampled by BDP, has been closely associated with the particular drum pattern on "Remix for P" ever since. More important for the present discussion, KRS-One's interpolation of Yellowman's melody effectively and firmly embedded the familiar tune into the ever omnivorous hip-hop lexicon, to the point where, for many listeners (and even for some MCs who invoke the melody on recordings), the "Zunguzung" meme has become, more than a conscious reference to the reggae tradition, a foundational figure for the hip-hop idiom. Tracing a melody like "Zunguzung" through a couple decades of hip-hop recordings thus offers a rather audible way to apprehend the depth to which reggae has penetrated hip-hop's very vocabulary.

a kind of self- and fan-appointed spokesman for "real" hip-hop, laid claim to the resonant phrase—and the classic sound it invokes—on his solo album *Return of the Boom Bap* (1993).

Criminal Minded became such a touchstone for hip-hop that nearly everything in it—every phrase, every melody, every drum pattern—has become a “hip-hop quotable.” This degree of influence is a bitter pill for Posdnuos of De La Soul, who would prefer his own rhymes have such currency, as heard on De La’s “Stakes Is High” (1996): “Man, every word I say should be a hip-hop quotable.” Referring to the column in the *Source* magazine that prints the “top verse” of the month, Posdnuos bemoans the turn that hip-hop has taken since the late 80s, following the aggressive, violent *Criminal Minded* as a template for the genre rather than more playful, positive examples offered by, say, De La Soul’s debut, *3 Feet High and Rising* (1989). Addressing the centrality of *Criminal Minded* for hip-hop listeners, De La Soul open their album, *Stakes is High* (1996), with a series of answers to the question, “When was the first time you heard *Criminal Minded*?” The collage of nostalgic and often enthusiastic responses serves to confirm the album’s place in the hip-hop imagination. Treating it as a kind of Kennedy-assassination moment for the hip-hop generation, De La Soul seem ambivalent about its status, even as they recognize with some reverence the significance and power that BDP’s recording holds for a large number of hip-hop devotees (much more than, say, their own debut album, the same question about which closes *Stake Is High* with pointed silence).

Due to its immediate impact and subsequent canonical status, *Criminal Minded* has introduced more hip-hop listeners to the sounds of Jamaica, perhaps, than any reggae recordings in their own right. Especially for listeners outside the increasingly Caribbeanized boroughs of New York, KRS-One’s tuneful snatches are often taken to be, rather than the rich allusions that they are, simply products of his distinctive creativity. In many cases where subsequent MCs invoke the “Zunguzung” melody, it is probable that they

refer only to previous hip-hop performances—and sometimes without knowledge even of KRS-One’s second- or third-hand allusions. By following this familiar contour across nearly two decades of hip-hop recordings, we can appreciate not only the degree to which reggae has provided compelling—and indeed, seminal—figures for hip-hop’s local re-articulations, but the ways that, as with the *Mad Mad* riddim, artists and producers create specific sites of meaning—often with specific ends—that accrue affective force precisely because of their intertextual nature (even when a conscious appreciation of the complete genealogy is seemingly missing).

Some subsequent occurrences of the “Zunguzung” melody demonstrate a more obvious connection to the BDP recording than others. Black Star’s “Definition” (1998), for example, is essentially an homage to “Remix for P,” replaying BDP’s beat (complete with second-hand samples of the *Mad Mad*) and featuring Mos Def singing Yellowman’s melody with lyrics that subtly update the BDP version: “Say, Hi-Tek, yes, you’re ruling hip-hop / say, J. Rawls, yes you’re ruling hip-hop / Re:Definition, say, you’re ruling hip-hop / say, Black Star come to rock it, what!” Though we will examine “Definition” in greater detail below (see “The 90s” chapter), the song merits mention here for its explicit pre-occupation with the state of hip-hop after the violent, untimely deaths of the Notorious B.I.G. (a.k.a., Biggie Smalls) and Tupac Shakur (a.k.a., 2-Pac). The group’s use of the “Zunzuzung” melody in this context connects their song sonically to the appearance of the same melody in songs recorded by Biggie and Tupac.

Biggie’s use of the “Zunguzung” melody should be heard within the context of Brooklyn’s strong Jamaican character by the mid-1990s. On “Player’s Anthem” (1995), a song intended to promote his crew, the Junior M.A.F.I.A., Biggie bases his ribald refrain

on Yellowman's tune: "(Niggas:) Grab your dicks if you love hip-hop / (Bitches:) Rub your titties if you love Big Poppa." Significantly, the chorus is rounded out by a third line, "Gotcha open off the words I say, 'cause..." followed by a scratched-in, well-known sample from Slick Rick, another rapper of West Indian descent (via England), "this type of shit happens every day." The song paints a picture of "macking" in Brooklyn—"living large" and having the perfect soundtrack to go with it. To set the scene, Junior M.A.F.I.A. cohort Lil' Ceasar even adds a little Jamaican flavor to his verse, confirming place of creole in the city's argot: "Gwaan, grit your teeth, / gwaan, bite your nails to the cuticles." As a Brooklyn-bred, second-generation Jamaican, and longtime hip-hop devotee—"I used to read *Word-Up* magazine," he reminisces on "Juicy" (1994)—Biggie would have been familiar with BDP and most likely with Super Cat and Yellowman as well. Indeed, Brooklyn's Jamaican-ness subtly seeps out of Biggie's music, as he, like so many other Brooklynite rappers, incorporates reggae lyrics, creole phrases, and a range of Jamaican-identified interjections regularly and seamlessly into his recordings.

Circulation and Circularity: Dancehall DJs Emphasize a Resonant Phrase

It is also possible that Biggie's decision to re-use the "Zunguzung" melody was influenced not only by an affinity for rap and reggae recordings of the 80s, but by several contemporary recordings by dancehall DJs. Bounty Killer and Buju Banton allude to the well-known tune in their own recordings from this time. In such cases, the reference is subtle and yet unmistakable. Toward the end (3:00-3:30) of Buju Banton's, "Big It Up" (1993), the DJ introduces a new melodic contour, one that diverges from the "stock"

melodies he employs during the previous verses and choruses.¹³ In this section—an “outro” or coda of sorts—we again hear echoes of the “Zunguzung” melody which, like a number of catchy contours in the dancehall repertory, serves here as a kind of resonant riff for the DJ’s exhortations. The audible departure from the rest of the song highlights Buju’s allusion to Yellowman and others. Similarly, in Bounty Killer’s “Kill or Be Killed,” the DJ makes a passing reference to the melody during the first verse (at around 0:45). That Bounty otherwise stays within a more restricted melodic range during the verse serves to highlight his dip into the familiar descending strains of the “Zunguzung” melody. As with Super Cat’s brief use of the melody in “Boops,” we can hear Bounty’s tuneful reference as a way to connect with past performances resonant with a dancehall audience.

Often dancehall DJs pattern an entire verse, chorus, or song after an existing recording, either out of homage, “counteraction,” or simply in order to make a kind of referential gesture irrespective of any positive or negative connotation. The common practice of cover songs and borrowed materials has been a fundamental part of Jamaican popular music since its beginnings in cover versions of R&B hits. We can also hear this approach in Buju Banton’s “Man a Look Yu” (1995), whose chorus employs the familiar descending contour of the first half of the “Zunguzung” phrase and answers it with a line that more closely resembles other sing-song melodies characteristic of mid-90s dancehall. Again, there is an audible incorporation of the well-known tune, but the DJ demonstrates his own creativity by placing the melody within the context of his own musical inventions. As one of the most popular songs voiced on the ubiquitous *Pepper Seed*

¹³ For more elaboration on the use of “stock melodies” in late 80s and early 90s dancehall, see Peter Manuel and Wayne Marshall, “The Riddim Method: Aesthetics, Practice, and Ownership in Jamaican Dancehall,” *Popular Music* 25, no. 3 (2006): 452-3.

riddim, Buju's "Man a Look Yu" would have been heard widely across the Brooklyn soundscape. Notably, Bounty and Buju are among the dancehall DJs who enjoyed the most "crossover" success in 1990s, finding receptive audiences around the world, especially in sites of Jamaican migration such as New York, and collaborating with various hip-hop artists in yet another explicit example of the continuous musical circuitry between Jamaica and the US. Thus, in the year leading up to the recording and release of "Player's Anthem," Bounty and Buju were responsible for keeping the simple strains of the "Zunguzung" melody in the air.

The year following Biggie's tuneful take on "Player's Anthem" witnessed an intense, media-fueled, musically-driven, and ultimately tragic clash between the Notorious B.I.G. and his "West Coast" rival, Tupac Shakur. Significantly, the "Zunguzung" melody played a role in the quarrel, giving Tupac a sonic signifier with which to skewer Biggie's character. In his vicious attack-song, "Hit 'Em Up" (1996), Tupac employs the "Player's Anthem" chorus (0:53) in order to threaten Biggie and Junior M.A.F.I.A.: "Grab your glocks when you see Tupac / Call the cops when you see Tupac." He follows the melodically meaningful couplet with yet another layer of intertextuality, "Who Shot Me? / But you punks didn't finish," making reference to the incendiary "Who Shot Ya?"—a record on which Biggie taunts Tupac about being shot while at a New York recording studio. The latter reference would not be lost on most listeners, including Tupac's teenage fans, but the melodic connection to anything *but* "Player's Anthem" likely would. Unlike the allusions made by Brooklyn-based rappers (even when referring most explicitly to BDP), in this case the connection to Yellowman or BDP is essentially meaningless. Thus we witness a reggae reference wholly consumed

by its new context. Ironically, Biggie's and Tupac's use of the "Zunguzung" melody are probably the most widely heard versions, surpassing even BDP's *Criminal Minded* in terms of record sales, radio and club play, and, despite what some purists or old-schoolers might say, its place in the hip-hop imagination. The Biggie-Tupac feud captivated so many young listeners, constituting a kind of media-saturated indoctrination for a new generation of consumers, that it essentially—for better and, as some suspect, for worse—re-aligned the axes of hip-hop history. Subsequent occurrences of the "Zunguzung" melody perhaps more frequently reference Tupac and Biggie than KRS and Yellowman, and this shift (and collective amnesia) say a great deal about hip-hop's de-localization as mass media spectacle.

It is precisely this drift away from historically-informed cultural politics that the Tallahassee-raised, Brooklyn-based group dead prez seek to correct with their song, "hip-hop" (2000), a remix of which, called "it's bigger than hip-hop" and included at the end of their debut, *let's get free*, mobilizes the "Zunguzung" melody in order to communicate their critique in resonant, sonic form. Just as Black Star's invocation of the "Zunguzung" melody a few years prior conjured notions of hip-hop classicism (and revisionism) and evoked Biggie's and Tupac's prior uses of the tune, the similarly "socially conscious" duo of dead prez also employ the tune in a song that questions hip-hop's direction as it mourns the loss of two of the music's greatest talents: "Ride to this if you miss 2-Pac / bounce to this if you love Big Poppa." Their choice to use these strains, and the lyrics they put to the familiar tune, demonstrate that Yellowman's melody had come to signify Biggie and Tupac for the hip-hop audience as much as it did classic hip-hop (via BDP), but not, notably, reggae or US-Jamaican relations. Indeed, an Internet search turned up a

fan review that identifies the melody only with Biggie and Tupac and names Biggie as the originator:

It's Bigger Than Hip Hop is a faster version of **Hip Hop** with the same thematic. Only slightly weaker than part 1, this song is excellent, calling for unity in Hip Hop. At the end, they sing:

*"Ride to this if you miss 2Pac,
bounce to this if you love Big Poppa",*

as sung first by Biggie (*grab your dicks if you love Hip Hop, bitches rub your titties if you love Big Poppa*) on **Player's Anthem**, and then Pac (*grab your glocks if you see 2Pac, call the cops if you see 2Pac*) on his infamous East Coast diss, **Hit Em Up**.¹⁴ (formatting in original)

Of course, this association is precisely what dead prez are out to evoke, though the lack of connection to previous performances again reveals the degree to which hip-hop has absorbed musical figures from reggae. Interestingly, dead prez punctuate their "Zunguzung" couplet with onomatopoeic gunfire that at once recalls Biggie's "Bam Bam!" from "Gimme the Loot" (1994), which itself recalls the venerated tradition of imitating gunfire in dancehall reggae, including similar and specific instances such as Shabba Ranks's "Bam Bam!" on "Wicked Inna Bed" (1989). Thus, despite the cultural amnesia obtaining in the sphere of mass reception, we hear in dead prez's re-articulation a continued practice of rich, intertextual allusion. In this case, considering dead prez's pan-Africanist stance and calls for armed insurrection, the invocation of a Jamaican-ized imitation of gunfire, as most memorably voiced by a black Brooklynite, speaks volumes.

¹⁴ See "Freedom is the goal, Hip Hop is the means," an online review submitted by sin-da-cat, a.k.a., Jovan Cicomil of Montenegro. <http://www.epinions.com/content_183732768388> [accessed 24 August 2005].

Mixed Degrees of Separation: On Slippage and (Re)Signification

Other appearances of the “Zunguzung” melody in recent hip-hop recordings appear to say much less than the multivalent musings of dead prez, and yet they say a great deal about the continued penetration of the sounds of Jamaica into hip-hop’s lexicon. On Jersey City rapper Joe Budden’s “Pump It Up” (2003) we hear Yellowman’s easily identified tune during the chorus: “do your thing, let me do my thing / move that thing, mami, move that thing.” Interestingly, the melodic contour here resembles Yellowman’s original AA phrase, rather than the AA’ phrase that nearly all subsequent performers have employed. Of course, this could as easily—and perhaps more plausibly—be heard as either a product of increased distance from the original, of Budden’s limited range, or of his desire to keep the melody reigned in and perhaps more consonant with the underlying track. As none of Budden’s other songs connect explicitly to early 80s dancehall, it would seem unlikely that he is seeking to connect to the original recording of “Zunguzung.” Few audience members would discern a link to Yellowman in “Pump It Up,” or even connect the subdued melody to the better known versions by Biggie or Tupac.

The echoes of Yellowman’s catchy phrase grow even fainter in Jin’s “Learn Chinese” (2004), a recording released not long after (and in direct reference to) Joe Budden’s “Pump It Up.” Clearly alluding to Budden’s chorus, which was still ringing in the ears of the listening public, Jin intones: “Me, I’m just Jin, just doing my thing, just / *doing my thing, just doing my thing* / [*rhyme in Cantonese, which loosely translates to: sing a song and dance a dance*] / *why is there beef everywhere I go?*” [melodic lines in

italics]. As an allusion to an allusion (to an allusion to an allusion, etc.), “Learn Chinese” represents not just another node along the “Zunguzung” network but yet another degree of slippage from the tune’s reggae roots. The lines above are preceded by the young MC’s admission of having “Biggie Smalls posters all over the walls,” suggesting a likely knowledge of Biggie’s use of the melody, but not necessarily confirming a connection from Biggie to Budden to himself.

Enriching the level of intertextuality in this case, the barely audible connection to Yellowman’s melody from “Zunguzung” in “Learn Chinese” is, remarkably, overshadowed by a more overt borrowing from the dancehall DJ. The song features a recurring bridge of sorts, following the second and third instances of the chorus, during which female back-up singers offer some suggestive, deadpan nonsense syllables, “oo-long, shong-long, shong-long pie, / shong-long, shong-long pie, / oo-long shong-long, a picky pie pie, / a picky picky pie pie po,” before singing the rapper’s praises in terms that recall Yellowman’s carefully-crafted image: “Mr. Jin, you are the sexiest man, / Mr. Jin, I love the way you do your thing.” The entire routine closely reproduces, and clearly re-articulates, Yellowman’s “Mr. Chin” (1982), a song in which the DJ, adding yet another level of irony to his name, criticizes and stereotypes the local Chinese shop-owner—“Mr. Chin, boy, you fi sell the right ting”—while mimicking an imaginary Chinese song that the DJ alleges Mr. Chin and his daughters (who become Yellowman’s lovers) are known to sing. “Mister Chin” is consistent with Jamaicans’ rather free use of explicit racial stereotypes, as demonstrated by riddims such as the *Coolie Dance* (packaged with images of East Indians in traditional garb and exotic poses), songs such as Elephant Man’s hilarious, self-deconstructing “Mexican Girl,” and commonly-used racial descriptors,

including “Indian,” “Whitey,” “Chiney,” “Brownman,” “Redman,” etc. An uneasy mix of frankness and racist ideologies marks Jamaica’s public attitudes toward race and ethnicity, and Yellowman’s “Mr. Chin,” for all its overt stereotyping, gives form to racially-defined class-tensions in Jamaica. Despite a population that comprises over 90% people of African descent, an entrenched, shade-based class system enshrines wealth and power among white and “brown” elites. And yet, the sense of black pride nurtured by Garveyists, Rastafarians, and Afro-Jamaicans more generally, means that the true minorities in Jamaica—those of Chinese, East Indian, European, and Middle Eastern descent—are treated and labeled as such. Presumably through the guidance of reggae-savvy producer Wyclef Jean, Jin takes Yellowman’s barbed, if comedic, stereotypes—including musical ones—and turns them around in order to make a statement about his own ethnocentric and linguocentric pride. He peppers his lyrics with Cantonese, reminds listeners that Chinese laborers “built the railroads” in the US, and declares that his audience will learn to speak Chinese, or else: “Y’all gon’ learn Chinese, / when the pumps [i.e., guns] come out, y’all gon’ speak Chinese.”

The ironies and layers of meaning in “Learn Chinese” are practically too many to count: a Chinese-American rapper interpolating a melody sung by an albino Afro-Jamaican named Yellowman in a song that revels in stereotypes about Chinese-Jamaicans, while a Haitian-American producer employs Jamaican slang, samples a well-worn James Brown loop, and replays a hackneyed “oriental” melody on an Eastern-sounding synth-lute. That Jin also references Yellowman a second time, if second-hand, by riffing off Joe Budden and Biggie Smalls only adds to the oddity, and yet the complex resonance, of the entire production. By embracing and debunking American stereotypes

of Asians or Chinese, deploying and re-signifying Jamaican stereotypes of Chinese-ness (where they constitute a minority, wealthy, merchant class), Jin follows a tortuous but well-worn path. The embrace of ethnic stereotypes—at once empowering and degrading—is a common strategy of non-black rappers: House of Pain took a similar tack with signifiers of the Irish working class; Cypress Hill, Big Pun, and other Latino rappers have sought to emphasize their Chicano-ness, Puerto Rican-ness, or Nuyorican-ness; Eminem and Kid Rock proudly wore the badges of White Trash culture; and so on. Jin carves out space for himself—notably, through signifiers of blackness and Jamaican-ness—as another kind of pariah yellowman: “Yeah, I’m Chinese. *And* what?!”

And what a long, strange trip Yellowman’s melody has taken. It continues to turn up in hip-hop and dancehall recordings in verbatim and ever more fragmentary forms. Hear hip-hop-inflected dancehall DJ Vybz Kartel, for example, create a Frankenstein melody from the first half of Yellowman’s “Zunguzung” tune and the second half of Buju Banton’s “Bogle Dance” for his typically lewd song, “Tight Pussy Gyal” (2004). And the recombinant character of hip-hop, reggae, and their various musical offspring ensures that their most well-worn figures appear in new contexts again and again. Thus note the radical recontextualization of dead prez’s *a capella* vocals for “it’s bigger than hip-hop” over the border-baiting producer Filastine’s “Judas Goat” (2005)—a beat comprising hip-hop drums with reeds and percussion recorded in Marrakech—as mixed by Boston-bred, Barcelona-based DJ /rupture for his eclectic, world-urban mix, “Low-Income Tomorrowland” (2005). Or hear Puerto Rican *reggaetonero* Nejo employ the tune for a chorus on DJ Joe’s *Fatal Fantassy 1* (2001), imposing the contour over a track built on the familiar synth “stab” from the *Drum Song* riddim. Or in yet another twist, hear

Yellowman's perennial melody turn up in a collaboration between quasi-Christian Nu Metal group POD and Hasidic singjay Matisyahu on "Roots In Stereo" (2006), providing an audible articulation of both acts' crucial engagements with genres cast as quintessentially oppositional, hip, and black.

Undoubtedly, the familiar contours of the "Zunguzung" melody, now firmly ensconced in several repertoires, will continue to reappear—with or without conscious connection to its reggae roots. In these myriad migrations of a multivalent meme, we hear reggae's reach into the world beyond Jamaica and the different shapes that musical forms can take when so rooted in routes. We also hear the undeniable and seminal presence of reggae in hip-hop. As an adjunct to the peregrinations of the *Mad Mad* riddim, the "Zunguzung" melody thus offers an audible demonstration of the deeply intertextual relationship between Jamaican and American music, of the remarkable range of meanings such shared musical materials can express (both contingent on and irrespective of connections to earlier appearances), and, ultimately, of reggae's ironic disappearance into hip-hop's very vocabulary.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The 80s (Side B): *A Jamaican Accent Becomes a Hip-hop Accent*

The first hip-hop song to “version” the *Mad Mad* is Boogie Down Productions’ “Remix for P Is Free” on their seminal album, *Criminal Minded* (1987). The BDP track features a truncated, but instantly recognizable, sample of the guitar riff from Junjo’s relick of the classic riddim. The appearance of the *Mad Mad* and so many other allusions to reggae on *Criminal Minded* offers strong evidence not just of reggae’s prominent profile in New York by the mid-80s but of the increasingly compelling resonance and affective force of the sounds and images of Jamaica in the urban areas of the Eastern Seaboard and, more and more, in mainstream American culture. Notably, despite the glut of reggae references infusing *Criminal Minded*, of all the samples BDP employ on the album (including such pop fare as AC/DC’s “Back in Black”), “Remix for P” is the only instance where producers Scott La Rock and Ced Gee actually sample a reggae recording.

KRS-One believes it was the Michigan & Smiley recording that inspired the sample: “Scott was big into reggae, too, just like I was. I think he took Michigan & Smiley’s ‘Dangerous Diseases,’ which was a huge record back in ‘80s.”¹ Indeed, *Criminal Minded* is literally filled with melodies, phrases, and vocal interjections—*bidly-bye-bye-bye; gwaan!; easy now, mon; galang-galang; yeeaaaah!*—from the popular dancehall hits of the day. Despite hip-hop’s well-rehearsed origins in Jamaican soundsystem culture—as famously imported by DJ Kool Herc, who moved from Jamaica to the South Bronx in 1967 (and, famously, played funk, rather than reggae, at parties)—

¹ Brian Coleman, *Rakim Told Me: Hip-hop Wax Facts, Straight from the Original Artists* (Somerville, MA: Wax Facts Press, 2005), 234.

reggae had never shown up so explicitly in hip-hop prior to *Criminal Minded*. The musical shift embodied by BDP's brash beats and creole poetics gave voice to a significant socio-cultural shift that, although in motion since the 1960s, achieved a kind of critical momentum by the mid-80s.

The Shifting Significations of Jamaicanness in New York

Back in the 70s, being Jamaican in the Bronx could be a liability, and some young immigrants found it better to conceal their West Indian heritage. Hip-hop's so-called founding father, Kool Herc (a.k.a., Clive Campbell), recounts the dangers of such an outsider identity: "At that time [i.e., the early 70s], being Jamaican wasn't fashionable. Bob Marley didn't come through yet to make it more fashionable, to even give a chance for people to listen to our music. . . . I remember one time a guy said, 'Clive, man, don't walk down that way cause they throwing Jamaicans in garbage cans.' The gangs was throwing Jamaicans in garbage cans!" Even before moving to the United States as a teenager, Herc practiced an American accent by singing along to his father's record collection, which included records by Nina Simone, Nat King Cole, and country singer Jim Reeves. He continued to mold his voice upon moving to the Bronx in 1967, tuning into rock and soul disc jockeys such as Cousin Brucie and Wolfman Jack—both of them white, despite their embrace of African-American slang—and absorbing the cadences of Smokey Robinson, the Temptations, and James Brown at the house parties to which his mother "carried him." Adjusting his accent so as to be intelligible to classmates, by the time he reached high school some of Herc's Jamaican friends didn't even know he was

Jamaican.² This chameleonic process extended to his performance practice, as Herc translated Jamaican soundsystem techniques for his funk-oriented Bronx peers. No fool when it came to playing to an audience, Herc selected “break” records—the hard, percussion-propelled funk of James Brown, Dennis Coffey, the Isley Brothers, and Michael Viner’s Incredible Bongo Band—rather than reggae tunes, to move the crowd. At that time in New York, Jamaican music was still, as Orlando Patterson once put it, “jungle music” to the ears of most African-Americans, many of whom, as first or second generation rural migrants from the South still sought to distance themselves from a “country” past.³

Herc has made clear again and again that the Bronx was not receptive to reggae, or Jamaicans, in the 1970s. He has often contradicted the well-rehearsed connections between reggae and hip-hop. When asked in the late 80s about the connections between Jamaican DJ style, i.e., “toasting,” and rap, Herc replied: “Jamaican toasting? Naw, naw. No connection there. I couldn’t play reggae in the Bronx. People couldn’t accept it. The inspiration for Rap is James Brown and the album ‘Hustlers Corner’ by the Last Poets.” Fellow hip-hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa confirms Herc’s story but notes some connections all the same: “[Herc] knew that a lot of American blacks were not getting into reggae. He took the same thing that the deejays was doing—toasting—and did it with American records, Latin records or records with a beat. . . . [H]e would call out the names of people who were at the party, just like the microphone personalities who

² Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), 72, 68, 73.

³ Orlando Patterson, in conversation, fall 2003.

deejayed back in Jamaica.”⁴ Both accounts seem to support Patterson’s assertion that reggae took quite some time to take root in the U.S. and required not just a critical mass of working-class migrants but also some time to percolate through African-/American, urban cultural practice:

Reggae spread to the United States as a result of a second mass migration of the Jamaican working class [the first was to England], which began with the liberalization of American immigration laws in the early 1960s. A new kind of West Indian migrant now entered America, not the relatively well-educated, highly motivated petty-bourgeois migrants of previous generations, but the working-class and lumpen-proletarian people from the Kingston slums. Eventually, the reggae music these new migrants brought over with them, along with their disk jockeys and dance halls (as well as their gangs, the notorious posses), were to influence black American youth, but what is interesting is how long it took to do so.⁵

Here Patterson identifies a number of features—changes in immigration law, large-scale migration of lower-class Jamaicans, and the concomitant arrival of reggae institutions as well as criminal networks—which appear to come to the fore by the mid-80s, given shape and form by the rise of reggae-inflected “gangsta” rap.

Although the number of West Indian residents grew steadily in New York during the 70s (due in part to a number of British anti-immigration acts passed in the 1960s and the U.S. INS Act of 1965, which abolished national origin as the basis for immigration legislation), it would seem that a certain critical mass had not yet crystallized so that borough culture could reflect such “foreign” infusions or so that normative blackness could include Anglo-Caribbean or even Latin Caribbean versions. (Which is not to say that people were not mixing and merging, or that black immigrants from the Caribbean

⁴ Kevin O’Brien Chang and Wayne Chen, *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 72.

⁵ Orlando Patterson, “Ecumenical America: Global Culture and the American Cosmos,” *World Policy Journal* 11, no. 2 (1994): 108.

were not racialized as black by the U.S.'s binary standards, but one gets the sense from accounts such as Herc's that the dominant cultural and social formations excluded or at least marginalized—and sometimes literally threw-out—more recent immigrants.) Perhaps more importantly, it was clear to recent immigrants such as Herc that the best option for an individual seeking to navigate this new world smoothly was to, in a sense, become “black” (which is to say, African-American) in walk, talk, and outward style. Of course, Clive Campbell had always been black. But to be Jamaican and black in New York in the 1970s signified something else, something different and somehow incompatible with American blackness. Identity in this case was a hard-won thing—at least among a prevailingly African-American peer group. Although Campbell certainly reconciled such opposing identifications for himself when projecting a public persona, in particular through musical performance, he found that the Bronx's social pressures called for a particular type of assimilation. Herc's adopted and adapted accent illustrates the limits of racialized subjectivities at this time in New York. It is remarkable that Jamaicanness and blackness are at odds at this point only because they seem so easily reconciled today, but that shift is one that would take place over the next three decades in a circular pattern of demographic change and mass media representation. Hip-hop, despite how its narrative restricts its Caribbean roots, would constitute one of the major media outlets for these changing perceptions of the difference and distance between African-Americans and various black others.⁶

⁶ Incidentally, Herc's story resonates with that of one of my grade-school classmates in the early 80s. Because he was Jamaican, and therefore an easy target, he was consistently harassed by the older kids in our neighborhood. As he waited with everyone else for the school bus, these older boys—most of them black—would taunt him, calling him “Jamaican Bacon,” and almost daily threw him over a short-fence that stood near the bus-stop. Of course, they did the same to the sole Muslim boy in our neighborhood, too, who was black but for his name and creed. It was clear, though, that these two were singled-out because they were different. Significantly, it was “Bacon” (who later adopted the slur as his nickname, effectively

As *Criminal Minded* demonstrates, by 1987 blackness in the Bronx could be tied to Jamaicanness rather unproblematically. KRS-One foregrounds his West Indian heritage on BDP's seminal album. The group's minimalist, dub-accented production, "ragamuffin" language, dancehall-cribbed tunes, street-wise tales and glorified violence made an enormous impression on the hip-hop scene and helped set the template for what would later be called gangsta rap. It is especially telling that in one of hip-hop's most gloried turf wars—the contest between the South Bronx and Queensbridge over rap's place of origin, or "of how it all got started way back when"—KRS-One could so effectively represent the Bronx and "authentic" hip-hop with a style so heavily-indebted to reggae and thus so marked by otherness.⁷ Of course, what this demonstrates is that Jamaicanness no longer carried the same stigmatized sense of otherness. It had become re-accented, as when BDP take a classic reggae bassline and re-imagine it as a stiff, breakbeat-saddled piano riff or when KRS-One sings a Billie Joel melody in a manner that recalls Yellowman's fondness for ironic quotation.⁸ That BDP's expression could at once be so Bronx and so hip-hop, and yet so Jamaican and so reggae bears witness to the degree to which Jamaican music and culture had become part of the texture of New York by the mid-80s.

One might even say that, especially in the boroughs of Brooklyn and the Bronx, the Jamaican presence had become ubiquitous and, at times, dominant. This cultural shift is undoubtedly tied to the high rates of migration from Jamaica to New York during this

diffusing it of its power) who in the 6th grade brought to school the first copy of Boogie Down Productions' *Criminal Minded* that I, or any of my classmates, had heard.

⁷ See, MC Shan's "The Bridge" (3rd Power Enterprises, 1987) [track 12, *The Source Presents: Hits From the Vault, vol. 1 (The Pioneers)*, Polygram Records, 1998]. MC Shan and the Juice Crew, representing Queensbridge, traded several musical barbs with Boogie Down Productions, representing the South Bronx.

⁸ Both of these re-accented figures appear in the song "The Bridge Is Over," though the album contains myriad other examples, as we shall see, of the same.

period. According to sociologist Mary Waters, “In the 1980s alone, Jamaica sent 213,805 people to the United States—a full 9% of its total population of 2.5 million people.”⁹ Of these immigrants, 45% stayed in New York, and “by 1996, it was estimated that 35.1% of the city’s black households was headed by a foreign-born person—the vast majority from the Caribbean.”¹⁰ Music journalist Peter Shapiro describes these socio-cultural changes in more evocative terms, “[B]y the mid-1980s, there were more first-generation blacks from the West Indies in New York City than African Americans who were born in the United States.”¹¹ And ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel offers another illustration of the power of numbers, “New York has become a Caribbean city, especially since the 1980s, when the Caribbean population reached a sort of critical mass of over two million. It is now the biggest Caribbean city and the second biggest Jamaican, Haitian, and Guyanese city.”¹²

This profound demographic shift was accompanied by a concomitant rise in the audibility and visibility of New York’s new neighbors. The city’s increasingly Caribbean cultural profile was projected, on the one hand, through reggae soundsystem culture which filled streets, parks, and clubs with the sounds of Jamaica, and, on the other, by the rise of the infamous cocaine-running posses (formerly aligned with PNP or JLP bosses), which quickly came to dominate the drug-trade in New York. Set loose from political patronage by the profits of the drug trade, the posses were legendary for their ruthlessness and firepower. They swiftly and brutally cornered the markets of Brooklyn and the Bronx and the greater Tri-State area, as well as sites of migration such as Miami, at the height of

⁹ Mary Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001 [1999]), 36.

¹⁰ Waters, *Black Identities*, 36-7.

¹¹ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 6

¹² Peter Manuel, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 241.

the cocaine and crack trades. According to posse historian Laurie Gunst, “their timing was superb: the Jamaican posses quickly proved themselves indispensable to the Colombians, Cubans, and Panamanians who controlled the supply of cocaine and needed street-level dealers to sell the cheap new product called crack.”¹³ The posses’ powerful presence undoubtedly realigned many people’s sense of what Jamaicanness—and reggae—could signify. Far from the islanders that were ridiculed as too “country” a generation before, Jamaican New Yorkers in the 1980s epitomized a powerful kind of cool in the dog-eat-dog world of urban America. As Gunst notes, “long before the posses began migrating to America, they were learning bad-guy style from Hollywood”; in another instance of circularity the posses took some cues in cool from American media, “acting out fantasies from the spaghetti westerns, kung fu kill flicks, *Rambo* sequels, and *Godfather* spin-offs that play nightly in Kingston’s funky movie palaces and flicker constantly behind young men’s eyes.”¹⁴

In stark contrast to the threat of harassment that beset Jamaicans in the early 70s, the powerful, new significations of Jamaicanness in the 1980s could be a young immigrant’s saving grace. In his memoir, *Gunshots In My Cook-Up*, Guyanese-born hip-hop journalist Selwyn Seyfu Hinds recalls getting into a confrontation one night while walking through the streets of Brooklyn. As he and his friends are surrounded by a menacing group of teenagers, he decides on a telling strategy to evade a beat-down: “I was scared shitless,” he recounts,

The kind of fear when your Adam’s apple swells up and seems liable to burst out your throat. So I did what most recently arrived Caribbean kids

¹³ Laurie Gunst, *Born Fi’ Dead: A Journey Through the Yardie Underworld* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Books, 1995), xv.

¹⁴ Gunst, *Born Fi’ Dead*, xv.

in that era would do in such a situation . . . I began talking with a Jamaican accent.

“Wha ya deal wit? Mi nah wan no trouble, seen?”

See, Jamaicans had a rep in those days. Still do. Jamaican kids in Brooklyn were thought of as fearsome, aggressive, not to be fucked with lightly. For the rest of us Caribbean folk, donning the trappings of that reputation when convenient was a welcome ability.¹⁵

Given this milieu, it is telling, but not surprising, that KRS-One embraces the signifiers of Jamaicanness on *Criminal Minded*, despite that his personal connection to the Caribbean consists of a biological father from Trinidad who was out of the picture from an early age, having been deported.¹⁶ Apparently, growing up in the Bronx or Brooklyn at this time could forge personal connections to the Caribbean that go beyond family heritage. Underscoring the power of this symbolic association, KRS alternately refers to Boogie Down Productions as the “BDP posse,” an appropriation of the powerful gang signifier, which itself was—in a fine stroke of irony—a term borrowed from Hollywood westerns, long popular in Jamaica, as Gunst notes. Fittingly, mainstream media projections of Jamaicanness at this time—from the dreadlocked alien hunting Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Predator* (1987) to the vicious, demonic “Rastas” in Steven Segal’s *Marked for Death* (1990)—served to reflect as they informed the stereotyped public perception of Jamaicans: a “cool and deadly” figuration which would later be reproduced in hip-hop films such as Hype Williams’s *Belly* (1998) and in dozens of hip-hop songs

¹⁵ Selwyn Seyfu Hinds, *Gunshots In My Cook-Up: Bits and Bites From a Hip-hop Caribbean Life* (New York: Atria Books, 2002), 27.

¹⁶ The widespread belief that KRS-One is of full Jamaican parentage demonstrates the persuasive power, and perhaps the perceived “authenticity,” of his performances on *Criminal Minded* as well as the degree to which people equate reggae style (and even Caribbean-ness more generally) with Jamaican-ness. Indeed, the relative hegemony of Jamaican-ness within the West Indian diaspora is striking, especially in instances where Jamaicans are in the minority compared to people from other islands.

where “rude bwoy” becomes a distinctively accented shorthand for gangsta, carrying a particular, powerful connotation in the Tri-State area.¹⁷

Borough Battles Recast as Sound Clash: Reggae Style and Hip-hop Aesthetics

Adopting the style of Jamaican soundsystems represented an explicit aesthetic choice—and even a tactic of sorts—for a young KRS-One seeking to distinguish himself and his crew from rival rappers. As he tells it:

My style was to incorporate Jamaican patois language over hip-hop beats. Oh, man, the damage we used to inflict on these [rival] groups, it was just crazy. We’d go into these clubs and they’d set up the battle and I would just start rhyming, and it wasn’t just the Jamaican lyrics. It was *how* we battled. We battled like a Jamaican sound system. You played one record, then you’d rewind, and the crowd would go crazy.¹⁸

In addition to the use of creole and the act of “pulling up” a record in live performance, KRS also connects his quasi-melodic rapping and his borrowing of pop tunes to Jamaican style:

No one at that time [ca. 1987] was even thinking about that sing-song kind of style back then. The closest was Doug E Fresh and Slick Rick. They, too, were battle MCs, and that was what you did when you battled. You

¹⁷ Nathaniel Samuel Murrell quotes a reporter from the Jamaican *Daily Gleaner* with regard to the Jamaican reception of *Marked for Death*: “The hit movie *Marked for Death*, regarded in Jamaica and among Jamaican Americans as anti-Jamaican and anti-Rastafari, ‘identifies Rasta characters as a brutal segment of the Jamaican “posse” and links Rastafarians with obeahism [black magic]’” (Murrell, “Introduction: The Rastafari Phenomenon,” in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, et al. [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998], 3). *Predator 2* (1990), set in the urban jungle of L.A., featured actual dreadlocked Jamaicans—“a Jamaican Voodoo posse,” as they are erroneously labeled—in addition to the Jamaican-esque alien (complete with beaded dreads and a mesh marina!), preying on them, their Colombian competitors, and Danny Glover alike.

¹⁸ Coleman, *Rakim Told Me*, 232 (emphasis in original).

took a familiar tune, which was also a Jamaican thing, and you turned it into a battle kind of thing.¹⁹

It is notable that the context for all these “imported” techniques is that of the *battle*—a cornerstone of hip-hop performance and another inheritance from Jamaican soundssystem practice. In line with the competitive spirit of the “sound clash,” as well as the oppositional stances and expressive possibilities engendered by reggae and posse style, hip-hop’s orientation toward battling (and embrace of violent metaphor) has been continually re-affirmed through its interaction with reggae.²⁰ Hip-hop’s take on sound clash aesthetics now stands alongside such seemingly foundational practices as sing-song vocal delivery and re-articulated melodies, all of which—of course—have precedents in African-American oral and musical traditions, underscoring again the cultural circuitry between the U.S. and Jamaica. Given such a wide range of familiar tunes to employ—and it should be noted that the Beatles and Billie Joel also provide melodic contours for boasts on *Criminal Minded*—it is more telling than ironic that KRS decided to employ melodies from two reggae songs, Yellowman’s “Zunguzung” (1981) and Winston Hussey’s “Body No Ready” (1984), in order to advance BDP’s dominance across New York’s boroughs. His choice not only confirms reggae’s resonance in mid-80s New York, it speaks to the degree to which these sounds were not merely present but *powerful*.

Like his use of the “Zunguzung” meme, KRS-One’s use of the melody from Winston Hussey’s “Body No Ready” represents yet another example of a reggae-derived hip-hop meme. Chronicling the bleak pragmatics of ghetto life in the crack era, “Remix

¹⁹ Coleman, *Rakim Told Me*, 233.

²⁰ See Norman Stolzoff, *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) for an authoritative account and analysis of the sound clash and its relation to reggae and Jamaican society more generally.

for P Is Free” begins with generic toasts to BDP’s greatness propelled by Yellowman’s classic contour from “Zunguzung.” KRS then employs the chorus melody from Hussey’s “Body No Ready” in order to describe the ease of procuring sex from a drug-addict: “The girlies is free / ‘cause the crack costs money / oh yeah.” He repeats the line and the tune, making it into a sort of refrain as well as staying close to the form of the original (which similarly repeats): “Your face look good / but your body no ready / oh no.” Of course, KRS signifies on the tune’s prohibitive message by changing an “oh no” to an “oh yeah” and endorsing the problematic sexual exchange in question with a kind of glee, which, nevertheless, should be heard within the context of KRS’s boastful, at times fanciful, embrace of “reality” tropes and streetwise hyperbole. Later, on the song “Criminal Minded,” KRS makes reference to Hussey’s melody once again with lyrics that more closely resemble their source of inspiration: “The girls look so good / but their brain is not ready / I don’t know / I’d rather talk to a woman / ‘cause her mind is more steady / so here we go.”

As with the “Zunguzung” meme, Hussey’s melody, after appearing in these instances on *Criminal Minded*, has become ensconced in the hip-hop lexicon. References to the tune, and often to KRS’s lyrics on “Criminal Minded,” turn up in a number of other hip-hop recordings. Some artists re-sing the phrase, some simply sample it (usually from the KRS performance). The various occurrences of Hussey’s tune on hip-hop tracks include the following: Chi Ali’s “Age Ain’t Nothing But a #” (1992), Gang Starr’s “Ex Girl to the Next Girl” (1992), Erick Sermon’s “Female Species” (1993), Khadejia’s “Here We Go” (1999), De La Soul/Camp Lo’s “So Good” (2000), Necro’s “Hoe Blow”

(2000).²¹ Although MCs such as Slick Rick were adapting well-known melodies before *Criminal Minded*, and despite a parallel tradition of versioning pop fare in old school hip-hop, KRS-One's prominent use of these tunes seems to have had the strongest influence on subsequent practice as his melodies have consistently re-appeared in later recordings. The prevalence of reggae-related melodies in hip-hop and the tendency for reggae-engaged MCs to perform such tuneful allusions would seem to provide further evidence for reggae's influence on this "versionist" approach to composition.

It is no coincidence that KRS selected melodies from "Zunguzung" and "Body No Ready" to sing over the beat to "Remix For P Is Free." There was a good amount of musical pressure suggesting such choices: both originals were recorded on versions of the *Mad Mad*, and the beat underlying "Remix for P" employs as a central sample the distinctive *Mad Mad* riff. As we have recounted, the *Mad Mad* had by no means disappeared after Junjo Lawes's hits in 1981-2. Several other re-licks of the *Mad Mad* from 1980-1985 kept the riddim's familiar strains in the ears of audiences and artists across the dancehall diaspora. It is clear by the reference to Hussey's song that KRS-One had also heard George Phang's re-lick of the well-worn riddim. The sound of reggae in the early 80s in the northeast United States was the sparse sound of the Roots Radics and groups of their ilk, as produced by Lawes, Phang, King Jammy, and others. Longtime Boston-based selector Junior Rodigan recalls this shift toward a more "hardcore"—which

²¹ Chi Ali's "Age Ain't Nothing But a #" (*The Fabulous Chi Ali*, Relativity 1992, which, in another example of hip-hop alluding to reggae, also includes a song called "Murder Chi Wrote"—a reference to the dancehall hit, "Murder She Wrote" by Chaka Demus and Pliers), Gang Starr's "Ex Girl to the Next Girl" (*Daily Operation*, Alliance 1992), Erick Sermon's "Female Species" (*No Pressure*, Def Jam 1993), Khadejia's "Here We Go" (on Funk Master Flex's *The Mix Tape Vol. 3: 60 Minutes of Funk*, Relativity 1999, and, notably, produced by Wyclef, that savvy student of hip-hop and reggae history), De La Soul/Camp Lo's "So Good" (*Hip Hop 101*, Tommy Boy Black 2000), and Necro's "Hoe Blow" (*I Need Drugs*, Psycho + Logical Records 2000).

is to say, less internationalist, less “slick”—sound in the dancehalls of the day. Notably, he singles out a Phang production, and one on the *Mad Mad* at that, as a prime example:

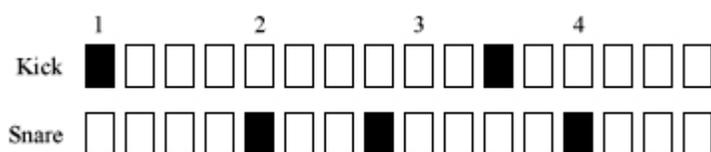
Nobody was playing [Bob Marley’s] “Who the Cap Fits” in 1982/83. They were playing Roots Radics music. And [Gregory Isaacs’s] “Night Nurse” would only play at the very end of the night when everybody’s got a girl in their arms and want to get their rub-a-dub on. But in the hardcorest part of the dance, they would just play some brand new tunes—brand new, less than 10 days old, fresh from yard that nobody had yet. You know, Michael Palmer, “Lick Shot.” Like, “Who the fuck is this guy? Sounds wicked, though.”²²

Indeed, George Phang’s productions appear to have contributed much more to *Criminal Minded* than just Winston Hussey’s melody. The stark yet powerful sound of Phang’s productions, not to mention particular drum patterns, seem to echo in the beats produced by Scott La Rock and Ced Gee. Phang’s productions are steeped in reverb and short delay, causing snare drums to extend just beyond their natural decay time and kicks to ring out, at times cavernously (see, for instance, Half Pint’s anthem, “Greetings”). At other times, as on Sugar Minott’s “Buy Out the Bar,” heavy “gating” of a snare drum cause such sounds to be truncated in a similarly “unnatural” manner, directing one’s attention to the mastery of technology, as embodied by the sound itself. The use of active panning across the stereo field, in particular of drum fills and bits of percussion, also links Phang’s work with BDP’s ping-ponging, minimalist beats. Phang’s (and his contemporaries’) embrace of drum machines and synthesized percussion more generally, especially synth claps, constitutes another sonic connection between the reggae and hip-hop of this era.

²² Interview with Junior Rodigan, 12 February 2004.

The drum patterns in reggae and hip-hop productions at this time demonstrate a remarkable similarity. Of course, they both express a funk-derived orientation toward the downbeat, placing strong kicks on 1 and 3 and prominent snares on beats 2 and 4 and often employing additional snare attacks, reminiscent of the Latin-tinged breakbeats that dominated the funk of the 70s, in order to create 3:2 syncopations against the duple meter. The beat underlying “Remix for P” features a snare drum pattern found across a number of popular breakbeats, including such well-worn drum breaks as those from the Incredible Bongo Band’s “Apache,” James Brown’s “Funky Drummer,” Al Kooper’s “The Landlord,” Lou Donaldson’s “Ode to Billie Joe,” and the Winston Brothers’ “Amen, Brother.” BDP boils down these breaks’ primary accents (and additional flourishes) into a simpler figure that would become one of the prevailing drum patterns in mid- to late-80s hip-hop and remains an enduring rhythmic framework today:

Figure 4: Boogie Down Productions’ Drum Pattern Schematic²³



A similar snare pattern can be heard on a number of songs—in fact, the majority of cuts—on *Criminal Minded*: “The Bridge Is Over,” “Elementary,” “Criminal Minded,”

²³ This is a purposely skeletal rendering of the rhythmic figure, calling attention to its most salient elements, namely the 3:2 snare pattern. BDP and various others frequently add kick and snare accents in other places in the measure, though the prevailing groove is the one pictured above. In a nod to the sequencer technologies employed by hip-hop producers, I have employed a notation similar to the display of such tools as well as the “Time Unit Box System” (TUBS) developed by UCLA drum ensemble instructor Philip Harland and popularized by James Koetting (e.g., “Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble Music,” *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology* 1, no. 3 [1970]: 116-146).

“Super Hoe,” “Poetry” (which uses the pattern every other bar), and “9mm Goes Bang” (which employs a delay on the snare that, as with many dub recordings, creates an echo in a 3:2 fashion and thus the same polyrhythm as otherwise programmed). Significantly, Phang’s *Mad Mad* productions in particular, which were among his most popular songs of the period, demonstrate a similar approach to drum patterns, which we can hear as a convergence of funk’s breakbeats and dub’s (and reggae drummers’) inclination toward 3:2 cross-rhythms. In all cases, the effect is to create a polyrhythmic relationship with respect to the previous snare/attack and the overall meter as well as to precede the following downbeat with an accent that seems to produce a particularly effective “lead in” or “pick up.” Sharing essentially the same rhythm track (if “dubbed” differently for each version), Palmer’s “Lick Shot,” Toyan’s “Bubble Gum,” and Hussey’s “Body No Ready,” all feature this kind of structure, though the snare syncopation usually occurs at the end of the measure rather than in the middle (as in the BDP breaks). Another Phang production from the same time period, Tenor Saw’s “I Got To Be There,” features a snare pattern (played with synth claps) that matches exactly the pattern on “Remix for P Is Free.”

Thus, we can hear how BDP’s sound, for all its Bronx-ness, relates rather directly to contemporary Jamaican music. At the same time, there is no mistaking “Remix for P” for a reggae song. Moreover, Scott La Rock and Ced Gee make their mark on the *Mad Mad* as decisively as their precursors—an influence borne out by the number of hip-hop songs that take BDP’s version as a kind of template, much in the same way that Junjo’s and the Roots Radics’ re-lick has informed subsequent reggae versions. In contrast to the bass-heavy reggae songs we have considered above, here—in typical hip-hop fashion—

the drums assume prominence.²⁴ Indeed, the bass tones that accompany each kick and snare attack in “Remix for P,” despite providing plenty of low-frequency heft, are consigned to an essentially percussive function. With their focus on gritty, forceful percussion, BDP’s beats played a crucial role in cementing popular notions—at least for the late-80s, and especially in New York—of what constituted a “hardcore” hip-hop sound. In this way, they differentiated themselves from slicker, more commercially-oriented groups, such as Run DMC, who employed a similarly stark approach toward beat-making, with songs often consisting of little more than a sparse drum loop and an occasional “stab” of sound. By employing early, low-bit-rate samplers such as the EMU SP1200, BDP connect their sound to contemporaries such as producer Marley Marl, who was making waves with his low-fi, “chopped” drums from classic soul and funk tracks.

The sample-based character of the drums on *Criminal Minded* lend the beats a kind of graininess that is consistent with hip-hop’s aesthetics—now associated more with the “Old School” (ca. 1979-1985) and “Golden Age” (ca. 1986-1993) periods—of “dusty” and even “dirty” breaks, of “funky” and “ill” sounds, and of sounds that embody the technologies that produce them and which sound “raw” rather than overproduced. BDP approach drum patterns in what can perhaps best be described as a “samplerly” manner—i.e., they are not arranged in the same way that, say, a conventionally-trained drummer would play; rather, the sounds of snares and kicks and hi-hats are treated as blocks of sound (*musique concrete*, Bronx style) and are arranged in sometimes unorthodox ways, as heard, for example, during the two-bar break at 3:09 in which the

²⁴ It should be noted, of course, that both of these musical focal points—drums and bass—involve a predilection for the “low-end,” thus connecting reggae and hip-hop in their overriding concern for propulsion, for movement, for rhythmic, physically powerful, and “feelingful” sonic force.

snare accents steady 8th notes, creating a crescendo of sorts but in a rather stiff, jarring, and yet gripping way.

For all the signifiers of hip-hop here, however, “Remix for P” also bears a number of subtle features, all samples aside, which connect the group’s sound to reggae as well. BDP’s distinctively stiff beats, reflecting the unforgiving quantization of the era’s drum machines and sequencers, may appear to be as far from reggae’s pliant, jazz- and funk-inflected drumming as one can get. They are rather reminiscent, however, of what were then the most popular reggae riddims being produced—the so-called “digital” or “computer” riddims that followed in the wake of the smashing success of King Jammy’s “Sleng Teng” riddim (1985), which was reputedly built atop a Casio keyboard’s oddly compelling, machine-like “rock’n’roll” rhythm pre-set. David Katz argues that the “Sleng Teng” served as a crucial musical bridge between reggae and hip-hop:

by drawing Jamaican music closer to the production values of American hip-hop, a greater exchange of ideas between the two musical cultures gradually resulted, and popular artists in many other lands would eventually draw on its inspiration, not only for salutary tributes cut in a variety of styles, but also through unauthorized emulation.²⁵

The computerized feel of BDP’s beats thus connects the group to their digital reggae contemporaries, while their application of various effects and use of layering techniques also point to dub reggae innovators, such as Lee Perry and King Tubby, whose craft also carried forward into reggae’s digital age. Although distinctive in its own right and clearly not cribbed from any particular reggae production, the off-kilter hi-hat that begins

²⁵ David Katz, “Sleng Teng Extravaganza: King Jammy and the Dawning of Jamaican Music’s Computer Age,” *Wax Poetics* 13 (Summer 2005): 85. I would dispute, however, Katz’s assumptions about how easily separable these “cultures” are, as well as his chronology in terms of the “greater exchange of ideas” between them.

“Remix for P,” with its disconcerting panning and erratic dynamics, recalls dub producers’ disorienting use of volume and stereo. The audible reverb and delay applied to KRS’s voice and to the guitar riff also strongly evoke dub style.²⁶

Significantly, for all its marking as a reggae-identified sound, the *Mad Mad* riff itself, as a “chopped” sample in “Remix for P,” departs from its previous function in the reggae songs we have examined. The riff is instead treated according to hip-hop’s distinctive sample-based aesthetics. For one, the ascending portion of the riff has been excised, leaving the familiar, three-note descending contour to stand alone. In place of the ascending part, BDP instead employ a fragment of the truncated sample—the middle note of the riff—as a kind of pick-up and leading tone, stuttering the figure throughout the song and teasing at the main riff, which occasionally follows, quite effectively, on a downbeat, relieving the tension built up by all the stuttering. BDP thus transform the *Mad Mad* riff into a three-note, descending guitar line—a block of sound that instantly conjures Michigan & Smiley even while it signifies hardcore Bronx-ness. Employed in a rather minimalist manner (though more present perhaps than in some reggae versions of the *Mad Mad*), the sample nonetheless serves as the major tonal referent in the song, aside from the vocals and the machine-gun-like bass which, while mirroring the kick and snare, seems to play around the root note of the riff, adding to its tonal pull. It is the most

²⁶ One should not underestimate the degree to which dub techniques, as a fixture in New York’s increasingly Caribbean soundscape, have been absorbed by hip-hop, not to mention other popular styles. Dub’s influence is so broad that its techniques have paradoxically disappeared into ubiquity. Moreover, not only was dub reggae circulating in New York from Jamaica, but it was being produced there as well—see, for instance, the Bronx-based studio of Lloyd Barnes, a.k.a., Bullwackies or Wackies, an active site of production throughout the early- and mid-80s. Also, the use of echo, dating back to Kool Herc’s early parties, has long been an integral part of the hip-hop sound. As Parish of EPMD told Brian Coleman, echoing production partner Erick Sermon (who called the Echo Chamber “the essence of hip-hop” and the “main attraction” at hip-hop-centric house and block parties): “We use a ton of Echo Chamber effects . . . because that was always big. You gotta write about the Echo Chamber, please, for hip-hop. . . . We were ODing on it, using it all over the place” (*Rakim Told Me*, 208).

prominent feature of the production and the one that subsequent producers would fasten onto in their attempts to reference BDP's seminal statement. As a reggae referent processed through hip-hop's omnivorous, appropriative methods of sonic reorganization, the riff reflects an awareness of and engagement with reggae production techniques while standing also as an example of vanguard hip-hop. The blurry lines between hip-hop and reggae styles and techniques, of course, serve as a testament to their common roots and their continued, circular influence on each other.

With this production, BDP put their own stamp on the *Mad Mad*—as definitively as Junjo Lawes, George Phang, Sly & Robbie, or any other producers. As we will hear in subsequent productions, the distinctive guitar riff is now strongly associated with BDP's drum beat, in particular the syncopated snare pattern. Because it set the template for stark depictions of urban life, *Criminal Minded* is considered a touchstone for hip-hop—and for gangsta rap and New York's "hardcore" sound more specifically. Nearly everything in it, including dozens of verbatim quotations from contemporary dancehall songs, has become a "classic" hip-hop reference, which serves to obscure further the boundaries between the two genres. For listeners unaware of the album's deep intertextuality, the tuneful phrases peppered throughout the album are understood simply as KRS-One's inventions. Despite their origins, these quotations are now canonical phrases of the hip-hop lexicon. Ironically, once Jamaicanness, as embodied in reggae musical style, becomes such a common feature of New York-based hip-hop, it seems to recede in audibility. A Jamaican accent starts to sound like Bronx accent, a New York accent, a black accent, or a hip-hop accent more generally.

“Reggae Music Is Not So Strange”: First Figurations and Other Early Experiments

Although it may seem ironic that rap’s gangsta subjectivity comes filtered through the Jamaican posse presence, this kind of fractured reflection becomes an important figuring process in the continued conversation between reggae and hip-hop. Suggesting a new type of “mirror/mirror” relationship, the hardcore pose, gun-talk, and ghetto-life reportage that increasingly has become the focus of reggae and hip-hop lyrics resonate as true and powerful representations for sympathetic (and fetishistic) ears in Jamaica and the United States. Rappers and DJs and their overlapping audiences have looked to each other’s representations of “reality” ever since, especially in cultural crucibles such as New York city, where reaffirming representations echo from car stereos, street vendors’ stalls, and soundsystems. BDP’s *Criminal Minded*, and the way that its sonic organization reconciles Jamaicanness and Bronx-ness and foregrounds reggae style, signaled a significant shift in New York’s socio-cultural fabric, but BDP was not the first hip-hop group to embrace the sounds of Jamaica, nor did they do so at a time when their peers were not similarly inspired by the stylings of dancehall DJs and producers.

A number of BDP’s contemporaries, including Slick Rick and Special Ed (both of Jamaican parentage), not to mention London-based pioneers of “raggamuffin hip-hop” such as Daddy Freddy and Asher D, were also instrumental in integrating the contemporary sounds of New York, London, and Kingston. Such hybrid expressions—some more explicitly so than others—demonstrate the degree to which Jamaicanness and blackness begin to overlap in New York by this point, projecting a global identity and no longer appearing as locally oppositional identifiers despite the enduring distinctiveness of

(Afro-)Jamaican, British-Jamaican, and African-American subjectivities. The increasingly audible integration between what were previously ethnic enclaves refigures blackness in a more transnational sense, perhaps bringing hip-hop's expressive power more in line with a pan-African articulation of "modern blackness," as Deborah Thomas calls it, which Jamaicans in Jamaica had long been proposing through their own embrace and selective appropriation of African-American styles.

New York-based rappers were making militant references to "I and I" and Bob Marley as early as 1980 on Brother D and Collective Effort's "How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise." And by 1985, rap's most commercially successful groups were incorporating reggae into their acts. While the Fat Boys put on their best Jamaican accents to *big up* Jacob Miller, Lord Sassafrass, and Michigan & Smiley on "Hard Core Reggae," riding a midtempo reggae riddim with rolled-tongue *ribbits*, Yellowman argued alongside Run DMC that "reggae music is rap to the beat" and, registering an enduring ambivalence among American audiences, "reggae music is not so strange." By collaborating with King Yellow on the track, "Roots, Rap, Reggae" (which took its title from Bob Marley's "Roots, Rock, Reggae"), Run DMC hinted at the degree to which Jamaican sounds had already permeated New York a couple years before BDP's critical release.²⁷ But, revealingly, in comparison to KRS-One's seamless incorporation of creole and dancehall style, Run DMC sound slightly awkward rolling their *r*'s and clumsily

²⁷ Moreover, it should be noted that Jamaican music, and Caribbean music, had had a presence in New York for some time. In addition to being the center of the calypso and Latin Caribbean recording industry since at least the 30s, the city also played host to plenty of reggae, both locally recorded and imported. Singer Willie Williams, for instance, notes that his music "was being played on a regular basis in New York" in 1979 (Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 312), and Lloyd "Bullwackie" Barnes had been running a popular studio in the Bronx since the late 70s, where he would record both visiting and expatriate Jamaican artists. Sugar Minott recorded there in 1983-4, for instance (Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 333). Coxson Dodd had operated a studio and storefront in Brooklyn since around 1980. And Count Shelley's Live and Love Records—also located in Brooklyn, with a distribution outlet in England as well—served as a direct line in the 1980s for such internationally-successful producers as King Jammy (Lesser, *King Jammy's*, 65).

riding a chintzy, quasi-Caribbean beat more remarkable in its embodiment of Caribbean musical stereotypes than its ability to support the vocalists' hybrid performances.

Significantly, Yellowman makes reference in the song to Welton Irie's "Hotter Reggae Music," an equally awkward cover of the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight"—employing the same refrain as Irie toward the end of the track (" 'otter, 'otter, 'otter reggae music").

In the last two years of the decade, shortly after *Criminal Minded* made its reggae-inflected impact, a swell of hip-hop releases seemed to affirm and encourage the fusion that KRS and BDP pursued on their seminal salvo. Unsurprisingly, a number of these efforts were produced by KRS and some were issued by BDP's B-Boy Records. Just Ice's *Kool & Deadly* (1988) may have been the most obvious nod to Jamaican style, titled after a reggae- and posse-propelled phrase with no little currency in New York at that time. On the record's sleeve, Just Ice is pictured with a grin full of gold and a Rasta-striped (with matching belt), Gucci-sampling, leather crown of a hat, emblazoned with the word "JUSTICE." In other words, he looks the part of a second generation Jamaican b-boy from the Bronx. Sounds that way, too. At various points throughout the album, Just Ice employs some of dancehall's familiar "stock" melodies, occasionally dipping into the sort of double-time, flip-tongue, fast-chat style—as perfected and projected by London-based Jamaican MCs such as Daddy Freddy and Asher D, whose "Raggamuffin Hip-Hop" (1987) deserves a place alongside BDP's first fusions—which would increasingly infuse hip-hop flow over the next several years.²⁸ Like KRS, Just Ice also peppers his lyrics with Jamaican slang and interjections ("Bim!" "Easy, mon!" "Lick shot!"), as when

²⁸ Notably, "Raggamuffin Hip-Hop" (Music of Life, 1987) employs the same chorus melody as BDP's "Bridge Is Over."

he dismissed his anonymous opponents as “pussyclaats” on the self-aggrandizing track, “The Original Gangsta of Hip-Hop.” Tellingly, though, the rapping on the disc is, on the main, mostly indebted to African-American accents and styles. Aside from a couple clearly hybrid songs, one largely hears Jamaican creole during the album’s spoken interludes (which occur at the beginnings, endings, and in the middles of the tracks), where the accents really come out, especially for KRS-One’s keyword exhortations: “Just Ice, you know you’re large, bwoi! / and definitely rule the dancehall, seen?!” Notably, several songs contain no audible allusions to reggae or Jamaica.

The production style on *Kool & Deadly* is rather similar to that on *Criminal Minded*, employing many of the same drum samples, the same minimalism, the same robotic quantization (even when a healthy degree of “swing” is applied). On a few tracks, however, one does hear a more explicit embrace of contemporary reggae’s prevailing rhythms and timbres. On the tellingly titled “Moshitup,” for example, a digital dancehall skank (complete with a crunchy keyboard chord on the upbeat at the end of each measure) not only recalls King Jammy’s influential “computer” riddims, some of the individual voices in the texture sound sampled from the *Sleng Teng* riddim or were produced on the same, or similar, synthesizers (if enhanced with a Roland 808 bass attack on the downbeat). KRS appears to exercise an enriched “yardie” vocabulary, alternating, as usual, between West Indian and American accents. Given the degree to which the track is infused with reggae referents, unlike many of the other tracks, it seems like an explicit excuse for both KRS and Just Ice to perform Jamaicanness. The obvious code switching within and across tracks gives voice to a Jamaicanness conditioned by New York as it expresses a New York accented by Jamaica. One hears a fair amount of delay, especially

applied to the vocals. Interestingly, as is more common in hip-hop than reggae, the vocal echoes often subdivide the beat evenly, falling on successive quarter- or eighth-notes, thus presenting a striking contrast to dub's preference for creating 3:2 polyrhythms out of echoed voices.

One final, subtle but significant detail is the use on “Lyric Licking” of a sample from the *Mad Mad*. Unlike most hip-hop “versions” of the *Mad Mad*, however, neither the distinctive three-note riff nor the “Zunuguzung” meme are present. Rather, one hears, a one-bar loop, containing only drums and bass, apparently sampled from a minimal moment of Junjo's recurrent re-lick. In particular, it is a bass riff by the Roots Radics' Flabba Holt, creating a I to iii motion over a repeating measure (as inspired by a similar passage in Alton Ellis's original), which leaps to the foreground and is accompanied by the distinctive—indeed, telltale—reverb of Style Scott's (or is it Scientist's?) snare drum. The track also contains other percussive layers and samples, added in part, one presumes, to make the sample slightly less obvious, although recognition of the source, whether registered subconscious or not, is clearly part of the sample-based aesthetic. Despite the absence of the *Mad Mad* riff here, the riddim still bubbles underneath. The sample does not even enter until a minute into the song, prior to which a sparse drum pattern in BDP's typical “boom bap” style (including that familiar, breakbeat-derived 3:2 snare pattern) provides the accompaniment while a horn-heavy sample from yet another version teases the listener with the same bassline that will follow. Marrying form and content, Just Ice shouts out Haile Selassie during the introduction, refers to his brethren and sistren during the first verse, and repeats the phrase, “hear me a chant,” on the chorus using the same ascending melodic contour employed on “Moshitup.” To top things off, some echo and

reverb additionally amplify Just Ice's vocals, sonically signifying reggae practice as the MC confidently boasts, "I'm a ram dance master, / kool and deadly."

The same year also saw the release, on B-Boy Records, of *Doin' Damage* (1988) by J.V.C. F.o.r.c.e., which not only also bore the imprint of KRS and BDP but contained yet another sample of the *Mad Mad*.²⁹ Although closely associated with Boogie Down Productions, JVC Force broke from the group's bleak visions of a crack-ravaged Bronx and attempted to accentuate the positive, representing themselves as fun-loving, anti-gang, middle-class youths, if in an "authentic," street-savvy, uncompromising hip-hop style—or as the liner notes put it, "They are really nice guys doing hardcore music."³⁰ Hailing from Long Island and Mt. Vernon rather than the Bronx or Brooklyn, one way that the group musters a hardcore accent is by putting on a Jamaican accent—and a fairly convincing one at that. Of course, such a sonically-embodied stance is mitigated by the song's title and theme, "Puppy Love," which nonetheless finds the group exhorting "every posse" to "come a dance" and dedicating the song to "all the selector out there" while affirming the sense that reggae was increasingly animating one nation under a groove (as George Clinton would have it). "Inna New York and a inna Kingston," they declare, "sweet reggae beats seh di national anthem."

To bolster their boasts, the group samples the same descending fragment of the *Mad Mad* riff that undergirds BDP's "Remix for Free." Instead of triggering and teasing the sample's first note before allowing the three notes to play, JVC Force simply drop the trim guitar figure on the downbeat every two bars, adding a delay to make the truncated

²⁹ JVC Force was supposedly an acronym (or, more likely, a "backronym") for "Justified By Virtue of Creativity For All Reasons Concerning Entertainment." Such names were common at the time (see, e.g., "Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone"), though it is also speculated that the acronym provided a defense if the group were sued by the electronics company of the same initials.

³⁰ Liner notes, JVC Force, *Doin' Damage*, B-Boy Records, 1988.

riff echo evenly on successive beats (at the quarter-note level) before disappearing into inaudibility around the beginning of the second measure. Not only do JVC's "biddy-bye-bye" interjections recall KRS's earlier experiments, the MCs' sing-song, flip-tongue style often evokes the main melodic contours employed on "Remix for P" (which were, needless to say, themselves borrowed from contemporary dancehall DJs). Against this tonal structure, familiarly grainy drums play the breakbeat-based, boom-bap figure (complete with 3:2 snares) heard on "Remix for P." Given how well the group puts on their accents for "Puppy Love," it's somewhat conspicuous that the album's other tracks display such a scant reggae presence (except for a short dip into creole on "The Force Is Buggin," including plenty more "biddy-bye-bye-byes"), suggesting that as much as a Jamaican accent had become a Bronx accent by this time, hip-hop style remained prevaillingly indebted to African-/American styles and sensibilities, with few exceptions.³¹

Negotiating Jamaican Heritage in a Reggae Resonant but Rap-centric World

An interesting comparison in this regard can be made between Slick Rick and Shinehead, both born in England to Jamaican parents and both having moved to New York as young men and aspiring performers. Each of them made a splash in 1988—but with rather divergent musical approaches. Having spent time in Jamaica as well as the island's two major sites of migration, Shinehead effectively employed a Jamaican accent, creole poetics, stock dancehall melodies, and the fast-chat style that contemporary

³¹ The only other feature that might be heard as a nod to Caribbean styles on *Doin' Damage* is on an instrumental track called "The Move," which during a prominent section foregrounds a 3+3+2 percussion sample, juxtaposing it against a bedrock, Bronx-style, "boom bap" drum pattern.

British-Jamaican MCs had developed. Indeed, he claims to be “the first to talk patois on a hip-hop beat,” and though that assertion might be challenged, Shinehead was among the first NY-based MCs to embrace and advance an audibly Jamaican style of hip-hop—and his creole is more convincing than that of many of his Bronx-based peers, even on those rather dated rolled *r*'s.³² Appropriately, Shinehead also provides another link in the chain of the *Mad Mad*, having performed over the riddim in a style similar to that heard on his rap recordings, though intended for the reggae-market. Alternating between early 80s dancehall patter and mid-decade fast-chat, Shinehead demonstrates on “Rough & Rugged” (1986), released alongside a deft cover of Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean,” the ways he bridges and smoothly segues between various stylistic approaches.

On *Unity* (1988), not only does Shinehead alternate rather easily between creole toasting and NY-style rapping, he does so over reggae-related riddims bolstered by breakbeats and hip-hop-style scratching. A keyboard or guitar skank mark most of the beats on the album, and many are versions of Studio One classics—he *big up* Coxsone’s imprint on one song—re-played (rather than, say, sampled) by top-notch reggae musicians, many of them Roots Radics: including Flabba Holt, Style Scott, Bingy Bunny, and Wycliffe “Steelie” Johnson (who alongside his partner-in-programming, Cleveland “Clevie” Browne, co-produced several of the tracks on the album).³³ In addition to Studio One re-licks, the album is filled, as was the common practice in dancehall and hip-hop alike, with interpolated tunes of all sorts, mostly from reggae songs but also nodding to

³² In the same Bravo documentary, *Reggae: The Story of Jamaican Music* (aired in February 2004), Shinehead also offers the following contention: “Rapping on a reggae beat didn’t work. . . Talking patois on a hip-hop beat works.” And though that may well describe the early days of reggae-hip-hop fusions, much of Shinehead’s own music (see the 1990 album, *The Real Rock*, for instance) indeed features American-style rapping over reggae riddims. Perhaps Shinehead is discussing his own work in retrospect, however.

³³ The track, “Hello Y’all,” for instance, re-licks the “Lecturer” riddim, as recorded originally for Studio One by the Soul Agents.

the Beatles and Sam Cooke. Shinehead champions reggae throughout *Unity*, describing dancehall aesthetics in detail on “Hello Y’all” and affirming again the music’s growing currency outside Jamaica. “Nowadays you can find reggae fans galore,” he raps, giving explicit credit to Bob Marley and Peter Tosh. But for all his creole and reggae stylee, Shinehead keeps things polyglot, and continues to code-switch his way through the linguistic snarls of the diaspora: “Yo star, my bredrin, homeboy, amigo,” he says, seeking to communicate rather widely, if locally. “I-man come fi tell it to the b-boy youth,” he adds on “The Truth,” and then substitutes “raggamuffin” and “roughneck” for “b-boy” on later passes, translating terms in rhyme over the course of the song. The album’s big single, “Gimme No Crack,” bore witness to the city’s drug scourge and approached the topic rather differently than BDP, aligning with reggae’s predominantly “socially-conscious” perspective.³⁴

Tellingly, reggae’s social conscience comes to the foreground on the one song on Slick Rick’s popular 1988 debut, *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick*, which fully embraces reggae style. On “Hey Young World,” the rapper drops his bawdy storytelling for a moment in order to provide some words of wisdom and caution for young listeners. Over an unmistakable reggae skank and bubbling bassline, reminiscent of contemporary digital reggae from the UK if slightly accented by some hip-hop drums, Slick Rick moralizes to his audience, offering a combination of condemnation and affirmation: “Hey kid, walk straight, / master your high”; “Society’s a weak excuse for a man”; “If you’re over 18, / I wish you’d act like an adult”; “And if you smoke crack, / your kids will smoke crack tomorrow.” When he intones, “righteous laws are overdue,” the

³⁴ Incidentally, Yellowman adds his baritone to the growing chorus of anti-cocaine voices as well on “Roots, Rap, Reggae,” telling listeners “don’t sniff cocaine” and “know the cocaine will hurt up your brain.”

Biblical/Rastafarian overtones are clear. “Hey Young World” is especially striking for its reggae style given the rest of the album’s heavily hip-hop-oriented accompaniment. Slick Rick does not foreground his Jamaicanness so much as his Englishness, which he puts forward with an almost cartoonish accent. Even so, the album advances a sound and style far more indebted to New York than London or Kingston. Slick Rick’s mellifluous flow, urban narratives, and odd, interpolated hooks (e.g., Burt Bacharach’s “Walk On By” on “Mona Lisa”) place him squarely in the NY hip-hop tradition, which had, of course, long ago incorporated, even as it influenced, the sound and style of contemporary reggae.

Another NY-based rapper of Jamaican parentage, Special Ed, took a similar tack to Slick Rick, offering but one reggae-inflected song amid an album of sample-based, boom-bap beats. Apparently, Ed’s producer, Hitman Howie T was surprised that the youngster was interested in performing in an American rather than Jamaican style:

I knew Ed since he was probably about 10, because [his cousin] Jennifer lived on my block. One day she came to my house and said, “My cousin Eddie wants to rap for you.” And because he’s Jamaican, I thought he’d do some chanting/DJ type of stuff. Ed surprised me by asking me to put “Impeach the President” on, and that’s where it started.³⁵

Special Ed’s witty rhymes, deft storytelling, and heavy Brooklyn accent demonstrate another side of the coin to KRS-One’s adopted accent. The only of his siblings born outside of Jamaica, Ed was thoroughly acculturated to his New York home while clearly savvy to new possibilities for playing with Jamaican music in a hip-hop context.

Although none of the songs on his debut, *Youngest In Charge* (1989), jump out at the listener with the same reggae skank as on Shinehead’s album or Slick Rick’s “Hey Young World,” one of the album’s singles, a braggadocio vehicle called “The

³⁵ Coleman, *Rakim Told Me*, 101.

Magnificent,” employs two distinct samples from well-known reggae songs to propel its “New School” bump. Sampled for the chorus in a fine bit of funhouse-mirror reflection is none other than Dave Barker, the Jamaican vocalist known for his ability to mimic American singers and disc jockeys, as heard on Dave and Ansel Collins’ “Double Barrel.” Ironically then, a Jamaican with a “natural” Yankee accent employs the voice of a Jamaican with an “artificial” Yankee accent to proclaim his greatness as an MC. Moreover, against some sampled and synthesized drums, “The Magnificent,” loops a two measure guitar-and-bass riff from Desmond Dekker’s “Shanty Town,” a song long projected into the global soundscape via *The Harder They Come* soundtrack (and itself nodding to the international in its references to “007” and “Ocean’s 11”).

Beyond the Boroughs: Raggamuffin Rap Registers a National Presence

A one-track nod to reggae style became something of a norm not just for New York-based or Jamaican-American hip-hop artists during the late 80s, but on rap albums more generally, testifying to an increasingly national profile for Jamaican style.³⁶ In Miami, another longtime site of Jamaican migration, the 2 Live Crew expressed their local character by including a song called “Reggae Joint” on their popular, controversial album, *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* (1989). According to group member Mr. Mixx, the inclusion of the track reflected reggae’s presence in the city’s soundscape: “Reggae was just big in Miami, and all those songs we sampled on there were big hits in the reggae

³⁶ In yet another NY-based example, Stetsasonic’s *In Full Gear* (1988) contained a song called “The Odad,” which featured a skanking guitar pattern, 3+3+2 drums, and various Jamaican references in the lyrics.

scene there. Luke used to play a lot of reggae stuff at his jams, with Ghetto Style DJs.”³⁷ For the track, 2 Live Crew sample two well-worn reggae riddims, Jammy’s *Sleng Teng* and the Studio One classic, *Heavenless*, named after a Don Drummond composition and ringing in the reggae audience’s ears via Half Pint’s perennial hit “Greetings” (1985) and several other re-licked versions. Despite vocal performances that sound more faux-Jamaican than pro-Jamaican (with, once again, a surfeit of “biddy-bye-byes”), the group demonstrates a fluency in reggae mixing techniques: the *Sleng Teng* is mixed under the vocals in typical knob-twist fashion, dropping in-and-out in slinky syncopation, while a steady 3+3+2 snare pattern—all the rage in contemporary dancehall—occasionally erupts into cavernous reverb. 2 Live Crew take the opportunity to play up the connections between their own lewd lyrics and dancehall’s penchant for “slackness,” though they are more directly degrading to women than most dancehall DJs (“Come sucky sucky,” they chant, “Bitch, bend down!”) and their endorsement of oral sex breaks a longstanding Jamaican taboo. An indirect connection to the Mad Mad lineage is made by the interpolation of the lyrics and tune from Nicodemus’s “Boneman Connection,” though the 2 Live Crew make it their own by adding, “Woman, come suck this bone.” Fitting easily alongside the group’s eclectic engagements with rock, blues, electro, and other genres, “Reggae Joint” nonetheless begins with the telling admission that “dis one different!”

On the other side of the country, dancehall reggae could be heard animating the emerging gangsta rap movement in Los Angeles. While producer Dr. Dre’s pre-NWA mixes demonstrated a fluency with East Coast rap (including BDP’s seminal releases) and rapper Eazy-E made allusions to influential Philadelphia-based gangsta rapper,

³⁷ Coleman, *Rakim Told Me*, 49.

Schoolly D, it was a badman boast by Yellowman—channeling Hollywood cops, no less—that would work its way into one of the group’s biggest underground hits.³⁸ On Eazy’s bank-robbing narrative, “Nobody Move” (1988), King Yellow’s voice is sampled and pitched-up—“Nobody move, nobody get hurt”—giving a cool and deadly air to the chorus and bearing witness to reggae’s remarkable resonance even in US cities with relatively small Jamaican populations. Another instance of West Coast engagements with reggae—and an odd one at that, perhaps testifying to a critical absence or distance—is NWA songwriter and associate D.O.C.’s performance on “It’s Funky Enough” (1989). Beginning the song with a raggamuffin-esque but nonsensical string of syllables, the rapper proceeds to inflect his flow with a fleeting Jamaican accent, occasionally dipping into a dancehall-derived, double-time staccato. Apparently, the style was something of a whimsical response to the Dre-produced beat and the rapper’s inebriation. As the D.O.C. later recounted: “Sometimes I had a Jamaican flow on there because I had been drinking that day and when I heard the track in the booth it sounded kind of Jamaican to me. I didn’t write the rap like that, it just came out like that.”³⁹ Thus, tellingly, alcohol proves something of a truth serum for the gangsta rap imagination in this moment (or at least for the D.O.C.’s LA-via-Texas imagination, which says something about reggae music’s spread). The D.O.C. demonstrates a desire to express the hardcore through the suggestive sounds of Jamaica.

³⁸ Eazy-E alludes to a line from Schoolly D’s classic gangsta salvo, “P.S.K. – What Does It Mean?” (1985) on his breakthrough single, “Boyz-N-The-Hood” (1987), changing Schoolly’s “all about making that cash money” to “all about making that GTA [Grand Theft Auto],” while preserving the cadence of the original. Similarly, if more directly, Dr. Dre demonstrated and probably added to BDP’s resonance in LA by including several cuts from *Criminal Minded* on the popular, underground mixtapes he sold at the Roadium swap-meet in LA. For more on Dre’s Roadium mixes, see <http://www.thaformula.com/south_bronx_of_la_-_south_bay.htm> (accessed 12 September 2006).

³⁹ Coleman, 185.

Such examples as these would seem to suggest that the circulation of Jamaican style is furthered by but not quite tethered to demographics. Indeed, reggae has found audiences, enthusiasts, and practitioners worldwide, propelled and projected across the global mediascape—especially along the axes of Anglo-American empire—in the form of recordings, films, and touring performers. As we’ll hear in the next chapter, reggae’s presence in West Coast gangsta rap is an enduring one, especially given its appearance on seminal recordings, from Eazy E’s and the D.O.C.’s early, influential efforts to multi-platinum albums such as Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic* (1992).

It is especially revealing that even when hip-hop artists weren’t explicitly embracing the sounds of Jamaica or styling themselves after Jamaican gangsters, hip-hop recordings increasingly registered the powerful presence of Jamaicans in the US, especially in New York. One finds non-Jamaican MCs defining themselves, significantly, in opposition to Jamaicans, giving negative shape to what had become a dominant formation in the city.⁴⁰ “Old school” rapper Grandmaster Caz, whose well-known routines provided a great many lines for the Sugar Hill Gang’s breakthrough “Rapper’s Delight” (1979), recorded a song called “Get Down Grandmaster” in 1988 which pays a kind of backhand tribute to New York’s by-then massive Jamaican community. Over a Ced Gee-produced beat, complete with trademark “Impeach the President” snares and 808 bass, Caz states matter-of-factly, “If you think I’m a Rasta- / farian or Jamaican, / you’re mistaken.” The line seems like a non sequitur, but, as with so many “brag tracks,” the song proceeds in a free associative manner and it is telling that Rastafarians and

⁴⁰ Similarly, we might hear Jamaican-American Special Ed’s admission that “I’m not a Puerto Rican, but...” on “I Got It Made” (1989) as bearing witness to yet another kind of ubiquitous Other in New York.

Jamaicans are one of many references that Caz makes while outlining his importance to the story of hip-hop.

A couple years earlier on Kool G Rap's self-defining first release, "I'm Fly" (1986), a similarly free-ranging bit of braggadocio found another NY-based MC nonchalantly but notably describing himself as "not Jamaican," demonstrating again that the Jamaican presence in New York, even by mid-decade, was something with which one had to reckon: "Yes, I act so conceited, 'cause I'm a full-breed / money-makin', not Jamaican, and no way that you could beat it." Notice that Kool G Rap's negative self-definition, motivated as it may be by a rhyme, leaves a strange omission as the MC never provides a positive noun to be modified by "full-breed." It seems more important for him to establish that he's *not* Jamaican than to be explicit about what he *is*. Though some may be inclined to dismiss such passing references, they are significant in the context of hip-hop's song genres, their limits, and the creative possibilities that arise out of such constraints. There is almost always more going on in "brag tracks" than pure self-aggrandizement or clever wordplay. Rhyme, metaphor, and other devices open up space for social commentary, metaphysics, intertextual allusions, and local references, among other things, and allow an MC to use the familiar forms of boastful self-presentation or "battling" to present, in the process, a fairly rich, round picture of himself or herself and his or her world.

From Jamaica's negative presence in these last examples to reggae's burgeoning presence in hip-hop performances and recordings nationwide, one hears an audible shift over the course of the 1980s. This is not to say that animosity and otherness completely fall away. On the contrary, Jamaican otherness remains a constitutive element in reggae's

affective force in the US. But the character of Jamaican otherness has changed, from country and quaint to urban and hip, happy-go-lucky to cool-and-deadly, and the otherness was mitigated by more widely circulating representations of Jamaican selves and subjectivities shaped by reggae. At least in certain parts of New York, Miami, and other sites of Jamaican settlement, one gets the sense that Jamaicans were not being so cavalierly thrown in garbage cans anymore. As dancehall-inflected hip-hop and hip-hop-inflected dancehall increasingly defined both underground/hardcore and mainstream styles, selves and others changed shape and changed sides, subtly. In turn this social change would continue to inform musical style, with the early 90s marking a moment of greater crossover and interplay than any previous era—longstanding patterns of mutual engagement notwithstanding. The examples above are thus, in some sense, harbingers of the shape of things to come, opening ears and eyes to new notions of racial and ethnic lines and expressing the inevitable change of new content in new contexts.

By the turn of the decade, Yellowman's defensive posture on "Roots, Rap, Reggae"—"reggae music is not so strange"—had become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Reggae had become more familiar than foreign in New York and the greater US, and though Caribbean caricatures continued to have no small currency (in the marketplace and the imagination alike), increasingly the sound of Brooklyn, as with Kingston and London, was a truly creole sound. As such, hip-hop and reggae offered new possibilities for cultural politics in local and international contexts, and the *Mad Mad*, having accrued additional resonance for various hip-hop and reggae listening communities, would continue to provide a pliant platform for articulating some of these new notions, new tactics, and new connections.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The 90s:

A Sign of the Times, the Mad Mad Maintains its Presence

Like other multiply-versioned, “foundational” riddims, the *Mad Mad* continued to reappear in reggae recordings throughout the 1990s.¹ As with previous re-licks of the riddim, each new version embodied its particular historical moment, as producers and vocalists employed the latest technologies available, dressed up the familiar strains in current styles, and used the resonant riddim to channel musical memory and connect with contemporary audiences around contemporary themes and lines of identification. A number of Jamaican- and US-produced versions of the *Mad Mad* kept the riddim’s familiar strains in the air—in Kingston as well as sites of Jamaican migration and consumption nodes in the international reggae market. At the same time, the degree of crossover and cross-fertilization between hip-hop and reggae had reached a fever pitch by the early 90s, and the embrace of Jamaican style—significantly, often marked by the *Mad Mad* and related memes—continued apace in the states. Since simply cataloguing and explicating the myriad instances of this increasing intertextuality would constitute a major project in itself, this chapter will instead continue to pursue the audible thread of the *Mad Mad*, examining new versions of the well-worn riddim in the context of this continued interplay and considering the social contexts and cultural politics animating its familiar strains and affective resonance from Kingston to NY and around the world

¹ Other examples are such perennials as the *Real Rock*, *Answer*, *Stalag*, *Cuss Cuss*, *Nanny Goat*, *Darker Shade of Black*, and *Heavenless*, among several others.

Re-Nationalizing Reggae: Making the Mad Mad “More Jamaican”

A version of the *Mad Mad* produced in 1991 by soundsystem impresario Maurice Johnson (a.k.a., Jack Scorpio or Black Scorpio) highlights a number of important, and culturally charged, stylistic shifts that reggae underwent in its post-digital days. Scorpio’s re-lick is, like many reggae productions of that time, entirely synthesized, featuring a heavy synth bass (as “round” and “fat” as reggae’s low-end emphasis, further deepened in the digital age, would demand), a chintzy keyboard playing a very occasional skank, a synth “woodblock” marking out a steady 3+3+2 with two kicks and a snare affirming the classic syncopation in typical early-90s *bomp-bomp* style, a hissing hi-hat on every 16th note (which “opens” with the snare accent in the first bar of each two-bar phrase), and the occasional synthesized tom roll.

The salience of the 3+3+2 rhythm in the production is quite representative of early 90s dancehall. Connecting back to earlier, pan-Caribbean and Afro-Jamaican rhythmic structures—as heard in Jamaican folk music and in early Jamaican pop, including much mento and calypso—and a steady polyrhythmic undercurrent in a great many reggae songs (even during reggae’s funkiest, most outward-looking, northward-leaning moments), the 3+3+2 that came to define the dancehall beat in the early 90s remains the predominant rhythmic framework in contemporary Jamaican music and identifies reggae’s distinctive thump worldwide.² For many listeners, the embrace of

² As Kenneth Bilby suggests in his emphasis on the traditional “half” of the story (see “Jamaica,” in *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, ed. Peter Manuel [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995], 143-182), it is crucial to hear the ways that the non-urban musical styles of Jamaica carry forward into today’s popular forms. Well-known work songs such as “Paraney Gal” (see Edward Seaga’s *Folk Music of Jamaica*, Folkways F-4453, track 6) and “Emmanuel Road,” for example, both suggest 3+3+2 figures in their call/response melodies (the latter evolved from work song into a children’s “ring game” and continues to turn up in reggae recordings). It is also notable that “Falla Me,” a

stark, Afro-Jamaican-identified rhythms by reggae producers—despite their appearance as slick digital beats—paralleled the increasingly “thick” creole and lower-class-accented slang that came to define dancehall DJs’ common lexicon, as they spoke more directly to an immediately local, black audience. As dub poet Linton Kwesi-Johnson put it,

One the one hand, the music is totally technological; on the other the rhythms are far more Jamaican: they’re drawn from Etu, Pocomania, Kumina—African-based religious cults who provide the rhythms used by Shabba Ranks or Bujū Banton. So despite the extent of the technology being used, the music is becoming even rootsier, with a resonance even for quite old listeners, because it echoes back to what they first heard in rural Jamaica.³

Indeed, the early 90s produced some of the most minimal expressions of this homegrown rhythm imaginable. Keyboard-based production crew Steelie and Clevie’s *Gi-Gi*, or the “barebones riddim” as Shabba Ranks refers to it on “Ting-a-Ling” (1992), consists of little more than drums and bass, which rarely stray from outlining the simple but steadily driving 3+3+2. Similarly, at various points during the songs voiced over Scorpio’s *Mad*

recreational song performed by the Charles Town Maroons and recorded by Bilby for the collection *Drums of Defiance* shares much of the melody and structure of “Emmanuel Road.” Similarly, the “ring play” songs “Hey Maroma” and “Walk in Dere” (also on Folkways F-4453, tracks 7 and 8), both recorded before a Kumina ceremony, also feature call/response, 3+3+2 figures in their improvised leads and repeating refrains, with the former containing a consistently tapped 3+3+2 accompaniment. Seaga also documents such rhythms infusing the hymnal music of “revival cults” such as Pukkumina/Pocomania and Zion (see, e.g., “Zion ‘Chorus’” [track 9]). It is also worth noting that the return of an explicit 3+3+2 accent emerges in the 80s out of mixing and live performance practice, as both studio engineers and live bands would accentuate the pattern in order to provide variation from one-drop or funk-style accompaniment.

Of course, although dancehall reggae’s “bomp bomp” seems to trademark the 3+3+2 as Jamaica’s proprietary national rhythm, we can observe similar approaches to rhythm across the Caribbean, from the often touted, influential “habanera rhythm” of Cuba to the folk and popular styles of Trinidad, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, etc. The combination of downbeat and offbeat accents in this basic polyrhythm, creating a constant sense of motion, makes for a rather compelling perceptual and sensual experience of the beat. Even so, it is significant that the “bomp bomp” which has come to define dancehall since the early 90s appears to mark music as Jamaican in the global imagination at this point and resonates as Afro-Jamaican, rural, and traditional for certain listeners. (The Jamaicanness of this figure will be important for making sense of reggae’s appearance and disappearance—as it becomes absorbed by hip-hop and R&B—in the United States.)

³ Linton Kwesi Johnson, “Introduction,” *Tougher Than Tough: The Story of Jamaican Music* [liner notes] (London: Island Records Ltd., 1993), 5.

Mad, we hear the riddim reduced to the barest bit of drums and bass. It is notable that the more duple bass pattern pulls against as it plays off the insistent 3+3+2 in Scorpio's version, but the simple, insistent bassline as played by the Roots Radics' Flabba Holt and heard on most 80s *Mad Mad* "do-overs" remains one of the most recognizable, and indispensable, features of the riddim. Interestingly, the bass on Scorpio's version alternates between a measure of Holt's lick (which ends on the fifth) and a measure of Robbie Shakespeare's (which ends on the octave), giving the song's bassline a distinctive, more variable contour. That Scorpio crowned his version the *Silver Dollar* would seem also to suggest a close connection to Shakespeare's work on the *Johnny Dollar*. The other salient feature of the *Mad Mad*, its ascending-descending, three-note riff, is far from absent here. Clearly announcing the riddim's identity, each version begins with a full statement, often repeated, of the easily recognized theme. Played on a synth horn, the riff echoes away on a short, subtle delay that spins off, in classic dub fashion, into 3:2 accents.

Scorpio voiced a good number of established and emergent artists on his re-lick, among them Admiral Bailey, Capleton, Cocoa Tea, General Trees, and Macka B. These singers' and DJs' performances, like the richly connotative structures of the riddim itself, open up into musically-allusive meanings while offering various forms of community-centered, and often critical, commentary. Capleton, for example, still a relative newcomer in 1991 and not yet the Rastafarian firebrand he later became, gets a knob-twisting mix (shaping even the bass into a 3+3+2) to support his somewhat unremarkable lyrics, but impassioned performance, on "Somebody." The text of the song revolves around the kind of self-centered, highly stylized, and often rather inventive boasting that has long formed

a kind of expressive core for dancehall and hip-hop artists, tied to the practice of talking over records in live events. As is typical for the form, Capleton's boastful toasting serves as a vehicle for voicing various topical and thematic concerns, allowing the DJ in this case to make reference to "healthy girls"—thus appeasing the dancehall's demand for "slackness," or sexually explicit content, even as he makes an implicit statement about (Afro-)Jamaican or Afrocentric notions of full-bodied beauty—as well as the often tragic gunplay that has also come to captivate, if not dominate, the dancehall imagination.⁴

Airport Problems and Foreign Minds: A Riddim Propels a Nation on the Move

Undergirded by a version of the *Silver Dollar* with new levels on the various instruments and a distinctive form created by different layering decisions, another voicing for Scorpio, "Airport Problem," audibly connects the *Mad Mad* riddim to a number of other musical threads and previous or contemporary performances. The song takes as its subject the suspiciously racist policies of English customs agents, and offers a rather straightforward statement about such prejudice: "custom officer no like black man, / it even worse if you a Jamaican." Sung by the British-Jamaican Macka B, who was well acquainted with the travails of travel between the U.K. and Jamaica, the chorus orients the listener to the particular problems facing high-profile, and thus easily targeted, reggae artists: "worries and problem dung a [down at] the airport / some Jamaican entertainers

⁴ It is important to note that despite Yellowman's role in reuniting reggae with Jamaica's (and the Caribbean's) longstanding tradition of bawdy song (see, e.g., the mento and calypso repertoires), reggae artists had never really abandoned the perennial subjects of the body and sexuality, expressed in everything from the subtlest innuendo to the most explicit (and for some, pornographic) terms. See, for example, the *X-Rated Box Set* (2002) from Trojan records, which collects some of the most lascivious reggae recorded between 1966-75. In terms of song texts focusing on gun violence, there exists an entire sub-category of dancehall songs with "gun lyrics."

nearly end up inna court.” More than simply a solipsistic reflection on such troubles, though, Macka B’s framing of the problem in a way that focuses on “Jamaican entertainers” allows him to perform some rather funny lyrics, thus addressing a serious matter in a comical, catchy, and compelling manner. He imitates a number of top singers and DJs (and their recent hits), adapting their lyrics to the situation in question and crafting a richly, explicitly intertextual song. When Tony Rebel is allegedly caught carrying ganja abroad, for example, Macka B impersonates the singer resorting to his hit “Fresh Vegetable” (1991) which assumes new significance in this context: “that a me fresh vegetable, / I beg unu fi leff Tony Rebel.” Similarly, “badman” DJ Cutty Ranks, caught with a plethora of weapons, replies, “that a me hand grenade! hand grenade! / fi customs officer gwaan like dem brave.” Macka B delivers these lines to the melody of Ranks’s “Hand Grenade” (1991), a tune that itself refers to previous dancehall recordings, most notably both Ninjaman’s “My Weapon” (1990) and “Murder Them” (1990), both recorded on Steely and Clevie’s version of the *Sleng Teng*. Moreover, the “stock” melody that Macka B employs when he’s not quoting from his contemporaries, and which he uses on the chorus, connects “Airport Problem” to a number of other reggae songs—and, depending on the strictness of one’s interpretation, a rather large batch at that. The sing-song melody that Macka B employs in these instances is common to a number of dancehall recordings from this period, including such popular, crossover hits as Super Cat’s “Ghetto Red Hot” (1991). The level of intertextuality on “Airport Problem” is thus rich and complex, but it is par for the course in a musical tradition where versioning and allusion stand as crucial, commonplace techniques of composition and improvisation.

Only a couple years later, the *Mad Mad* would be heard again in dancehalls across the Jamaican diaspora via a re-lick by Bobby “Digital” Dixon, a *Sleng Teng*-era apprentice of King Jammy who soon established himself as a top-notch producer in his own right. Supporting voicings from popular DJs of the day—including Terror Fabulous, Jack Radics, General Degree, Junior Tucker, and Red Dragon—Dixon’s version was broadcast by soundsystems on the island and abroad. Once again, the production illuminates the ways that technological and stylistic changes constantly inform the creation of new riddims and versions, underlining a dynamic expression of cultural politics that continues to move in step with the changes facing Jamaican society. Indeed, Dixon describes his own creative process as an attempt to seek out the new while maintaining ties to traditions that resonate as “authentic” for reggae artists and audiences:

Each thing you do, you try to make it one step ahead of time, so everything don’t sound like the same thing, so you try to introduce a little more live music, feed into the computer drumming. You try to play a live guitar, you try to play a live bass on it, to really give it a warm, make it sound more real, that although it is in the digital age, but you really try to keep that authenticness about the thing.⁵

While affirming the same enduring ideas about technology and authenticity that dancehall would otherwise seem to challenge in its embrace of quantized rhythms and chintzy synths, Digital’s description of mixing “computer drumming” with live instrumentation does effectively describe his distinctive production style, especially in recent years. But the highly synthesized riddims Bobby Digital was producing in dancehall’s “digital” days also balanced the sounds of “computers” with more “human” features. Frequently employing Steelie and Cleve to build riddims with a kind of live-

⁵ Interview with David Katz, *Murder Dog* (June 2003), <http://www.murderdog.com/june03_articles/dancehall_artists/BobbyDigital3.htm> (accessed 6 September 2005).

ness that programmed sequences more often lack, Dixon's music could appeal to dancehall denizens as well as (some) reggae purists.

Bobby Digital's version of the *Mad Mad* is representative in this manner, at least for his sound in the early 90s. Featuring digital samples of vocal interjections ("hey!" "huh!"), triggered at regular intervals—often on the offbeat preceding the kick on 1 or 3—the riddim manages to make such "computer voices" sound less mechanical by inserting an occasional "huh!" on an odd accent. At the end of every two-bar pattern, the "huh!" becomes a multiply-triggered "huh-huh!" which, spanning the spot where it fell the measure before, sounds slightly "off beat" (rather than *on* the offbeat), giving the sample-based pattern a more "randomized" or "humanized" feel. (Ironically, "humanize" has become a standard quantization setting for many sequencers, usually involving some degree of subtle placement before or after the exact pulse.) Dixon's digital bass offers a similar mix of the human and computer. Despite being recognizably synthesized, the bass tone's "round," "fat," and "warm" timbral qualities derive from reggae's foundational aesthetics in analog recording technology. Moreover, the bass's quantization here is not such an issue: by riding the pulse so exactly, it accomplishes precisely what Flabba Holt and Robbie Shakespeare often strove for—a lockstep rhythmic sense so "in-the-pocket" as to be unwaveringly *on* the beat. (The contour of the bassline recalls both Holt's and Shakespeare's versions, playing predominantly on the root tone but using the fifth and octave for end-of-the-measure turnarounds.) The keyboard chords, playing the "skank" pattern that had yet to be supplanted by dancehall's 3+3+2 minimalism, sound remarkably "clean" here—a timbral quality associated with the "digital" sound. At the same time, an underlying tonal fragment, aligned with the hi-hat and low in the mix,

gives the overall texture a slightly less “clean” sound by removing the intervening silences so characteristic of digital productions and so rare in live-band sessions. Moreover, occasional keyboard fills, often falling at the end of a four-bar phrase, serve to evoke a feel more “live” than programmed, while the *Mad Mad* riff, which appears as usual at the beginning of the track (and is played on the same “organ” sound as the fills), also produces a “humanizing” effect. Most likely, the riff was recorded as a “live take” by an accomplished keyboardist.

The drums on Digital’s *Mad Mad* are clearly programmed, repeating what is essentially a one-bar loop over the course of the song, and they connect the sound of this version rather audibly to contemporary movements in both reggae and international pop. Notably, this most-programmed aspect of the riddim is also arguably its least reggae-centric feature. As much as the drums here may connect to earlier, funk-infused reggae riddims, with its kicks on 1 and 3 and snares on 2 and 4, the pattern here more closely resembles American musical style than, say, Jamaica’s one-drop or 3+3+2 and thus gives the version an internationalist sheen (or “outernationalist,” as reggae parlance would have it). Similar rhythmic patterns can be heard on other reggae tracks produced in 1993, including the R&B-tinged riddim produced by Clifton “Specialist” Dillon which propelled crossover hits by Mad Cobra (“Flex”) and Buju Banton (the homophobic anthem, “Boom Bye Bye”), both of which found favor among hip-hop DJs in the US partly, one would presume, because of their familiarity. Indeed, several other emerging reggae producers at this time, among them Donovan Germain and Dave Kelly, distinguished themselves through riddims that borrowed heavily from American (and international) pop, R&B, and hip-hop. In addition to their rhythmic organization, the

drums' timbres on Dixon's re-lick are slick and synthetic. Significantly, the drums often stay out of the texture until the track's reggae-ness has been firmly established by the skanking chords and familiar bassline. On the version underlying Red Dragon's "Girl Yu a Benz," for instance, the drums do not enter until 40 seconds into the song.

Given the mix of musical signifiers of Jamaican-ness and foreign-ness on Bobby Digital's *Mad Mad* re-lick, it is telling that one of the biggest songs on Dixon's version, Red Dragon's "Girl Yu a Benz," employs foreign car metaphors to discuss the attributes of an object of his affection. Red Dragon made his name with the 1987 smash "Hol' a Fresh"—a massive dancehall hit which, while ostensibly referring to a brand of soap, also seems to riff off contemporary hip-hop's infatuation with "fresh" as a slang term connoting approval. "Girl Yu a Benz" continues this engagement with things "from foreign" (and their meanings in Jamaica), comparing a woman to a Mercedes Benz and thus distinguishing her from possible competitors, who are dismissed as BMWs, Hondas, and worse: "she a old Chevrolet," intones Red Dragon, "but you a Benz." Beginning the song by spelling out the car's name—"B – E – N – Z!"—the DJ proceeds to encourage the woman in question to "ease up offa the brakes," "step 'pon the gas," and "clutch [her] gear," among other innuendo-laden suggestions. Carrying the metaphor further, all the while dipping into the kind of tongue-twisting, double-time delivery dancehall DJs had embraced by the early 90s—a virtuosic style marked as Jamaican, though indubitably influenced by, even as it informed, the "fast rap" cadences of late 80s hip-hop and British-Jamaican styles—Red Dragon compares the gal's image to a brand-new car: "gal, look how you shine, look how you criss," he says, as if you "a come out a plastic."⁶ The

⁶ *Criss* is Jamaican pronunciation for *crisp*, a term not unlike *fresh* in describing something that looks good because of its newness. The class-related dimensions of such terms of approval should not be overlooked.

DJ's compliments impart a sentiment often expressed with the Jamaican colloquialism, "pretty like money" (almost always referring to a woman, as in, "she coulda pretty like money, but...")—a phrase that would seem to reflect the same enchantment with the glamour of capital as the more recent hip-hop coinage, "bling," now well-ensconced in reggae parlance. Significantly, "Girl Yu a Benz" appeared as a 12" that also featured a "club mix" of the same song, adding additional foreign sonic signifiers. Thus the track calls attention to the demands, or seductions, of an international market, just as the international market—and its shiny, pricey commodities—suggests for Red Dragon (and presumably, his audience) the seductiveness of a sexy woman.

Alongside longings for the best goods the outside world has to offer and implicit affirmations of global capital's allure—often accompanied by a concomitant dismissal of the Jamaican state's ability to facilitate access to such—dancehall DJs express a good amount of ambivalence about such fascination with foreign commodities and values. In 1994, over a Jammy's-produced re-lick of the *Mad Mad*, Beenie Man—a DJ who rose to international fame by paraphrasing rapper/producer Missy Elliot and singing "Who got the keys to my Bimma? [i.e., BMW]"—nonetheless critiques what he sees as the essentially un-Jamaican values which have found purchase among Jamaican youth and the population at large, especially given the large number of Jamaicans who maintain close ties to friends and relatives living abroad.⁷ Beenie Man's *Mad Mad*-propelled song, "Foreign Minded" (which was, somewhat ironically, a hit in the U.K.), warns against the

⁷ Beenie Man's "Who Am I? (Sim Simma)" (1998), released in the US with a hip-hop remix, was a major stateside hit, epitomizing another crest of dancehall crossover in the US mainstream. Notably, the underlying riddim, produced by crossover-savvy Jeremy Harding, employs a sample from hip-hop group the Roots' "Section" (1996), thus indexing a continued engagement with African-American music even in "hardcore" dancehall (i.e., dancehall intended primary for a Jamaican audience). For all its hip-hop borrowings, however, the track's 3+3+2 rhythms and creole lyrics place it firmly in the reggae tradition.

mythical seductions of the North, especially for (return) migrants: “foreign a no bed of roses / don’t follow no guy and get foreign minded / foreign a no bed of roses / man reach a foreign, come back inna one trousers.” Thus, despite the promise of wealth so bound up with Jamaicans’ imagination of and migration to the U.S., it is possible to return—indeed, to be returned, as a deportee, or as Beenie puts it “go a prison, get dip”—with nothing but the clothes one is wearing. The DJ proceeds to detail a litany of afflictions that accompany a “foreign” mindset, using as a morality tale the story of a deportee whose woman takes all he had and, adding insult to injury, marries his best friend. In the process, some of the DJ’s criticism endorses rather conservative mores, including patriarchal assumptions about the duplicity of women and ideal family size.

Overall, however, the DJ’s critique centers on the materialism, superficiality, and sense of entitlement associated with the metropolitan centers of the Jamaican diaspora. Beenie assails the typical Jamaican male migrant who seeks to “go get rich and put all of him love and trust in this image [of American-style wealth].” Similarly, in consecutive lines, he denounces Jamaican women who embrace Babylon’s excessive and entitled consumption patterns—“anything inna the world the gal want, she get it”—while, in contrast, participating in the un-Biblical barrenness of “Western” childbirth rates: “only one pickaney she have inna foreign.”⁸ The song thus features a seemingly uneasy mix of ideological positions, at once affirming the myths of the “American dream”—that men and women actually can get rich and have access to what they want, which is, of course, only true in a very relative sense, and certainly not for all migrants—and criticizing such

⁸ *Pickaney* (sometimes *pickney* or *pickaninny*), a colloquial term for *child*, is commonly used not just in Jamaica but in the Caribbean more generally. Although some associate these terms with slavery—and, specifically, with “master” discourse—they are used most commonly without such negative connotations (similar to the colloquial use in Jamaica, especially among men, of *breed* to mean *impregnate*).

pre-occupations, such attitudes toward accumulation, as fundamentally at odds with a sort of idealized, Jamaican community ethic, a proper *livity* (to use the Rastafarian term). Despite its contradictions, though, the song effectively engages longstanding and enduring tensions in Jamaica—a nation, we should remember, increasingly constituted by its “citizens” living abroad—around foreign versus local values. Considering the asymmetrical economic and political relations between Jamaica and the U.S., it is notable, though unsurprising, that critiques of so-called foreign values so frequently take up the banner of anti-materialism. That dancehall DJs such as Beenie Man have since embraced hip-hop’s bling-bling imagery and pragmatic stance on personal accumulation even as they continue to articulate a Rastafari-informed critique of North American consumption patterns and the effects of global capital speaks to the slipperiness and increasing contradictions of hip-hop as a carrier of, even as it critiques, capitalist ideologies. Far from falling on deaf ears in Jamaica, hip-hop’s seductive strains—especially as projected via cable television and the Internet—produce forms of resistance and accommodation in dancehall’s mirror/mirror engagement with the ubiquitous genre.

Dancehall DJ as Global Gangsta: Recasting Rebel Music as Murder Music

Appearing on the same album as Beenie’s “Foreign Minded”—the rivalry-themed joint-release, *Face to Face* (1994)—and riding the same re-lick of the *Mad Mad*, Bounty Killer’s “Kill or Be Killed” presents another side of the ongoing conversation between hip-hop and reggae. Since the early 90s Bounty Killer has emerged as dancehall’s leading proponent of a “hardcore” sound—an aesthetic that combines the gangsta pose of

glorified gun violence, an advocacy for the underclass that has cemented the DJ's self-appointment as "the poor people's governor," and a savvy approach to musical style that brings together, and alternates between, machine-gun style creole performed over dancehall's starkest, "Jamaican-est" riddims and crossover-courting hip-hop beats peppered with American slang. (Bounty Killer was one of the first, and has been one of the more prominent, Jamaican performers to employ the term *nigga*—a word not common to Jamaica otherwise—in a fashion similar to rappers' commonplace use of the re-accented epithet.) No stranger to luxury car metaphors, Bounty's "Benz and Bimma" (1996), for example, produced by U.S.-based riddim-smith Aidan Jones, follows Red Dragon's lead and compares girls' figures to the sensual shapes of Mercedes Benz, BMW, and Lexus. The poor people's governor is, thus, not terribly concerned with affirming traditional symbols of wealth, at least not as much as affirming the beauty of Jamaican women (as he objectifies them) or affirming his own standing as a "ladies-man."

On "Kill or Be Killed," Bounty takes a different but familiar tack, using Jammy's slick re-lick to rehearse a set of now familiar clichés about violence in Jamaica and the survivalist stance it engenders. These images and sentiments, often referred to in Jamaica as "reality" lyrics, have long been Bounty's stock-in-trade. Overlapping easily with and reflecting an engagement with American gangsta rap, such "gun tunes" or "gun lyrics" have been embraced by Jamaican youth audiences and by an entire generation of DJs who grew up in the context of Jamaica's politicized violence and reggae performers' glorification of the gunman—a representational practice consistent with the longstanding

appeal of Hollywood Westerns and outlaw figures in Jamaica (where the law has not always been on the side of justice).

Although “gun lyrics” had exerted influence over reggae recordings long before he emerged as a leading DJ, Bounty Killer nevertheless distinguished himself in a crowded field through his flair for creatively re-inventing such images and attitudes, consistently connecting them class issues (see, e.g., “Look” [1999], an explicitly class-oriented apology for gun violence), and projecting them through the sensual, musical form of his class-inflected language, dancehall- and hip-hop-drenched rhythms and rhymes, and deep, commanding voice, which occasionally leaps an octave for emphasis. Thus, for all his clichés, Bounty Killer’s music is embraced by dancehall audiences as fresh, compelling, and insurgent. The face of contemporary “rebel music” as Bob Marley called it, continues to chant down the government and express empathy with “sufferahs” even as it articulates an increasingly insular, individualist, and intimidating stance. As one of the leading proponents of this revised rebellion, Bounty Killer’s oppositional orientation finds one form of expression in songs such as “Kill or Be Killed”—songs which adopt a pragmatic, survivalist, and sometimes predatory stance in the face of abject poverty, political exploitation and abandonment, and the harsh, bleak “reality” which so many Kingstonians experience daily. Although rooted in such social causes, Bounty’s militancy and intense rhetoric also have enabled the DJ to distinguish himself against a crowded field of badman DJs. Promotional materials from Greensleeves, one of the labels that issues Bounty’s music, affirm this link between his almost cartoonish performance of “badness” and a perception that his music engages with “real” issues: “In the early ’90’s the reggae public thirsted for larger-than-life characters capable of taking on all-comers

and asserting the hardened, streetwise attitudes rife in the deprived ghettos of Jamaica. By lashing out at not only the musical competition but also paid government informers, political corruption and police brutality, Bounty Killer quickly became a force to be reckoned with.”⁹

“Kill or Be Killed” paints a portrait of the artist as badman, gunman, and reveler in his own viciousness. Beginning the song with his trademark exclamation—the fitting plea (if so stylized as to escape its repentant overtones), “Lawd a mercy!”—the DJ goes on to describe in morbid terms how he will spill the blood of any who stand in his way, especially “informers,” those most reviled enemies of DJs and badmen everywhere. “Gunshot a crush out your bone like mill,” he warns, comparing his firepower to the grinding force of a mill, later rhyming it with another macabre metaphor, “And as your bread, me gi’ you two iron pill.” The chorus presents a rather straightforward statement of Bounty’s badman philosophy:

Kill or be killed—
Dem stay deh talk until [They continue to talk until]
Mi big “God a Come” pop out [I pull out my “big gun,” named “God Is Coming”]
And dem blood ova spill [overspill]

Propelling his lyrics with the same sort of generic melodic contour so typical of dancehall in the early 90s, Bounty shrouds his gun talk in catchy, sensual form. At one point, the DJ’s sing-song delivery departs from its regular cadence to take a familiar shape, that of the “Zunguzung” meme. Recalling the descending melody of the first half of Yellowman’s famous tune, Bounty Killer boasts that “S’ madee call mi name from dem go mention kill”—which is to say, being the Killer, his name is invoked anytime

⁹ See “Bounty Killer” at < <http://www.greensleeves.net/bio/biogboun.html>> (accessed 19 September 2005.)

“s’ madee” (creole for *somebody*) employs the term *kill*. The interpolation of such a resonant musical phrase here connects the DJ to previous performances and catches the audience’s attention at a crucial, self-referential moment.

Indeed, since the 90s dancehall has been seen, alongside gangsta rap, as nearly synonymous with “murder music” (to borrow a phrase both from hip-hop group Mobb Deep and from U.K. gay activist organization Outrage!, which organized an effective campaign against reggae’s rampant homophobia in 2005). The glorification of violence in both genres should be viewed alongside increasingly violent content in the mainstream media as well as the socio-political contexts of entrenched poverty and the militarization of ghetto areas (with more, or less, direct assistance—i.e., weaponry—from the governments of Jamaica and the United States). When Brooklyn-based, creole-steeped rappers the Cocoa Brovaz chant, “‘ghetto red hot’ round the world you hear that,” on Talib Kweli’s “Gun Music” (2002), alluding to the title of Super Cat’s “Ghetto Red Hot”—a crossover hip-hop/dancehall hit in 1992—they give voice not only to the shared experiences of the urban poor worldwide but to the particular, compelling figurations that Jamaican reggae artists offered to their “brethren” abroad.¹⁰ Bounty Killer stands as a prime example of the mirror/mirror exchange between reggae’s and hip-hop’s representational practices and musical forms. In giving sensual form to the shared experiences, the “reality,” of the poor (and in particular, the black poor), dancehall and

¹⁰ “Gun Music” is a deeply intertextual song, alluding as well to BDP’s “Bo Bo Bo” (from *Live Hardcore Worldwide* [1991]), which employs a late 80s-style dancehall riddim, complete with 4/4 kicks and 3+3+2 snares. Using the dancehall-derived chorus melody but not the dancehall-style beat of the BDP song, Kweli and the Cocoa Brovaz (formerly known as Smif’n’Wessun, a creole-steeped, Brooklyn-based duo) advance the archetype of the gunman as militant, making implicit links to the Black Panthers and figures such as Robert F. Williams and explicit links to “ghettos” worldwide: Kingston, New York, Philadelphia, Jamaica, Brooklyn, Ethiopia. It is no surprise, given dancehall’s gunman profile, that reggae style is employed to make this articulation of pan-African, rebel militancy—nor is it a surprise, given Rastafari’s linkage of Jamaican and Ethiopia, that the latter site is named in the song.

hip-hop have emerged as the musics of the “real” *par excellence*, resonating with diverse actors across postcolonial contexts. Considering that the stories of class and racial struggle remain such deeply constitutive myths in Jamaica, the United States, and the wider world, it is no surprise that such evocative portrayals find audiences not just among the subjects and “sufferahs” in question but among the larger populace, traversing quite a range of voyeuristic and empathetic subject positions. This engagement with the “real,” however, and its inherent relationship to musical representation and a market that seems to reward extreme rhetoric over nuance, means that “reality” lyrics have steadily moved away from reality and into the same realm of fantasy as indulged by Hollywood and cable television. The “real” and its increasingly narrow depiction in reggae and hip-hop stands as a tantalizing specter: while traces of engagement with actual social, political, and economic conditions of poverty remain, the glamorization of gunplay, the hustle, and conspicuous consumption have overtaken the “rebel music” imaginary.

The meanings that audiences make of such strong and yet seemingly contradictory sentiments as found in both “Kill or Be Killed” and “Foreign Minded” depend not only on the various contexts of reception, one’s subject position, and the like, but on the lyrics’ inflection by the riddims that propel them (or trip them up). Notably, both songs ride a re-lick of the *Mad Mad* which, unlike the more Northward-leaning version produced by Bobby Digital the year before, projects its Jamaican-ness with a prevailing 3+3+2 rhythmic structure (achieved via knob-twisting “breaks”) and hand-drumming that evokes Rastafarian/Afro-Jamaican drumming traditions. But just as the bassline here, which walks up to the octave in the same way as Robbie Shakespeare’s performance on *Johnny Dollar*, pulls slightly against as it plays off the 3+3+2 with its

foursquare funk, King Jammy's re-lick at times seems to tug against Beenie's anti-foreign critique and Bounty's hardcore provincialism. For all its signifiers of Jamaican-ness—including the predominant 3+3+2 rhythm, the chintzy synthesizers, the skanking keyboards, and the clear allusion to various versions of the *Mad Mad* (including, via its distinctive horn-riff, the *Golden Hen*)—Jammy's version also references the rather foreign sounds of smooth-jazz saxophone and Casio-produced bleeps-and-bloops which, despite their naturalization through the popularity of the *Sleng Teng* riddim and its "digital" descendants, nonetheless signal a kind of "international" orientation and provide a stark contrast with the "rootsier" sounds in the mix. The uneasy combination here is, however, reined into reggae style through quintessential dancehall-style vocal performances by the DJs.

Although their individual vocal styles both display an engagement with hip-hop flows, Beenie and Bounty also maintain an identifiably Jamaican sound via such distinctive features as sing-song melodies, staccato deliveries, double-time/flip-tongue rhythms, and, of course, plenty of creole and local, class-accented slang. In the end, Jammy's *Mad Mad* version succeeds in making continued links to dancehall's North American partner-in-rhyme while maintaining a predilection for Jamaican aesthetics. The music serves as further testament to the increasing, intimate interplay between hip-hop and reggae, an interaction intensified by migration and the circulation of such media as these very recordings.

The Mad Apple: A Well-Worn Riddim Resonates in New York

Turning our attention stateside, we can observe the mirror/mirror relationship between reggae and hip-hop taking a number of different forms, each of them pointing to a separate, if related, sphere of activity and interpenetration. At the same time that the *Mad Mad* maintained its presence across Kingston's (and, by extension, New York's) soundscape, several U.S.-based producers and vocalists were also returning to the familiar strains of the riddim and its associated melodies in order to connect with local (and foreign) audiences. By examining these American eruptions of the *Mad Mad* we can trace yet further connections within and across styles and apprehend further the depth of penetration of the sounds of Jamaica into American musical and cultural practice.

In 1993, Louis "Kayel" Sharpe, a/k/a K7, released a single called "Zunga Zeng," which employed for its chorus a digital sample, sped and pitched up, of Yellowman's classic refrain. The single, which proved popular in clubs, followed a much larger hit for K7, "Come Baby Come"—a ragga-tinged dance pop confection that quickly climbed the club and pop charts. Before embarking on a solo career, Kayel was one-third of the group TKA, a "Latin freestyle" trio, releasing the kind of synthesizer-heavy, electro-propelled dance pop and syrupy ballads that, as performed by acts such as Expose, the Cover Girls, and Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam, found large audiences in New York, New Jersey, and Miami. Before long the style was co-opted, to immense sales and success, by such pop acts as Madonna, Jody Watley, Debbie Gibson, and the New Kids on the Block. In an interview with DJ Johnny Budz, Kayel himself calls TKA's style "dance pop music," but he also draws his musical genealogy more precisely when asked about hip-hop's contributions,

“Hip-Hop is the mother sound of Freestyle and R&B, and I grew up listening to that kind of music.”¹¹ Indeed, the hip-hop influence, not to mention a healthy dose of dancehall, emerge much more audibly in Kayel’s work as a solo artist. K7’s debut, *Swing Batta Swing*, was a certified gold record, largely due to the popularity of “Come Baby Come,” a track that, with its gruff-toned, call-and-response vocals and catchy nonsense syllables—*ba-dang-da-dang-da-dang-da-dada-dang-dang*—was clearly informed by, and piggy-backed on the popularity of, the crossover-oriented dancehall (e.g., Shabba Ranks) which was finding traction in U.S. “urban” and pop markets at around the same time.¹² A description in the *All Music Guide* affirms the perception of K7 as an act bringing together these stylistic threads: “New York City native K7 had success in the mid-'90s with his fusion of rap, dancehall, and dance.” The group’s Yellowman-sampling second single, “Zunga Zeng,” would have been widely heard as both an album cut and a minor club-anthem.¹³ Yellowman’s decade-old refrain would not have seemed at all out of place for the increasingly polyglot pop emerging from New York City at this time.

“Zunga Zeng” not only gives us a window into the continued penetration of reggae into the American pop vocabulary, it also demonstrates the particular production values of its day. Although we hear group harmonies and a prominent synthesizer melody, this is not the freestyle music of TKA. The sole synth-line, a high-pitched, wheezy melody, connects the production to the “G-Funk” that had come increasingly to

¹¹ See interview at clubfreestyle.com: <http://www.clubfreestyle.com/onstage/interviews/tka/interview_tka.htm> (accessed 19 September 2005).

¹² Shabba Ranks’s breakthrough album, *As Raw As Ever* (1991), containing such radio- and video-propelled hits as “Trailer Load a Girls,” “Housecall” (featuring British-Jamaican singer Maxi Priest), and “The Jam” (featuring KRS-One) represented a major splash for dancehall’s early 90s crossover wave. At a time when major labels—Shabba was signed to Epic Records—had begun showing interest in dancehall reggae, Shabba’s success encouraged the promotion of similar acts.

¹³ “Zunga Zeng” was given a prominent position as the third track on the album. Unsurprisingly, “Come Baby Come” was the album’s opener.

define L.A.-based hip-hop and found widespread favor on Dr. Dre's multi-platinum outing, *The Chronic* (1992).¹⁴ Although the beefed-up breakbeats—enhanced with synthesized drums and a booming bass reminiscent of the Roland TR-808—underlying “Zunga Zeng” point to Dre's production style as well (in particular, to the albums for N.W.A. and Eazy-E, whose “Nobody Move” [1988] also featured a sampled Yellowman refrain), the influence from West Coast hip-hop ends there. Despite its pop-sheen, the rest of the production fits easily alongside contemporary, N.Y.-based hip-hop, especially those songs, such as Naughty By Nature's “O.P.P.” (1991), which also enjoyed some radio-play and sales-chart success.¹⁵ Between the “dusty,” well-worn breakbeats and the saxophone loops and more fragmentary jazz samples (recalling sample-based producer Pete Rock), “Zunga Zeng” typifies a particular kind of sample-heavy hip-hop production. Coming at the tail-end of hip-hop's “Golden Age” when, still unbridled by the chill of copyright litigation, sampling practices ran rampant, such tracks often dazzle in their dense mix of musical signifiers. In this context, a Yellowman sample represents yet another layered reference in a rich world of recorded music ripe for such “plundering.”

¹⁴ Remarkably, for all its West Coast-centric, G-Funk stylings, *The Chronic* contains conspicuous Jamaican and Jamaican-inspired voices throughout the album, bearing witness to a steady, if not increasing, creole presence in hip-hop even outside such established sites of Jamaican migration as New York and Miami. (Similarly, the Atlanta-based Arrested Development demonstrated the same with their reference to Johnny Osbourne's “Budy Bye” on their national hit, “People Everyday” [1992]. Atlanta has, incidentally, increasingly become a popular site of migration for Jamaicans.) From “Diggity” Daz's flip-tongue, dancehall-steeped verses on the KRS-One sampling “The Day the Niggaz Took Over” and “Lil Ghetto Boy” and RBX's code-switching on “Lyrical Gangbang” to Dr. Dre's creole-fluent female suitor during the introduction to “Let Me Ride.” Similarly, one could hear reggae-infused rap coming out of Northern California at this time as well, affirming reggae's circulation and resonance beyond its traditional centers. Raw Fusion, for instance, a group associated with Digital Underground, released an album called *Live From the Styletron* (1991) which put forward an explicit fusion of hip-hop and reggae, especially on fast-chatting, melody-interpolating tracks such as “Hip Hip/Stylee Expression,” the Cutty Ranks invoking “Don't Test,” and the *bomp-bomp*-propelled “Ah Nah Go Drip,” with the intention of ushering in, at least according to the tongue-in-cheek liner notes, “a new age and a new cultural awareness, that will eventually bring all people together as one, and eliminate the hate brought about by ignorance.” Thus the group embraces a foreign style, reggae, as a way to confront entrenched racial and ethnic divisions.

¹⁵ Notably, Naughty By Nature's “Ghetto Bastard (Everything's Gonna Be Alright)” —from the same, eponymous album that contains “O.P.P.”—features an interpolation of Bob Marley's “No Woman, No Cry,” demonstrating yet another node of connection between hip-hop and reggae.

And yet, despite the leveling effect of such a motley mix, the choice to sample from a reggae song, and from “Zungazung” at that, represents a significant strategy. What we hear in K7’s music is a condensation of New York’s varied soundscape, but “Zunga Zeng,” as a pop-savvy song, does more than merely distill the city’s “sound”: it mobilizes a set of resonant figures, with reggae firmly (if distortedly) in the center, in order to strike a chord with contemporary listeners.

The presence of reggae signifiers in such an ephemeral yet widely heard track as K7’s “Zunga Zeng” further confirms, as it propels, the presence of Jamaican musical style in the American mainstream. As if to dispel any doubts about dancehall’s influence here, not only does “Zunga Zeng” contain a sample of Yellowman’s “Zungazung” (which includes not just the vocals, but the bass, drums, and other sounds of the original arrangement—all pitched/sped up), Kayel also peppers the recording with the same cliché interjections that also gave BDP’s music some of its Jamaican tinge, including the distinctively Jamaican stylizations of onomatopoeic gunfire (“Bo! Bo! Bo!” “Bdddrrrrap!” “Bdddrrrrap!”). Perhaps more telling is the appearance late in the song of the terms “ragga” and “Rasta”—two common signifiers (if empty ones in this case) of Jamaican-ness. Kayel pronounces the terms side-by-side, without any elaboration of their significance, suggesting that their employment here functions primarily—and revealingly—as a kind of play for authenticity, seeking to cement the vague but powerful sonic connections to reggae which otherwise operate at a more implicit level throughout the song. Interestingly, the references appear at a moment in the song (at around 3:00) when Kayel is otherwise rapping in Spanish, suggesting at once the foreignness of and familiarity with Jamaican language:

Y yo te hablo
Como te gusta
 I talk to ya
Just like you like it
 Te toco eso
Como te gusta
 A ragga Rasta!
Just like you like it

This seemingly more explicit attempt to foreground the Jamaican-ness of “Zunga Zeng” seems as nonsensical (but nevertheless meaningful) as the scat-like syllables that begin the song. The collective response to these two relatively unrelated signifiers (save for their common Jamaican-ness), is, “just like you like it”—perhaps acknowledging the current vogue for dancehall style. The placement of these Jamaican terms after the translations that precede them, however, appears to create an odd equation: K7 juxtaposes “te toco eso” (trans., “I touch you there” or “I touch that [thing] of yours”) with “a ragga rasta,” which perhaps is to say, coyly, “this Jamaican-style music touches you, no?” Then again, maybe we should not make too much of this passing reference except to note that K7’s employment of such Jamaican terms appears at least to confirm their currency. After all, the song is a light bit of club fare: the lyrics are so much dance-pop doggerel—though remarkably bilingual given the American mainstream’s general intolerance of anything but English—rarely rising above such clichés as, “Move! / Come on, come on! / Hey ladies, let your bodies flow!”

Not atypical for a dance-pop (or even hip-hop) single, “Zunga Zeng” was released as an “extended mix” 12-inch including three remixes and an *a capella* vocal. The various remixes allow the record to appeal both to DJs in search of different, seemingly “exclusive” versions and to DJs within niche markets—such as Latin freestyle—who

might not otherwise play the original version. The remixes illustrate K7's cross-market strategy, linking stylistic features to demographic targets (e.g., mainstream/top-40 consumers, dance-floor denizens, the "Latin" market). At the same time, the multiple versions of "Zunga Zeng" also give Kayel an opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of styles that informs his sound and to make additional sonic (and thus social) connections. The "Diamond Mix" substitutes different samples but stays essentially within the same hip-hop/dance-pop style: a bluesy guitar line takes the place of the jazz fragments and sax riff, new (but again familiar) breakbeats provide the rhythmic drive, while a soul-jazz organ provides some occasional lift. On the "F.U.N Mob Remix," orchestral "stabs" and vocal grunts flesh out the texture as yet another well-worn breakbeat (from Melvin Bliss's "Synthetic Substitution") serves as anchor. Occasionally, a freestyle-evoking bassline enters and some light synth percussion plays in right channel. Different from the other versions, the "F.U.N. Mob Remix" features the vocalists engaging in some call-and-response with the Yellowman sample toward the end, while a second breakbeat, on every other bar, adds to the percussive texture.

The "Top Dog Remix" is perhaps the most interesting of all. Beginning with spacey synth, followed by a programmed break and a slinky bass lick, the track quickly breaks into a synth-heavy workout, replaying, at a faster tempo than the original, the accompanimental track to Yarbrough & Peoples' dancefloor classic, "Don't Stop the Music" (1981). A clear and impressively faithful homage, the beat re-connects K7 to his freestyle roots via the sounds of electronic R&B, one of the major tributaries feeding the freestyle sound. On this mix, the Yellowman sample is gone in lieu of a group rendition of "zungazungungusunguzeng" since, presumably, the new texture is too dense to mix

with the Yellowman sample (and its accompanying arrangement). Connecting further to the sounds of freestyle and electro (both of which frequently employed vocoder technology), some vocals on the “Top Dog Remix” are electronically-processed, including the chorus vocal, “I love to turn you on.” Fulfilling the tribute, there is a short bridge of sorts following the chorus, during which the texture and chord progression change substantially while a female voice sings a memorable (and, for hip-hop and R&B listeners, oft quoted) phrase from the Yarbrough & Peoples’ original: “I just wanna rock you, / all night long.” The short but faithful interpolation departs rather strongly from the rest of the song, but given the multiple references already at play here, it is easily reconciled within the intertextual world in which K7’s music revels.

Subliminal Minded: The *Mad Mad* in the Making of “the Real”

If K7’s 1993 reference to the *Mad Mad* complex serves to confirm reggae’s place in early 90s pop, then KRS-One’s allusion in the same year—on a re-working of “Remix for P”—demonstrates the enduring resonance of these musical figures for “underground” hip-hop artists and audiences. Shedding the BDP moniker, KRS-One’s solo debut, *Return of the Boom Bap*, advanced a notion (and a sound) of “authentic” hip-hop which—coming at a moment when hip-hop’s commercialization appeared increasingly intrusive for artists who prized the music’s oppositional orientation and “raw” sound—sought to promote a certain kind of hip-hop purism by embracing a “true-school” aesthetic and wresting hold of hip-hop’s narrative, emphasizing its DIY ethic, bringing related practices (such as b-boying and graffiti) under the umbrella, and denouncing the term *rap*

as a market-produced corruption of “hip-hop as culture.”¹⁶ In order to achieve such a sound, KRS turned to hardcore, underground producer *par excellence*, DJ Premier. As the beat-maker and DJ behind Gang Starr, among other groups aligned with “street” style, Premier had cemented his status in the early 90s by producing dozens of tracks, mostly for New York-based MCs, which, brimming with “dusty” drums and obscure soul-jazz samples, proved crucial in crystallizing a sense of what “real” hip-hop should sound like. In this context, references to previous performances become rather important. Channeling history and embodying “classic” hip-hop techniques, Premier’s sample-based beats served to establish credibility with artists and audiences alike by making the kind of symbolic links to “Golden Age” hip-hop that KRS-One has consistently made to dancehall reggae.¹⁷

Versioning “Remix for P” on *Boom Bap* could, and should, be heard as the authenticating gesture that it is. The sounds of Jamaica offered a new form of hardcore subjectivity in the days of *Criminal Minded*, and the resonance of reggae style—fueled by mass media projections and the socio-cultural repercussions of continued (and intensified) migration—has only accrued further power since that moment. Indeed, reggae’s embodiment of authenticity, so bound up with associations of militant blackness, gun violence, and the harsh realities of contemporary Jamaica, has achieved a

¹⁶ *True-school* is a relatively recent term, so my use of it here, although not inappropriate, is somewhat anachronistic considering that it attained currency almost a decade after *Return of the Boom Bap* (1993). Nevertheless, in the contemporary public conversation about hip-hop, the term is mobilized to express essentially the same thing KRS-One advances on his first solo album: an aesthetic commitment that seeks to enshrine a particular imagination of “old school” and “golden age” practices as well as a particular narrative about hip-hop. Among other things, a “true-school” approach might include: sample-based beats, virtuosic (and often dense) rhymes, numerous references to hip-hop’s so-called “four elements” (MCing, DJing, B-boying/Breakdancing, and Graffiti/Writing), and meta-rap about one’s own style. Although “true-school” MCs often express a “socially conscious” perspective, they frequently value form over content.

¹⁷ Indeed, in a review for the *Village Voice* music journalist Joseph Patel describes “KRS-One’s desire to institutionalize the living, breathing energy of hip-hop” as “abusive in its consistency.” (See “Metaphysical Refinitions Overstood at Last!” *Village Voice*, 13-9 June 2000 <<http://www.villagevoice.com/music/0124,patel,25486,22.html>> [accessed 6 September 2006].)

kind of global status as the music of “the real” perhaps rivaled only by hip-hop (and, tellingly, often conflated with hip-hop outside of the Americas).¹⁸ Savvy to these dynamics and seeking to make a claim on “real hip-hop,” KRS-One returns to the sonic palette with which he established a fearsome reputation on *Criminal Minded*. On “P Is Still Free,” DJ Premier directly indexes BDP’s canonical work by employing the instantly recognizable sample of the *Mad Mad* riff from “Remix for P” and “flipping” it in order to create a resonant underpinning for KRS’s rhymes. Teasing the sample by repeatedly re-triggering it, Premier employs the familiar fragment as a kind of sonic bedding, accenting steady 8th notes during the introduction and choruses and triggering it more sporadically during the verses, where the producer allows it to play in its truncated “entirety” on the downbeat of every other measure. The sound of the guitar, although recognizably related to the recording by BDP (and the Roots Radics), is subtly altered here, pitch-shifted to a lower register, giving the sound a more mellow timbre and blending it into the other elements of the beat, which include a looping, loping upright-bass figure and a shrill, siren-like sample—two sonic signifiers common to the jazz-, funk-, and blues-derived hip-hop beats of the early 90s.

The other crucial component Premier brings to the production is the minimal, unwavering, breakbeat-indexing drum pattern which, with its emphasis on the downbeat and “sharp” snare attacks on beats 2 and 4, evokes the “boom-bap” to which KRS’s album title onomatopoeically refers and which many artists and audiences equate with “true-school” hip-hop aesthetics. Significantly, the “hard, basic beats” (as described by the All Music Guide’s Stephen Erlewine), which underpin *Boom Bap* and instantly

¹⁸ See the introductory chapter for a discussion of reggae’s and hip-hop’s conflation in the wider world.

identify DJ Premier's style, can be traced back, in large part, to the spare "bangers" produced by Ced Gee and Scott La Rock for *Criminal Minded*.¹⁹

For his part, KRS-One mobilizes an "authentic" voice on *Boom Bap* by employing such signatures as clear enunciation, heavy intonation, an emphasis on end-rhymes, and regular returns to the kind of sing-song, creole poetics that one reviewer refers to as "pseudo-ragga style."²⁰ Indeed, the opening line of "P Is Still Free" with its conflation of raggamuffin clichés—"all roughneck rudebwoy hold tight!"—appears at once to address any and none, for the "ruffneck rudebwoys" that KRS may have in mind (i.e., Jamaicans living in New York) probably would not self-identify, or even self-stylize, in such a hackneyed manner. Pseudo or not, KRS claims the "hip-hop reggae" hybrid as his own again and again—and does so increasingly as popular discourse and purchasing patterns affirm their intersection as a fruitful marriage: on "Attendance" from his later album *The Sneak Attack* (2001), KRS asks rhetorically, "Who was the first to hit hip-hop reggae on the nail?" Such reminders serve to introduce *Boom Bap*: the album's opening track assembles fragments of KRS's previous recordings alongside such explicit calls to acknowledgement as, "Remember: *Criminal Minded*." And while creole phrases, dancehall-derived interjections, and Jamaican-ish accents infuse many a track on *Boom Bap*, KRS also foregrounds this kind of vocalizing on several particular songs—notably, on songs which take their inspiration from reggae recordings, including "Black Cop," "Sound of da Police," and "Uh Oh." On "P Is Still Free," KRS continues this allusive

¹⁹ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Return of the Boom Bap" <<http://allmusic.com>> (accessed 21 October 2005).

²⁰ See Charles Isbell, Jr., "The Return of the Boom Bap" <<http://www.seditionists.org/HFh/reviews/053.nj41.html>> (accessed 21 October 2005), which, apart from the seemingly pejorative phrase quoted here, is a rather positive review of the album, calling it, "the best album that KRS-ONE has **ever** done (and that includes *Criminal Minded*)" [bold in original].

approach by reprising a number of the borrowed melodies he originally employed on the 1986 version of “P Is Free.” Winston Hussey’s melody from “Body No Ready” reappears, as does the “Zunguzung” meme, which KRS updates with new lyrics to suit his new circumstances: e.g., “Yes, Premier you know you rule hip-hop!” KRS also modifies the geographical referents that served as his “shout-out” sites in 1986. In place of “the Bronx” is the broader, “New York,” while what were formerly references only to the city’s boroughs are now regional and international in scope, as Queens and Manhattan are dropped for Jersey, Brazil, and Germany (though, notably, Brooklyn maintains its place).

Brooklyn Keeps on Making It: Reggae Production in 90s New York

Brooklyn, or greater New York in general, has remained central to reggae’s and hip-hop’s interactions not simply via the projections and reflections of hip-hop recordings. It has long served as a hub for reggae production and distribution. By the mid-90s, after reggae had firmly established itself in the city’s soundscape, New York-based producers, recording artists, labels, and soundsystems were playing an increasingly influential role in the international circulation of reggae recordings. One such producer is Bobby Konders of the Massive B soundsystem and record label. Konders, and his 1996 re-lick of the *Mad Mad*, present yet another set of nodes in a dense network of interrelated urban musical styles. Over the course of his career, Konders has worked in the overlapping but often distinct worlds of club- or dance-music (largely in the post-disco style, house), hip-hop, and reggae, and his own productions frequently bring these together.

Notably, Konders's hip-hop remix of Super Cat's "Ghetto Red Hot" (1992), for which a video was produced and heavily promoted on MTV and BET, served to introduce the DJ to a stateside audience by juxtaposing Super Cat's sing-song delivery with a quintessential early-90s beat comprising sirens, booming bass tones, vocal samples, breakbeats and other "jeep beat" staples.²¹ The ability to traverse both styles, and find their common ground, was a prized skill during reggae's early 90s crossover bubble, and Konders was well poised to deliver thanks to his cross-cultural experiences in Brooklyn. Around this time, Konders played an important role in New York's burgeoning, home-grown reggae industry, producing and co-producing some of its first hits. His earlier work as a DJ and producer in New York's house scene, as collected on *A Lost Era in NYC: 1987-1992* (2002), shows Konders to be a producer with an ear for hybrid sounds—in particular, for bringing the stylistic features of one genre to bear on another: reggae-reminiscent basslines bubble beneath house's steady rhythmic framework and "acid" squiggles and squelches as dub poets chant down Babylon. Such an ecumenical approach has been in evidence even as Konders has increasingly turned his attention almost exclusively to reggae.

On Konders's 1996 re-lick of the *Mad Mad*, we can hear how he attempts to update the well-worn riddim in his own way—which is to say, in a New York-centric, hip-hop-inflected manner. One immediate sign of hip-hop's aesthetic here is the presence

²¹ The "hip-hop remix" of "Ghetto Red Hot" was co-produced with Salaam Remi. The same 12" single also contained a "hip-hop remix" of "Don Dada" produced solely by Konders. It is worth noting as well that at this time hip-hop remixes of reggae songs represented a common ploy by record companies to appeal to American listeners. The single for Buju Banton's "Champion" (1995), for example, featured on the b-side a hip-hop remix clearly indebted, in its whining synth line and bass-boosted breakbeats, to Dr. Dre's still popular G-Funk style (and, indeed, featuring a sample from Ice Cube's "You Know How We Do It"). Around the same time, however, plenty of dancehall tracks (such as Chaka Demus & Pliers' hit, "Murder She Wrote") had steadily become staples in hip-hop DJs' sets without needing any sort of remix, testifying again to the (increasing) mutual resonance between the genres.

of direct samples, rather than re-played elements, from previous *Mad Mad* recordings. Most notably, the introductory drum-roll from the Roots Radics' early 80s version appears not only at the beginning of the version but also recurs, if in fragmentary form, throughout the song as a break or turnaround (especially at the end of a four- or eight-measure section). In addition, the snare drum frequently features a composite snare of sorts, combining a rather typically "tight" hip-hop snare (i.e., one of short duration and high frequencies) with a snare that sounds as if it is from a record or tape which is rapidly slowing-down, an effect tied both to reggae's and hip-hop's grounding in performance-accented technologies and which can be heard on such previous *Mad Mad* recordings as Toyan's "Stylee" (1982). Other features of the riddim point more directly to hip-hop aesthetics: the kick-snare pattern is indubitably duple (rather than outlining a 3+3+2), while a steady hi-hat accents the pulse at the eighth-note level. Moreover, the drums occupy the foreground of the mix in a way that is more typical of hip-hop than dancehall (where the bass more frequently assumes sonic dominance).

At the same time, Konders is careful to remain faithful to certain reggae signifiers, and in these sonic articulations we can hear once again the way that questions of form relate to social and cultural formations. For example, rather than simply emphasizing beats 1 and 3, the kick drum accents every beat of the measure—a pattern fairly common to reggae since the advent of disco-influenced "flyers" and "rockers" styles and one that, significantly, also overlaps with Konders's background in house and other "four-to-the-floor" dance genres. With regard to other dancehall markers, Konders's version features a skanking guitar, treated heavily with reverb, an occasional accent from a synth tom, and quite frequently the kind of "knob-twist" mixing style

typical of dancehall/dub recording and performance practice. Striking this delicate balance between hip-hop and reggae signifiers allows Konders to claim space for himself as a “Yankee youth” working within the bounds of “authentic” reggae aesthetics.²² And Konders’s longtime anti-racist stance and cross-cultural collaborations, even while reifying race and culture in the process, also adds to the perceived “authenticity” of such an unlikely reggae producer.²³

Some of the DJs and singers who Konders voiced on his re-lick demonstrate a similar fluency with hip-hop and reggae. On “Ganja Man Live On,” for example, Devon Clarke and Yankee B shift seamlessly between Jamaican and American slang in their ode to marijuana, alternately calling it, respectively, “ganja” and “sensi(milla)” or “chronic” and “ism.” Yankee B, of course, explicitly recognizes his New York roots in his name. His recordings have tended to fuse hip-hop and reggae to an even greater extent than the bulk of releases from Konders’s Massive B imprint, which, on the main, project a more faithful, or even conservative, interpretation of dancehall/reggae style, seeking to compete in the reggae market not just in New York but in Jamaica and the wider world. Indeed, for all the ways that hip-hop and even house seep into Konders’s productions, he seems careful to establish himself, his associated artists, and his label as “authentic” purveyors of reggae music. And he has been rather successful in this endeavor, helming a longstanding, popular reggae program on New York’s Hot 97 FM as well as, for the last several years, the most popular float in Brooklyn’s West Indian Day Parade, which usually boasts a coterie of the reggae elite. Through such overlapping activities, Konders has played no small role in the projection and circulation of reggae music in New York

²² See *I-Jones* interview with Bobby Konders <<http://www.i-jonez.com/v1/features/bobbykonders.shtml>> (accessed 3 November 2005).

²³ See, e.g., the black nationalist vocal samples Konders layers over his version of the *Cuss Cuss* riddim.

and beyond. Indeed, just as the presence of “Diseases” and “Zunguzung” in the early 80s spawned a number of New York-based engagements with the *Mad Mad*, the continued versioning of the riddim by Jamaicans, “Jamericans,” and non-Jamaican New Yorkers over the course of the 1990s all helped to keep the riddim’s resonant strains in the air.²⁴

Black Star’s Redefinition of a Familiar Riff

Caribbean migrants and their descendents develop complex and multiple senses of identity, so that a second-generation Jamaican may see him- or herself in various contexts as Jamaican, West Indian, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-American, Brooklynite, or just plain American. Most Caribbeans, rather than wishing to assimilate totally, want to retain some sense of their origins, and their musical tastes generally reflect these cosmopolitan and overlapping senses of identity. (Peter Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*, 241)

Slightly more than a decade after *Criminal Minded*, Black Star—a group that, significantly, takes its name from Marcus Garvey’s famous fleet of ships—would channel the sounds of Jamaica via the Bronx via Brooklyn to make a musical statement that, despite numerous references to the reggae repertory, many listeners would hear as pure hip-hop classicism, a testament to the deep degree to which, by the late 1990s, hip-hop had absorbed a Jamaican accent.²⁵ On Black Star’s “Definition” (1998), an homage to

²⁴ One additional example worth mention is Aidan Jones’s 1997 version for his East Coast records imprint. As with the Massive B version, Jones brings a hip-hop aesthetic to the production, augmenting the riddim’s well-worn bassline, riff, and chords with a “tight” snare, steady hi-hats, and punchy kicks. Balancing the hip-hop elements with reggae techniques, Jones employs the knob-twist style of mixing to performances such as Sanchez’s “Do It for Love” and Spragga Benz’s “Gimme the Bible,” giving each track a distinctive shape despite the same underlying version. Consistent with the reggae tradition, Jones also uses a number of effects, including heavy delay on the occasional keyboard chord or horn riff and a phaser on various voices in the mix. Jones’s stateside productions in the late 90s represent another important node in the increasingly international network of reggae producers, especially since his work with prominent Jamaican vocalists circulated widely.

²⁵ Connecting further to Garvey’s legacy—and making the linkage in their name explicit—Black Star reproduce images in the album’s liner notes not just of Garvey but of a newspaper headline in the *Negro World* hailing the first ship in the fleet, a share of stock in the line, and the title page from the Constitution

BDP's "Remix for P," rapper Mos Def, a native Brooklynite of West Indian descent (and rarely identified more specifically), brings a dancehall-derived style to his flow, employing steady, staccato rhythms, a sing-song delivery, consistent end rhymes, and stuttered singing reminiscent of Jacob Miller and singers of his ilk. Introducing himself and his colleagues, he borrows the same "Zunguzung" melody that KRS-One borrowed from Yellowman and invokes additional Jamaican slang for good measure, including allusions to such contemporary DJs as Bounty Killer. DJ Hi-Tek, the producer of the track, stays faithful to BDP's beat to the point of true homage; he even draws his samples directly from BDP's version, as opposed to, say, any of the "original" reggae versions of the *Mad Mad* riddim. Expressing at once reggae's ubiquity in the Brooklyn soundscape and the music's paradoxical disappearance into the hip-hop idiom, Black Star's reverent re-make affirms BDP's reggae allusions as foundational to hip-hop's lexicon even as it obscures further their Caribbean origins, especially for listeners outside New York's cosmopolitan listening community. The group's debut, whose red, gold, and green album art references both Rastafari and Afrocentrism more generally, thus stands as an important moment in this *Mad Mad* story: their music embodies, if subtly, New York's increasingly Caribbean character as it proposes a radical revision of hip-hop's cultural politics.

Black Star's re-statement of these well-worn sounds is especially significant considering the degree to which their debut was received as an "attempt to return hip-hop to its essence."²⁶ That hip-hop's "essence" is so entwined with the sounds (not to mention

of Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). They also feature a note from Makeda Garvey, great granddaughter of Marcus, who offers an endorsement of the group's vision.

²⁶ Rob Kenner, "Dancehall," in *The Vibe History of Hip-hop*, ed. Alan Light (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 352.

the techniques and technologies) of Jamaica—and circa ‘87 at that—speaks volumes about the two genres’ deeply relational character, despite the frequent relegation of reggae’s influence in hip-hop to misty origins. Thus, it is at once ironic and not at all that “Definition” takes hip-hop soul-searching as its subject even as it centrally features reggae samples and vocal styles heavily indebted to dancehall. The allusion, however, stops for many listeners at *Criminal Minded* precisely because BDP’s accented album has attained such a canonical status, a fact which, because many listeners still lack acquaintance with the Jamaican originals, has committed KRS-One’s voluminous borrowings from the dancehall repertory directly, and often anonymously, to hip-hop’s vocabulary. Similarly, the dancehall-inspired features of Mos Def’s flow, more often than not, also tend to pass under listeners’ radar, subsumed as it is by hip-hop’s omnivorous stylistic appetite and unremarkable in its sheer typicality, recalling such “flip-tongue” (Jamaican-)American stylists such as Busta Rhymes more immediately than, say, Beenie Man.

Although Mos Def, who has displayed no small acquaintance with the reggae repertory, apparently suggested the homage and its central sample, Black Star mobilize the *Mad Mad* in service of a historically-grounded hip-hop activism more directly tied to KRS-One’s profile than dancehall’s: by making direct reference to a hardcore hip-hop classic, BDP’s “Remix for P,” and a nostalgic, creole-tinged plea for peace, BDP’s “Stop the Violence” (1988), they align themselves with a tradition that they seek to celebrate as they redirect.²⁷ Interpolating the main melody of “Stop the Violence” for the chorus of

²⁷ Talib Kweli told me in September 2004 that the concept for the song was Mos Def’s brainchild. In the album’s liner notes, Mos Def explains his motivation: “I thought it would be dope to rock the ‘p is still free’ beat. Everybody been caught up in jackin’ old beats which ain’t so bad, as long as it’s not ninety

“Definition,” Black Star infuse the homage with additional associational and emotional resonance and enhance its reggae-propelled critique. Interestingly, Black Star do not refrain from indulging in the original’s use of occasional onomatopoeic gunfire, which, on a song about non-violence, offers a particularly striking example of how inextricable from the dancehall—and hip-hop—idiom such sonic symbols of violence have become. And yet the group juxtaposes BDP’s anthems of aggressive borough dominance and anti-violence, and marshals hip-hop’s braggadocio more generally (with plenty between the boastful lines), to critique the violence that too often exceeded the lines of metaphor in late 90s hip-hop. Significantly, just as the group reconciles the use of symbolic gunfire to lament the shooting deaths Biggie and Tupac, there is little sense of contradiction about using reggae references to express an identity primarily oriented toward hip-hop and Brooklyn.

But there need not have been any contradiction on this point. Brooklyn had been a Caribbean place for some time by the late 90s, and hip-hop, reggae, and a range of fusions produced by their interplay had long offered suggestive forms of the borough’s socio-cultural profile.

Hearing Brooklyn’s—and Hip-hop’s—Jamaican Accent

In the early and mid-90s, with more first and second generation Jamaicans living in Brooklyn than at any previous moment, a musical dam seemed to burst as creole phrases, reggae riddims, and hybrid styles of various sorts became more the norm than

percent of your output. *And you can open up some new angle on the original version.* Otherwise, folks could just listen to the original” (emphasis mine).

the exception. Whereas it had seemed impossible to wear Jamaicanness on one's sleeve in New York in the 70s, and implausible—if surprisingly effective—in the 80s, by the mid-90s it seemed unthinkable to “represent” a borough like Brooklyn musically without a nod to reggae style. Indeed, greater New York City more generally seemed to project reggae references and creole poetics from every corner during the 1990s, whether or not the artist in question was of Jamaican or even West Indian heritage.

Long Island's Public Enemy worked samples of Jamaican radio DJ Mikey Dread's promos for “Dread at the Controls” into their dense, critical collages (e.g., “Welcome To the Terrordome” [1990] samples from the DJ's “Headline News”—i.e., “Riddim a full a culture!”—as collected on *African Anthem* [1979/80]), while fellow “Strong Islanders” De La Soul incorporated Dirtsman's hit “Hot This Year” (1993) into their playfully, lightly accented “Itzsoweezee (Hot)” (1996) and Uniondale's Leaders of the New School distinguished themselves largely through Brooklyn-born Busta Rhymes's frenetic, dancehall-infused contributions.²⁸ Nas, a non-Jamaican MC representing the Queensbridge projects, made sly reference to Michigan & Smiley (“Memory Lane”) and incorporated familiar reggae-propelled, Rastafarian notions into songs such as “One Love” (1994), which was produced (and featured a chorus vocal) by fellow Queens dweller, Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest. Indeed, Tribe's music often referenced reggae songs, especially in the rhymes of Phife Dog, who frequently identified himself as Trinidadian and occasionally gave his lines a West Indian lilt; tellingly, though, aside from a stray reference to popular calypsonian the Mighty Sparrow, Phife was more likely to interpolate a melody from dancehall DJs such as Ninjaman or singers

²⁸ Busta's show-stealing turn on A Tribe Called Quest's “Scenario” (1991), which opened doors for his successful solo career, included the revealing, emplacing line, “Eating Ital stew like the one Peter Tosh.”

such as Tanya Stephens.²⁹ Method Man represented Staten Island’s cosmopolitan cool and deadliness by bringing reggae references into such self-defining anthems as “Bring the Pain” (1994).³⁰ Jamaican-born Heavy D hailed from Mount Vernon and delivered convincing creole verses on Super Cat’s “Don Dada” (1991). New Rochelle, a suburb of New York 2 miles from the Bronx, produced Grand Puba, who released the ragga-tinged “Sexy” with Masters of Ceremony back in 1986, as well as his later group, Brand Nubian, who infused their 5 Percent Nation philosophy and “pro-black” politics with reggae’s connotative militancy.³¹ BDP and Slick Rick continued to represent the Bronx’s Jamaicanness with no little code-switching on their early- and mid-90s releases.³² Queen Latifah, who not only borrowed several reggae melodies but collaborated with the British-Jamaican label Music of Life, hailed from Newark, New Jersey, while Poor Righteous Teachers, sometimes referring to themselves as a “posse,” projected their

²⁹ Phife references a well-worn sound clash sentiment (as heard, for example on Ninjaman’s “Murder Dem” [1990]) on “The Jazz” (1991)—“competition dem try fi come sideway, but competition dem must come straight way”—and, ironically, resignifies Stephens’s feminist boast, “You Nuh Ready Fi Dis Yet” (1996) for his own macho posturing on “His Name Is Mutty Ranks” (1998), which, tellingly, begins with a reference to KRS-One’s attempt at selector-style—“Live and direct!”—on “Remix for P Is Free.” When asked in a relatively recent interview about his relationship to dancehall, Phife exclaimed, perhaps hyperbolically, “I love dancehall more than Hiphop. I always have.” He went on to put his love for the music in social context: “I grew up around a lot of Jamaicans back in Queens and in High School, my father used to play soccer with them. I just attached myself to their culture for some reason. Not discrediting Trinidad at all, I love TnT by all means, but I just love dancehall.” In the same interview (available at <<http://www.chicagoreggae.com/phifedawg.htm>> [accessed 14 August 2006]), Phife also names KRS, Just Ice, and Grand Puba as important influences in demonstrating to him that hip-hop and reggae could be fused effectively, authentically.

³⁰ “Bring the Pain” interpolates, with echoed affirmations from Method Man, Ninjaman’s sound clash classic, “Number One (Test the High Power)” (1991), a “soundboy killer” tune par excellence.

³¹ Masters of Ceremony’s *Dynamite* (1988) contains a number of telling titles, among them “Redder Posse,” “Rock Steady,” and “Hard Core.” The first of these was included on a somewhat prescient compilation released by Mango Records called *Ragga Hip Hop Volume 1* (1989), mostly collecting British-Jamaican artists such as Asher D and Daddy Freddy, London Posse, and the Demon Boyz, but also containing tracks by similarly-inclined American acts like Just Ice and Masters of Ceremony.

³² BDP’s *Live Hardcore Worldwide* (1991) finds the group doing live versions of *Criminal Minded* tracks over actual reggae riddims on “Reggae Medley,” complete with 3+3+2 knob turning (1:10) and onomatopoeic gunfire and such well-rehearsed shout-outs as “Nuff respect!” and “Lick some shots!” Interestingly, Slick Rick’s mid-jail-term release, *Behind Bars* (1994), demonstrates the MC’s ability to pull off convincing ragga-rap (which had not been heard on his debut) as well as his desire to keep one style separate from the other: “A Love That’s True” has two parts, the first in African-American vernacular and rap style, the second dressed up in double-time, flip-tongue, creole-steeped dancehall duds.

righteous, raggamuffin rap style from nearby Trenton on such hits as “Rock Dis Funky Joint” (1990).³³ Also representing Jersey in a Jamaican tongue were the Fugees, especially singer/MC Lauryn Hill, despite that two of three group members were of Haitian heritage and none were Jamaican.³⁴ Not insignificantly, almost all of these groups were explicitly, if not militantly, Afrocentric. For them, reggae was not only something “cool and deadly” and in the air, it offered a particularly powerful way to speak to issues of racial injustice.

Amid all this activity in and around New York City, Brooklyn was the epicenter. By the early- and mid-90s, a remarkable number of Brooklyn-based hip-hop artists—especially groups associated with the Boot Camp Clique, among them Black Moon, Smif’ n’ Wessun, and Heltah Skeltah, but also more cartoonish acts such as the Fu-Schnickens and Das EFX—were performing in a style that spoke from a kind of creolized subject position, incorporating creole phrases and flip-tongue flows as much as they did more traditional hip-hop stylistic markers. The dreadlocked Das EFX are particularly significant for the way that they appropriated flip-tongue, fast-chat style and used it to create a kind of rhythmic-syllabic filigree (“iggity iggity”) with which to give their lyrics—often free-associative romps across the pop culture landscape—a kind of post-ragga resonance.³⁵ Although they employ few actual Jamaican phrases—e.g., “Call me

³³ In yet another circuit of versions, “Rock Dis Funky Joint” sampled War’s “Slippin’ Into Darkness,” a Latin-tinged track, including a 3:2 clave pattern, written and played by an African-American soul group which was itself given the reggae treatment by Carl Bradney in 1975

³⁴ Hill has gone some way toward strengthening her connection to Jamaica and reggae, having given birth to several of Bob Marley’s grandchildren. More audibly, though, Hill’s music often alludes to reggae songs, such as her sly reference to Sister Nancy’s perennial favorite “Bam Bam” on “Lost Ones” (1998).

³⁵ One can hear plenty of precedent for this sort of triplet-indulging vocalization in mid- to late-80s dancehall recorded in both Jamaica (e.g., Admiral Bailey, Lieutenant Stitchie) and England (e.g., Daddy Freddy, Asher Senator, Papa Levi, etc.). No doubt the currency and appeal of such a style was reinforced further by the release of Daddy Freddy’s *Raggamuffin Soldier* in 1992. Just around the same time, the style

butterfingers cause I dribbity drops, um, nuff styles,” on “Mic Checka” (1992)—their embrace of “raggamuffin” style to put forward a rugged, (“boogity, woogity”) Brooklyn-based identity is nonetheless significant. Meantime, other Brooklyn-based performers, including the Notorious B.I.G., Jeru the Damaja, Big Daddy Kane, and Gang Starr, continued to register Jamaica’s presence in Brooklyn, representing the borough by making occasional and often more subtle (though sometimes less subtle) allusions to Jamaica’s music and cultural institutions, from Rasta to Rudie. While Kane invoked common Jamaican sayings (“Nuff Respect” [1993]) and Gang Starr’s Guru put on an odd accent to proclaim himself a Brooklyn rude boy (“see me a rude boy / from inna Brooklyn” on “Tonz ‘O’ Gunz” [1994]), Jeru referred to himself as a non-Jamaican Rasta (on the D&D All-Stars “1, 2 Pass It” [1995]), routinely working such concepts as “tricknology” (“Revenge of the Prophet (part 5)” [1996]) into his critiques and invoking the “King of Kings,” “dreads,” and a “nyabingi drummer” on explicitly “pro-black” songs such as “Jungle Music” (1994).³⁶ Conspicuously, despite his rather public Jamaican heritage, Biggie only occasionally peppered his rhymes with reggae references—and usually only if they were already a firm part of the borough’s soundscape and common parlance—demonstrating an enduring if no longer dominant African-American cultural orientation, especially for second generation Brooklyn-Jamaicans “representing BK to the fullest” (“Unbelievable” [1994]).³⁷

could be heard in some rather mainstream places as well: e.g., the top 40 hit “Jump” (1992) by Kriss Kross, the adolescent one-hit-wonder duo produced by Jermaine Dupri.

³⁶ Another noteworthy contributor to the D&D All-Stars track is Mad Lion, a London-born, Jamaica-raised transplant to Brooklyn with a gruff voice reminiscent of Buju Banton. With his album, *Real Ting* (1995), Mad Lion increased the ranks of dancehall-derived MCs representing Brooklyn. Unsurprisingly, KRS-One (who produced and promoted Mad Lion) and Smif’n’Wessun also rap on the track on which Jeru proclaims his non-Jamaican commitment to Rastafari.

³⁷ Biggie’s incorporation of Jamaican language was extremely subtle, as on “Gimme the Loot” (1994) when he claims to “lick shots” (a common Jamaican term for firing a gun) and inserts some onomatopoeic

Similarly subtle in their expression of what we might hear as a second-generation Jamaican Brooklynness, if occasionally more showy in their use of particular terms and accents, the members of the Boot Camp Clique seemed to express their borough's creole character with an ease and fluency that seemed, finally perhaps, quite at home.

Reconciling the “cool & deadly” currency of Jamaican music and language with a “Golden Age” aesthetic seeped in dusty jazz samples and boom-bap funk breaks, groups such as Black Moon, Smif’ n’ Wessun, and Heltah Skeltah incorporated a glut of reggae references into their tracks with a nonchalance that distinguished their approach from BDP’s brash efforts in the mid- to late-80s, marking a significant shift in the city’s musically-mediated cultural politics. Still, it is no coincidence that Black Moon samples KRS-One, self-appointed spokesman for “real hip-hop” and pioneer hip-hop/reggae fusionist, for the chorus of “How Many Emcees” (1993). Other tracks, such as “Enta da Stage,” are filled with creole grammar and reggae argot—“run up on your block with my trigger ‘pon cock, / so ease up selecta”; “come test me if you waan dead”—as well as dips into double-time flows so strongly associated with “raggamuffin hip-hop” by this point: on lines such as “...and when i pick-up-the-microphone...” (1:00), Buckshot crams, but coolly, several syllables into a smaller space than set up by the cadence of preceding lines, thus inserting catchy, compelling rhythmic figures and emplacing himself in contemporary hip-hop style and in his island-accented borough.

Likewise, Clique-mates Smif’ n’ Wessun (a/k/a Tek and Steele, or the Cocoa Brovaz) code-switch seamlessly even as they position reggae style and creole poetics as central to their expressive language and to the soundscape of Brooklyn. “Sound Bwoy

gunfire—“bakka bakka bakka” (3:07)—which not only invokes reggae practice more generally but, as with his “Bam! Bam!” (3:54), recalls such specific instances as Shabba Ranks’s “Bam! Bam!” on “Wicked Inna Bed” (1990).

Burrell” (1995), for instance, a classic assassination of anonymous opponents, calls attention to the overlap between the hip-hop battle and the reggae sound clash by, among other things, beginning and interrupting the song with long samples from Fuzzy Jones, a popular “intro artist” from the 1980s known for his long, lilting boasts (and disses) and nonchalant confidence. The verses alternate, every few lines or so, between deadpan dancehall allusions and contemporary African-American slang, beginning with a quotation from Buju Banton’s controversial anti-gay anthem, “Boom Bye Bye” (1993):

Boom bye bye inna battybwyo head—
 The shottie fly now the battyguy lie dead.
 Two shots dead to him chin.
 Enemy or friend, fake the funk,
 I’ll put the junk to an end.
 Now who the rude bwyo waan come test dog?
 I’ll find his family to ID him in the morgue.
 I betcha never thought I’d bust lead—
 Surprise! I’m a *forti-fied* blunt head
 just like the dreads...

Although still clearly very much in a hip-hop style, the duo playfully and convincingly demonstrate the ease with which hip-hop can accommodate Jamaican stylistic features, frequently juxtaposing reggae melodies and sing-song flows against gritty boom-bap beats.³⁸ For all their “bumboclaat” and “rude boy” references, the MCs also generally go beyond simply stringing together well-worn creole phrases and reggae references, employing grammatical constructions (as with the use of objective pronouns in place of

³⁸ Similarly, Heltah Skeltah’s “Sean Price” (1996), adapting the chorus from Super Cat’s, “Nuff Man a Dead” (1991), demonstrates an enduring resonance around and currency for dancehall melodies in the Brooklyn soundscape, even those 5 or 10 years old. Moreover, Heltah Skeltah’s Rockness Monster almost always raps in a tonally-engaged baritone, rather than the more monotone flows that mark the performances of his cohorts, save for the occasional invocation of a dancehall tune. Since the late 90s, however, and the rise of “thug balladeers” such as Jah Rule and 50 Cent, both of whom also display a close acquaintance with Jamaican style—not to mention the influence of Tupac’s preacherly sing-song, drawn more from gospel than dancehall traditions—such tonally-engaged flows have become more common.

nominative or possessive ones above) which often demonstrate a better acquaintance with Jamaican linguistic practices than many of their predecessors. This would seem to signal a deeper engagement and closer familiarity with Jamaican practices than previous attempts by hip-hop MCs to string together reggae catch phrases, though those are there too, as heard on more gratuitous attempts to evoke Jamaicanness: “Bumboclaat rude boy, lick your nine!”

Nevertheless, by breaking out of the mode of the everyday and into the explicit, the MCs’ more stereotypical moments of “hardcore” Jamaican sensibilities call attention once again to the particular valence of such invocations. More than merely indexing Brooklyn’s Jamaicanness or demonstrating reggae’s commonplaceness as an expressive resource, such examples serve to signify the group’s toughness, even if hopped-up in the kind of cool, macho pose that both dancehall and hip-hop predominantly project. Jamaicanisms in the music of the BCC and other Brooklyn groups often bestow authenticity, signifying a kind of hardcore, militant blackness as well as embodying the distinctive cultural profile of Brooklyn. Like their dusty, gritty production values, their employment of Jamaican threats and curses—by invoking the island itself, long a seat of authenticity in the global imagination, as well as Tri-State posse power and seminal, “hardcore” hip-hop (e.g., *Criminal Minded*)—helps to buttress their self-conscious positioning as an “underground” group. “Don’t believe the forefront of the industry,” says Tek on “K.I.M. (Keep It Moving).” The mid-90s music of the BCC thus seemed to mark a shift in hip-hop’s relationship to reggae (and New York’s to Jamaica), demonstrating a greater familiarity and fluency and projecting a locally-grounded but transnational black subjectivity even as such invocations continued to partake in as they

affirmed stereotypical notions about the meanings (and possibilities and limits) of Jamaicanness in the US.

Despite such a profusion—and range—of Jamaican-accented hip-hop performances, the same stereotypes heard in the music of the Boot Camp Clique would not only endure but be reinforced by other contemporary examples. Coexisting dialectically with authenticating gestures of selfhood and radical revisions of black community bounds in the boroughs were more fetishistic authenticating gestures of otherness. In such cases, Jamaicans (or sonic representations thereof) served to establish or buttress a sense of strong ethnic identity, but not necessarily a Jamaican one, often via their embodiment and expression of violent, macho, and/or homophobic clichés. Rapper/actor DMX affirms this lingering perception, forged during the crack wars of the 80s, when he addresses the quintessentially “cool and deadly” Jamaican drug lord, Lennox, in the film *Belly* (1998), directed by acclaimed hip-hop music video auteur Hype Williams. Although Lennox is portrayed in a refreshingly banal way compared to previous filmic representations of Jamaican drug lords—in contrast to the exotic, demonic, “voodoo”-practicing “dreads” of *Marked for Death* (1990) and *Predator 2* (1990), he sits in his suburban mansion, clean-cut, watching a soccer game—in the course of his attempts to convince the drug lord to supply him with a powerful strain of heroin, DMX proclaims, “Jamaicans are the wildest niggas out here.” Attempts at flattery aside, here DMX gives voice to the same common sentiment that animated Selwyn Seyfu Hinds’s defense strategy while walking the streets of Brooklyn: “Jamaicans had a rep in those days. Still do. Jamaican kids in Brooklyn were thought of as fearsome, aggressive,

not to be fucked with lightly.”³⁹ Beyond issues of demographics, it is this Jamaican “rep”—fed by as it informs musical, filmic, and other media representations—which inspires a continuing circuit of “badman” guest spots for reggae-tinged MCs, whose gruff voices, quasi-exotic curses, and familiar-but-foreign flip-tongue flows epitomized a powerful kind of black cool in hip-hop throughout the 90s.

A case in point is “Irish” rap group House of Pain’s prominent use of Jamaican-accented vocalist Cokni O’Dire on their album, *Truth Crushed to Earth Shall Rise Again* (1996).⁴⁰ House of Pain, and lead rapper Everlast, had shown their willingness to exploit ethnic and class stereotypes from the outset. Through a musically- and visually-projected Irish-American, blue-collar kitsch, the group performed a kind of “classface” minstrelsy presumably intended to allay the anxieties of appropriation connected to their putative whiteness—a strategy that has been followed by such self-consciously working-class white rappers as Eminem, Kid Rock, and Bubba Sparks. For a beer-swilling, Jesus-pendant wearing, tattoo-covered Irish Muslim such as Everlast, the incorporation of a Jamaican accent into the group’s swell of seemingly contradictory but richly connotative identifications offered yet another way to charge House of Pain’s music with the authenticity that accrues to (exaggerated, if not cartoonish) performances of race and ethnicity in the contemporary US. O’Dire’s cockney-Jamaican accent makes another suggestive connection here, reinforcing the (ironic) Irish connotation of his last name and recalling Jamaica’s and Ireland’s shared colonial histories.

³⁹ Seyfu Hinds, *Gunshots in My Cook-Up*, 27.

⁴⁰ O’Dire describes his national and geographic heritage in the following (confusing) manner on his myspace page: “Cokni O’Dire was born in England by Jamaican parents in NY in the 70’s on some Carlito’s way ish. We the moved from the Boogie down to the Desert where he first experienced what we all know as the hip hop renaissance where a ni@@a got to know how to break, bomb, battle, burn, and blend as a bboy. I’m part of mad crews. My first crew was El Producto consisting of cats from Harlem and Brooklyn who moved to Jamaica Queens and wanted to make it like they hood.” <<http://myspace.com/cokniodire>> (accessed 10 September 2006).

Jamaican style on *Truth Crushed to Earth*, as most audible in O'Dire's accent, slang, and ragga-rap flows, serves more to add a kind of exotic spice, an authenticating ornamentation, to the act than it seems to provide a kind of integral contribution to the sound. Although he is granted a number of verses throughout the album, Cokni generally provides spoken-word intros, outros, and interludes during the songs, as well as regular interjections of reggae's prototypical wordless punctuations over Everlast's verses. The introduction to "Fed Up" features O'Dire accusing anonymous opponents of being "dirty, stinking . . . battyboys," while "Pass the Jinn" finds him cursing, Jamaican-style, in a manner that seems to descend into rather than transcend clichés around such speech-acts: "real bumboclaat ragga bloodclaat muffin." For his part, Everlast peppers his own verses with reggae references, dropping terms like "dubplates" and "don dada" into his rhymes and conflating, once again, Jamaican style with gun violence: "Boy, where you gwaan run when the gun get hot?" ("The Have-Nots").⁴¹ Of course, there is always the possibility that such cartoonish representations of race and ethnicity serve to deconstruct themselves, and Everlast's wince-worthy joke on "Fed Up"—"You high on gas like a Rastaman farted"—suggests, perhaps, that the rapper does not take such figurations too seriously, despite reveling in and advancing certain well-worn stereotypes. Perhaps confirming the ornamentality of Jamaican style here, the production on the album avoids any reference to reggae style, instead layering samples of post-bop jazz and 70s soul against classic breakbeats (looped and chopped). The album's prevailing vinyl-tinged, "dirty" aesthetic evokes a similarly anti-commercial, working-class ruggedness as the

⁴¹ Everlast's reference to "don dada" on "X-files"—"Here come the don dada, / makin' ghettos get hotta"—is clearly an allusion to Super Cat, whose songs "Don Dada" and "Ghetto Red Hot" were both hits in the hip-hop scene, the former a collaboration with Jamaican-American rapper Heavy D and the latter, via a hip-hop remix by Bobby Konders, a video hit on MTV and BET.

music of the Boot Camp Clique and consummate “underground” hip-hop more generally (especially via Brooklyn), bearing witness again to reggae’s well-ensconced, and violently accented, place in the hip-hop imagination.⁴²

Similar to the powerful presence registered in late-80s self-descriptions of African-American MCs such as Kool G Rap and Grandmaster Caz (i.e., as “not Jamaican”), another telling sign of the continuing currency—if not, at times, hegemony—of Jamaicanness in Brooklyn during the 1990s is the attempt by non-Jamaican West Indians to maintain an “authentic” sense of national attachment despite their embrace of the irresistibly compelling Jamaican-identified forms circulating so widely at the time. We see this in the pressure for Selwyn Seyfu Hinds, as a Guyanese youth, to perform Jamaicanness in a moment of danger, and we hear this in the ambivalent but undeniably reggae-tinged performances of non-Jamaican rappers of West Indian heritage. The Fu-Schnickens, for example, who sampled Tenor Saw’s dancehall staple, “Ring the Alarm,” for their own single of the same name, made a name for themselves in the early 90s with a style deeply steeped in the language of dancehall but filled with denials of cross-national appropriation. The group’s lead MC, Chip Fu, raps in a flashy and rather virtuosic flip-tongue, fast-chat style, including plenty of iggity-iggity filigree. Against the audible Jamaicanness of his performance, however, his lyrics consistently foreground his West Indianness and/or Trinidadianess. The MC’s prideful non-Jamaican self-identification is impossible to miss in the first verse of “Ring the Alarm”:

⁴² This “true school” aesthetic stance is symbolized not only by the album’s “dusty” beats in general, but by such specific instances as sampling Gang Starr’s “Words I Manifest” (1989)—a manifesto for East Coast underground rap if there ever was one—for the “Fed Up” remix, featuring Gang Starr’s Guru as well as Cokni O’Dire, who provides another ragga-tinged vitriolic outro.

This lyrical prophet you can't stop this from the West Indies...
 Born in Trinidad, not Tobago,
 land of steel pan and calypso—
 Cyap is a buck and a buck is a cyap.
 That's the real true thing and a natural fact.
 This lyrical man you can't hold me back.
 From the red, the white, and also the black
 Island, which is my land, my place of birth
 You can tell by the tongue that's swung
 And the lyrical structure in me verse...

Chip Fu thus attempts to tie his musical style to his island of origin, rather than Jamaica, invoking Trinidadian slang and music to do so, but he soon feels the need to address a nagging sense—and perhaps actual charges—of appropriation. The second verse signals a strong degree of self-consciousness around the connotations of the group's style:

'Cause MCs try these Rasta-
 farianic raps and sound like wannabes,
 But a wannabes not what I wannabe, see...
 Me, a Rastafarian?
 No, not me but I do stun.
 I'm not fakin' Jamaican,
 so all MCs, you better run.
 Because Mr. Chip Fu man a come
 And sitdung pon the riddim and sitdung pon the vibes—
 A di heartical don,
 True me full up a style and me wicked and wild...
 Unu better give I and I respect
 When this Trinidadian I come
 Sing out!

One hears a clear anxiety emerge here, addressed quite frankly by Chip Fu.⁴³ The MC's direct discussion of “wannabes” attempts to meet any potential detractors head-on as it recognizes the increasingly common cooptation of dancehall style by non-Jamaican and

⁴³ Moreover, this is but one of many examples of such self-consciousness on the album. See also, for example, “Back Off,” wherein the MC invokes Bob Marley only to add: “Not a dreadlocked Rasta, / but you know I gotta / prove myself.”

non-Caribbean performers. And yet, he disavows any attempts at “fakin” Jamaicanness through the unmistakably distinctive language of reggae and Rastafari (from “wicked and wild” and “heartical” to “I and I”—not to mention their ragga-fied rhythmic setting), making it an odd and possibly self-defeating strategy. What we hear, then, is at once an attempt to position Trinidad as yet another site of Caribbean musical and cultural authenticity and a rather self-conscious registering of the long shadow Jamaica had cast over Brooklyn.

Black Star’s Redefinition Revisited: Hearing Reggae’s Presence and Future

If there were any lingering doubts by the late 90s about reggae’s place in the Brooklyn soundscape, or, say, in a hip-hop song about hip-hop, Black Star appear to reconcile such contradictions rather easily on “Definition,” embracing hip-hop’s techniques of juxtaposition and synthesis to produce a locally inflected but globally resonant reflection on the genre’s relationship to violence. The introduction to “Definition” plays somewhat jarringly with signifiers of African-Americanness and Jamaicanness, presenting them as part of the same sonic world despite their rather different timbral qualities and connotations. Beginning with a sample from a live jazz performance announcing that they are “recording live from somewhere,” and thus locating themselves at once in an explicitly specific place—i.e., within an African-American musical tradition—and in a non-specific and perhaps universal(ist) place, the group sets up a strong contrast to the rest of the song. The cracks-and-pops of an aged jazz record soon drop out, immediately followed by the smooth, solo voice of Mos Def,

intoning a drawn-out “Laaaaaaaaawd” (lasting for almost a full three seconds), and then “Lawdamercy” [Lord have mercy]—evoking Bounty Killer, and his present popularity, while connecting to a long tradition of Jamaican performance—before continuing in smooth creole to hail the audience, employ a familiar dancehall phrase, and launch into the “Zunguzung” meme, a la BDP: “All nice and decent crew, / Follow me nuh! / Me say, / Say Hi-Tek if you’re ruling hip-hop...” It’s a very reggae beginning to a song about hip-hop, acknowledging the roots of the KRS-One reference and, in the process, acknowledging hip-hop’s Jamaican accent.

Not many listeners, however, would necessarily hear it that way, or connect the chorus to Yellowman. The group’s other MC, Talib Kweli, makes far fewer, if any, audible references to Jamaica or reggae, keeping his vocals grounded in a hip-hop monotone and employing a more variable flow than Mos Def’s steady staccato. Small samples of KRS-One’s voice—“yaaaaa”—lurk in the background, affirming again the *Criminal Minded* connection (and its mediation of reggae style for many listeners). The familiar spiky guitar stab once again plays a prominent role in the track, though it too seems to embody the song’s “second-hand” engagement with reggae.⁴⁴ Whereas BDP tease the *Mad Mad* sample on “Remix for P” by stuttering a pick-up note, available to them via the reggae record, Black Star producer Hi-Tek, whose layer-based mixing style and knob-twist breaks subtly embody hip-hop’s incorporation of dub reggae techniques, simply triggers the full chord, as heard on the BDP production, over and over.

Undergirding the samples is the same breakbeat-based, boom-bap drum pattern heard on “Remix for P,” with its 3:2 snares and machine-gun kicks, but the sounds themselves are

⁴⁴ Perhaps third- or fourth-hand would be more appropriate, but I am referring here to the fact that Hi-Tek employs a sample of a sample rather than himself sampling the same original as BDP (i.e., the “Diseases” version of the *Mad Mad*).

“fatter,” heavier—enhanced by a decade’s distance in production techniques and technologies. Nevertheless, the timbres still recall BDP’s distinctive, “dirty,” distorted drum aesthetic—a product of 80s-era samplers and a “Golden Age” sonic signpost if there ever was one.

As knowing a wink as it may be for some, especially Brooklynites, Black Star’s “second-hand” gestures testify again to the degree to which hip-hop has absorbed, even as it has influenced, reggae style.⁴⁵ Extending these articulations, on Mos Def’s solo album, *Black on Both Sides* (1999), nearly every track reveals another way that Jamaican language, music, or cultural practices have come to permeate the texture of life in Brooklyn. On a song called “Hip-hop,” the rapper makes his hybrid linguistic strategy explicit, “Used to speak the King’s English,” he admits, “but caught a rash on my lips, so now I chat just like dis.” Tellingly, the alternative to the King’s English is not simply figured here as African-American vernacular speech but as creole-inflected slang, evoked by the use of the Jamaican-associated term “chat” and the pronunciation of *this* as *dis*—which, of course, is a pronunciation shared by African-American and Caribbean dialects, an overlap that would not be lost on a native Brooklynite. Mos Def’s polyglot style renders Brooklyn in what he calls a “native tongue”—an allusion to the Afrocentric, reggae-resonant styles of the Native Tongues (i.e., A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, the Jungle Brothers, etc.)—which includes, in addition to some mellifluous Spanish, the idioms of thirty years of hip-hop and thirty years of reggae. With no lack of nuance, Mos Def portrays a place where hip-hop and reggae, African Americans and West Indians, blacks and blacks and browns and blacks, reside in intimacy. Importantly, while his

⁴⁵ This level of interplay may help to explain why many, especially outside of the United States or Jamaica, perceive hip-hop and dancehall as a single, conflated genre or set of practices. See the introduction for a discussion of this common conflation outside Jamaica and the US.

music's form gives shape to the transnational black society where he resides, its content calls for "*all* black people to be free."⁴⁶ Mos Def maps out an intensely local place in his music, but a place that is always already familiar with the foreign, where things Jamaican are more mundane than exotic, and where race matters more than national origin. Mos Def's fluid figuration of a hybrid Brooklyn, which is nonetheless "black on both sides," articulates a sense of belonging that surpasses earlier and narrower nationalistic or ethnic conceptions of community.

A drum'n'bass remix of "Definition," issued two years after the original on Rawkus's apparently affiliate label, Rawkus Primitive, served to (re)connect—at least for the small circle of connoisseurs/DJs who collected it—additional nodes in the transnational network, embodying reggae's routes to/through London, its interaction with hip-hop there, and the shared space in the soundscape they have long occupied.⁴⁷ In the early 90s, British-Jamaicans, many of them (such as the Ragga Twins) formerly fast-chatting DJs/MCs for local soundsystems and labels, were instrumental in shifting a segment of the hardcore (techno) rave audience toward the use of breakbeats, reggae basslines, and creole toasting. A fusion of hip-hop, reggae, and various electronic dance styles, jungle was the outward looking but locally tuned sound of second- (and third-) generation Jamaica coming of age in the ol' metropole. Later, drum'n'bass, garage, grime, and dubstep, to name a few, would each follow the template in their own way, gravitating toward one or another international style (often with heavy infusions of contemporary hip-hop and reggae) and offering a distinctive synthesis of the present

⁴⁶ "Umi Says," *Black on Both Sides* (Rawkus, 1999).

⁴⁷ Rawkuts was another label that issued drum'n'bass remixes of Rawkus singles. Both labels, Rawkuts and Primitive Rawkus, appeared to have privileged access to the Rawkus recordings based on their use of *capellas* unavailable on commercial releases.

London soundscape. (It should be noted, moreover, that the reggae's—and hip-hop's— influence in the UK extends to all genres of popular music, from local dance pop and hip-hop to bhangra.) Dancehall reggae samples became a staple in jungle and its offshoots, and hip-hop samples were quite popular as well. The Primitive Rawkus and Rawkuts drum'n'bass mixes applied the jump-up treatment Rawkus's quintessentially underground hip-hop singles, sampling and stuttering the vocals, superimposing soaring synth lines, and dropping double-time breakbeats on top. Produced by the New York's Pish Posh (a/k/a DJ Wally, or Keef DeStefano), the remix of "Definition" does all of those things, maintaining the *Mad Mad* riff as a central, echoing element as it re-propels Black Star's attempt to redefine a genre.⁴⁸

Black Star's attempted intervention was, in many ways, more about remembering and reflecting than redefining. After all, their homage to a hip-hop classic, violent contradictions notwithstanding, invoked a long, complex history of reggae-tinged, activist hip-hop. Aligning themselves musically and philosophically with a great many Brooklyn-based and Tri-State peers and predecessors, Mos Def and Talib Kweli deployed familiar riffs, textual allusions, and creolized "native tongues" to "open up [a] new angle on the original version" and chant down—if with no little sonic violence—the violence that had come to plague hip-hop and, by extension, black communities nation- and worldwide.⁴⁹ It is not coincidental that the sounds of Jamaica so strongly infused their stance. Notably, many of the hip-hop artists who affirmed reggae style's place in the Brooklyn soundscape and the hip-hop idiom similarly fused a kind of rude boy militancy, Rastafarian

⁴⁸ For biographical details, see <<http://www.djwallypishposh.com/About/Biography/index.html>> (accessed 13 September 2006). It should be added that Pish Posh's remix further redefines "Definition" by mixing in vocals from the subsequent, related track on the Black Star album, "Re:Definition." He also highlights the KRS-One presence by making his "yaaaaa" a recurring sample.

⁴⁹ Mos Def, liner notes, *Mos Def and Talib Kweli are Black Star* (Rawkus, 1998).

deprogramming (from dreadlocks and other external symbols of black pride to its critical-conceptual-linguistic legacy), and, among various strands of Afrocentrism, terms and ideas drawn from 5 Percenter philosophy as well as more traditional referents in the longstanding African-American and pan-African struggle for social justice (from the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam to Marcus Garvey and Nelson Mandela). As such, they were able to advance a rich, new, transnational politics of blackness, locally grounded but also articulating a worldwide “ghetto archipelago” (as later spelled out more explicitly, if somewhat facilely, by Kweli and the Cocoa Brovaz on the BDP-steeped “Gun Music” [2002]). As the new millennium approached and passed and a new wave of rap-reggae crossover ensued, Black Star’s remake—at least in its hybrid sonics—seemed less like a throwback and more like a prophecy.

CHAPTER NINE

The New Millenium: *A Different Ting a Gwaan?*

In 2002 dancehall DJs Vybz Kartel and Wayne Marshall released a song called “New Millenium.” Over a riddim called the *Mad Antz* which for all its consummate dancehall swing seems to allude, with its arcing half-measure arpeggios, to Black Rob’s “Like Whoa,” a ubiquitous hip-hop hit two years prior, Kartel nonchalantly introduces himself with rhyming, punning catch-phrases—“up to the time, down to the minute”—before unleashing a torrent of syncopated syllables that seem to flow, angular and regular, in a space somewhere between Jay-Z and Beenie Man. The deft DJ’s carefully modulated, conversational intonation may be inspired by Jamaican vernacular speech, but it is undeniably all his own:

Inna me Karl Kani
 Wit a bokkle of tall Canei—
 Tough a lie?
 Spliff a light spliff so til me high,
 Cork a fly,
 Crate of Guinness pile up inna di sky,
 Ooman a watch me like a spy,
 Kartel nuh shy guy.
 Me nah go lie...

Though there’s no denying that the song represents contemporary dancehall reggae style, what’s remarkable is how much hip-hop has been absorbed into the genre’s distinctive sonic stew by this point—conspicuous consumption of internationally-circulating luxury goods included. A hip-hop generation DJ par excellence, Kartel’s complex, compelling

flow embodies dancehall's roots in and routes through hip-hop.¹ Marshall, who provides the track's chorus—"This a the new millennium, / a different ting a gwaan"—is similarly steeped in American as well as Jamaican style, making a name for himself as much through his inventive covers of contemporary hip-hop hits as his distinctive turns on songs by Kartel, Bounty Killer, and other top DJs.² Here the DJs proclaim the newness of the time and the newness of their style. But is there really anything new about Jamaican musicians synthesizing local and foreign styles (as fragile as those terms may be)? The answer is, unsurprisingly, yes and no. As this chapter will show, the new millennium represents both an intensification of longstanding interactions and something of a break in the interplay between hip-hop and reggae, the US and Jamaica. While dancehall would see its popularity and influence reach new levels in the US and worldwide, its wide diffusion would also portend a paradoxical disappearance into ubiquity and add fuel to the difference-making engines of capitalist markets and national and racial ideologies.

At the turn of the new millennium, reggae and hip-hop were ascendant in global popularity, finding new devotees in likely and unlikely places as the genres spread to every corner of the world. Often, they traveled together via mediascapes and ethnoscap

¹ When asked what "set [him] going in the direction of music," Kartel replied, revealingly: "I always used to listen to a lotta Hip Hop songs and write them out word for word and study them. Then I started writin my own songs." This practice, incidentally, echoes the biographical details I heard from other aspiring, hip-hop generation DJs in Kingston, as does Kartel's self-description not as "hip-hop style" but "international style": "[L]istenin to Hip Hop growin up, I'd say my style is more of a international style." In the same interview, Kartel names KRS-One, Run DMC, Big Daddy Kane, and Slick Rick as important influences on him, all of them, notably, are hip-hop artists who engaged in the 80s and 90s with reggae style. <http://www.murderdog.com/january_articles/vybz_kartel/vybz.html> (accessed 11 September 2006).

² Marshall made himself a darling of the "dancehall massive" by, most frequently, turning stateside hip-hop hits into locally resonant anthems about marijuana, demonstrating at once the Jamaican appetite for localized versions of foreign fare and their familiarity with the originals. Thus, Outkast's "The Whole World" became "Legalize Ganja" (as in, "don't the whole world, want to legalize ganja?") while their smash "Hey Ya" became simply re-sung as "Ganja." D-12's and Eminem's "Purple Pills" was resignified to praise "Purple Skunk," a potent strain of ganja from Westmoreland's Orange Hill area. And, in a slight departure, Marshall maintained the focus of Ludacris's "Area Codes (Got Hoes)" on his "I Got Ho's" but changed the area codes to ones Jamaicans would recognize, including those from local cellphone competitors and common dialing spots in the diaspora.

especially those linked to Anglo-American empire—which is to say, they were practically ubiquitous.³ The two were easily conflated, partly due to the longstanding interplay that had brought them closer stylistically than ever before (and facilitated collaborations, which exploded in number around this time), and partly because they both circulated as black/Afrodiasporic musics with connotations of opposition, cool, violence, and license. Multivalent and expressive yet grounded in local codes, reggae and hip-hop each appealed to a core, physical audience as well as a larger network of enthusiasts and practitioners whose engagement was primarily through electronic media. The circulation of the two genres via the movement of people and media also led, unsurprisingly, to even greater interplay and mutual resonance. In particular, alongside the advent and diffusion of new media technologies and the continued dominance of US media, the central sites of hip-hop and reggae production and consumption—namely, New York, Kingston, Miami, and London—continued to see demographic changes that would foster the popularity of hip-hop in Jamaica and reggae in the diaspora. Cable and satellite television became far more common and accessible in Kingston, while the internet opened up new opportunities for discovery and exchange among the digerati. And although Jamaican migration to the US actually decreased over the course of the 90s, reflecting tightened

³ I borrow the terms *mediascapes* and *ethnoscapes* from Appadurai's theories of "global flows" (*Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996]). Despite their wide embrace around the world, in certain contexts, especially when seeming to take on a hegemonic character, hip-hop and reggae have been cast as forms of cultural imperialism. Kofi Agawu, for example, names reggae and African-American popular styles as "assaults" on African musicians: "The musicians among them [i.e., Africans with "apparently incoherent lived experiences"] may have played hymns and Mozart at the harmonium, danced to highlife, sung a chorus or two from *messiah* as members of a church choir, and been assaulted by soul, reggae, and funk on radio" (Representing African Music, xviii). In another instance, a piece by Benjamin Gedan in the *Boston Globe* "Travel" section on 8 August 2004—tellingly titled, "Exotic and Exuberant," betraying a certain romanticism about "untouched" Africa—affirmed this perception with regard to Eastern Ghana, offering a provocative subtitle, "An outpost uses its instruments against hip-hop and reggae," and quoting Emmanuel Agbeli, director of the Dagbe Cultural Institute and Arts Centre, who complained that "People are trying to bury our culture with hip-hop and reggae music."

immigration laws, new generations were born to previous waves of immigrants as remittances and deportees from the US to Jamaica increased substantially.⁴

High numbers of deportees returning from such outposts as Brooklyn and Hartford would serve to affirm and increase the island's already longstanding love for hip-hop and other African-/American styles, encouraging a well-worn circuit of sound and sentiment.⁵ For the sons and daughters and neighbors of deportees, what Ken Bilby calls Jamaica's "deep and distinctive cultural wellsprings" no doubt came to include, as a matter of second nature, hip-hop, R&B, and other putatively foreign but deeply familiar genres.⁶ Accordingly, a new generation of hip-hop savvy dancehall DJs and producers looked increasingly to the massive success of their hip-hop brethren and prepared another wave of "ouernational," crossover hits, addressed first and foremost to the denizens of the dancehall (if long a diasporic "massive"), who had grown accustomed to hearing the latest hip-hop hits worked into sets at even the most "hardcore" soundsystem dances.⁷

⁴ As Deborah Thomas notes, "While 14,420 Jamaican were returned to Jamaica in 1996, 125,840 Jamaicans were deported in 1997 (Criminal Justice Research Unit 2001:1). Despite a decrease in actual numbers, however, the amount of money sent back to Jamaica by migrants increased sixfold" (*Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2004], 83).

⁵ The variety one beholds on the Jamaican airwaves, for instance, offers a revealing reflection of the variety of everyday engagements Jamaicans have with foreign and local music, though it rarely receives recognition as a significant, and symbolic, feature of the Jamaican soundscape. Scanning across the radio dial in Kingston, one encounters a vast range of musical styles broadcast by and for Jamaicans. Radio in Jamaica offers a veritable archive of international popular music from the last 50 years, encompassing myriad genres across various eras (though often segmented according to demographically-targeted stations, if less so than in the consolidated, "clear channels" of US media). As one of my collaborators, Raw Raw, noted, one should not underestimate the power of Jamaica's ecumenical and popular radio broadcasts: "The radio in Jamaica presents a variety of music, and people listen to the radio *often*, you see me?" For an audible demonstration of Jamaica's range, see my blog entry and accompanying sonic collage, "Sunday Radio Jamaica": <<http://www.wayneandwax.org/blog/february/wm-02-13.html>>. A shortened version of the collage appears as "Jamaican Radio Edit" on my "ethnographic" album *Boston Jerk* (2004).

⁶ Kenneth Bilby, "Jamaica," in *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*, ed. Peter Manuel, 143-182 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 145.

⁷ Consider, for example, the Jim Brown Memorial Dance in Tivoli Gardens. An annual event commemorating one of Kingston's toughest neighborhood's toughest gunmen, one would expect to hear little in the way of foreign fluff in such a context. It is hence telling that, within a set largely focused on dancehall, selector Fire Links played tracks by 50 Cent, Busta Rhymes, and Jay-Z during the 2003 event.

While some young Kingstonians embraced hip-hop completely and sometimes even put on Brooklyn accents, others have been more careful in negotiating the signifiers of “yard” and “foreign” (as will be discussed in the next chapter). At the same time, the new millennial slew of crossover-friendly dancehall releases led US-based producers of hip-hop, R&B, and pop to embrace dancehall riddims with unprecedented fervor, to the point where the genre’s telltale 3+3+2 groove became absorbed into the American musical landscape, often losing its identity as a Jamaican style. Misheard and re-labeled as, say, “syncopated hip-hop” dancehall suddenly became the latest hip but anonymous “sonic wallpaper” for NFL interludes and beer commercials.⁸ And yet, alongside this disappearance into the American pop idiom, many such mainstream “appropriations” of dancehall style were accompanied by melodies and other figures associated with the Far and Middle East, an orientalism suggesting that dancehall had not lost its exotic sheen despite its increasingly commonplace character. In the process of all this continued engagement, the *Mad Mad* would rear its recognizable head, or at least its well-worn riff, once again. (Actually, it would do so several times.)

New Millennial Mutual Influence: Round and Round We Go

The last several years have seen an explosion of dancehall reggae rhythms in hip-hop, R&B, and pop. Most distinctively marked by the genre’s predilection for, and

⁸ From 2003-4, during the apex of dancehall’s early 00s crossover bubble, I heard dancehall-style rhythms in commercials for Chili’s Restaurant, Michelob Ultra, and Skippy Peanut Butter. The Chili’s campaign used the term “syncopated hip-hop” to describe the music accompanying Evander Holyfield’s call for “Baby Back Ribs” (see the press release here <<http://www.shareholder.com/brinker/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=138650>> [accessed 12 September 2006]). During the 2004 Super Bowl broadcast, I also noticed a generic dancehall-style rhythm accompanying the infographics for the starting line-ups of each team. I’m remiss that I was not able to record any of these, though I do have a copy of the Skippy Snack-Bars commercial, which was the most explicit invocation of Jamaican style of them all—and the most hilarious.

distinctive statement of, a quintessentially Caribbean, additive rhythmic framework (in contrast to the even subdivisions of most American popular music), dancehall's prevailing 3+3+2 groove have turned up in the "multi-platinum" pop of Missy Elliott, R. Kelly, Justin Timberlake, Beyonce Knowles, and Britney Spears, among others. Reflecting, on the one hand, the shimmer of rapidly circulating, global mass media, this new degree of penetration and refraction of reggae style also speaks to a more concrete, local reality, for the contemporary socio-cultural fabric in the urban centers of the Eastern Seaboard has been increasingly textured by the experiences and expressions of Caribbean immigrants. Cities such as New York, Miami, and Atlanta—hubs of music industry activity and Caribbean migration alike—now boast significant communities of Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, Bajans, and Trinidadians. Such popular genres as dancehall, reggaeton, soca, and merengue—all of which share common musical features—resonate across the American urban soundscape via radio, clubs, cars, and public festivals. The extent to which Caribbean musical style has become an influential part of the new and innovative popular musical vocabulary suggests that mainstream American culture is being informed by, and trying to make sense of, these social changes. It remains unclear, however, despite optimistic pronouncements of an emerging "Ecumenical America" (Patterson 1994), whether this pervasive infusion of Caribbean music and cultural practice represents but another cyclical flirtation with America's "others" (as with periodic "Latin" music crazes) or signals a more significant and enduring cultural shift.

In 2004 dancehall pioneer Eek-A-Mouse released a song called "Jamaicanese" which addressed, comically and critically, the degree to which African-/American

performers had embraced, or perhaps appropriated, Jamaican style. Reaching slightly in his allegations, Eek-A-Mouse offers a list of top hip-hop performers who “chat Jamaicanese”:

Everybody wanna talk inna Jamaicanese...
 Enough of you American MCs...
 Busta Rhymes chat Jamaicanese,
 Biggie Small chat Jamaicanese,
 Heavy D chat Jamaicanese,
 Jay-Z chat Jamaicanese,
 Ludacris chat Jamaicanese,
 50 Cent chat Jamaicanese,
 P Diddy chat Jamaicanese,
 Nelly Nelly Nelly chat Jamaicanese,
 Ja Rule chat Jamaicanese,
 Eminem can't chat Jamaicanese...⁹

In the course of the song, Eek-A-Mouse also argues that hip-hop was born in Jamaica and would be reclaimed by dancehall artists: “Inna Jamaica, we start the rap, / now we a come and call it hip-hop, / Sean Paul, dancehall come fi take it back.” He offers a list of seminal reggae DJs in order to buttress the island’s claim to rap’s origins. Complicating his critique, however, the DJ also registers Jamaica’s love for foreign goods, from Versace to Mercedes Benz. At any rate, “Jamaicanese” reflects a growing perception inside and outside of Jamaica not only that reggae is foundational to hip-hop but that it remains a crucial input to the genre.

The success of Sean Paul, who had a number one hit in early 2003 with “Get Busy” (on the ubiquitous *Diwali* riddim) once again opened American ears, and wallets, to the dancehall sound, even though most stateside listeners found the DJ’s lyrics unintelligible save for well-placed instances of hip-hop slang (e.g., the “dro” [from

⁹ Although Eek-A-Mouse never explains why Eminem “can’t chat Jamaicanese,” it is telling that he singles out the white rapper in this way, underscoring again the degree to which reggae is cast as black music.

“hydroponically-grown” marijuana, now merely slang for any potent strain] and “Mo” [Moët champagne] he calls for in his breakthrough single, “Gimme the Light” [2002]). It became a commonplace celebration to note that Sean Paul succeeded on the US charts without “watering down” dancehall style, performing his creole-heavy lyrics over so-called “unadulterated” reggae riddims, but few who rehearsed such proclamations of purity noted that contemporary dancehall riddims such as the *Diwali* or the *Mad Antz* bear strong timbral and textural similarities to contemporary hip-hop beats.¹⁰ Still, Sean Paul’s chart successes served as a new beachhead for reggae in the international market, and for a time—especially from late 2002 through 2004—dancehall held a conspicuous place in American popular music, opening doors for other Jamaican artists and encouraging US performers and record labels to attempt their own dancehall-derived ditties.¹¹

In the first few years of the twenty-first century, reggae’s presence in hip-hop takes various shapes, demonstrating the many types of engagements American artists and audiences might have with the music and the various connotations the music might have outside Jamaica. In hip-hop’s most mainstream offerings, one could hear both obvious, indexical samples of Jamaican music as well as more subtle transmutations of reggae riddims into hip-hop beats. In the case of the former, producer Kanye West sampled Max

¹⁰ It should be noted, moreover—as is often lamented by Jamaica’s culture police—that reggae singers have incorporated more recent R&B-inflected approaches, complete with overblown melismatic flourishes, into their vocal performances. Vocalists such as R. Kelly and Usher represent popular touchstones in Jamaica, as do female singers from Destiny’s Child to Celine Dion.

¹¹ Other examples of dancehall’s success on the US charts at this time include the *Diwali*-propelled hit by Wayne Wonder (“No Letting Go”) as well as the NY-based Lumidee’s “Never Leave You (Uh-Oh),” which employed a remix of Steven “Lenky” Marsden’s *Diwali*. Shortly thereafter, another popular dancehall riddim, Everton “Scatta” Burrell’s *Coolie Dance*, also scored a number of chart hits, including Mr. Vegas’s “Pull-Up,” Pitbull’s “Culo” (which interpolated Vegas’s melody), and Nina Sky’s “Move Your Body.” That the hits, aside from Vegas’s track, were performed by US artists demonstrates the eagerness, and speed, of US producers to capitalize on dancehall’s cresting popularity.

Romeo's dub classic "Chase the Devil" (1976) for Jay-Z's "Lucifer" (2003), while Ja Rule employed Sizzla's "Solid As a Rock" (2002) on his own "The Crown" (2003) while the dancehall original was still being played regularly by reggae selectors. (Notably, Sizzla's "Solid As a Rock" in the form of a mashup with southern rapper Bonecrusher's "Never Scared" [2003] was a hit that year in hip-hop and reggae scenes alike.) In the latter, 50 Cent's "Many Men (Wish Death)" (2003)—a song I heard several times at dances in Jamaica—features a bassline that traces a contour many Jamaicans would hear resonating with the well-worn *Stalag* or *Tempo* riddims (and hints at this connection with the quasi-creole chorus lyric, "Many men, wish death 'pon me"), while Eminem's otherwise forgettable "Crazy In Love" is supported by an obvious 3+3+2 drum pattern, despite its red-herring chipmunk-soul sample of Heart's "Crazy On You."

Dancehall's millennial parade through the pop charts produced no small number of copycat hits by R&B, dance pop, and teenybop acts, all of them employing 3+3+2 grooves and, in a fine bit of indiscriminating orientalism, often adding melodic elements evoking the Near, Middle, or Far East. Beyonce's "Baby Boy" (2003), produced by Scott Storch and featuring Sean Paul, added synthesized sitars, flutes, and tamboura-style drones to a dancehall beat and went to #1 on the US pop charts. Britney Spears got into the act as well on "The Hook Up" (2003), employing a sitar-ish synth evoking the Middle East against a beat with steadily syncopating snares tracing out a 3+3+2 rhythm (but more closely resembling, with four-to-the-floor kicks, early 90s dancehall riddims or those from contemporary soca or reggaeton). Underpinned by yet another dancehall-style beat, Christina Milian's "Dip It Low" (2003) substituted a Far Eastern sounding (synth) lute melody for the more common Indian/Middle Eastern signifiers and peaked at #5 on

the US charts. And R. Kelly offered a couple such numbers in 2003, “Snake” and “Thoia Thoing,” the first attempting to evoke snake-charmers, the second Japan. Both employed fluttering flute lines and dancehall rhythms, though each used a high budget video—one set in the desert, the other a tea room—to cement the associations. Significantly, in another bit of circular motion, “Snake” inspired a knock-off version of the riddim in Jamaica called the “Baghdad”—an appropriate title given the connotations and the historical moment—which served to underpin, among other things, an anti-war song by Capleton. Thus, at the same time that dancehall reached a kind of popularity to the point where its presence faded into an almost unmarked omnipresence, the oddly consistent marriage of dancehall rhythms and orientalist melodies served to belie, if subtly, a persistent exoticism around such “foreign” but utterly familiar musical features.

In addition to its ubiquitous presence (at least for a brief period) in the pop sphere, including mainstream hip-hop, the appearance of dancehall’s distinctive 3+3+2 in underground hip-hop marked another sort of arrival for reggae. Despite all the crossover in the 80s and 90s, in mainstream/major and underground/indie circles alike, it remained relatively rare for either reggae’s one-drop or “bomp-bomp” rhythms to supplant hip-hop’s more funk-derived beats as accompaniment. But recent years have seen self-consciously underground hip-hop artists embracing such a framework, which is telling given a certain tendency toward stylistic conservatism—despite an equal penchant for progressivism—in underground hip-hop. From the NY-based Def Jux camp, MCs such as Aesop Rock (“NY Electric,” which also featured a slinky, orientalist melody) and Mr. Lif (“Home of the Brave”) propelled their politicized lyrics with dancehall’s metric movement. The Bay Area’s Blackalicious and Lyrics Born (“Last Trumpet,” “One

Session”) both infused their music with copious reggae referents. Similarly, as also heard in the UK (where reggae has long infused all popular styles), hip-hop’s radio and mixtape circuits in the US provided yet another place for reggae style to take root in recent years. Mixtape DJs such as Kay Slay evoke dancehall selectors in the way they talk (or shout) over the tracks, dropping out the sound momentarily for emphasis, while radio DJs, especially during less commercial segments, have taken to “juggling” tracks as reggae selectors do, playing a number of songs sharing the same accompaniment in short, rhythmically-precise succession. It is also common for mixtape DJs, such as DJ Technic of the Bronx, to offer reggae mixes alongside—and often shot through—hip-hop mixes, and of course dancehall songs have been a staple in DJs’ live hip-hop sets, if often isolated into their own block, since at least the early 90s.¹²

Today songs continue to ping-pong back and forth between the US and Jamaica, often with astonishing rapidity. In 2005, shortly after Damian Marley’s “Welcome to Jamrock” began climbing urban playlists, Brooklyn’s Lil Kim recorded an homage, “Lighters Up (Welcome to Brooklyn),” remarkably faithful in its reproduction of Marley’s flow during the verses as well as corresponding to aspects of the original’s content. Going in the other direction (which remains a more common procedure), Vybz Kartel recorded his own version of Jadakiss’s “Why” (2004), wittily substituting Jamaican-centric topics and references. As mentioned above, dancehall DJ Wayne Marshall frequently records comical covers of hit hip-hop songs. Perhaps more structurally important is the persistent use, especially by Elephant Man, of well-known American and international pop melodies to provide a resonant, and often ironic, basis for new dancehall compositions. In just the last few years, Elephant Man has cribbed tunes

¹² See, e.g., <http://www.myspace.com/DJ_TECHNIC> or browse at allmixtapes.com, hotmixx.com, etc.

from disco mainstays Gloria Gaynor and the Bee Gees, American rock group Survivor, Canadian songstress Celine Dion, German pop singer Nena, and even *Sesame Street*. Jamaica's hip-hop savvy DJs have also become coveted collaborators in the US, both on pop/R&B artists' albums (e.g., Janet Jackson, No Doubt, Beyonce) and on highly promoted projects such as Island/Def Jam's *Red Star Sounds Presents Def Jamaica* (2003), which brought the island's most popular DJs together with prominent rappers (sponsored in part by Heineken's "Music Initiative"). Indeed, increasingly the interaction between hip-hop and reggae occurs at the highest levels of the music industry, though the grass roots remain a hotbed for hybrids.

One good example of the myriad, messy interactions embodied in the contemporary interplay between hip-hop and dancehall is the Terror Squad's "Lean Back" (2004), a massive international radio and club hit despite being an anti-dance dance song. "My niggas don't dance, / they just pull up their pants, and / do the rockaway, / now lean back, / lean back," went the chorus, intoned by Bronx-based MC, Fat Joe, a rapper of Cuban and Puerto Rican heritage who, nonetheless, has long put forward an African-American-aligned, NY-steeped sound. Jamaican listeners would instantly identify the sort of Simon-says dance number with a subgenre of the reggae repertory even if it did not make reference to the "Rockaway," a contemporary dancehall step which clearly served to inspire the Terror Squad track. Demonstrating again the penetration of dancehall style in places such as the Bronx, "Lean Back" would make additional connections across between hip-hop and reggae via various remixes and versions. On an official remix featuring rappers Mace, Eminem, and producer Lil Jon (who himself has dabbled as a reggae selector and directed Usher to do the "Thundaclap")

in the singer's "Yeah" video), Eminem refers to himself as the "original don dada," a cliché allusion to Super Cat and other posse-invoking DJs and an obvious reference to a term from reggae parlance which long passed into the hip-hop lexicon.

Another version of the song served to connect it to yet another node in hip-hop's and reggae's criss-crossing global network, Toronto (a/k/a T Dot), a longstanding site of Jamaican migration. For an unauthorized remix included as the B-side to his single "Bang Bang" (2004), Canadian-Jamaican rapper Kardinal Offishall borrowed the beat from "Lean Back" in order to deliver a set of boastful rhymes that switch seamlessly between hip-hop slang and creole phrases. On the slightly retitled "Bumboclawt (Lean Back)," Offishall localizes the global hit, beginning with a series of shout-outs to significant places in the Toronto imagination: "T Dot, LA, Miami, New York, Trinidad, Tobago." Peppering his lyrics with plenty of Jamaican profanity and onomatopoeic gunfire, the MC also makes reference to new immigrants arriving in the city, characterizing them as violent imports ("fresh-off-the-boat niggas holding them triggers"). As a remarkable footnote of sorts, I also stumbled (via a p2p network) upon a sloppy mashup of "Lean Back" on which an unidentified producer chose, tellingly, to layer samples of dancehall DJs Buju Banton and Sizzla over the Scott Storch-produced beat. When vocals from a widely-circulating freestyle by NY-based, Peru-born MC Immortal Technique enter, however, the track falls apart as the *a cappella* slips away from the timeline of the underlying track. A better example of a "Lean Back" mashup is DJ BC's "Lean Back on Me," which mixes the Terror Squad track with Club Nouveau's 1986 cover of Bill Withers's soul classic, "Lean on Me" (1972). Interestingly, although the Club Nouveau version would not seem at first to present another connection to reggae's routes through

American pop, as it so happens the song ends with a bizarre pop-reggae coda: as the track's rhythmic skank comes into greater focus, the singers repeat, with a slight but distinct accent, "We be jammin'! We be jammin'!"

The final version of "Lean Back" that merits our attention here, however, is a remix by veteran mixtape DJ, Tony Touch (a/k/a Tony Toca), featuring Puerto Rican rapper Tego Calderon. Delivering a verse in his trademark nonchalant baritone, more indebted to Tupac Shakur than Shabba Ranks, Tego's participation in the "Lean Back" phenomenon connects the song to yet another important and increasingly intersecting style in the mixed-up world of hip-hop and reggae interplay.¹³ Puerto Rican reggaeton, itself primarily a fusion of hip-hop and reggae, has made a remarkably strong showing in the American pop mainstream in recent years, especially considering its lyrics are almost entirely in Spanish. And though its stateside popularity owes no little debt to the large numbers of Spanish speakers residing in the US, reggaeton's mainstream appeal is undoubtedly strongly tied to the space opened for it by dancehall's hip-hop-assisted gains in the earlier part of the decade. Like dancehall reggae, from which reggaeton gets its prevailing rhythmic orientation, as well as many of its very sounds (most reggaeton tracks are built atop popular, early 90s dancehall riddims such as the *Dem Bow* and the *Bam Bam*), reggaeton offers what are largely unintelligible lyrics to its English-speaking audiences but does so with a distinctive, compelling rhythmic and melodic character (also largely drawn from dancehall style)—or as Tego puts it on "Slo Mo" (2006), "You might not understand, but it's hot though." Moreover, reggaeton artists are also well-versed in the familiar stylistic codes of hip-hop, and thus they project an Afro-Puerto

¹³ To such a category, of course, we could also add soca or any number of other genres, across the Americas and beyond. But for the sake of space, we will concentrate here on the example of reggaeton, especially since it offers another version of our audible narrative thread, the *Mad Mad* riddim.

Rican modernity which is rather resonant—even purely as sound and image—for mainstream American audiences. Fostering collaborations with hip-hop and reggae artists alike and increasingly marketed with and alongside its “parent” genres (see, e.g., Miami’s Power 96 *Dancehall Nice Again* compilations), reggaeton embodies the Latin Caribbean’s place in the hip-hop and reggae narratives as well as in the “ecumenical” zones of the United States which are increasingly constituted—socially, culturally, politically, and economically—by their Caribbean citizenry (Patterson 1994).

***Mad Mad* Movimientos: “Hip-hop Reggae” en Español and the Mobilization of Musical Blackness**

Although reggaeton’s reggae referents are far more heavily weighted toward early 90s dancehall, the familiar sounds of Junjo Lawes’s 1981 re-lick of the *Mad Mad* make an undeniable appearance on Tego Calderon’s debut album, *El Abayarde* (2003). Employing varied accompaniments, including the use of the *Mad Mad* for his ode to marijuana, “Bonsai,” Tego set himself apart from his reggaeton peers. Like hip-hop and reggae, reggaeton is a rather ecumenical genre, imposing its distinctive beat—the boom-ch-boom-chick it borrows from dancehall—over a variety of musical textures, embracing merengue and bachata figures, salsa “re-licks,” hip-hop and pop samples, and, prevailingly, plucky synthesized backings that point to techno (or “tecno”) as much as to contemporary hip-hop and reggae and embodying the genre’s tools of production: keyboards, drum machines, and software. Though he employed many of the genre’s top producers for synth heavy *pistas* (i.e., riddims/beats), Tego’s debut was remarkable in its musical diversity, offering some of the genre’s first experiments with Latin and Puerto

Rican musical sources, notably Afro-Puerto Rican bomba. The use of a rootsy early dancehall sample broadened further the album's palette, and the sample's strong resonance with hip-hop as well as reggae served to make sonic connections to both genres that went far beyond reggaeton's well-worn *Dem Bow* breaks and rapid-fire rap.

Like hip-hop and reggae, reggaeton is a deeply diasporic music, emerging out of transnational circumstances to give shape and form to new kinds of experiences and identifications. The roots of the genre are frequently traced to the Jamaican migrant labor communities in Panama. Maintaining connections to home well after assisting in the construction of the Canal, these communities fostered a Spanish-language engagement with reggae from as early as the 1970s. Through circuits of migration to such centers as New York, Panamanian *reggae en español* ignited the musical imagination of Latin American youth in New York with El General's early 90s covers, or translations, of contemporary dancehall songs. Tracks such as "Tu Pum Pum" found enthusiasts not just in the Tri-State area, but back in Puerto Rico as well, where it fit easily alongside the dancehall reggae and reggae-infused hip-hop that had become all the rage in New York and San Juan alike. Facilitated by what some sociologists have described as an intensifying pattern of circular migration, a Spanish-language hybrid of hip-hop and reggae, in lockstep with the contemporary hits of both genres, began to build a strong following in the "underground" scenes in Puerto Rico and in stateside centers of Puerto Rican migration, especially the cities of the Northeast.¹⁴ Bringing together influences that seemed to reflect and give shape to this regional circulation, reggaeton, as it was being

¹⁴ Francisco L. Rivera-Batiz and Carlos E. Santiago, *Island Paradox: Puerto Rico in the 1990s* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996), 59. Similar to Jamaica, Puerto Rico has become a nation that exceeds its island borders. Soon more self-identified Puerto Ricans will reside outside of Puerto Rico than on the island.

called by the late 90s, soon became the music of a generation (or two) of Puerto Ricans who sought to express their urbane modernity—and, at least for a while, their blackness—without abandoning important cultural symbols or traditions.¹⁵ As such, the music developed a strong grassroots network of supporters and practitioners across Puerto Rico and its diasporic nodes. It was not until Jamaican dancehall made its millennial mark on the US pop charts, however, and provided opportunities for Spanish-language performances over the same or similar riddims (see, e.g., Pitbull’s turn on the *Coolie Dance* riddim), that reggaeton would finally find Anglophone ears ready for its distinctive synthesis of contemporary popular styles.

Despite its obvious synthesis of hip-hop and reggae and its Spanish vocals, Tego’s “Bonsai” is far from a typical reggaeton track, stylistically speaking. Of course, we need not impose too narrow a definition on the genre, and Tego clearly does not, but in a genre which predominantly features synthesized melodies against a rhythmic pattern indebted to early 90s dancehall reggae (with its four-to-the-floor kicks and syncopated snares) at a club-friendly tempo of around 100 bpm, “Bonsai” stands apart with its relaxed tempo, roots-reggae loop, and funk-derived, hip-hop style drums. For all its commonness as a breakbeat-based configuration, the drum pattern here should be heard as a rather specific figuration. Indeed, it recalls, more or less verbatim, the same drums that Scott La Rock and Ced Gee imposed over their sample of the *Mad Mad* riff almost two decades earlier as well as, of course, the drums that Hi-Tek arranged for Black Star’s

¹⁵ Hip-hop and reggae are as integral to the sound of Puerto Rico at this point as salsa or plena—or merengue for that matter. And the sound of Puerto Rico, in turn, is, as Juan Flores (*From Bomba to Hip-hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2000]) might note, the sound of New York and thus, to some extent, Jamaica: I heard a couple young Jamaican rappers use the Nuyorican term of endearment, “Ma,” over and over again in their performances, having been influenced not necessarily by Puerto Ricans but simply by New York-based rappers such as Busta Rhymes, Cam’ron, P. Diddy and others who had embraced the term.

1998 homage to BDP's "Remix for P" (1987). As such, "Bonsai" is not simply a self-consciously styled hybrid of hip-hop and reggae, as is most reggaeton; it is also an explicit invocation of and contribution to a rich, particular history of musical interplay, amplifying its source materials through DJ Adam's beefed-up arrangement, which layers a Flabba Holt-mimicking synth bassling atop the Roots Radics loop and occasionally augments the beat with a 4/4 kick drum recalling reggae's 70s-era "militant" rockers style. Adam is careful, as well, to emphasize the *Mad Mad* riddim's distinctive riff, without which few listeners might readily hear the active articulation and fusion of these familiar but foreign elements.

Using the term "hip-hop reggae," Tego locates "Bonsai" in the space created by the two genres' longstanding interaction, with additional musical allusions enriching the intertextual power of the song:

Hey, hey, hey—
 Whatchoo gonna say?
 Si la pista es buena,
 El resto es un mamey.
 Pa' que bling-bling
 Si no tienen el swing?
 You know I mean?
 Oyeme.
 Relajate.
 Sienteme.
 Enciendete.
 Si te gusta, apoyame.
 Mira quien es
 Que le mete chevere!
 Hip-hop reggae.
 Yo soy quien me adelante.
 Color café...

Hey, hey, hey—
 Whatchoo gonna say?
 If the dancefloor's good/nice,
 The rest is a piece of cake.
 What good is bling-bling
 If you ain't got that swing?
 Know what I mean?
 Listen to me.
 Relax (yourself).
 Feel me.
 Light yourself up (Get ready).
 If you like it, support me.
 Look who it is.
 Do it right! (also sexual connotation)
 Hip-hop reggae.
 I'm the one who gets me ahead.
 Color of coffee...

Thus Tego, in the course of encouraging listeners to “light up”/”get ready” and have a good time, incorporates a number of significant, subtle markers of style.¹⁶ Calling attention to the fusion—and, tellingly, calling it “hip-hop reggae” rather than “reggaeton”—is one way that the former hip-hop MC grounds himself in two genres that have been more influential on him than the relatively new hybrid called reggaeton. (He frequently cites Bob Marley as a major influence and discusses the admiration he developed for BDP, Rakim, and NWA while living as a teenager in Miami.) Indeed, Tego still describes himself primarily as a hip-hop artist or, in a nod to Ismael Rivera and other salsa heroes of his, a sonero. He goes further by interpolating an obscure but recognizable melody (from Duke Ellington’s “It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing)”) in order to critique, as he celebrates, the contemporary fascination with bling-bling, or ostentatious displays of wealth.¹⁷ Over the course of the song he peppers his boasts and toasts with references to 9/11’s effect on the marijuana trade, discusses local police surveillance, and, as seen in the final line quoted above, foregrounds his blackness (or in this case, brownness).

The use of a sampled loop of the *Mad Mad* riff and the reproduction of BDP’s classic drum pattern not only demonstrates a familiarity with the originals and a desire to engage with both traditions at once, they advance a cultural politics that militates against Puerto Rico’s putative, or repressed, non-blackness. For a genre that was marked quite strongly as black in the 1990s—with vocalists often proclaiming it “musica negra”—

¹⁶ I’d like to thank Michelle Muñoz and her own “assistants,” Barbara Sabat and Luis Hansen, for preparing a translation for me, which I have slightly modified here. Significantly, Tego’s lyrics, spiked with extremely local and obscure slang, are not easy to decipher, even for native Spanish-speakers and Puerto Ricans. According to Michelle, via email: “I had to pool many Puerto Rican sources, call up cousins and what not, haha, Tego has some very interesting and exclusive slang.”

¹⁷ He may even allude to the 1967 Alton Ellis original, “Mad Mad Mad,” in his “hey hey hey” chorus, which almost exactly echoes Ellis’s refrain—a somewhat obscure song at this point, even for reggae enthusiasts.

reggaeton has undergone something of a “whitening” process reminiscent of the “mulatto escape hatch” that still functions in Puerto Rican society. As it has found commercial success in the US and abroad, reggaeton artists and labels have increasingly courted a wider audience under the seemingly more inclusive banner of “reggaeton Latino.”¹⁸ In contrast, Tego consistently calls attention to his blackness through his sartorial choices (e.g., wearing an Afro), his lyrics (e.g., calling himself “El Negro Calde”), and his embrace of Afro-Caribbean musical signifiers, from bomba and plena, classic salsa, and Afro-Cuban styles to hip-hop, reggae, and more recently, blues. He has also made his position, his racial identification, quite clear in interviews: “I’m black first and then Boricua ‘cause it doesn’t matter where I go, what you see is a black face—you don’t know if I speak Spanish or whatever. My experience on my island is like that, no matter where I go I’m just black, even in my own hometown.”¹⁹ Projecting his racial politics, Tego’s music, through its direct indexing of black music (or “musica negra”) via samples of the *Mad Mad*, BDP drum beats, and salsa and bomba infusions, thus puts forward a transnational, pan-African blackness—a significant alignment to emphasize in a creole society where, in the vast majority, people self-identify as white (at least on census surveys).²⁰

¹⁸ The term “mulatto escape hatch” was coined by Carl Degler to describe a similar social process of (de)racialization in Brazil. Since then, a number of Caribbean scholars have applied it to such societies as Puerto Rico. See Carl Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

¹⁹ In “The Year Dancehall Ate the City,” interview by Edwin Houghton, *The Fader* 23 (Aug 2004): 94.

²⁰ According to the 2000 census, 81% of Puerto Ricans identified as “white,” 8% as “black,” and 7% as “other” (source: Orlando Patterson, lecture on Puerto Rican identity, 23 October 2003, Harvard University).

It's a Mad, Mad World: New Millennial Re-Licks of a Timeworn Riddim

While the *Mad Mad* was making its first appearances in Puerto Rican “hip-hop reggae,” it continued to resonate in Jamaican dancehalls, the Jamaican diaspora, and the American mainstream. Midway through the first decade of the new millennium, the well-worn riddim remained a staple of the reggae repertory, inspiring several new re-licks, each in its own way engaging with the riddim’s rich history as well as contemporary themes and technologies. The *Mad Mad* also lived on in the heavily specialized, vibrant, and practically undocumented world of dub plates, as selectors and soundsystems worldwide placed perennial requests for reggae artists to record customized versions of their signature tunes for use as sonic weapons in the competitive sound clash circuit (possibly multiplying the number of *Mad Mad* versions several fold). In addition, the riddim’s viral memes have found such non-Jamaican carriers as Christian Nu Metal bands, Hasidic ragga-style rappers, and Long Beach-based ska punks. These familiar and foreign manifestations no doubt ensure that the *Mad Mad* will persist in its presence even as its riffs and melodies slip further from their knotty roots.

After nearly four decades of constant circulation and reanimation, the *Mad Mad* has accrued not just sentiment but sediment of a sort—sonically and culturally—and the latest versions of the riddim embody its forty-year routes in various ways. Any re-lick of the *Mad Mad* at this point is both enhanced and freighted by a long history of memorable performances. Producers and vocalists thus must reckon with the ghosts of past riffs and recordings. It is not surprising, for example, given technological and aesthetic changes as well as the strong connotations carried by particular renderings of the *Mad Mad*, that the

use of digital samples from previous performances has become one commonplace procedure for creating a new version of the riddim. A 2002 re-lick on the Rashanco label—which served to support a dozen voicings, including Luciano’s “Warning” as well as Michigan & Smiley’s told-you-so return to their 1981 classic (“Jah Lick We”)—offers a remarkable synthesis of both the “Diseases” and “Golden Hen” versions of the *Mad Mad*. Reproducing the Junjo version’s distinctive introductory drumroll and guitar riff, the re-lick augments these elements with additional, newly recorded drum and bass tracks and adds a re-played version of the distinctive horn line from the “Golden Hen.” Another recent version, released by Logon Street Vibes in 2006, similarly samples the classic drum intro from Junjo’s version, locating it immediately in the realm of memory, but quickly providing a strong timbral contrast with a newly recorded accompaniment that embraces more contemporary synthesizer and drum machine sounds, playing the distinctive riff with a combination of a phased-out guitar and a synth-horn.

Enhancing its reprise of the classic riddim, the version features several veteran DJs, including Peter Metro, Sugar Minott, Josie Wales, King Kong, and Johnny P. More closely resembling dubplate practice, where it is customary to use various already circulating versions of the riddim, an even more straightforward, if not egregious, example of a sample-based approach to contemporary versioning can be heard on a set of singles released in the beginning of the decade by RMC promotions. Employing Junjo’s “Diseases” version as accompaniment, this “re-lick” (if it can be labeled so) simply plays the extant version, occasionally employing volume-slider effects to add a slight degree of customization, to support new vocal performances by such DJs as Merciless (“Keep On the Trousers,” an explicit allusion to “Diseases” in melody and topic), Capleton (“Bun

Out di Chi Chi” and “Weh Dem Go So Fast”), Sizzla (“Guns Out”), and Elephant Man (“How di Fire Fi Out”). For their part, the DJs appear inspired by version’s classic strains and thus reference “Diseases” in their performances, mainly by endorsing the same conservative moral code that Michigan & Smiley advised, often adding a more explicit anti-gay angle for contemporary resonance.

Two other new millennial re-licks are worth noting here for their audible, and remarkable (in the sampling age), continuity with traditional re-lick practice. The first—issued by the Fat Eyes label in 2001 and supporting Lego’s “Good Ganja” and Buju Banton’s “Hold Me Tight,” among other voicings—faithfully reproduces a number of elements of the popular “Diseases” variation on the *Mad Mad*, but does so entirely by replaying the riff, chords, and bassline while using a drum machine (complete with synth claps) to evoke without exactly reproducing Style Scott’s early 80s performance. The second, a 2005 re-lick of the “Golden Hen” by Down Sound Records called the “Dutty Rub,” also distinguishes itself by resisting the temptation to simply sample its sources, even if that means offering oddly dissonant and slightly divergent forms of the riddim’s well-worn figures. Interestingly, DSR’s website describes the “Dutty Rub” as having been “[i]nspired by the tic-a-tick-a-toc riddim,” referring to the first line of Tenor Saw’s performance on “Golden Hen,” hence seeming to signal a primarily aural acquaintance with the version and a lack of interest in the riddim’s history commensurate with their own version’s wayward tonality.²¹ As one can hear, however, well-worn riddims such as the *Mad Mad* continue to provide no end of grist for the mill of Jamaica’s music industry, for amateur and veteran, synthesizer- and sample-based producers alike. Thus, despite a continued engagement with hip-hop, which can be heard—even when not terribly

²¹ See <<http://www.downsoundrecords.com/invasion.cfm>> (accessed 12 September 2006).

explicit—in vocal styles and allusions as well as production values, reggae remains a distinct and autonomous genre with, indeed, “deep and distinctive cultural wellsprings” from which it draws. Those wellsprings, however, always include localizations of “foreign” styles. After all, one hears little “indigenous” (which is to say, Arawak) music in modern Jamaica.

Outside Jamaica, new versions of the *Mad Mad*—and, frequently, versions that do not circulate on the island—are a regular feature of the global sound clash scene.²²

Although primarily recorded in Jamaica, dubplates are intended for rather specific foreign contexts, often specific encounters between selectors or soundsystems. In the name of surprise, few of these entities keep a public record of their dubplate collection lest they give opponents an edge, so it is difficult to estimate how many additional recordings on the *Mad Mad*, or “Diseases” or “Golden Hen,” have been produced. One Boston-based selector whom I interviewed, Mad Skim, had several dubplates which employed some version of the *Mad Mad* riddim. These usually featured, as is customary, a well-known reggae artist reprising one of their hit songs on the riddim while substituting compliments to the selector and offering warnings to competitors. Skim’s “Dead Sound,” for instance, features Michael Palmer reprising his 1984 hit for George Phang, “Lick Shot,” while singing praises to Skim and his sound, Stout Style:

Dem a dead sound,
 Lord have mercy...
 Down in Stout Style home town,
 Some idiots come haffi test the sound,
 But Stout Style a the talk of the town,
 No idiot sound can a test the sound.
 Ca’ dem a dead sound,

²² As I will explain, however, their newness and version-ness might be disputed, for they typically employ extant versions.

Dem haffi lay it down,
 Dem a dead sound,
 Dem better lay it down...

Significantly, the version of the *Mad Mad* underlying the dubplate in this instance prominently features the memorable hornline from the “Golden Hen” version. Because selectors now receive dubplate recordings via DAT, CD-R, or even an emailed mp3, usually with both an *a cappella* vocal and an instrumental version, they have the opportunity to remix the vocals themselves. In Skim’s case, he decided to substitute a version with the “Golden Hen” horns for the plain “Diseases” version which first accompanied it: “The horns make the riddim ten times wickeder to me so I always go for golden hen. I ordered the dub on the golden hen version but it was voiced on diseases anyway... so the original cut of my dub is actually on the diseases version. I refixed it to the golden hen though which is what u heard.”²³

As an integral part of the reggae economy, generating something of a living wage for new and old artists in a world of elusive royalties, the dubplate system represents another way that riddims such as the *Mad Mad*, and their various versions, remain in the global soundscape and, moreover, charged with rather specific meanings which transcend, but carry, Jamaica’s own cultural politics with them. Hence when one hears a Stout Style dubplate proclaiming Skim’s to be “an African vibes,” the Irish-American selector embraces such a sentiment and alignment, as one hears in Skim’s decision to use the song in question, Terry Ganzie’s dubplate recording of “Organize the Vibes,” as the opening on a mix showcasing a number of his (presumably already “used”) dubs.²⁴ Of course, he has little choice, except not to play it, of course, which would mean losing his

²³ Via email, 27 July 2005.

²⁴ See *Organize the Vibes* (December 2004), available at <<http://madskim.com>> (accessed 12 Sept 2006).

investment (often, hundreds of dollars). Likewise, as I watched Skim play records at a bar in Somerville, Massachusetts, I was struck by the explicit homophobia voiced by TOK on another *Mad Mad* (or “Golden Hen”) dubplate.²⁵ Though Skim may align himself easily enough with the Jamaican perspective on sexual, as well as racial, politics, the moment called attention to the ways that Jamaican ideologies about self and other circulate even (or, perhaps, especially) on recordings customized for performances in such nominally liberal places as the Boston area.

A somewhat unlikely recent appearance of the “Zunguzung” meme calls further attention to the ways that reggae style and cultural politics serve to animate, and complicate, performances outside of Jamaica. Although they would seem at first glance to be rather unlikely proponents of Jamaican perspectives toward race and sexual orientation, the quasi-Christian Nu Metal band, POD (Payable on Death), have long incorporated reggae style and Rastafarian imagery into their act. The group features at least two members with dreadlocks, and their shows have used a depiction of a “Rastaman Jesus” as provocative backdrop.²⁶ The opening track on their 2006 album, *Testify*, which one reviewer describes as “reconfirm[ing] their reggae roots,” not only features Matisyahu, the Hasidic reggae singer from White Plains, NY, who brings his dancehall-derived rapping and scatting to the recording, it is completely shot through with reggae references.²⁷ “Roots in Stereo” alludes to at least a half-dozen dancehall songs, including Buju Banton’s “Boom Bye Bye,” Barrington Levy’s “Here I Come,” and, of course, Yellowman’s “Zunguzung.” Given Sonny Sandoval’s rap-style vocals and

²⁵ This was at an event in September 2005, *Dubplate Culture*, to which we both were invited as guest DJs.

²⁶ The provocation was proven effective by such responses as the seething critique at http://www.av1611.org/crock/pod_conf.html (accessed 12 Sept 2006).

²⁷ See, Mike McGuirk, <http://play.rhapsody.com/pod/testify/track-1> (accessed 12 Sept 2006).

allusions to several of the songs brought together in Smif'n Wesson's "Sound Bwoy Bureill," it is possible that this is something of a second-hand engagement. The number of reggae clichés—though as we have seen, even Brooklyn-based rappers have trouble avoiding such perennials as "original," "rude boy," and "chant down"—would also seem to confirm a certain distance from the repertory. POD's invocation of dancehall style and Rasta beliefs bolster both their "aggressive" sound and "tough guy" stance, otherwise emphasized by heavily distorted guitar lines and rap-style drums and vocals (a la Rage Against the Machine), as well as their ecumenical but consistently Christian spiritual orientation. The "Zunguzung" meme rears its head in order to rally, in deeply Jamaican language, POD's audience to be holy warriors: "Lick a shot if you a mighty warrior, / Lick a shot if you a freedom fighter, / Lick a shot if you a true solider, / Now that's the way back to Zion." The song presents a barrage of reggae, rap, and rock signifiers, accruing authenticity for the group among their predominantly white, Christian, middle-class American fan base by aligning, quite audibly, with Jamaica's quintessentially oppositional (and cool and deadly) place in the global imagination.

Of course, as discussed above, reggae's appearance in mainstream American and global pop is hardly new, though instances of the *Mad Mad* are far less common in rock and pop than in, say, hip-hop recordings. Indeed, rock musicians, especially those based in London, were among the first to embrace the sounds of Jamaica, bringing the strains of ska, reggae, and rocksteady into their synthesis of various African-/American styles. As a major site for Jamaican migration, London had seen (or heard) its soundscape change indelibly by the introduction of Jamaican soundsystems and reggae style. From the Beatles ("Ob La Di, Ob La Da" [1968]) to Led Zeppelin ("D'yer Mak'er" [1973]) to the

Rolling Stones (“Cherry Oh Baby” [1976]) and, of course, Eric Clapton, who in 1974 made Bob Marley’s “I Shot the Sheriff” a bigger international hit than the Jamaican singer could have hoped for his own recording, British rock musicians introduced reggae’s skanking rhythms to mainstream pop well before hip-hop emerged from block parties in the Bronx.²⁸ These earlier examples, however, were often more about style than substance—treating reggae, like the blues, as but another “authentic” genre from which to draw—and it was not until the punk movement, which emerges from England’s “second wave” ska or two-tone movement, that reggae’s oppositional character, as well as its rhythms, would also infuse rock. The reggae- and ska-steeped punk rock of the Clash, the Specials, the Madness and others of their ilk carried forward—and across to the US—in the “third wave” ska heard from such California- and Massachusetts-based bands as the Mighty Mighty Bosstones, Operation Ivy, Bim Skala Bim, No Doubt, and Sublime. The latter two groups combined ska and punk with elements of pop and more contemporary Jamaican styles, especially dancehall. While No Doubt recorded their album *Rock Steady* (2001) in Jamaica and collaborated with dancehall DJs Lady Saw and Bounty Killer, Sublime’s frontman, Brad Nowell, was known to break into a Jamaican-ish accent and Super Cat-style ragga-rap, as on the group’s big hit, “What I Got” (1996).

In addition to covering many a reggae song and incorporating ska and reggae style into their punk-infused brand of garage rock, Sublime also merit mention here for a subtle but unmistakable reference to the *Mad Mad* riff on their song “Greatest Hits” (1994), released on the self-produced album *Robbin’ the Hood*, a title winking at the group’s knowing appropriation of rap and reggae style. Giving further indication of the

²⁸ Clapton’s version was a #1 hit on the US pop charts for the singer—his only one, in fact—whereas Marley never even cracked the pop charts in his lifetime.

group's hip-hop/reggae influences—and fingering one probable source of their *Mad Mad* allusion—Sublime recorded a song called “KRS-One” in 1995, employ several samples from hip-hop songs to propel its message. The song pays tribute to the alternative lessons learned from KRS-One, and, presumably, from hip-hop (and reggae) more generally:

In school they never taught ‘bout hamburgers or steak,
Elijah Muhammad or the welfare state.
But I know.
And I know because of KRS-ONE.
Yeah and I know
And I know because of KRS-ONE.

Extending a remarkably consistent homage to their influences, “Greatest Hits” begins with the riff’s telltale, three-note ascending line and repeats the complete riff twice, keeping time with muted strokes on the upbeats, before the drums enter—just after Nowell shouts, “gwaan!”—and the bass reprises the I to iii motion of various renditions of the *Mad Mad*, demonstrating an acquaintance with the riddim that goes beyond the riff. Played at a noticeably fast, ska-indebted tempo, the song soon shifts into other sections unrelated to the introduction, though the distorted guitar figure employed for the chorus seems to recall the riff’s ascending contour, keeping it in the ears of the listener. Although the drums and bass generally play rock-style rhythms throughout the song, together they shift, significantly, in the song’s final ten seconds to a lockstep 3+3+2, clearly referencing dancehall’s prevailing pattern. “Golden Hits” thus offers a brief but rich glimpse at reggae’s resonance—and the *Mad Mad* riddim’s reach—well beyond the shores of Jamaica. Here the sounds of reggae offer a means to express both an easy-going Southern Californian attitude and a social conscience.

As we reflect on the new millennial manifestations and connotations of the *Mad Mad*, and as this attempt at an intertwined history reaches the limits of hindsight, it is important to note that *all* of the *Mad Mad* versions discussed throughout this dissertation resound together in the present. Except for the more obscure examples, they are replayed on a daily and nightly basis in myriad contexts worldwide. In this manner, they continually enrich each other's resonance, paying embodied testament to international identifications, to shifting borders and changing notions of race, ethnicity, and nation, and to reggae's, and hip-hop's, "solid foundation" in transnational black consciousness movements and postcolonial struggles even as they mobilize entrenched racial formations and ideologies, truck in exotic stereotypes, and reinforce numerous social hierarchies and power relations. Although, as we have heard, reggae and hip-hop both powerfully project their locally-forged meanings abroad, ultimately it is in particular moments of reception—from Boston to Brooklyn, San Juan to London, LA to JA—where the music does its cultural work. So, while there may be a *different ting a gwaan* in dancehall's newfound ubiquity, the meanings of its mainstream manifestations still depend crucially on context. In an attempt to excavate at a deeper level some of the meanings that arise from hip-hop's and reggae's contemporary interaction, and interaction based on as it revises longstanding relationships, I offer in the epilogue, after a brief conclusion, an ethnographic analysis of one particular, complex encounter between the worlds of hip-hop and reggae, of elder ideas and new millennial youth, as I attempt to answer, in a Jamaican context, Tego's vexing, perplexing—or, if you will, *Mad Mad*—riddle: "Pa que bling-bling, / si no tienen el swing?"

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusion: *Re:Versioning Hip-hop and Reggae History*

The *Mad Mad* story I have told in the preceding pages is intended to disrupt the established contours of reggae and hip-hop histories, underscoring the transnational interplay between the two genres and arguing that such interaction has been foundational to their local and global poetics. As well-worn and pliant musical figures, the *Mad Mad* riddim and the “Zunguzung meme,” among others, offer audible threads through time and space, illuminating the uses to which Jamaicans have put the music of the US, especially music cast as black, and the role that Jamaican music has played in shaping the sound and cultural politics of hip-hop, a genre that also embodies its cosmopolitan roots and routes. The intertwined narrative I have presented elaborates on the anthropological reading of modern Jamaican cultural practices advanced by Deborah Thomas in *Modern Blackness* and extends the suggestive figuration of the Jamaican imagination which Rex Nettleford provides in *Mirror/Mirror*.¹ Moreover, the analysis of reggae’s foundational and increasing presence and shifting significations in hip-hop, especially in New York, contributes a new body of evidence to the sociological and ethnomusicological literature on the Caribbeanization of American culture, as examined by Philip Kasinitz, Nancy Foner, Ray Allen and Lois Wilcken, et al.² Although I have focused on the resonance of the two genres in their primary sites of production and reception, Kingston and New

¹ Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Rex Nettleford, *Mirror, Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica* (Kingston: W. Collins and Sangster, 1998 [1970]).

² Philip Kasinitz, *Caribbean New York: Black Immigrants and the Politics of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Nancy Foner, *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Ray Allen and Lois Wilcken, eds., *Island Sounds in the Global City: Caribbean Popular Music and Identity in New York* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

York, understanding their imbricate character offers new ways of hearing their significance in “far-flung” places, where, as I have also argued, the two are frequently more conflated than they are in Kingston and New York.

Against the well-worn shape of the reggae narrative, a story which too often emphasizes local creation as if it took place in a national vacuum, I have emphasized a longstanding history of engagement on the part of Jamaican artists and audiences with American music, in particular, that of African-Americans. Hence, in contrast to an established stylistic history that proceeds as if ska’s emergence from localized versions of American R&B signaled the beginning of a highly creative but “insular” period of Jamaican cultural history, I have shown how, for example, the rocksteady of Alton Ellis demonstrates in its embrace of soul style a continued articulation with “black music” from the US. Similarly, we have heard how reggae musicians have incorporated into the music’s flexible but distinctive template the stylistic features (and the social-political significations) of disco, funk, rock, and most recently, of course, rap or hip-hop. Underlying all this musical activity, circuits of migration, mass media, and commodity exchange have facilitated what might be heard as an alternative fashioning and projection of (Afro-)Jamaican nationhood.

Teasing out reggae’s largely untold story of embracing putatively foreign styles alongside the signifiers Afro-Jamaicanness thus sheds light on the advancement of a cultural politics which, in the wake of massive disenchantment with politics qua politics (e.g., electoral politics), militates against enduring inequalities of wealth and hierarchies of value associated with the entrenched vestiges of colonialism, i.e., an all too enduring pigmentocracy. Understanding—or, indeed, hearing—reggae’s subtle negotiation of the

music's roots and routes in this manner challenges persistent attempts on the part of officials, elites, and middle-classes to appropriate the music of Jamaica's black lower-classes. It also makes the reggae narrative itself more coherent, as the last two decades of musical activity—marked by a close engagement with rap style—rather than appearing as a cultural corruption, a Northward-leaning aberration, can be heard instead as consistent with a creative, pragmatic, active reimagination and rearticulation of nationhood for people who have long looked beyond the state and local elites for ways to advance themselves, their families, and communities.

The other side of the coin has to do with hearing what we might think of as hip-hop's Jamaican accent. Although the nature of the interplay and its local significations in various US cities certainly differs in kind from the cultural politics traced out above, the implications of hip-hop's constitutive engagement with reggae are similarly radical for the established narrative of the genre and the lines of community it tends to draw. Reggae's resonance in the US changes radically over the last quarter century, reflecting important demographic changes in major US cities (especially media centers such as New York and Miami) and informing the very connotations of the "hardcore" and which sounds and styles could powerfully represent such foundational hip-hop sites as the Bronx. Despite an acknowledgment in the hip-hop narrative of the crucial participation of many Jamaicans as well as others of West Indian and Caribbean heritage, the enduring and increasing role that Jamaica in particular has played in the hip-hop imagination—as exemplified by the presence and resonance of reggae style in the genre—remains on the margins of the most well-worn stories about hip-hop.

Hearing a Jamaican accent change from something one would have to conceal in the Bronx during the 1970s to something that became, by the late 80s, downright appealing as a means for non-Jamaicans to invest their music with a kind of hardcore authenticity, belies popular representations of the genre as expressing little more than African-American particularism, as if hip-hop—in the words of Paul Gilroy—“sprang intact from the entrails of the blues.”³ In contrast to the standard line, I have attempted to tease out a “secret history,” if you will, of hip-hop’s Jamaican accent. From MCs in the mid-80s bearing negative witness to the posses’ powerful presence by defining themselves against Jamaicanness to the growing audibility and currency of creole phrases and reggae samples in hip-hop throughout the 90s to the disappearance into ubiquity of dancehall-derived figures today, one can hear over the course of hip-hop’s history the emergence of what Orlando Patterson calls “Ecumenical America.”⁴ As the most popular music in the US at century’s end, hip-hop’s deeply transnational character would thus seem to raise serious questions about our understanding of the borders of Americanness. Moreover, as I addressed in the chapter on musical interactions since the new millenium, reggae’s now familiar foreign presence serves to mediate other representations of otherness—namely, orientalist figurations—during a moment of profound social change and political crisis in the US and the wider world.

The intertwined history that I offer here, then, is an attempt to make sense of what I hear to be the inherent and dynamically transnational constitution of two genres that have, to date, been represented as quintessentially nationalist in orientation. As I have

³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 34.

⁴ Orlando Patterson, “Ecumenical America: Global Culture and the American Cosmos,” *World Policy Journal* 11, no. 2 (1994): 103-117.

argued, this commonplace interpretation misses a great deal—both about the nuances of local cultural politics and the translocal projection of community relationships. In order to shore up my contentions, I have devoted no little space to documenting the longstanding, increasing interplay between hip-hop and reggae. It is my hope that the work thus stands not only as a persuasive critique but as an evidentiary base for further research—perhaps even, in the spirit of dubbing and sampling, as a set of recordings that might serve as the basis for future mixes. As I reshape the dissertation into a monograph, I expect to focus on fewer examples, to expand the ethnographic and other contextual frames (or further thicken the description), to make my social and cultural analysis of this *Mad Mad* story as robust as possible. The epilogue that follows stands as an example of such “thicker” description and as a bookend to this version of the story: a close-up of sorts, it brings us up to the near present (2003, to be precise) and returns to some of the original, central questions which served to animate my research into and my shaping of this interwoven narrative.

Having conceived of this project as a “dub history,” I fully expect—and hope—that others will “version” the materials here, echoing some passages, dropping others out, shifting foreground and background, manipulating the layers in a new manner, and allowing certain events and voices to reverberate. No doubt, I will too.

EPILOGUE

Bling-bling for Rastafari?

As a direct outcome of its growing sonic and visual presence hip-hop has come to define what it means to be black and “modern” within a global context and particularly in youth cultures. Because of hip-hop’s preeminence, Afro-diasporic youth populations habitually identify with or define themselves against hip-hop culture, creating identities suspended between the local and the global.

Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies*

On the one hand, they desire to participate in the world as cosmopolitans who can move with social ease across geopolitical divides, unfettered from nation or locality as a primary source of identity. On the other, they face a pressure to metaculturally mark their global participation as ethnically specific and emplaced. When the processes of imagining the global and fashioning sounds that might enable access to its stages are situated within the context of local struggles, processes of mediation and commodification become analytically inseparable from conceptions of culture and musical experience.

Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa!*¹

When I asked him about the relationship between hip-hop and reggae, Wasp, a Kingston-based DJ and one of my primary collaborators, told me: “Rap, ‘pon a level now, come from reggae, seen? Dancehall now is a new ting weh come after rap, seen? So hip-hop get influence from reggae, but this what we a do now—what Dami D a do, Beenie Man a do, Bounty a do, y’know—a dancehall, and that come from rap.” Due in part to the hip-hop retrospectives frequently aired on MTV and VH1, many Jamaicans understand hip-hop as an outgrowth of reggae and, conversely, dancehall (the latest subgenre of reggae), as a direct product of hip-hop’s local influence. Even Jamaicans, including Wasp, who seek to maintain their identity as “reggae artists” are increasingly

¹ Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 146; Louise Meintjes, *The Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 220.

drawn to hybrid musical styles, often in order to play to the perceived tastes of the coveted international (i.e., US) audience. Once while collaborating on a riddim with Wasp, he instructed me to place the snares squarely on beats 2 and 4 and to avoid any semblance of a 3+3+2—dancehall’s distinctive rhythmic accent. He did not want a dancehall sound. He wanted what he called an “international sound,” which, stylistically, amounted to hip-hop.²

Hip-hop in Jamaica: Representing the Local through International Sound

Today, dancehall’s incorporation of hip-hop style most frequently takes the form of allusion (e.g., adapted choruses, interpolated rhymes, covers and parodies of pop songs using un-licensed instrumentals, etc.), as well as more subtle attempts to evoke hip-hop’s timbres, textures, rhythms, and themes. With the advent of cable television and the internet in Jamaica, some young Jamaicans have adopted hip-hop style wholesale, calling themselves MCs or rappers—as opposed to DJs—and trading local stylistic markers for putatively foreign ones. I met a number of young performers, for instance, who would shift seamlessly between speaking in creole and rapping in Brooklynese, for instance, and who peppered their “yard” slang with references to “mami’s”—essentially a Nuyorican coinage—and “playa-haters.” For all of hip-hop’s popularity, such a full embrace of “foreign” style is a contentious issue in Jamaica. Most of the artists I interviewed (who were predominantly young and lower middle-class) unabashedly admitted to incorporating *some* stylistic features from hip-hop into their own style, but generally they

² We might compare this “internationalist” orientation to the similarly idealized, and pragmatic, notion of “overseas” that Louise Meintjes teases out in her ethnography of South African musicians, as described in the epigraph above (*Sound of Africa!*, “cut 6,” 217-49).

expressed a sense that a wholesale embrace of such a foreign music was too culturally transgressive and simply not for them.

None of my collaborators would go so far as to say that a Jamaican who rapped was not “keeping it real,” so to speak. As another Kingston-based DJ, Raw-Raw, put it: “If someone lives in Jamaica and him wan’ rap like him born in Brooklyn, I have no comment on that beca’—whatever you feel [is valid].” In other words, Raw-Raw would not want to tell a performer what is in or out of bounds regarding their mode of expression. Yet, this stated generosity toward Jamaican performers’ embrace of styles marked as non-local is not necessarily shared by all. When I asked Raw-Raw how Jamaican audiences receive a Jamaican performer who raps in an American style, he simply noted that “they don’t like it” if someone’s style is not perceived as original. Other Kingston-based artists assented that such a stylistic strategy implies a serious trade-off but is a testament to hip-hop’s power. A singjay named Dami D equated the decision of a young Jamaican to write a rap song with “put[ting] away all pride.” At the same time, he attributed the phenomenon of Jamaican rappers to hip-hop’s ability to inspire people, or in his words: “That show, seh, that hip-hop, it dedeh for really uplift the youth dem.”

Many Kingstonians view homegrown hip-hop performers as confused about their cultural identity, making an implicit equation between musical practice and national attachment. As Wasp put it, “I just be a man weh stick to my culture, still. Our culture is like, reggae, dancehall, seen? From your yard, man, is either you have a choice between reggae and dancehall, you see me a say?” Hence part of hip-hop’s reception in Jamaica, at least in terms of who can perform in a style still strongly marked as African-

/American, flows from enduring beliefs about cultural propriety and national identity, about what one can and cannot do as part of a community. Despite the range of significations that hip-hop in Jamaica carries, it remains, at least in some sense, foreign—which, given its hybrid and fairly Jamaican roots, not to mention the number of Jamaicans now living in the US, perhaps speaks more to the tenacity of nationalist ideologies than anything else. Wasp gives voice to the tension and incongruity of embracing something perceived to have come from the outside. Despite himself being a reggae artist of the hip-hop generation, as influenced by Tupac as by Beenie Man, he ultimately stated that a Jamaican who decides to express himself completely through American rap style might as well move north: “If a man live a yard and him a rap is like, me feel like him fi just go seh, bomb, and just know seh, yo, him fi go live in other heights, you know?” A connection to the local thus remains paramount despite Jamaicans’ longstanding (and perhaps increasing) fluency with so-called foreign forms.

Conceptualizing Jamaicans’ embrace of hip-hop as a locally-accented *use* of America, as Deborah Thomas suggests, may help to make sense of the perplexities swirling around such appropriations. While Thomas acknowledges, for instance, that “aspects of modern blackness appear to reproduce some of the discourses regarding consumerism and individualism that are associated with neoliberal capitalism,” she reconciles the apparent contradiction of employing such seemingly derivative discourses by shifting our frame of reference to more specific, local acts:

[I]f we reorient our vision of politics in a way that decenters totalizing revolutionary narratives and pays special attention to very locally grounded negotiations, incorporations, and rejections, we are able to more clearly conceptualize the ways people confront and revise both structural and ideological systems of power and domination. From this perspective,

black Jamaicans *use* ‘America’ to simultaneously critique, selectively appropriate, and creatively redefine those aspects of the dominant capitalist ethos that they believe benefit themselves and their communities, both materially and psychologically.³

Indeed, if one examines hip-hop in Jamaica from the perspective Thomas provides here—a perspective grounded in her own historical and ethnographic research and resonant with mine—certain contradictions around national musical provenance, imaginary as they may be, recede in importance next to questions about the local meanings of such practices. Moreover, even seemingly irreconcilable incompatibilities, such as those between Rastafarians’ longstanding critique of materialist capitalism and hip-hop’s “bling-bling” celebration of conspicuous consumption, might be understood as expressing something other than a lack of coherence or integrity or the end of an influential era of oppositional cultural politics.⁴

In order to examine further the local meanings of hip-hop’s and reggae’s longstanding and contemporary interplay—and specifically, the negotiation of musically-mediated borders between “authentic” local appropriations of African-/American style and what might be perceived as a capitulation to “foreign mind” (a kind of “mental slavery,” in Rastafarian parlance)—I turn in this final chapter to a specific ethnographic encounter: a recording session that I participated in with three brethren from the Twelve Tribes of Israel, whose headquarters on Hope Road stood just across the street from my place of residence while living in Kingston in early 2003. With the vignette—based on a

³ Deborah Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 14, emphasis in original.

⁴ *Bling-bling* is a quasi-onomatopoeic, metonymic term for the shine of jewelry. It was popularized in the late 90s by the New Orleans-based Cash Money Millionaires. It endures as a symbolic expression—and not just in hip-hop, but in dancehall, soca, and other popular global forms that have been influenced by the language of hip-hop.

journal entry made shortly after the recording session—and analysis that follows, I seek to illustrate the ways that certain limits on and expressions of Jamaican “uses” of America take musical form, mediate social relations, and perform various kinds of cultural work in contemporary Jamaica.⁵ In the process, I hope to reflect on some of my own assumptions about such boundaries and to make sense of the encounter—and what struck me initially as contradiction—through the critical and historical perspectives advanced to this point in the dissertation. Ultimately, with this intentionally provocative example, I mean to explore the latent tensions and redemptive possibilities of contemporary Jamaican uses of hip-hop.

Reconciling Contradiction and Crafting Community “In di Dance”

Of the various orientations and practices Thomas associates with modern blackness—among them, urban cosmopolitanism, transnational citizenship, and conspicuous consumption—there may be no better symbol for this shift in cultural politics than the embrace of contemporary hip-hop’s “bling-bling” ethos by Jamaicans living in Jamaica. Moreover, few examples call attention to the perplexities and contradictions of such an embrace as the endorsement of bling-bling style by Rastafarians, who historically have articulated, on the one hand, a transnational, pan-African outlook that aligns itself with African-American and other Afro-diasporic populations and practices, and, on the other, an antagonism to the glamorous materialism

⁵ While conducting research in Jamaica from January to June 2003, and again in the summer of 2004, I kept an online journal of my recordings, observations, and analyses as an ethnographic experiment of sorts. I am pleased to report that the endeavor has connected me to a number of crucial interlocutors, informants, and other “research assistants” over the last several years. An archive can be found at <<http://www.wayneandwax.org/blog.html>>.

of Babylon, or Western capitalism, the system held responsible for creating and perpetuating the state of exile and exploitation in which millions of descendents of African slaves still live. Or as Freddy McGregor famously put it in 1979, “I’m a revolutionist . . . / I-man no deal with capitalists, / I’m a Rastaman.”⁶

So you can imagine my surprise when a Rastafarian collaborator began to extol luxury vehicles over a riddim which I and his brethren had just worked quite carefully, and sometimes contentiously, to ensure did not sound too American (or perhaps un-Jamaican). But I’m getting ahead of myself. Allow me to interrupt this discussion for a moment to bring you a brief narrative description of the event.

[*run tune!*]⁷

“It’s gone too hip-hop again,” said Damian, his brethren, Fiya Rhed, nodding in assent. Rashorne, a gentle guy with a raspy voice, looked on with interest but did not add his opinion, despite being the vocalist, or DJ, for whom we were building a riddim. I turned back to my computer, about to remove the stuttering, double-time hi-hat line I just added to a beat that had sounded enough like dancehall reggae only moments before. Suddenly, they reconsidered: “Wait a minute,” Damian said, apparently intrigued by the mix of styles, “It can work.” For the next hour or so we continued to negotiate the sonic boundaries of hip-hop and reggae, I pulling toward hip-hop almost subconsciously,

⁶ Freddy McGregor, “I’m a Revolutionist,” *Bobby Babylon*, Studio One/Heartbeat Records, 2006 [1979].

⁷ The following section is drawn largely from my weblog (see note #4). I have chosen to set it off as a performance/recording of sorts by employing as “bookends” the terms used in dancehall performance to call for the playing (i.e., *run tune*) and rewind (i.e., *pull up*) of a record. After the *pull up*, rather than to *wheel and come again* (i.e., to replay the selection), I will instead replay the encounter as an analytical remix.

having honed my skills as a producer in the style of sample-based rap traditionalists, with Damian and Fiya Rhed pushing toward a sound more “Jamaican,” more appropriate, perhaps, for a DJ representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel, one of the largest groups on the organized side of the Rastafarian movement. Placing snare drums on beats 2 and 4 of each measure had created too duple—too American—a feel, so instead I added syncopated handclaps to evoke dancehall’s distinctive, dominant rhythmic pattern. To make the bassline “dubbier” I added a number of quickly repeated (sixteenth) notes, including the ever important “pick-up” accent just before each beat. I combined a rimshot with the kick drum in imitation of classic reggae drumming technique, and I employed what I considered a reggae-resonant synthesizer—a little bit “chintzy,” to my ears—in order to flesh out the texture.⁸ Each step of the way, I made adjustments according to the brethren’s reactions.

The interaction was a powerful lesson in musical sensibility, and I took note of which features in particular connoted Jamaican, as opposed to American, style. When we finally settled on a mix that seemed to satisfy all, Rashorne stepped up to the microphone and launched into the first of many takes of his tune, “In di Dance”:

⁸ By “chintzy” I mean that the timbre of synthesizer seemed consistent with the predilection for 1980s-era synthesizers ushered in by the *Sleng Teng* riddim in 1985. The combination of a kick drum and rimshot I refer to here as “classic” can be heard on many a reggae recording from the 60s and 70s, especially in the “one drop” style favored by roots reggae musicians.

Now mi bankbook gettin' fatta	Now my bankbook's getting fatter
Girls dem gettin' hotta	Girls are getting hotter
Dem say, "tat fi tit, an' tit fi tatta"	They say, "Tat for tit, and tit for tatter"
Ova big Ras, weh di girls dem a flatta	To me, "Big Ras," whom the girls flatter
Monday, we rollin' in di Esc-y-lator	Monday, we drive the [Cadillac] Escalade
Chuesday, it's di Navigator / Yo, di	Tuesday, the [Lincoln] Navigator
Benz and Bimma dem can stay until later	The Benz and BMW can wait until later

Having wrestled for hours over the placement of kicks and snares, the rhythms of hi-hats and basslines, the timbres of samples and synthesizers—and all that these sonic details suggest—I was first surprised and then delighted by the irony that Rashorne's lyrics and delivery seemed to be caught in their own struggle between hip-hop and reggae. As his affirmations of Rastafari and Jamaican dancehall culture alternated with a celebration of luxury SUVs and expensive liquor, it was clear that I was not the only one bringing hip-hop into the mix. At the end of the night, having finished an initial version of "In di Dance" (the title itself a nod to American rapper 50 Cent's "In the Club"), I reflected on what seemed to be an ethnographic microcosm of the various tensions and paradoxes swirling around hip-hop in Jamaica today.⁹

[*pull up!*]

At first glance, contemporary hip-hop's endorsement of conspicuous consumption appears to contradict rather strongly one of Rastafari's most common tenets: a rejection of the oppressive conditions, physical and psychological, of Babylon. According to Ennis Barrington Edmonds, "Globally, Babylon is that worldly state of affairs in which the struggle for power and possessions takes precedence over the cultivation of human

⁹ One can hear a finished mix of the song at <<http://www.wayneandwax.com/music/in-di-dance.mp3>>.

freedom and the concern for human dignity.”¹⁰ Randal Hepner essentially equates “chanting down Babylon”—note Rashorne’s lyric in the chorus, “listen to the words weh di [which the] Rastaman *chant*”—with “signify[ing] to themselves and others their rejection of a world based on crass, materialistic values.”¹¹ Rex Nettleford couches the stance in more specifically anti-American and class-based terms, arguing that Rastafarians emphasize self-reliance over “a North American consumption pattern” and “living within one’s means versus the wanton overconsumption of the ostentatious *nouveaux riches*.”¹² If the US is frequently equated with Babylon, whose materialistic values seem so embraced and amplified by mainstream American hip-hop artists, Rashorne’s hip-hop-accented celebration of luxury goods would thus appear to contradict commonly held Rastafarian notions of the good life, or *livity*—“a code of relationships with God, nature, and society.”¹³

From the opening line about his expanding “bankbook” to the litany of luxury vehicles, each casually assigned a day of the week for driving (or to use Rashorne’s hip-hop-inflected term *rollin’*), the young DJ seems to embrace wholeheartedly American hip-hop’s preoccupation with ostentatious displays of wealth. Remarkably, during our recording session, some of Rashorne’s most materialistic lyrics surfaced in moments when he appeared to forget his lines, veering off in extemporaneous “freestyle” verses that seemed to fall even more egregiously into the clichés of contemporary hip-hop.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ennis Barrington Edmonds, “Dread ‘I’ In-a-Babylon: Ideological Resistance and Cultural Revitalization,” in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 24.

¹¹ Randal Hepner, “Chanting Down Babylon in the Belly of the Beast: The Rastafarian Movement in the Metropolitan United States,” in *Chanting Down Babylon*, 211.

¹² Rex Nettleford, “Discourse on Rastafarian Reality,” in *Chanting Down Babylon*, 316.

¹³ Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 169.

¹⁴ Freestyle, or extemporaneous rap, offers an interesting medium for observing the relationship between composition and improvisation. In particular, by demanding spontaneous exposition, freestyle exposes the

Two freestyle moments stand out in particular for their progression from Jamaican to American points of reference, complete with African-American slang and hip-hop style flow. In one instance, Rashorne's freestyle moved in non-sequitur fashion from devout Rastafarian maxims through more earthy, Jamaican-dancehall sentiments to an American hip-hop-accented preoccupation with money which seemed ultimately, and significantly, to trip up the performance itself: "Givin' thanks and praises to the Almighty / you on the dancefloor, moving hardcore / money fi flow, yo, you know it's all dough / it's all dough, it's on the flo' / money a flow, money a flow . . ." In another instance, Rashorne transformed the pre-composed phrase "sippin' on some roots"—an endorsement of the "natural" tonics favored by Rastafarians—into an endorsement of two of the preferred, pricey beverages of contemporary hip-hop stars: "sippin' on Hennessy mix up with Mo' [Moet Champagne]."

During such moments, I was often left wondering whether Rashorne was simply refashioning American hip-hop for his own use or falling prey to its attractive, materialistic rhetoric. Rather than some subliminal surrender to black Babylon's bling, however, Rashorne's freestyles—and, for that matter, his pre-composed lyrics—seem to signal a more deliberate deployment of stock phrases and patterns. Perhaps we can compare Rashorne's appropriation of hip-hop to Rastafarians' adoption and revision of the Bible, about which Stuart Hall observes:

way that language—in the form of stock phrases—can determine the content and underlying philosophy of one's lyrics. Typically, performers will return to a set of idiosyncratic tropes during a freestyle—a crutch perhaps, but also a necessary strategy in a challenging practice. Particularly striking in my experience with freestyle in Jamaica was the recurrence of certain phrases, especially when the freestyle veered into American rap-style verse. Again and again, I heard references to such tropes as "representin'," "keepin' it real," and "playa-hatin'." These phrases are strong markers—if not clichés—of mid- to late-90s hip-hop (a formative period for hip-hop's influence on a generation of Jamaicans), and, although they have fallen somewhat out of vogue in the US, they frequently emerge in the freestyles and written lyrics of hip-hop-influenced Jamaican artists. It is no surprise, for instance, that "playa-haters" make repeat appearances in Rashorne's song, and in the pre-composed sections at that.

[Rastafarians] had to turn the text upside-down, to get a meaning which fit their experience . . . They learned to speak a new language. And they spoke it with a vengeance . . . They did not assume that their only cultural resources lay in the past . . . They did not go back and try to recover some absolutely pure “folk culture,” untouched by history, as if that would be the only way they could learn to speak. No, they made use of modern media to broadcast their message.¹⁵

Indeed, recent reports have revealed that even the militantly anti-materialist Bobo camp in Nine Miles, Bull Bay, now features a small computer lab, while Rastafarian scholars consulted by the *Jamaica Observer* discuss the embrace of computers, the internet, television, and even money as “vital tools,” consistent with a long (“African”) history of technological innovation, through which Rastafarians are advancing themselves, their families, their communities, and their ideas.¹⁶ In the same way, we might hear Rashorne’s song as employing a newly accented vocabulary through which the DJ can communicate with the wider world of transnational Jamaican society, the pan-African Rastafarian movement, and the overlapping global audiences—and international markets—of hip-hop and reggae, not to mention with other Kingstonians who are as enmeshed in the overlapping worlds of dancehall and hip-hop as Rashorne is.

Thus, the apparent contradiction of a young Rastafarian extolling symbols of material wealth should not be too quickly seized upon as an indication of local values crumbling beneath the force of American imperial power. At the most obvious level, “In di Dance” represents, at least from Rashorne’s perspective, a fully coherent statement.

Although Rashorne borrows forms, phrases, and symbols from hip-hop, he deploys them

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, “On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 143.

¹⁶ See “Laptop Dreads”: <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/lifestyle/html/20060624T160000-0500_107643_OBS_LAPTOP_DREADS_.asp> (accessed 13 September 2006).

in a way consistent with his understanding of himself as a Rastafarian and a black Jamaican. A close examination of Rashorne's rhetorical strategies and their context reveals an underlying logic. For one, he places himself within an African-American and Afro-Caribbean tradition—alongside performers such as Sammy Davis Jr., James Brown, and hip-hop's Cash Money Millionaires—wherein those traditionally denied access to opportunity and prosperity, in turn, flaunt symbols of affluence to confront the status quo. Significantly, in describing such a stance as “radical consumerism,” Deborah Thomas invokes one of the very symbols—a BMW—that Rashorne names in his opening verse: “Taking ‘radical consumerism’ seriously may reveal that the lower-class black Jamaican man driving a ‘Bimma’ has more on his mind than individualist conspicuous consumption. Instead, he could be refashioning selfhood and reshaping stereotypical assumptions about racial possibilities through—rather than outside—capitalism.” Hence, for Rashorne, hip-hop's ostentatious display of wealth, or “bling-bling,” rather than endorsing the social order, could stand in direct opposition to Babylon—especially if we view this moment as one of the “locally grounded negotiations” that Thomas contrasts with “totalizing revolutionary narratives” in her call for interpreters of Jamaican cultural practices to re-orient their understanding of politics on the island.¹⁷

Rashorne's embrace of bling-bling “infrapolitics,” if you will, is additionally locally grounded because of the way that flashy style or conspicuous consumption dovetails with dancehall sartorial practices more generally.¹⁸ What Kingsley Stewart calls

¹⁷ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 251, 14.

¹⁸ I borrow the term *infrapolitics* from Robin D. G. Kelley, who employs it, after James C. Scott (*Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990]), as a means of recovering the political import of everyday oppositional practices in the Jim Crow South. See Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 75-112.

“the pre-eminence of the external” in dancehall style represents a common strategy through which young, disenfranchised Jamaicans make themselves visible within the dancehall and project their existence to the larger world. From loud music to loud clothing to explicit lyrics—and, one might add, big cars—Stewart notes that “There is an overarching and strong drive in dancehall to make the unseen visible.”¹⁹ Parading through Kingston’s streets in large, loud, expensive vehicles, engaging in extravagant consumption, or simply invoking the signs and symbols of capital, from which power flows in Babylon, all represent oppositional tactics for someone like Rashorne who as a Rastafarian and a young, black Jamaican is associated with a marginal underclass—despite Rastafari’s cultural prominence and spread to the middle- and even upper-classes.

In this sense, we might compare some Jamaicans’ deployment of hip-hop style to the “homeboy cosmopolitanism” that Manthia Diawara attributes to young people of color in contemporary Greenwich Village—a cultural politics of public display, of undeniable visibility, which Diawara compares to his and his peers’ adoption of James Brown’s style during the 1960s and 70s in West Africa and to the flâneurs of Paris so admired by Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. For Diawara, hip-hop’s commodification, ostentatiousness, and global reach “are an expression of poor people’s desire for the good life.”²⁰ Hip-hop’s embrace by young Jamaicans might thus be understood as consistent with a broader cultural pattern across the wider world, whereby American popular culture—disseminated both by mass media and interpersonal diasporic connections—has come to dominate the imaginations of young people yearning for the freedom and wealth so often denied them in post- and neo-colonial circumstances and so sensuously

¹⁹ Kingsley Stewart, “‘So Wha, Mi Nuh Fi Live To?’: Interpreting Violence in Jamaica Through the Dancehall Culture,” *Ideaz* 1 (2002): 24.

²⁰ Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 238.

symbolized by the sounds and images of African-Americans flaunting the power to consume. In this case, what Alexander Weheliye calls “hip-hop’s preeminence,” which causes “Afro-diasporic youth populations [to] habitually identify with or define themselves against hip-hop culture,” is quite closely tied to Thomas’s “radical consumerism”—or “an insistence that consumption is a creative and potentially liberatory process and that the ability to both influence and reflect global style is, in fact, an important public power”—which hip-hop quite effectively taps into, selling the art of selling, or as Snoop Dogg has put it, *Da Game Is To Be Sold Not To Be Told*.²¹

If the preoccupation with bling in contemporary dancehall (and hip-hop for that matter) is, in some sense, a matter of fashion—as well as a psychological-sartorial practice inextricable from local cultural politics—it is not insignificant that Rashorne would choose to amplify his voice by using terms with such popular resonance. Another of my collaborators, Dami D, referred to bling-bling songs—and “gun tunes” alike—as “bubblegum.” He explained that there was an undeniable demand for these familiar themes among dancehall-engaged youth, and he felt that one of the most likely ways to succeed as a recording artist was to play to these expectations. This is, of course, true of the popular music industry in a more general sense. Pop calls for—and is perhaps inseparable from—the reproduction of clichés in sensual terms, adorned with the latest stylistic markers. Although the selection of particular symbols usually takes creative, savvy work, in a music market it should come as no surprise that performers tend to employ and rehearse certain clichés in order to play to the sense of what is popular or perceived as “current” (for that is where the currency flows). Given this tendency and this

²¹ Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 146; Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 250; Snoop Dogg, *No Limit Records*, 1998.

practice, such clichés beg interrogation when they arise. Much can be gleaned by the ways that artists play with the formulae of the day.

Looking more closely at the lyrics of “In di Dance” it is telling that Rashorne’s deployment of hip-hop’s clichés often verges on parody. Not only are his boasts almost always incredibly excessive (how many cars is that again?), he appears to display a patent lack of interest in the objects he glorifies: his corruption of “Escalade” to “Esc-y-lator,” for example, stands in stark contrast to the almost obsessive specifics of some American rappers’ descriptions of their prized possessions. All of this suggests that Rashorne self-consciously employs these symbols of power, these gestures to the wider world, in order to invest listeners in the song’s simple and fundamental point: having fun at a dance. Rashorne revels in the positive images of his brethren and sistren enjoying themselves and looking good—“jumping” and “prancing”—and he underscores the importance of community with the first person plural subject of the chorus: “Find *we* in di dance.” The focus on the dancehall and on conspicuous consumption, moreover, draws our attention to the cultural turn in grassroots Jamaican politics. The withdrawal from state-centered politics, or “politricks” as some Rastafarians would say, and the investment of energies and resources into cultural activities—from music to crafts, education to gardening—is something that Rastafarians long ago established as foundational to their social organization. Despite the trappings of bling-bling boasting, Rashorne puts forward a stance that seems, from his angle, quite consistent with the Rastafarian notion of livity. The juxtaposition of forms and practices in “In di Dance” thus points to synthesis, coherence, and an underlying logic of identity, as much as it may suggest paradox or fracture.

Rashorne's denial of any contradictions in his performance serves to affirm his own belief in the coherence of what he has to say. When I tried to push him on the question a few days after we made the recording, he answered me in a way that expressed a lack of concern with the tensions I had been wondering about:

W: You express a strong element of Rastafari in your music. Do you ever feel like that's in tension with some of the major themes of hip-hop or dancehall?

R: Well . . . music is jus' music, y'know. Seen? And whether . . . you a do Rastafari music inna a hip-hop way, or you a do it R&B, or you a do it jazz, seen? Or you a do it blues, seen? Or you a do it funky, you see-me-a-say? Or even if you do it rock 'n' roll, it still remain music.

W: And it doesn't matter if it's about sufferation or flossin'?

R: No. It no matter, a still music.

W: They come under the same umbrella?

R: Yeah. Still music. It jus' one ting, y'know: music. A seven note, y'know.

Directing the conversation toward music's transcendent and phenomenological qualities, Rashorne indicates that, for him, there is no tension here. He draws on the language of hip-hop and reggae as one would play notes from a scale. He makes music that expresses himself and Rastafari irrespective of genre. Indeed, music's very embodiment of the Rastafarian triumvirate—word, sound, and power—would seem to speak for itself as far as Rashorne is concerned. In the chorus to a second song we worked on, he underlined the inherent (and perhaps inviolable) unity of his performance, expression, and philosophy: “Everything I do a jus' Rastafari / Everything I say a jus' Rastafari.”²²

²² This track is also available online: <<http://www.wayneandwax.com/music/everyting-a-rastafari.mp3>>.

Such a pliant and pragmatic, if rather solid, notion of Rastafarian livity leaves plenty of room for change, but change is nothing new for Rastafari—a young religious movement which has already undergone great change in its time. The very spread of Rastafari’s symbols and ideas and language from Jamaica’s poorest sectors to its middle- and upper-classes, ultimately finding devotees worldwide, offers a powerful reminder of the ways the movement has changed since its inception—not to mention how Rastafarians have embraced popular music and various technologies to facilitate the spread of their perspectives and lifeways. Over the course of the religion’s short history, Rastafarians have had to accommodate themselves and their vision to a number of significant and often traumatic events: from crises in direction after the raid of Pinnacle in 1954 and Claudius Henry’s highly publicized and highly disappointing attempt at repatriation (and possibly revolt) in 1959; to violent, state-sponsored repression throughout the 60s; to political appropriation in the early 70s; to the deposition, arrest, and death of Haile Selassie in the mid-70s. For many Rastafarians, such events precipitated a turn inward, where the return from exile could be accomplished in spiritual rather than literal terms. Most Rastafarians have remained in Jamaica, or followed Jamaican society more widely in its movements toward various metropolitan centers.

In the context of such change and accommodation, intensified as well by revolutions in information and communication technologies, it makes sense that young Rastafarians today, like Jamaican youth more generally, would embrace the latest, greatest forms of black subjecthood. For dancehall participants, argues Kingsley Stewart: “The ideal self is a shifting, fluid, adaptive, malleable self.”²³ Such a position, according to Stewart, allows for the reconciling of seemingly conflicting sentiments, “such as

²³ Stewart, “‘So Wha, Mi Nuh Fi Live To?’,” 25.

deejay Sizzla invoking praises to Haile Selassie and graphically explaining the details of his alleged conquests of the female genitalia, all in the same sentence.” Arguing that such an ontology emerges from deeper cultural mores, he goes on to place such practices in the context of Jamaica’s trying social history: “Jamaicans throughout history have a heritage and a legacy of creating multiple, dynamic selves to survive and make sense of their realities.”²⁴

Despite such an ability for adaptation, however, Rastafari, as with many religions, has its orthodoxies, and Rashorne’s expressive tactics, as much as they may challenge Babylon, may also challenge Rastafarians with a different conception of livity and of how Babylon is to be chanted down. Considering the individualist, if often communitarian, orientation of the Rastafarian movement, it is not surprising that Rashorne would fashion his own conception of Rastafari, his own consistent practices, his own synthesis of the cultural resources available to him. For many, Rastafari is a faith and a movement which, as a matter of principle, resists institutions due to their inappropriate mediation of one’s relationship to Jah. Such a built-in individualism necessarily creates a degree of heterodoxy among Rastafarians. Indeed, many are critical of such organizations as the Twelve Tribes of Israel, of which Rashorne is a member.²⁵ With the creation of formal organizations such as the Twelve Tribes, certain conventions of belief and practice prevail at the level of the group, despite what may be an overall ethos of inclusivity.²⁶ For

²⁴ Stewart, “‘So Wha, Mi Nuh Fi Live To?’” 25-6.

²⁵ See, e.g., Frank Jan van Dijk, “Chanting Down Babylon Outernational: The Rise of Rastafari in Europe, the Caribbean, and the Pacific,” in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 178-98.

²⁶ Due to its focus on “religiosity and the cultivation of an African cultural consciousness and lifestyle,” rather than “a commitment to more political and social goals” (Ennis Barrington Edmonds, *Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers* [Oxford: Oxford University Press], 70), some scholars categorize the Twelve Tribes of Israel as one of the “churchical,” as opposed to “statical,” Rastafarian organizations. In addition, Twelve Tribes has been one of the most popular groups internationally. It exerted a strong influence over

many this leads to the incorporation of ideologies incompatible with the traditional principles of Rastafari. For example, the Twelve Tribes, which for decades has served as “a haven for middle-class Rastas” (not to mention reggae musicians), is often characterized as espousing liberal values, such as “greater equality between the sexes” and “freedom for those who prefer not to grow the beard or wear dreadlocks.”²⁷ Thus, Rashorne’s affiliation with this particular order of Rastafari might shed additional light on his seemingly idiosyncratic interpretation of Rastafarian tenets.²⁸ Espousing the value of material accumulation but without traditional middle-class temperance, as “In di Dance” does, not only seems consistent with certain bourgeois values even as it challenges them, it also stands in glaring opposition—and perhaps as an alluring temptation—to Rastafarians not interested in embracing the liberal standards associated with the Twelve Tribes. Here then is yet another way to see Rashorne’s embrace of hip-hop’s symbols not as contradictory but as coherent, contingent, “locally grounded,” and provocative.

the movement’s spread in England and claims a worldwide membership, with headquarters in Ethiopia, Ghana, New Zealand, Sweden, Canada, and, among others, several in the US, including HQs in New York, Los Angeles, and Boston. Twelve Tribes brethren from overseas, especially from the United States, are regular visitors to the Kingston HQ. Thus, as a transnational group with close ties to the US, it is reasonable to expect that the organization facilitates the kind of cultural transmission—via the movement of people, goods, and ideas—that has made hip-hop, and other North American products and perspectives, so popular in Jamaica (and reggae so popular in, say, Brooklyn).

²⁷ Barry Chevannes, “Rastafari and the Exorcism of the Ideology of Racism and Classism in Jamaica,” in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 66.

²⁸ Despite its idiosyncratic spelling, Rashorne’s name (pronounced ‘Rahsaan’) also gives some indication of his “unorthodox” background. Whereas many Rastafarians, like Jamaicans more widely, have names drawn from the Bible or from a heritage of British names, Rashorne’s name points to Black Power-era Afrocentrism, especially of the American variety.

Global Texts, Local Readings

As with any number of African-/American cultural forms before it, hip-hop offers a range of compelling and contradictory significations to Jamaican artists and audiences. From “modern blackness” to “foreign mind,” transnational cosmopolitanism to militant pan-Africanism, radical remixology to outright mimicry, hip-hop in Jamaica embodies the myriad ways that Jamaicans embrace, reject, and incorporate foreign yet familiar forms. Empowered by as it critiques US political, economic, and military dominance, hip-hop resonates across the Jamaican soundscape as a suggestive symbol of the contradictions facing a nation whose citizenry increasingly resides abroad, whose promise of postcolonial self-determination remains elusive, and whose internal conflicts—in particular, the persistence of vast inequalities that correlate all too well with an entrenched pigmentocracy—undermine any overarching or at least official sense of national belonging. In this sense, hip-hop provides one set of cultural practices among many through which Jamaicans—in particular, lower-class blacks—have asserted, since well before independence in 1962, a cultural politics, which Deborah Thomas calls “modern blackness,” around a racial and often transnational sense of community.

And yet, although “modern blackness” offers a compelling lens through which to view Jamaicans’ embrace of so-called foreign resources, Jamaican musicians’ own discourse about such engagements suggests that such an embrace cannot happen wholesale. As Thomas notes, Jamaicans’ appropriation of African-American practices tends to be a *selective* appropriation.²⁹ Performers most often attempt to advance a sense of Jamaicanness that maintains coherence despite and through their engagement with the

²⁹ Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 14.

foreign—however familiar, or familial, such resources may be. Not every engagement with African-American music in Jamaica constitutes an unambiguous expression of Afro-Jamaican resistance, nor does every expression of transnational blackness or conspicuous consumption put forward a stance that other lower-class blacks necessarily recognize as an alternative, militant Jamaicanness. Middle- and upper-class Jamaican youths' embrace of hip-hop can just as easily be read as articulating an identification with a transnational elite, and lower-class Jamaican youths must reconcile their love of Jay-Z with deeply felt local preferences for sounds and styles identified as unambiguously "hardcore" Jamaican (despite such symbols' typically hybrid roots). Accordingly, Jamaican artists and audiences demonstrate no small ambivalence about such a complex cultural resource as hip-hop. Even among those Jamaicans who fully embrace hip-hop—who watch videos on BET and MTV, who "bus' a shot" every time a selector plays 50 Cent at a dance, and who collect and circulate CD-Rs of the latest American hits—there is a sense that one can go too far in this embrace, that one can lose oneself in the foreign and wind up deracinated, a terrible fate in such a roots-conscious place.

The longstanding and increasing interplay between dancehall and hip-hop brings such issues to the fore, as we observe how musical style—i.e., the intentional deployment of specific musical figures, forms, and timbres as cultural signifiers with particular connotations—works to draw the lines of community. The strong associations produced by certain rhythmic patterns, melodic contours, formal structures, and rhetorical figures in local contexts of performance and reception often illustrate the limits, for some, of cosmopolitan, transnational, and/or diasporic identifications. Sometimes there emerge what seem to be inherent contradictions in such appropriative gestures, as when, for

instance, Rastafarianism rubs up against conspicuous consumption. By examining more closely the ways that Jamaican artists deal with such a complex, contradictory product as hip-hop, we get a better sense of the terrain of cultural politics in Jamaica today, the degree to which young artists resist and reproduce established nationalist narratives, and the pragmatic ways that Jamaican youths negotiate their place in the world.

It is an oft-repeated assertion that almost as many Jamaicans now reside outside of Jamaica as on the island itself. To some extent, then, Jamaica's ongoing formation as a nation—in both real and imagined terms—is as determined by Jamaicans living in Brooklyn, Boston, and Miami, and their musical practices and predilections, as by Jamaicans living in Kingston. “Music is central to the diasporic experience,” argues Mark Slobin, “linking homeland and here-land in an intricate network of sound.”³⁰ And indeed, for the past three decades, the transnational circulation and combination of hip-hop and reggae, as embodied by the travels of the *Mad Mad*, have given shape and form to a Jamaican nation that well exceeds its geographical boundaries. Jamaicans' *use* of hip-hop and America, both on the island and in the diaspora, has been crucial to the fashioning of a cultural identity that makes sense of these new circumstances.

At a historical juncture when many Jamaicans have shifted their metropolitan gaze and economic aspirations to American cities as well as to the glamorous, “American” lifestyles projected by Hollywood, cable TV, and mainstream hip-hop, an initially perplexing performance such as Rashorne's “In di Dance” illustrates in a particularly vivid manner some of the ways that hip-hop draws the lines of community in Jamaica today. The cosmopolitanism one hears in contemporary Jamaican dancehall, and in songs such as Rashorne's, bears witness to these social and cultural changes.

³⁰ Mark Slobin, “Music in Diaspora: The View from Euro-America,” *Diaspora* 3, no. 3 (1994): 243.

Ironically, Jamaicans draw on global sounds, especially those of the US, in order to affirm a rather local sense of selfhood and community. The social signifiers of such international sounds—e.g., materialism—do not necessarily corrupt an internally coherent musical system that, for example, supports Rastafarians against Babylon or forges transnational bridges across the Afrodiaspora. Hip-hop in Jamaica thus offers a rich, if freighted, resource for creative reinvention, another powerful text to turn upside-down. With regard to Rastafarians' use of the Bible, Stuart Hall notes that, "in turning the text upside-down they remade themselves."³¹ Taking transnational hip-hop as their text, many young Jamaicans appear eager to do the same.

³¹ Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation," 143.

GLOSSARY

3+3+2: common rhythmic accent across a great deal of Caribbean popular and folk music, from son to calypso to reggae to ring-play songs; a hallmark of dancehall reggae style, often in a minimal, electronic arrangement

Babylon: Rastafarian symbol for the West, often denoting capitalist, post-slave societies; refers as well to the state of exile; also used more specifically to describe the police and other expressions of state-sanctioned force

b-boy: initially described breakdancers, also known as beat-boys, break-boys, and Bronx boys; also refers to hip-hop practitioners or devotees more generally

beat: in hip-hop parlance, the full accompanying track over which one raps—not simply its rhythmic attributes

bling-bling: quasi-onomatopoeia for the sound of shining jewelry; an expression of hip-hop's millennial preoccupation with conspicuous consumption; the term gained a global currency, however, coming into use, for example, in Jamaica and in dancehall reggae too

bomp-bomp: another way of describing dancehall reggae's prevailing rhythmic accent (in this case, representing the 3+3 of a 3+3+2 figure, since so often dancehall riddims fill out the pattern thusly: kick-kick-snare, thus producing a "bomp-bomp" emphasis)

boogie: term describing the boogie-woogie and related American Southern R&B styles popular among Jamaicans in the 40s and 50s; also describes Jamaican cover versions and originals produced in a similar, localized style

boom-bap: describes the breakbeat-derived drum patterns (boom-bap = kick-snare) that mark a great deal of "Golden Age" hip-hop; became a phrase denoting a particular "underground" stance toward sample-based production aesthetics

break / breakbeat: typically short, relatively unadorned, syncopated drum solos in funk songs and related genres; favored by breakdancers and pioneer DJs; as samples, breaks provide the rhythmic and timbral foundation for hip-hop beats

counteraction: in reggae, a defense or counterattack in song provoked by another recording; a common practice in a soundclash-centered and competitive music industry

dancehall: describes both physical setting of public reggae events as well as more contemporary, electronic, and hip-hop influenced sub-style of reggae; the term has described non-roots reggae recordings, artists, and style since the early 80s

DJ: in hip-hop and most vinyl-based genres, the DJ is the manipulator of the turntables; in reggae, the DJ is the rapping/scatting/talking vocalist, while the selector plays the records (or more recently, and increasingly, CDs)

don dada: term of power and respect embraced by boastful dancehall DJs (and hip-hop MCs seeking to invoke the charged symbol for themselves, always with a reference to Jamaica); derived from term for leaders of political gangs and drug posses

dub: a recording technique involving the manipulation of pre-recorded tracks, usually entailing live mixing and remixing of the various layers of a recording, often with heavy use of echo and reverb and ghostly semi-removed vocals; describes an approach to mixing as well as a sub-genre of reggae

dubplate: special recording made for a specific event, selector, or soundsystem, typically featuring well-known artists performing tailored versions of their well-known songs; initially produced for Jamaican soundsystems, dubplates now serve as a major source of regular income for contemporary and veteran reggae vocalists alike, with demands worldwide and varying price tags, from under US\$100 into the thousands of dollars

farin: localized, “creole” pronunciation and spelling of “foreign”; a term attached to no little anxiety and degradation, as in “farin mind”; also refers to any overseas destination

flip-tongue: style of vocal performance among dancehall DJs involving a rapidfire form of rap, typically accomplished via 32nd note syllables inserted within a flow otherwise emphasizing more or less steady 16th note values; emerged in soundsystem selectors’ “fast chat,” further developed by UK reggae DJs, and often a telltale sign of dancehall influence in hip-hop (in the US and worldwide)

flow: in hip-hop, a vocalist’s style of delivery, comprising everything from rhythmic precision to inflection to rhyme placement and, for some, timbre and persona

freestyle: in hip-hop, a term to describe improvised rap; also the name of electro-influenced Latin pop during the mid-80s, especially as produced in New York and Miami

foor-to-the-floor / four-on-the-floor: the use of a kick drum on each beat of a 4-beat measure, as in disco, house, techno, etc.; also found in reggae influenced by disco and Philly Soul, such as the rockers style (see below) in the mid-70s; a rare pattern in hip-hop

Golden Age: although a contested term, generally describes a particular era in hip-hop marked by early but modest commercial success and a flowering of the form marked by an intense concern for “lyricism” (i.e., flow and wit) and an unbridled approach to sample-based production

hardcore: adjective commonly applied to hip-hop, dancehall, and other genres to describe an uncompromising approach to the style, as if for a “core” audience, and thus

able to be appropriately “hard”; also resonates with “hard-knock” narratives and cool / tough posturing in both genres; bound up with notions of integrity and authenticity

hip-hop: umbrella term for variety of musical and cultural practices associated with the Bronx’s cultural renaissance in the early- through late-70s, especially the so-called “four elements” of MCing, DJing, graffiti, and breakdance; also used simply as a term for the musical component (i.e., the recording of rapped vocals over a breakbeat-derived accompaniment) and thus as a synonym for *rap*

I-tal / Ital: Rastafarian term for “pure” way of living or manner of preparing food; an inversion of “vital,” emphasizing, as in much of the Rasta lexicon, ‘I’ (e.g., I&I); in cooking, although variously interpreted, often means “no salt” or vegetarian

juggle: technique of reggae DJing (or selecting, to be precise), in which a number of tracks recorded on the same underlying riddim are played in succession

jungle: UK-based electronic dance music, derived from reggae and rave styles, emerges in early- to mid-90s; usually features dancehall DJs over tracks with double-time breakbeats (with the “Amen” break serving as a particular staple of the genre)

mashup: post-millennial, popular approach to remixing, often using consumer end software and peer-to-peer circulated files; most orthodox form involves juxtaposing the acapella vocals of one track with the instrumental backing of another

massive: reggae parlance for the “masses”—specially, the denizens of the dancehall, the target audience, the enthusiastic and committed supporters of reggae music

MC: hip-hop term for rapper, often translated as “master of ceremonies”; typically used in self-reference by self-consciously “underground” rappers to distinguish their artistry from more crassly commercial or unaccomplished performers

one drop: the prevailing rhythmic pattern in roots reggae, typically using a kick drum to accent beats 2 and 4 in a 4-beat measure

outernational: Rastafarian (and hence reggae) parlance for the wider world, the international sphere

pull-up: in reggae performance, to stop a track, rewind it (if on record), and begin again from the beginning; a common technique applied to popular songs of the moment

politricks: Rastafarian term used to estrange and degrade official political discourse and processes

posse: term used to describe violent gangs funded by political patrons and drug trafficking; assumed no small resonance in dancehall and hip-hop alike, with crews of artists often using the term for self-description

ragga: derived from *raggamuffin* (see below), occasional synonym (especially in UK) for dancehall reggae; also describe reggae-centric form of jungle (also, ragga-jungle)

raggamuffin: typically describes tough, poor, inner-city children; also used more broadly as a symbol for hardcore reggae style or toughness

rap: in the most general terms, an approach to musical performance featuring rhythmic, sometimes speech-like vocals against various kinds of musical accompaniment; more specifically, tends to describe the genre emerging from funk-centric dance parties in the Bronx in the 1970s; sometimes used in distinction to *hip-hop* to describe a more commercial approach to the form or simply the vocal performance, sometimes (including in this dissertation) used synonymously to describe the same genre

rapper: sometimes also known as or referred to as an MC, a rapper is a vocalist often distinguished from a singer because of a predilection for speech-like declamation

reggae: Jamaican genre of globally-engaged, Afrocentric pop; used specifically to refer to the style that emerges in the late 60s out of rocksteady (and including such substyles as roots, dub, and dancehall); sometimes used more inclusively to describe modern Jamaican popular music, including ska

reggaeton: Puerto Rican fusion of hip-hop and reggae, emerges in 1990s between Puerto Rico and New York, with notable early contributions from Panamanian DJs; referred to as *underground*, *música negra*, *melaza*, and *dembow* before being crowned *reggaeton*

remix: a production in which a previously recorded and mixed song is given a new treatment, sometimes subtly, sometimes radically

re-lick: reggae parlance for re-playing the accompanimental track from another song in order to create one's own version of the riddim

riddim: in reggae parlance, the full accompanying track over which one sings, DJs, raps, or talks-over—not simply its rhythmic attributes

rocksteady: Jamaican popular music of mid- to late-60s, often described as bridging transition from ska to reggae; marked by slower tempos and engagement with soul music

roots: reggae style since the late 60s featuring skanking guitars, one drop drums, and typically Rastafarian themes

rudie / rude b(w)oy: 1960s-era term for militant inner-city youths; a term of disapproval and a badge of pride; embraced by dancehall DJs and hip-hop MCs to describe oppositional stance and toughness

selector: in reggae, the operator of the turntables (or CD decks, etc.) who supplies the backing tracks for DJs or other vocalists or simply plays records for (and exhorts) the audience

ska: genre of Jamaican popular music from early 60s, emerging from Jamaican boogie scene and played by the island's jazz instrumentalists and top studio musicians; one of first Jamaican pop genres to find favor abroad, especially in the UK; now in its third or fourth "wave" of popularity (though largely outside of the island)

skank / skanking: typically describes distinctive stylistic feature of reggae and Jamaican popular music more generally in which a guitar or keyboard emphasizes the offbeat of each beat in the measure, giving the music an "upbeat" lift; skanking can also describe a style of dance to a skank beat

slack / slackness: typically referring to sexual promiscuity and explicitness or "loose" morals, often used to pass judgment but sometimes more a matter-of-fact description

sound clash: competitive musical events between soundsystems in which selectors and DJs employ song selection, dubplate specials, and strong rhetoric in attempts to prove skill, dominance, and favor among audiences

soundsystem: either a mobile or stationary rig for projecting music, usually including custom speakers, amplifiers, etc.; often refers to specific entities, e.g., Coxsone's Downbeat

toasting: can describe early style of reggae DJ vocal performance or simply reggae DJ style more generally (i.e., to differentiate from rap); often comprises a kind of boastful, improvisatory acuity

special: a custom recording, typically made for a particular soundsystem for a particular purpose (e.g., to serve as a thematically-appropriate "weapon" in a clash)

underground: term used within self-consciously anti-commercial hip-hop scene, also denoting ideologies of artistic integrity and authenticity consistent with an "old school" or "Golden Age" aesthetic

version: can either refer to an instrumental reggae side (i.e., the B-side of a record), or can describe more generally the practice of covering or riddicking a song or riddim

voice / voicing: reggae parlance for the act of recording a vocal performance in a studio

yard: a synonym for Jamaica

yardie: a Jamaican, though not necessarily living in Jamaica or born there, but explicitly identified as such (often via dress or accent or self-identified national/cultural pride)

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