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To cite this article: Delali Amuzu (2021) Rastafari and Reggae Music as Tools for Critical Pedagogy in the African Academe, *Muziki*, 18:2, 74-94, DOI: [10.1080/18125980.2021.2011612](https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2021.2011612)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2021.2011612>



Published online: 22 Feb 2022.



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Rastafari and Reggae Music as Tools for Critical Pedagogy in the African Academe

Delali Amuzu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3904-3334>

University of Ghana

delamuzu@ug.edu.gh

Abstract

Reggae music emerged in the 1960s, an era of intense anti-colonial and anti-imperialist sentiments and struggles. Having originated in Jamaica, a jurisdiction where Africans had been enslaved, the genre has a tradition of social criticisms, especially the depravity that asymmetrical power relations extend to Africans globally. Through its Rastafari influences, reggae offers an avenue for redemptive philosophies and complex frameworks to waken consciousness and to offer identity, pride and dignity. To decolonise knowledge and conscientise the marginalised on the issues that enslave them, this article analyses four reggae songs by three artists to show how the content of some reggae songs can serve as critical literature for critical pedagogy (CP) in the African academe. CP creates the atmosphere for learners to identify the machinations of dominant forces in education and how to nurture agency for liberation. It promotes an association between education and society, arguing against the annexation of higher education by private capital. The ethos of reggae music, Rastafari and CP converge on the interactions between knowledge, authority and power.

Keywords: Rastafari; reggae music; higher education; critical pedagogy; Africa

Introduction

Africa is arguably the most annexed space in human history and the so-called Scramble for Africa involved the invasion, annexation, division and colonisation of most of Africa by seven Western European powers between 1881 and 1914. These incursions captured land, resources, and crucially, the humanity of the people. Africans have had their humanity questioned, commoditised and enslaved. The enslavement and colonial arrangements were insidious schemes that shattered and destroyed the memory of Africans regarding their antiquity, denying them the knowledge of self. Further, these acts have caused both continental Africans and those in the diaspora to imbibe well-designed alien consciousness. These schemes have flourished owing to Europe's military sophistication and concomitant patterns of psychological manipulations (Diop 1974; Mungwini 2017; Nketsia 2013; Watson 2016).

Despite the varied manifestations of culture in Africa, there is consistency regarding belief in a supreme being, the ancestors, family, name, birth, death, and their influences on humanity. This cultural heritage manifests in Africa's diaspora: for instance, spiritually, Brazil's Candomble is a fusion of Bantu, Fon and Yoruba spiritual systems, while Vodun in Haiti is a Fon spiritual system (as practised in Benin, Togo and Ghana). Jamaica, Trinidad and Cuba call theirs Obeah, Sango Baptise and Lukumi/Santeria, respectively (see Amuzu 2017). The African cultural concord leads Diop (1962 cited in Higgs 2008, 451) to suggest that

there is a profound cultural unity still alive beneath the deceptive appearance of cultural heterogeneity present in Africa, which gives rise to the contents of an indigenous African knowledge system.

Karenga (2006 cited in Nketsia 2013, 732) advocates that the African renaissance rests on African "history, religion (spirituality and ethics), social organisation, economic organisation, political organisation, creative production (art, music, literature, dance, etc.) and ethos". The adverse consequences of the Eurocentric bastardisation and demonisation of African spiritual systems linger on worldwide. Citing Vodun (Voodoo), I contend that the negative outlook created about the practice is a result of its role as the spiritual crux for the Haitian revolution, spurring the defeat of three European superpowers – Spanish, French and English – from 1894 to 1904 (Ghachem 2012; Thornton 2012). Vodun's role in that unprecedented feat probably instigated the quest to make it unattractive.

Notwithstanding Africa's centuries of cultural oppression, traces of African culture and consciousness thrive among Africans globally. To add to the aforementioned spiritual concord there are African arts and intellectual forms used as mediums to assert the African's humanity. For instance, the Negritude Movement of the 1930s–1940s led by Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, focused on confronting European expansionism by deconstructing European imagery of Africans. Writing on the spirit of the African and need for African agency, Senghor (1974, 270) argues that:

The first among these values, which is of philosophic nature, is that for all black people, the soul is incarnated within the body and more generally the spirit within the matter. In other words, the matter and the spirit are in a dialectical relationship, bearing in mind that it was the spirit which first informed the matter.

The Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, another cultural resurgence among African Americans in Harlem, escalated through the United States (US), attracting publishers and critics to African American culture. The Renaissance went global and opened avenues for African American literature, music, art and politics into mainstream American culture (Baker Jr. 2013).

Continuing with the arts, music plays an important role in the lives and activities of Africans, featuring in performing rites of passages, festivals, and other celebrations. To labour-intensive activities, it has therapeutic effects by soothing the strain and even those idling around find time to sing, whisper, or hum a song. Overall, music performs recreational, therapeutic, educational and spiritual functions. It can be very political, as seen in South Africa's apartheid government's banning of Bob Marley's album *Survival* for its insurgent ideas and calls for political resistance. In other instances, certain songs are being proscribed for corrupting society's moral fabric. Mohitlhi and Quan-Baffour (2011) illustrate the existential importance of music to the Batswana in Southern Africa; Arko-Achemfuor (2017; 2011) shows the significance of music to Ghanaians; while Teffera (2006) highlights its status in East Africa. According to Arko-Achemfuor (2017) and Quan-Baffour (2007), music is an important means of cultural expression among Africans. From the Middle Passage, that is, the forced voyage of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the enslavement plantations in the New World, music played its role in the quest to survive. African music influences permeate world music and cultures, such as samba, salsa, soca, calypso, hip hop, reggae, rap and dancehall, among others.

The aim of this article is to illustrate how the tenets of Rastafari and lyrics of some reggae songs can serve as critical tools (critical literature) to facilitate learning in higher education. In an era of decolonising African education, reggae music advances radical political narratives and African-centeredness. It discredits dominant Eurocentric worldviews, and challenges and enlightens Africans on the disparaging representations of Western constructs. Although the Arabian enslavement of Africans preceded the European incursion, the article concentrates on the latter owing to reggae music's preoccupation with Eurocentrism and "white supremacy".

Critical pedagogy (CP) creates an atmosphere for learners to nurture critical consciousness to liberate their minds from enslavement. It also works to show the interactions between knowledge, authority and power.

Methodological Considerations

The article is qualitative in approach and employs the tenets of critical theory through Rastafari and reggae music “to liberate” Africans “from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer 1982, 244). I selected the four songs purposively based on familiarity – many years of listening – and how the content (lyrics) aligns with the aim of the article which is cultivating critical African consciousness. The type of purposive sampling inclined more to a critical case sampling since the selected songs offered the information being sought (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim 2016). I analysed the songs using a conceptual content analysis by systematically evaluating the lyrics, and identifying trends and patterns that could be interpreted to make inferences that clarify Africans’ cloudy understanding of themselves and the politics of knowledge.

The first step of analysis was to identify words, phrases, sentences and concepts in the songs, for instance, “human segregation”, “shackles and chain”, “centuries”, “nothing but pain”, “verbal abuse”, “robbed”, “betrayed”, “Babylon”, “Rome” and “home”, among others. They helped to develop the themes, namely, injustice and oppression; rediscovering and embracing self; the rise of human civilisation; African-centred intergenerational education; and false friendships, where the lyrics were analysed based on the redemptive framework of Rastafari and reggae’s interpretations, inferences and consciousness (Elo et al. 2014; Hsieh and Shannon 2005). The lyrics of the songs were sourced from online sources (duly referenced). They matched my understanding of the songs and the interpretations made were solely mine. The analysis did not factor or account for rhythm or sound. I selected songs that were released from 2010 to highlight the fact that despite the excessive commercialisation of the music industry, the genre endeavours to remain focused on its revolutionary crusade against the historical, socio-cultural, and politico-economic exploitation of Africa and Africans.

Rastafari

Black Power movements emerged in the early 1900s in reaction to European domination and manipulation, both culturally and ideologically. They opposed the socio-economic and political ostracism and cultural hostility towards Africans. One such movement operated in Jamaica in the 1920s, becoming Rastafari upon the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I (1892–1975) in 1930 (see Edmonds 2003). Rastafari’s association with Haile Selassie added a spiritual connection to a previously exclusive political movement. It relied on the belief that Haile Selassie descended from the biblical King Solomon. Haile Selassie’s crowning as “His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, King of Kings and Elect of God” (Edmonds 2003, 1) gave further credence to this spiritual association. To Rastafari, Haile Selassie was the “Black Messiah” (Edmonds 2003, 1). Etymologically, Rastafari is a combination of two words – “Ras”, an Amharic word meaning leader or head, and “Tafari”, meaning one to be respected or feared, the first name of Haile Selassie – Tafari Makonnen. Rastafari as a movement has contributed significantly to maintaining elements of African culture and consciousness globally, encouraging Africans in the

diaspora to relate to and connect with the continent. It is primarily a Black Power movement with a spiritual nexus.

Rastafari thought was significantly shaped by the ideas of Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), the Jamaican political and cultural activist. In the 1900s, Garvey advocated for Africans worldwide to accept their Africanness, establishing the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 and immigrating to the US in 1916. UNIA opposed European imperialism and advocated for African self-determination, becoming the biggest mass movement in African American history, with over 800 branches worldwide (Vincent 1977). Garvey’s thought combined religious, political and economic principles designed to liberate Africans, advocating for “Black Nationalism” with the continent serving as the fulcrum in organising global African affairs. Vincent (1977) suggests that, in an era where European imageries of Africa and Africans were unpleasant, Garvey pioneered the advocacy for African pride reflecting on UNIA’s slogan: “Africa for Africans, those home and abroad”. The activities of UNIA led to the Pan-African congresses in Paris and London in 1919 and 1921, respectively.

The political nature of Rastafari doctrines made it a threat to European imperialism. In Jamaica, it was a critique of the society, highlighting the prevailing marginalisation of the majority African population. Regarding the whitewashed image and symbolisms of Christianity and God, Rastafari asks: “Where is the black man’s God?” Like other resistance movements, Rastafari lacked legitimacy among the ruling class in Jamaica. Relentless persecution and prosecution forced early adherents to move into the hills and bushes, to find the “peace” and “freedom” to chart their cause. One such location is Pinnacle in St Catherine, arguably the most popular and revered location for Jamaican Rastafari. That is where Leonard Howell, a founding Rastafari, taught Rastafari doctrine (Da Vinci 2017). Howell, in his critique of society and teachings, articulated repatriation to the motherland (Africa), based on the UNIA slogan. Although Dunkley (2018) analyses repatriation within a political prism, I choose to see it as presenting a binary of thoughts – physically returning to the continent or holding an African consciousness. An extended position could be the need to establish greater collaborations between Africa and its diaspora.

To maintain their African roots, two main denominations of Rastafari embody African consciousness, namely, the “Bobo Shanti” – in recognition of Ghana’s Ashanti ethnic group – and “Nyabinghi” – a legendary Ugandan queen. Even though the dreadlock hairstyle associated with Rastas has existed since Africa’s antiquity, Anderson (2004, 208) says it draws from “a Nazarene approach to personal grooming”. Their “livity” – way of life – is based on “the strict dietary laws of Levitical Judaism and a belief in the use of marijuana (‘herb’) as a religious sacrament and tool for meditation” (Anderson 2004, 208). The movement gained some legitimacy after Haile Selassie’s visit to Jamaica in 1966. Rastafari’s pursuit of black redemption and hailing of Africa remains relevant in the African liberation struggle.

Reggae Music

Reggae music originated from the Caribbean island of Jamaica in the 1960s. Its emergence can be traced from the older genres of ska and rocksteady. The 1960s witnessed immense anti-colonial and anti-imperial sentiments. By December 1960, African countries like Ghana, Cameroon, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo and Nigeria, among others, had attained political independence. The lyrical content of reggae music, especially in the 1970s, centred on “spiritual and political matters or, in the local parlance, ‘roots and culture’” (Anderson 2004, 208).

Whether by sheer coincidence or destined, a close affinity emerged between Rastafari and reggae. The genre being influenced by canons of Rastafari, including vociferous “African nationalism, political and social separation from Babylon (i.e. European culture and its influences), and the divinity of Haile Selassie” (Anderson 2004, 208). Among the early reggae artists who based their works on the Rastafari doctrine are “Kerry ‘Junior’ Byles, Max Romeo (born Maxwell Smith), Burning Spear (born Winston Rodney), and Bob Marley (born Robert Nesta Marley)” (Anderson 2004, 208–209). The Rastafari philosophy contributed to some of the most profound reggae albums, including “The Abyssinians’ Satta, Junior Murvin’s Police and Thieves, and Bob Marley’s Exodus” (Anderson 2004, 208–209).

It is important to note that Rastafari ethos continues to shape and influence reggae music. The genre’s greatest export, Bob Marley, significantly advanced the political and spiritual outlooks embedded in the Rastafari consciousness. To continental Africans, its diaspora and many other marginalised populations, reggae music pushes their concerns and offers a voice for the voiceless – a class of people Gramsci (2006, 13) and Riach (2016, 26) refer to as “subaltern classes”.

Rastafari normally associates Haile Selassie with religiosity, submerging his political views. He spoke against white supremacy and its consequences, demanding dignity for Africans. In a speech at the League of Nations (now the United Nations) in 1963, he argued:

That until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned: That until there are no longer first-class and second class citizens of any nation; That until the color of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes; That until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race; That until that day, the dream of lasting peace and world citizenship and the rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion, to be pursued but never attained; And until the ignoble and unhappy regimes that hold our brothers in Angola, in Mozambique and in South Africa in subhuman bondage have been toppled and destroyed; Until bigotry and prejudice and malicious and inhuman self-interest have been replaced by understanding and tolerance and goodwill; Until all Africans stand and speak as free beings, equal in the eyes of all men, as they are in the eyes of Heaven; Until that day, the African continent will not know peace.

We Africans will fight, if necessary, and we know that we shall win, as we are confident in the victory of good over evil. (Goodreads n.d.)

Bob Marley used the above speech to compose his song, “War”. Reggae’s tradition and focus on issues of global social injustices and inequalities make it a revolutionary genre with a phenomenal global impact. UNESCO judged it as “cerebral, socio-political, sensual and spiritual” (BBC 2018). And joins “a list of international cultural treasures which the United Nations has deemed worthy of protecting and promoting” (BBC 2018).

Critical Pedagogy

CP emerged as a philosophy of education and social movement after World War II and is attributed to the Frankfurt School and the works of Paulo Freire (Usher and Edwards 1994). Like many social concepts, CP is defined diversely. Its aims and purposes frequently converge on themes, such as, testing (in school), emancipation, justice, humanity, anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism. It also centres on the “politics of knowledge and knowing”, that is, knowledge creation, validation and distribution (Giroux 2014; Shapiro 2015). These themes are central to the endeavours of Rastafari and reggae (Anderson 2004; Edmonds 2003).

According to Giroux (2014, 494), people often conceive pedagogy as a “set of strategies and skills to use in order to teach prescribed subject matter”. These, he argues, are teaching methods or systems that disconnect “pedagogy with the social and political task of resistance, empowerment or democratization” (Giroux 2014, 495). Neither is there a demonstration of how “knowledge, values, desire and social relations are always implicated in power” (Giroux 2014, 495). Giroux (2014, 495) maintains that any worthwhile conception of CP must discard such notions because “critical pedagogy works to illuminate the relationships among knowledge, authority and power”. To McLaren (2016), CP is the “working out of a systematic dialectic of pedagogy that is organized around a philosophy of praxis. Here, the dialectic involves a process of mutual understanding and recognition, a movement between an outlook on reality and a method of analysis” (McLaren 2016, 27). A pedagogy is critical when it centres on the intricacies of knowledge formation and how it shapes education. CP is therefore interested in nurturing public centred people. This is achievable through inquiries that interrogate connections between education and activism (social change), well-intentioned knowledge, knowing, and paths necessary for social growth. CP is both theory and praxis for learners and educators; it intends to create worthy associations, and help learners gain agency and perspective. CP is ethical and radical as it contests asymmetrical power relations in society; preaches emancipation; and offers prescriptions for alternative social relationships. Through critical thinking and problem-based approaches, CP facilitates critical learning (Giroux 2014; 2018; McLaren 2016). Castoriadis (1996 cited in Giroux 2014, 495) cautions that the centrality of politics encapsulates “political judgements and value choices”, not solely power. Thus, Giroux reiterates that the essence of CP is to nurture socially conscious citizens willing to build

an egalitarian society by threatening prevailing schemes of exploitations as it situates knowledge in appropriate historical perspectives. CP is not training, and education within its purview is not the ability to cram materials but liberating the mind for the greater good.

Giroux (2014) says contemporary educators should create the atmosphere for learners to identify self and adopt agency to confront materialism, imperialism, religious extremism and all forms of inequities. CP must link education to society and see education as a form of liberation and not as an annex of private capital. To achieve this, pedagogy should align with culture and empower educators and learners. Commenting on the politics of knowing and how it shapes social relationships, CP conceives power as an association where environments are created for learners to

engage in a culture of questioning, to raise and address urgent, disturbing questions about the society in which they live, and to define in part the questions that can be asked and the disciplinary borders that can be crossed. (Giroux 2014, 496)

Aronowitz (2010 cited in Giroux 2014, 497) suggests that CP should be guided by “radical political and social movements that are willing to make educational reform central to democratic change”. However, McLaren (2016, 20) contends that CP has done much to “inspire dissidents to engage culture in the agonistic terrain of the cultural imaginary so as to break with dominant relationships of power and privilege through forms of pedagogical subversion”. Although these actions have been worthwhile and started alternative social interactions, CP has also created a new crop of narcissism (McLaren 2016) and has not achieved the desired results because of the organisation of school activities (Pishghadam and Naji Meidani 2015). McLaren (2016) maintains that CP has not offered options to prevailing structures that perpetuate the status quo. He argues further that critical educators tend to see structural problems as cultural, hence

paternalistic presumption implicit in contemporary school reform approaches, namely, that the poor lack the proper ‘civilized’ attitudes and cosmopolitan values to help them realize their full humanity and succeed in consumer capitalist society (McLaren 2016, 25).

Historically, CP provided alternative worldviews to dogmatic schooling. It endeavoured to make learners critical thinkers desirous of confronting the pervasive inequalities in society. It is in this context that I argue that Rastafari and reggae could be useful in creating critical thinkers in the African academe. According to Freire (1985), education devoid of agency leads to and sustains subjugation. In this education, participants imbue a sense of hopelessness as because of their passivity in the learning process. This “banking” mode of education, where learners are “blank slates” needing knowledge, facilitates ideological subordination that leads to hopelessness, over-dependency, and alienation (Freire 1970). It is excessively abstract and meaningless because of the disconnection between the learner and the learning environment. Talents are stifled because of the dearth of expression and critical knowledge, and cannot equip learners

to comprehend factors that cause and sustain their conditions. Therefore, Freire (1973) proposes an education that connects the learners to their environment in order to nurture consciousness for emancipation. Education must reflect culture to enhance the learners' humanity, offer agency, and develop their critical awareness since local context thrusts the broader outlook.

Reggae as a Tool for Critical Pedagogy

The colonial origin of the African academe has caused extensive conversations for transformation to reflect African aspirations (Asante 2012; Karenga 2003; Nketsia 2013; Rodney 2009). As shown earlier, reggae is a potential source of literature to engender conversations and provocations in the struggles against capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, and racism. It “chants down Babylon”; Babylon, in reggae parlance, is the global systems of exploitation and corruption. Issues bordering on race, class, political symbolisms, and politics are all tackled with the view that dismantling these systems requires the creation of a radical consciousness.

Reggae asserts Africa ideologically, culturally and historically, and promotes a holistic outlook on life. This focus is not isolated: Asante (2000, viii) argues that Africans studying Africa's classical perspectives of the universe and humanity would improve their shattered self-esteem:

Earliest human thinking about the nature of the universe, human relations, good and evil, beauty, order, harmony, ethical behavior, the sources of things – in effect, philosophy – brings us as close as we can get to our intellectual origins ... the description and explication of the African view of reality as presented in the writings of the earliest thinkers. This departure is necessary to wrest the study of ancient Egypt from the grip of those who see it only in relationship to Greece.

These are pertinent issues of CP and of concern to Africans. As aforesaid, central to CP is the liberation of the mind and giving voice to the voiceless. CP is both radical and ethical because it desires to alter power relations in society and strives to help learners gain agency and perspective, respectively. It maintains that critical learning is achievable through the adoption of critical thinking and problem-centred education. (Giroux 2014; 2018).

I will now attempt to show how reggae can serve as critical literature. Reggae's tradition of social criticism raises consciousness, and in this case, African consciousness. Early forebears, like Peter Tosh, Bob Marley, Bunny Wailer and Burning Spear, among others, used metaphorical expressions to illustrate realities, making their lyrics layered in multiple meanings. The four songs analysed here are Stephen Marley's “Made in Africa” which features Wale, The Cast of Fela, written by Carlton Grant, Carlton Errington Grant, Olubowale Victor Akintimehin and Stephen Marley. It is from his album, *Revelation Pt.1, The Roots of Life*, released in 2011. Another is “Battered and Bruised”, written by Anthony Mark Myrie aka Buju Banton, taken from the album,

Before the Dawn, released in 2010. The other two are from the catalogue of Duane Stephenson – “Border” and “African Woman” released in 2011 and 2014, respectively. The themes drawn from the songs are injustice and oppression, rediscovering and embracing self, rise of human civilisation, African-centred intergenerational education, and false friendships.

Injustice and Oppression

Africans’ resistance to the physical exploitative schemes of enslavement and colonialism did not totally extinguish European imperial aims. These exploitative arrangements still exist under different guises, resulting in the deplorable conditions in which Africans continue to live globally. Banton sums up Africa’s imperial experiences as follows:

We’ve been battered and bruised
We still nursing wounds

Had the wounds been merely physical, the nature and duration of treatment would have been unambiguous. However, considering that these wounds are insidiously mental, the treatment is arduous and duration expansive. Banton expresses bitter sentiments about Africans’ psychological torment, humiliation and servitude:

We face all forms of human segregation
Who are you to ask me where I am from

They brought us here in shackles and chains
And throughout the centuries it’s nothing but pain

Words also cause wounds that equally take long to heal – and when schemes perpetuate them, they become more daunting to remedy. Many have internalised these wounds, making those resisting appear like rabble-rousers. Banton articulates that:

You don’t have to love me but am not your enemy
And am not amused by your verbal abuse
You think you are clever what a sorry excuse

In line with reggae’s preoccupation with remonstrating against the centuries of pain, it chants down the dehumanisation of Africans and oppressed. Stephen Marley, in his song “Made in Africa”, recounts and recasts how physical, mental and spiritual injustices interact to dislocate Africans. The struggles towards emancipation, recognition, socio-economic advancement and political determination have been unending. He realises the pre-eminence of mental liberation when he says:

Ships that sailed to distant places
Robbed us of our rights and words
History says that you’ve been betrayed us

Talking of the gods you serve
Hear the rumbling in the sky
Tears that our forefathers cried
And today we're still in chase
Take the shackle from our minds

Rediscovering and Embracing Self

Similar to the wounds analogy in the previous section, physical unshackling is much easier unlike the mental counterpart. To unshackle the African mind is an extensive project requiring immense patience. It calls primarily for a rediscovery and embracing of African self. As aforementioned, they design the imperial schema ultimately to capture the mind of the oppressed (Gramsci 2006; Riach 2017), leading to the oppressed being ashamed of their being and escaping it. To Banton, colonial education seeks to:

Play[ing] with the minds of people, dangerous games they play
Man if you are not careful they lead you astray
Protect your soul by any means necessary
Take nothing for granted

The reggae genre takes nothing for granted; apart from being a way for the oppressed to escape their condition, it is also an avenue to transmit socio-political ideas, assert ideals, and profess beliefs. In the song "Border", Stephenson attempts to assert a social stance by connecting Africans to both a geographical location and cultural origin. The song situates largely in a diasporic context by reiterating Rastafari's call for repatriation (see Dunkley 2018). An alternate interpretation suggests attaining a consciousness [border] where Africans begin to question uncritically accepted Eurocentric ideals. The critical or conscious African educator must steer learners to that point [border] to nurture an alternate consciousness (Giroux 2014). It is at that point that they can step across the Greco-Roman indoctrinations to embrace self, according to Stephenson:

If I could reach the border
Then I would step across
So please take me to the border
No matter what the cost so I'm leaving
I'm leaving out of Babylon
I'm leaving out of Rome
I'm leaving out of this land
Leaving out this place could never be our home
Sing we wan we wan go home
Afrika we want to go
It's a our forefathers home

Euro-colonial socialisation teaches Africans to self-doubt and self-loathe, manifesting multifariously and, most times, subliminally. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP 2008) reports that 77% of Nigerian women regularly use skin

bleaching products, just like 59%, 35%, 27% and 25% of women in Togo, South Africa, Senegal and Mali respectively. The eagerness to shed off the black skin has become pervasive among blacks because they construct notions of aesthetics on Eurocentric archetypes. Thus, to appear beautiful is often to attain those standards, a phenomenon Hunter (2011, 145) calls acquiring “racial capital”. I hasten to add that men also bleach their skin (Benn et al. 2016), a reflection of their conception of beauty. Conceiving and appreciating aesthetic notions within African constructs is crucial to towards mental salvation because, as Pedler, Willis and Nieuwoudt (2021) write, emotive values and attachment contribute to inspire a sense of belonging and self-love.

Having encouraged Africans to leave the Greco-Roman pedestal for an African consciousness in the song “Border”, Stephenson in another song, “African Woman”, offers a cocktail of Africa’s antiquity, geography with tints of aesthetics to confront “imperial aesthetics” (Yerima 2017, 642). The song, though primarily an attempt to project the beauty of the African woman, extends to stress the essence of the Nile River and the fertility of its land on the Nile Valley Civilisations. Also, the veneration which Rastafari accords Haile Selassie’s wife, Empress Menen, extends to all black women (see Goldson 2020). Probably with UNEP’s (2008) report in mind, Stephenson says:

Oh, African woman (royal)

Queen of the Nile, yeah
 With that perfect smile
 You’re so special with an open mind
 Keep on flowing deep just like river Nile
 Oh so beautiful and so divine

With that African eyes
 And that African smile, yeah

You’re a queen, you’re a lioness
 In the future, girl, I see you as my empress
 Always dress inna your royal gown
 My Nubian princess, simply the best

The popularity Rastas have accorded the dreadlock hairstyle through their cultural expression is an example of how professing positive self outlooks can influence people globally. To affirm African aesthetics, a phenomenon battered and bruised by eccentric interrogations and interpretations, in “Made in Africa” Stephen Marley articulates:

How beautiful art thou, Africa
 A nation you have to bow, Africa
 Don’t you fall from grace
 You’re that sacred place

Wale, The Cast of Fela rap accordingly:

I can never be ashamed of her
I got my features
And my name from her
Mama Africa

Rise of Human Civilisation

To rediscover and embrace the African self requires Africans offering an alternate narrative. To push the imperial arrangements, Africa's classical feats either had to be denied or the ethnicity of the inhabitants of those jurisdictions questioned. The most fiercely contested being the KMT [ancient Egyptian] civilisation (Van-Sertima 1989). However, Diop (1974, xiv) argues that copious archaeological and anthropological evidences suggest that

ancient Egypt was a Negro civilisation. The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in the air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt.

The controversy about this civilisation causes some African scholars to hesitate to claim it. To Diop (1974, xiv) a scholar

who evades the problem of Egypt is neither modest nor objective nor unruffled. He is ignorant, cowardly and neurotic. The moral fruit of their civilisation is to be counted among the assets of the Black world.

In line with Rastafari and reggae's positive projection of Africa and Africans, and probably taking a cue from Diop to appear informed and bold, Stephen Marley provides a profound introduction to his song "Made in Africa", saying:

Scholars and scientists now conceive that Africa is the first place of mankind.
Africans were the first builders of civilization.
They discovered mathematics, invented writing, developed sciences, engineering, medicine,
religion, fine arts, and built the Great Pyramids.
An architectural achievement which still baffles modern scientists.

These words epitomise the genre's underpinnings to broadcast its 'truths' and unapologetic state of mind, especially against repressive bias towards Africans. Stephenson also claims this history:

Like the warriors of great King Pharaoh
I'll protect you, so dem cyaan come near you

Even though this narrative has gained credence in scholarship, they neither shape nor influence the education of Africans globally. Schooling (education), owing to its Euro-colonial origins, begins with Greece, not Axum or KMT, giving credence to calls for decolonisation (Abdi 2018; Adjei and Dei 2008; Alvares and Faruqi 2012; Asante 2000; Smith 2012). However, to deconstruct requires a unique form of African education

centred on knowledge of self as instructed by the Ancestors (Mungwini 2017; Watson 2016). The importance of this potential African education thrust Stephen Marley's inspiration to Africans to:

Educate yourself of, Africa
To liberate yourself, Africa
Keep your heads up high
No more will we cry

African-centred Intergenerational Education

Euro-colonial education of Africans cannot uplift and advance the essence of the African being and their culture. There is little or no meaningful nurture of self-worth and self-esteem in that process (Amuzu 2019). Dei (2017), Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) and Nketsia (2013), therefore, argue for an indigenous knowledge to liberate the mind. Africans who dare to change the denigrating narrative are Afrocentric, reactionary, utopian, or anachronistic (Ferguson 2011; Lefkowitz 2008). I can pardon the shortfalls of people resisting being products and consumers of other people's culture, thus seeking agency and self-determination. Education of Africans must recover the best of the past to rebuild and sustain African culture. It must tap into inherent competitive advantages, project its subjective aims and aspirations without losing sight of the politics.

The importance of trans-generational transfer education mandates any preceding generation to ensure they culturally align successive ones with its realities and identity. These are the pursuits of decolonising education and do not overstretch the functions of education (Amuzu 2021; Dei 2017; Nketsia 2013). Succeeding in this endeavour would contribute meaningfully towards the nurture of a generational sense of purpose, a cause Africans must prioritise. Wale, The Cast of Fela rap accordingly in "Made in Africa":

So before I have seeds
Gotta understand my roots
Gotta understand the truth

Swayed by unapologetic trademark of Rastafari consciousness, Stephen Marley reacts to shunning of African social, political and cultural realities and general lack of ethnic identity by enunciating that:

Our children must be taught of Africa
The science and the arts of Africa

Banton says:

One life u've got to live
Come on lets us live it right

Teaching successive generations of Africa, its science and arts, would contribute to halting the prevailing epistemicide (Masaka 2018). Failure would continue to affect African Indigenous knowledge systems negatively, stifling development (Odora-Hoppers 2021). The quest for “epistemic liberation” (Masaka 2018, 286) is fundamental to freeing the mind to nurture and live the desired consciousness – “livivity” in Rastafari parlance. This would offer African agency and re-centre their marginalised perspectives (Asante 1998).

False Friendships

Africa’s wealth continues to make it attractive to outsiders. History, however, recounts that outsiders’ relationships with Africa have always been exploitative, leaving Africans in disharmony, suppressed and impoverished – “battered and bruised”. These realities must guide the African trajectory of life, as anything bereft of the right consciousness will continue to perpetuate prevailing conditions. The current trappings of globalisation, where multi-national corporations expand their reach on Africa and its resources (Mutekwa 2012) and incursions of China in Africa, cause Stephen Marley to entreat Africans to beware of imperialists because:

They infiltrate our homes, Africa
They claim it as their own, Africa
Now we must stand tall
To break down these walls

Banton offers a sterner admonition, probably because Africans continue to manifest ignorance, naivety and lacking historical recall:

If u’re in bed with the devil
Then you ave made your choice

In “African Woman”, Stephenson opts to advocate for agency to confront any domineering force:

Dem can’t kick or come box you down
Stand your ground, hit them pound for pound

The call to return to the past, in line with the concept of Sankofa (Temple 2010) automatically raises concerns about romanticisation. But I must state that this is not a blind call. No group of people have advanced without embracing who they are and I tie African cultural hesitancy to events of the past that require redress. African subservience to Euro-colonial ideals has not yielded meaningful results; hence, the contemporary circumstances and conditions. People may see Africa either as an old rickety car [scrap] needing disposal or an antique with immense potential value – for Rastafari and reggae, it is the latter.

Rastafari and reggae's appreciation of Sankofa syncs with what Aikins (2010 cited in Dei 2012) refers to as "Sankotie" and "Sankowhe" – returning to the source to see, listen and learn. Maison (2010, 81), using the folklore of Ananse [the spider] to illustrate the importance of a knowledge of self towards survival, states that Ananse searches within itself to "repair and restore its web (its world/cosmology) whenever it suffers damage. It is the indigenous epistemic protocols of Ananse that the African has to seek and restore". In the politics of knowledge generation, dominant forces always find ways to either "erase" history or make it irrelevant; hence the need for these conversations. The past is a reference point for the present as people continue to construct the future.

Concluding Remarks

Reggae music as aforementioned is a rebel genre and often tied to themes, like resistance, oppression, African identity, self-determination, subjugation, love and spirituality, amongst others. From an African perspective, it endeavours to delve into the past and reconnect with an ancestral origin, land, time and place in history, utilising the interactions between these variables to discern contemporary realities. The selected songs touch on these forced dislocations from a cultural centricity and consciousness. As critical theorists suggest, critical educators need to see educational limitations as structural and endeavour to assist learners to gain agency and perspective. This requires cultural shifts that invoke histories of African resistance and empowerment considering that the knowledge generation, validation and dissemination process is intensely political. Rastafari and reggae offer an avenue for redemptive philosophies and complex frameworks to waken consciousness, offer pride and restore dignity.

Rastas have cultivated a cultural expression where they self-determine within their own logics and make meaning of their realities, refusing to be validated in the eyes of their enslavers. It has taken a stance against oppression and provided alternate narratives through both idiosyncratic and collective chronicles to spur causes, give hope, unite people, and extol Africa, pan-Africanism, and African aspirations. A cue which critical African scholars can take from the tenacity of Rastafari and reggae is that the lack of mainstream acknowledgements does not hinder their focus and utility to cultivate a certain socio-political and cultural consciousness. Reggae music, gifted with the power of words and articulation, has delivered on a broad spectrum of emblematic themes and ideological impetus by utilising its subjective power and authority to create African knowledge, and consequently derive its authority and power. The African academe must embrace and institutionalise the asking of hard questions and engaging in painful queries to nurture knowledge and understanding of self, mental salvation, self-sufficiency, and ultimately, unity among Africans.

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