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There ain't just Black in the Atlantic, Jack!

Transformations of Masculinity from the Outlaw to the Rebel
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by

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Résumé : À contre-courant des discours essentialistes et des explications racistes sur la responsabilité envers les victimes et/ou des auteurs de violences, ma contribution analysera les formations textuelles et performatives de la violence dans la musique reggae dancehall. Dans cette perspective, je m'intéresserai aux influences tant extérieures que locales, qui contribuent à la construction d'une figure complexe qu'est celle du « Rude Boy ». J'analyserai cette identité sous l'angle des théories de la pratique, notamment à travers le concept bourdieusien d'habitus. La figure du « Rude Boy », analysée sous le prisme de ces « outils analytiques », devrait permettre de questionner certaines des hypothèses paradigmatiques autour du concept d'hybridité développé par Paul Gilroy dans son ouvrage majeur *L'Atlantique Noir – Modernité et Double conscience*, et qu'il oppose à la revendication de l'« authenticité » d'une pensée essentialiste et nationaliste.

Key-words : *hybridity – authenticity – habitus – Rude B(w)oy – Reggae Dancehall*

*Born and raised as a Rebel
 Some folks say, I may be miserable
 Always stand up for my rights
 And that's the reason why they give me a fight ...
 Yes, I'm a Rebel with a cause
 For that cause, that cause, that old babylon cause ...*

Gregory ISAACS, *Rebel with a Cause*, 1987

Dancehall Reggae represents one of the most vibrant and innovative artistic expressions to emerge from the contemporary Caribbean experience(s).¹ Although thoroughly Black in its political and cultural agenda, the music spread globally, perhaps because of its categorical connection to other cultural contexts and universal concerns (Bilby 1995: 180). This openness in turn may be the dominant reason why it appears unequalled in its multi-sited appropriations or “glocalizations”. Some of its most surprising strongholds may be found in Japan, Maoriland or Germany with their distinct local variants. It could thus serve as a viable field of study to analyze empirically some of the distinctive attributes of Black cultural forms, which Paul Gilroy focused on in his conceptualization of the “Black Atlantic” as a critical Black version of an envisioned counter-modernity. For him these expressive cultures are modern, modernist and western, “(...) because they have been marked by their hybrid, creole origins in the West, because they have struggled to escape their status as commodities and the position within the cultural industries it specifies, and because they are produced by artists whose understanding of their own position relative to the racial group and of the role of the art in mediating individual creativity with social dynamics is shaped by a sense of artistic practice as an autonomous domain either reluctantly or happily divorced from the everyday world” (Gilroy 1993: 73).

1. For an overall view of the music and its various sub-fields, particularly dancehall Reggae see: Chang and Chen (1998), Davis and Simon (1979), and Johnson and Pine (1982).

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In this contribution I will use this very (sub-)field of Reggae to question some of the propositions made by Gilroy's (1993) "counterculture of modernity" which he developed in ostentuous opposition to the various forms of Black political and cultural Nationalisms dominant in Black political discourse at the time of his writing. This limited aim does not cover a fundamental critique of Gilroy's quite brilliant contribution to the deconstruction of European modernity, i.e. their imposition of a eurocentric, supposedly universalist version of Enlightenment and modernity on the rest of the globe against the background of its own genocidal violence (slavery, colonialism, imperialism). Nor do I want to dispute the importance and potential of double consciousness for the reconstruction of Diaspora Blacks cultures, " (...) as expressions of and commentaries upon ambivalences generated by modernity and their locations within it" (ib.: 117). I will only argue on the basis of the Reggae evidence that Gilroy stops somewhat short in his central intention to overcome the fruitless opposition between essentialist and anti-essentialist Black politics by creating a remodelled antinomy between the "legitimately hybridized black Atlantic" and the presumably pre- and/or antimodern afrocentrist ideas of "Blakk Africa". This juxtaposition of hybridity and authenticity may prove just as fruitless, because it seems to miss the particular logics of divergent practices in a spatial and temporal dimension.

On a praxeological level hybridization and authentication could be read as situational strategies of empowerment. They are then less expressions of dynamic, (counter-)modern versus static or stable premodern attitudes than different choices in comparable yet not congruent struggles for power. Instead of presenting absolute values, hybridity and authenticity could both be interpreted as forms of symbolic capital that make sense in a particular situation for a given period of time in order to achieve strategic goals. To inquire into their comparative rationality would subsequently require a critical parameter, as for instance provided for by the figure of communicative rationality elaborated by Jürgen Habermas (1984 and 1987). Gilroy makes partial use of this author's critique of modernity in his well-sought exploration of the universalizing power of Black modernity for the unfinished project of modernity. But he neglects the critical potential of the concept of communicative rationality. The author of the "black Atlantic" therefore privileges the affirmative acceptance of hybridization over a negatively constructed ideology of authenticity. The empirical example of dancehall Reggae however gives excellent access to a local Jamaican

arena where the comparative potential of its hybrid and “authentically afrocentric” variants for meaningful anti-racist politics are not that clear from the outset.

Dancehall by its very nature of extreme openness to transnational contexts embodies theoretical concepts of hybridity, syncretism, bricolage, or generally intermixture of bits and pieces from various cultural experiences. But this fact alone does not advance the project of a Black counter-modernity, as numerous counterexamples show. A good deal of dancehall productions follows the practical logic of mainstream (Western) modernity and thus incorporates cultural imperialism. Globalized images of (virtual) violence derived from Hollywood or Hongkong are reproduced in this hybrid artistic field that bears some resemblance with a “real” war zone. The dominant violent means that the superpower(s) resort to, wherever they lack rationality to find political solutions, return as questionable reservoirs for creativity on the stage of performative acts. “Gun lyrics” and ritualized verbal battles – in the form of DJ clashes – draw on the motives of the classical Western and, more recently, Eastern movies. Far from simple mimicry or imitation such dancehall tunes become hybridized by their translation into the Jamaican lifeworlds of the urban ghetto. Nevertheless, this does not save them from the scrutiny of other Reggae artists who consider the adaptations from foreign experiences as “mix up, mix up” – to use a phrase of Bob Marley. Interestingly, self-coined conscious Reggae pleads for a re-orientation to the “authentic African roots” to overcome the imported structures of physical violence. It will be argued in this chapter that firstly “mixing” does not necessarily privilege cultural cross-fertilization, secondly that the directions and potentials of such hybridizations depend on the historical and material conditions, and thirdly that the concept of the black Atlantic juxtaposed against “Blakk Africa” thus creates a false antinomy – the double k in “Blakk Africa” indicating a connection to cultural and historical experiences rather than an essentialist notion of a racial or fixed identity.²

2. Gilroy doesn’t capitalize the notion of black. I therefore stick to this writing when it directly refers to his category of the black Atlantic. In contrast to this usage „Black“ is capitalized in reference to afrocentric, pan-Africanist and Black nationalist discourses, in order to mark the critical differentiation to racist associations of Black skin colour and Africa. It relates to the totality of African Diaspora experiences including racism.

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Local equivalences to globalized images

Dancehall Reggae came to life in the violent condition(s) of the political geography in Kingston, which the art form reflected and reproduced to some extent, but also deconstructed and occasionally critiqued. Therefore, the abundant everyday violence mirrored in the music should not be interpreted as a (entirely) homegrown activity or as a consequence of irresponsible role models, in contrast to the mainstream opinions in the Jamaican press as well as in other local and international media. Not the “ghetto people”, as a notion used in a common circumscription for the black masses in Jamaica, share a “primordial tendency” to violent solutions, but the economic and social conditions of hopeless poverty and alienation prefigure a hotbed for the ubiquitous resort to force and arbitrary justice. In this prestructured social space the transcultural enactments of violence from the globalized film industry find a fertile soil to perpetuate and reproduce those very structures of violent behaviour. Against the essentialist and racist shift of responsibility to the victims/perpetrators of violence this contribution will look behind the curtain of the textual and performative emanations of violence in dancehall Reggae to ask for the external and internal factors for the construction of the complex identity of the “Rude Boy”, or more recently the “Gangsta for life” to paraphrase Mavado, the latest dancehall phenomenon at the time of writing. This hybrid identity will be analysed in the framework of a praxeological theory and particularly in the light of the “Rude Boy Habitus” production. Habitus can be defined as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, interpretations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks (Bourdieu 1977: 82).

Such a praxeological perspective concerns the relationship between cultural practices and broader social processes. By concentrating on a specific field of cultural production and its accumulated history, I intend to determine the social positions and roles of Reggae artists who produce this so-called “popular culture”. This requires dissecting the historical relationships between systems of thought, social institutions and different forms of

material and symbolic power.³ The use of these notions or “analytical tools” in the empirical example should allow to question some of the paradigmatic assumptions of Gilroy’s black Atlantic concept of hybridity, which he conceived as a means against essentialist and racist thinking. It will be argued that mutation, hybridity, and intermixture as such have no unquestionable legitimate value “en route to better theories of racism and of black political culture” (Gilroy 1993: 223). The example of the hybrid “Rude Boy/Outlaws” identities in the Jamaican life worlds and in its dancehall Reggae reflection points towards the need for a structural history of domination, which the essentialization of hybridity against essentialist theories seems to lack.

Dancehall Reggae offers access to a fascinating world of cinematographic performances of the DJs and Sound Systems in (verbal) battle form that transects the real and the fictional.⁴ This artistic field and its actual practices resemble the choreography of Quentin Tarantino movies, as for instance the plot of bloody revenge in *Kill Bill* Vol. 1 (1994a) and Vol. 2 (1994b). In fact, dancehall productions share many of the narrative features of these movies, or the ones of the Western and Eastern genre “sampled” by this Hollywood filmmaker. Reggae lovers unfamiliar with the musical and other practical expressions of the dancehall would (with some probability) shun the actual encounter with this cultural context. Politically incorrect practices dominate here: the celebrations of manhood as pictured in the Western movie myths of pioneers and gunmen – all “dead-serious”, the misogynist contortion of “proper womanhood”, the homophobic obsession, the “violence for violence”-excessiveness, the death threats to everything that gets in the way of such a lifestyle (especially police informers); not to speak of the astounding practices of “real” gun salute, firecrackers, flame throwing lighters, pick pocketing, actual sexual harassment and so on (see Salewicz and Boot 2001: 170-199). In short, the actual reality of the dancehall, as possibly the most influential arena of Reggae in Jamaica, and indeed increasingly

3. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice (1977 and 1993) provides a useful framework to look empirically into these questions. Especially the concepts of field and habitus allow for an empirical analysis of the dialectic between social structures and agents (Johnson 1993: 5-7). See also Calhoun (1993).

4. See Gayle (1982) on the popular practice of Deejaying.

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internationally, is a far cry from the idealized revolutionary image of the “Black Rebel” that became iconized in the personality of Bob Marley.⁵

Posseism, the formation of gangs or “Posses”, as they are called in the Western genre, emerged as a dominant feature of “partisan or garrison politics” in Kingston (Gunst 1995; Stone and Brown 1981). A place of birth (or settlement, in the case of migration from the country side or even a foreign country) in a particular “corner” of Kingston mediated a fixed political identity, affiliation with and allegiance to a particular Posse. Everyone born in one street belonged to a political party zone and therefore essentially, and not by conscious ideological or emotional decisions, to one of the two leading parties (PNP or JLP). Speaking of the political geography of Kingston refers to those spatial divisions as essential markers of belonging. Residence in one area, even a particular street, thus marked factitiously a political identity. Just around the corner all the people living in another street were conceived almost as natural enemies. Rivalry between the two parties was (and still is) intense, at times deadly. Once born into one political “Posse”, to quote famous dancehall DJ Josey Wales’ allegory to the Outlaw gangs of the Western movie, you were always “moving with this Posse”. The motto during the foundation time of dancehall in the 70s reveals a lot of conformity with contemporary dominant political thought in the US of America: “Who is not with us, is against us.” Foe and enemy were clearly marked through the spatial definition of affiliation that was at times – when “Kingston was (politically) hot”⁶ – played out in the simplistic mode of “kill or be killed”. One had to be ready to give everything (including one’s life) to a party and its leading local political “lord”, the so-called *Area Don* (Güldner 2004: 64).

Allegiance to a local (Kingstonian) Posse in practice meant an essential identity fixed to a “place” with clear geographical boundaries. Its particular format drew on the Western image of a group of men (mostly Outlaws) riding together. In content this stance presupposed a set of

5. Cf. Cooper (1993) on the gender aspects; and Cooper (2004) on Jamaican dancehall culture in general.

6. As vividly decribed by the dancehall tune „Kingston Hot“ (1993) by Ninja Man (feat. Cocoa Tea).

informal “rules”, a code of honour and conduct governing the group.⁷ Another notion signifies the practices of DeeJing more than anything else: *to ride the riddim* (rhythm). The meaning of this metaphor refers to the competitive personal abilities of the artists to “stay on the riddim” by making better use of their rhythmical and rhyming skills than their competitors (see Zips 1994: 118-145). There are thousands of Reggae tunes that include similar standardized phrases like “siddung (sit down) ‘pon de riddim like a lizard ‘pon a limb” or “ride de riddim like a Cowboy on his horse”. Comparable to the Rodeo Cowboy the skills and abilities of the DJs are tested against each other; the artistic competence in “riding the riddim” is connected in meaning with the musical showdown of the “Sounds Clash” or “DJ Clash” when two or more Sound Systems or DJs meet in competition over their cultural capital (musical and rhetorical capabilities), their social capital (the politically or culturally powerful individuals in the crowd they are able to attract to the dance), and their economic capital (material and technical infrastructure).⁸

The weapons of such a duel are of course “riddims” and words, although occasional switches to physical violence seem to be on the rise (Cooke 2008: 13). Given the underlying logic of challenge and (adequate) response, the ambivalence of such artistic encounters may hardly be surprising. The battles are indeed “staged” upon the dramatic structures that are known to the actors through their exposure to the imported Western and Eastern drama (Zips 2001). At times the dramatization turns into a veritable drama, when real guns get into the “play”. The local metaphor for such a situation is “Sounds crash”; it means that a *Sounds Clash* is broken down because of the outbreak of violence – a violence that is of course no direct response to the music, but rather conditioned by modes of acting encoded into the (hybrid) habitus. Contrary to interpretations which reduce the emergence of violence, male dominance, sexism and

7. The notion Posse carries of course flexible meanings if used for a group of friends, a belonging to an (illegitimate or legitimate) organization, a district like Tivoli Gardens, Waterhouse or Dungle in Kingston, or extensively for a national(ist) identity, or (quasi-)ethnicity like in Jamaican Posse, American Posse, African Posse, or foreign Posse.

8. Cf. Bourdieu (1993) and Calhoun (1993) for a general outline of the praxeological framework of analysis used in this chapter.

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misogyny embraced by some Black male artists (and their audience) to an essentialist notion of blackness, these attitudes and practices stem at least not exclusively from the Black cultural experience but to a large extent from the prevailing values transmitted through dominant cultural expressions such as Western movies (see hooks 1994: 118).

When the highly ritualized showdown of Western or Eastern movies is reconceptualised into a lyrical duel in the dancehall, a syncretic process often circumscribed as a “glocalization” or localization of the global takes place. Artistic performances and other social practices appear traceable to intersecting dispositions appropriated from diverse religious and cultural traditions. Values and attitudes inculcated by the continual exposure to Hollywood, Hongkong, or Tokyo movies combine with historically deeper, long time embodied speech patterns of “Black Talk” (Sidran 1981). The contest forms of the *Men of Words* (see Abrahams 1983: 3) in Black speech acts and performances meet with the quest for respect in the Outlaw motive of the Wild West or East.⁹ Situations and codes of those movies are endowed with meanings and interests that reflect the actual social conditions of the artists’ and their audience’s positions within Jamaican society. Many of the artistic inventions are actually re-enactments of imported images and motives from Hollywood, and therefore mainstream US-culture. Through the embodiment of these structures drawn for instance from Western movies, the sense of the game becomes transferred to another cultural environment. What is generally conceived as the “violent male Jamaican personality” might therefore be questioned as a myth.¹⁰ A myth of violence that is imparted on the Jamaican context from the most powerful and richest centre of cultural production. Needless to emphasize that the political culture of belligerence in the interest of gaining control and unrestrained access to the most

9. Verbal battles to gain the reputation of being a Man of Words have been interpreted as an essential part of Black rhetorics in African and Diasporan cultures. Contest (performance) techniques come to the fore at places of public congregation and can take on a diversity of forms. Sound- and DJ Clashes are one (originally) Jamaican variant among comparable expressive resources in Jazz, Calypso, Capoeira, Rap or Playing the Dozens (see Abrahams 1983: 3; and Zips 1994: 135-143).

10. A myth that draws upon the structure of the Western with its «symbolically simple but remarkably deep conceptualization of American social beliefs» (Wright 1994: 119).

important resources has the same origin as the arsenal of military weapons and handguns imported in excessive numbers into the island.

There is no *given* equivalence between the fictional actions of the Western movies, the myth of the Wild West and Caribbean cultures shaped by structures of violent domination and resistance against the various modes of oppression. Rather, the symbolic fragments of dramatized situations from the movies are given significance in the context of Jamaican ghetto life by the social actors. This process should neither be misinterpreted as a conscious identity formation nor as a forceful implementation of a rule or even an ordered structural adjustment, but as a subconscious (acceptance of) inculcation of dominant structures into the habitus (cf. Taylor 1993). By this key notion of habitus for the praxeological approach Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 82) sought to escape mechanistic theories of social action without doing away with the structural moment of (the reproduction of) domination: “I said habitus so as *not* to say habit – that is, the generative (if not creative) capacity inscribed in the dispositions as an *art*, in the strongest sense of practical mastery, and in particular as an *ars inveniendi*” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 122).

Hybridity vs. authenticity: some categorical mistakes

Habitus as a conglomeration of lasting and transposable dispositions tends to protect itself against questioning and critique. Such a set of internalized structures “seeks” situations, social groupings, and discourses that it is already (pre)accustomed to, therefore contributing to its reproduction. But prolonged, recurring, and reinforced situations of social crises make it vulnerable to (self-)critique and (self-)reflexivity. In the Jamaican context of (post-)colonial rule, the emergence of Rastafari in Jamaica threatened the eurocentric assumptions of “proper” social development.¹¹ The dominant system therefore “punished” the symbolically powerful challengers of the colonial habitus with executive repression for a period of at least four decades

11. See Yawney (1978) on the social dynamics of Rastafari.

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(from the 1930s to the 1970s). Only when some Rastafari representatives gained the symbolic capital of international recognition the picture changed. Consequently the likes of Bob Marley were able to play havoc with the official doctrine of a national identity formation that sought to integrate the British legacy of colonial institutions and values with the majority experiences of cultural expropriation, disintegration, and indoctrination (cf. Nettleford 1978: 187-188). Out of many one? The official state motto for an integrative national identity came under constant attack in the field of (Rasta) Reggae.¹² Rastafari show no sympathy for processes of syncretism, creolization or hybridization, which they usually interpret as a detraction from emancipatory attitudes rooted in the (African) resistance to slavery, dependence, and assimilation.

A literary analysis of so-called Roots or Rasta emanations of Reggae including its dancehall sub-field appears to offer much more evidence for a rational critique of the violent aspects of modernity, than the hybrid musical styles of the dancehall, with their textual openness for mainstream culture, as for instance the Western and Eastern film production. With its explicit claims to authenticity, shunned by the black Atlantic model, Rasta Reggae perhaps even provides rather adequate starting-points for a (literary theory) of a counter model to modernity. Ironically, for the perspective of the black Atlantic, as proposed by Gilroy (1993), the quite Africa-centric and Pan African Black nationalist positions of Rastafari artists, which explicitly tackle hybrid cultural forms of identity formation and "nation building" as "mental slavery" (Bob Marley), "brainwashing" (Sizzla), or "confusion" (Mutabaruka) appear more promising for a conscious reformulation of universal modernity that pays due respect to the Black experiences alongside all other human experiences.¹³ Even the dominant images of Western set-scenes and personalities thus come under a critical revision by Rastafari Reggae artists like Pablo Moses who titled one song *Outlaw* on his album *Tension* (1985). It employed an inversion of the dominant imagery, which not only dismantled the image from its

12. Mutabaruka's poem titled „Out of Many One“ (1983) offers the best example.

13. See Zips 2006a and 2006b (xx-xxiii) for the potential of Rastafari as a universal philosophy and 2006c (99) on the „thieving legacy“ – to use a poem's title of Mutabaruka (1989) – of black Atlantic music; see also the film „Rastafari – Death to all Black and White Downpressors“ by Werner Zips (2004a).

connection to the gunman icon of Western culture, but also rather turned it upside down by implying that righteousness and honesty make one to an Outlaw in the very society dependent on violence/the gun:

*Outlaw
I am an Outlaw
With no ma an paw (Ma and Pa)
I have no gun to draw
Found guilty for honesty
Wrongly charge by their sarge (seargent)...
I gave my statement
They know I am innocent
But wanting me to suffer
They make it rougher
I am an Outlaw...
I have no gun to draw...¹⁴*

In another famous example, the Bob Marley song *Buffalo Soldier* (on the album *Confrontation*), published in 1983 well after Marley's passing, the subversive strategy applied to perceived equivalences is further heightened. Marley uses his identification of the "Buffalo Soldier" (fighting for American independence) with the "Dreadlocks Rasta" (stolen from Africa) to make a political statement for Black (historical) consciousness in general and the acceptance of *Africanness* in particular:

*Buffalo Soldier, Dreadlock Rasta
There was a Buffalo Soldier
In the heart of America
Stolen from Africa, brought to America
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival...
If you know your history
Then you would know where you coming from...
I'm just a Buffalo Soldier*

14. Moses, Pablo: *Outlaw*, LP: Tension. Sunset Records (1985).

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*In the heart of America
Stolen from Africa, brought to America...
Said he was a Buffalo Soldier
Win the war for America...*¹⁵

Most examples for a self-reflexive critique of the suppressive elements of modernity created by Reggae artists indeed emanate from Rastafari doctrines and philosophical expressions. But the abundance of such “Rebel with a cause”-examples in the international arena of the (more or less) global Reggae market should not obstruct a critical view on the reproduction of the “Western Outlaw” imagery and its symbolic arsenal of violent action in the Jamaican dancehall scene, which is an important source for the creativity of Reggae. The habitus of the Outlaw – “the Rebel without a cause” – prevails in this field, although the “Gangsta” hymns and performances increasingly *clash* with the afrocentric and pan-Africanist imperatives of Rasta DJs, particularly from the Bobo Shanti house who have become identified with the “Fire Bu(r)n” dancehall Reggae from the mid 1990s onwards.¹⁶ Recently such “clashes” of divergent habitus formations may even affect one and the same artist, as the example of Munga Honarebel, a current shooting star of dancehall Reggae reveals. The self-acclaimed “Gangsta Ras” came to some prominence in 2007 through his hybridization of Bobo Shanti militancy with an open appraisal of “Gangsta” lifestyles and attitudes. Big Reggae festivals in Jamaica, such as Eastfest or Rebel Salute with performances from Reggae artists holding competing positions in the larger field, allow the direct observance of the strategic struggle for symbolic power. They also give access to the practical manifestations of unresolved contradictions and thereby warn against untenable generalizations juxtaposing a preconceived emancipatory quality of hybridization against the “conservative” or presumably reactionary tendencies of “pure authenticity”.

Reggae as Jamaica's central space of cultural production hosts quite a few artists who predominantly reproduce global structures of dominant violence. This may appear in tension

15. Marley, Bob and the Wailers: *Buffalo Soldier*, LP: Confrontation. Island Records (1983).

16. See Zips (2003d) on the sources and beginnings of the Rasta militancy tradition in dancehall Reggae.

with their occasionally vocal critique of “empire”. Political and historical consciousness, the questioning of oppressive “race”, class or gender relations, and the visionary reaffirmations of unity, peace and love may easily gain the upper hand on the level of international audiences and Grammy awards. On the local core level of productivity, such acts are duly classified as “international” and implicitly challenged by “hardcore” local dancehall. Young people in Jamaican society are confronted with a wide spectrum of diverse and in many cases contradictory or oppositional “traditions”. Some “foreign” cultural products such as the dominant attitudes of the Western or Eastern film genre become appropriated by their translation into local experiences (e.g. of Kingstonian ghetto zones). Elements fitting to the new contexts are stripped of their histories and accumulated in the hybrid habitus formation. Their artistic actualizations in dancehall Reggae allow empirical access to the sites of integration, hybridization, or “mixing” of diverse traditions. These sites therefore provide a stage for mutation, hybridity, and intermixture of ideas, practices and structures. But all these practices of “fusion” remain contested by the afrocentric consciousness of self-acclaimed authentic “Roots Reggae” with its adherence to selfreflexivity, resistance, and subversion to cultural domination. For that matter the antinomy of hybridity and authenticity is less than convincing, since the recovery of a lost or stolen African identity involves no authentic, pure or static image of Africa. It rather constitutes a decisive deconstruction of the forced identification with “slaves” as a potential source to depart meaningfully from the powerless social positions of the alienated materially poor.

Hybridity and intermixture therefore hardly guarantee for better theories of racism and an effective critique of “Western modernity” or an innovative approach to a counter model of modernity, as Gilroy’s “black Atlantic” model envisions. In my view, it depends on other factors embedded in a particular realization of (communicative) rationality, if such aims can be achieved. A praxeological approach may thus appear well advised to refrain from binding itself to a particular model of “good” cultural/political practice. Hybridity and authenticity will rather be analyzed as open-ended strategies of actors in empirical constellations of power (struggle).

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Black Atlantic and essential identities

Praxeological theory intentionally searches for the inherent power relations and seeks a critical position for situations of dominance. It tries to unveil modes of domination that are sometimes not recognized as such by the social actors. These systematic correlations have to be drawn into the consciousness of the actors in order to open a channel for a reflexive stance on structures that promote the reproduction of domination. Thereby social science gains the option to assume its full critical function. What bell hooks (1994: 115-118) writes on the cultural politics behind the phenomenon of *Gangsta Rap* – another Outlaw culture that draws extensively from incorporated images of motion pictures – appears just as applicable to dancehall. According to this author, the musical genre of Rap is not a product created in isolation within a segregated black world but is rather expressive of the cultural crossing, mixings, and engagement of black youth culture with the values, attitudes and concerns of the white majority: “The sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 1994: 116).

Therefore, a contextualized critique may be needed to raise the consciousness about larger structures of domination. Its most important aim consists in questioning the embodiment of “the norm” by social actors. General values of “mainstream culture” – such as the individual (Cowboys) or the material (Gangsters) or the patriarchal (e.g. the Samurai from the Eastern genre) – provide these “norms” that are reproduced in popular culture.¹⁷ Entrepreneurship and the politics of “hedonistic consumerism” perpetuate and maintain these values by reinforcing the embodied norms of violence, sexism and misogyny (hooks 1994: 117): “How many disenfranchised black males would not surrender to expressing virulent forms of sexism if they knew the rewards would be unprecedented material power and fame?”

Only the social actors themselves can finally dismantle such veiled processes of habitus formations. The same medium of popular music that reproduces structures of dominance and

17. See Perry Henzell's film *The Harder They Come* for an illustrative treatment of this habitus formation.

power can also be applied for their very critique. Some Reggae dancehall texts can be analytically understood as empirical examples for the unconscious continuation of historical power relations, whereas others are clearly critical through the use of direct (historical) contextualization, irony and other rhetorical forms and tropological strategies of deconstruction. The latter scrutinize old and new world orders for their preference of militant measures over political solutions. However, Jamaican ghetto youths do incorporate the fictional structures, dispositions, and actual practices learned from Western (and Eastern) movies. Of course, these cultural products are themselves reproductions of violent global realities. Daily news of warfare and military intervention as the “right of the fittest” perpetuate the central lesson of dominant culture: Violence pays. Local acts of violence, in the physical and symbolic sense, can be interpreted accordingly as linked manifestations. The row of killed Reggae artists tells only one part of the whole story. Their cases may serve as tragic examples, how the role-play and metaphor used in performances caught up with the actors in reality. They stick out as nationally and (partly) internationally known artists from a mass of ten thousands of anonymous victims of violence since the 1970s in Jamaica. Among them were, of course, also perpetrators of violence, as for instance most locally known individual Jamaican Outlaws, area Dons, and gun-crazy policemen. Some of these famed personalities received their posthumous recognition through the tune *Warrior Cause* co-performed by Elephant Man and Spragga Benz, two leading DJs in the first decade of the third millennium:

*“Elephant Man me say hail up all warrior...
 Well me come fe big up every warriors from the present to the past
 Ah who know dem fight for a cause...
 So I big up all the warrior from the present to the past
 Ah who know dem died for a cause me nuh know
 So I big up all the warrior from the present to the past
 Ah nuff a dem died for a cause...”¹⁸*

18. Elephant Man and Spragga Benz: *Warrior Cause*. CD: Elephant Man: Log On. Greensleeves Records (2001).

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One objective cause might be identified with the political geography of downtown Kingston that is divided into frontiers. Such partisan zones were shaped on the basis of the perceived colonial heritage of the Westminster dual party system. Its Jamaican variant contributed to a long history of what is referred to locally as “tribal warfare” between the supporters of both parties. The partisan politics led to a series of fierce showdowns. Their (unofficial) laws and rules of conduct were arguably fuelled and reproduced by the (fictitious) matrix of the Western and Eastern films (Zips 2001). Such a “strange” cultural climate (partially) formed and informed the habitus out of which the artistic expressions emerged. It may be defined by a daily struggle for survival (subsistence) in the harsh environment of divided ghettos in Jamaica's capital Kingston and of political violence.

Dancehall artists inhabit a local political terrain dissected by clearly marked boundaries. These physical frontiers evoke metaphysical loyalties that were constructed, reproduced and even nurtured by the structures of political strife and competition between the two leading political parties. Nevertheless the artists cross over international borders with their transcultural and transnational products in the aesthetic field. Such textual and performative dynamics in the field of dancehall Reggae support the basic assumptions of the “black Atlantic” regarding the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade and therefore underline Gilroy's (1993: xi) paradigm of “the inescapable hybridity and intermixture of ideas”. But does this empirical diagnosis (re)state more than the obvious? Gilroy takes the severance from an “African identity” as the decisive starting point for his “promotion” of hybridity, syncretism, creolization, bricolage¹⁹, or more generally the intermixture of ideas as a vehicle for a “black Atlantic theory” of countermodernity. According to his readings of African American art, the novelists and the performances as well as the textuality of generations of Black musicians and authors (literary, oral literary, and musical) “allowed the confluence of racism,

19. Bricolage is another descriptive notion for “the formation of new cultural forms from bits and pieces of cultural practice of diverse origins” (Shaw and Stewart 1994: 10). All these categories do not yet facilitate a determination of the inherent power structure at work in the process. For such a grounded empirical analysis a social theory that allows to combine the perspectives of social structures and agents appears indispensable.

rationality, and systematic terror to configure both their disenchantment with modernity and their aspirations for its fulfillment” (Gilroy 1993: 222).

Gilroy thus employs and develops a theory of “double consciousness” that he appropriates from W. E. B. Du Bois to claim a meaningful position for Black intellectuals, writers and musicians in the unfinished project of modernity. He departs from the venerable aim to demonstrate that the polarisation between essentialist and anti-essentialist theories of Black identity has become unhelpful – as indeed most polarisations might prove in the light of their unrealized potential of communicative rationality. The black Atlantic approach proposes a true universalist unfolding of self-declared universalist thinkers such as Marshall Berman and Jürgen Habermas whose works eurocentrically aim at a realization of the unfinished project of modernity in and through Western democracy (Zips 2002: 214-228).

For Gilroy (1993: 49), this “deep faith in the democratic potential of modernity” is much too farfetched, but he upholds the core idea that modernity can be apprehended through its counter-discourses. The black Atlantic constitutes such a potential countermodel to modernity. Its design pays recognition to the evident and unquestionable reason that eurocentric modernity inherited an order of racial difference from the premodern era that it sustained and relocated to its dispersed power spheres. Structures of domination counterfactual to the emancipatory aspects of this Western concept of modernity pervaded the transatlantic relationships. Gilroy therefore criticizes authors such as Berman and Habermas whose works emphasize a (self-) critical approach towards modernity for their neglect of the transplanted and enslaved Black masses. They ignore that the physical energy of the enslaved built the material conditions of capitalist modernity. Therein lies the main reason for their own continuation of (symbolic) violence: “(T)heir analyses remain substantially unaffected by the histories of barbarity which appear to be such a prominent feature of the widening gap between modern experience and modern expectation” (Gilroy 1993: 49).

Against Jürgen Habermas and other eurocentric authors, Paul Gilroy claims the vital, essential, and even central contribution of Black intellectuals, writers, and artists to transcend the limitations of eurocentric, violent, and racist versions of enlightenment, which turned the

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project of modernity against its own potential results. Gilroy's philosophical literary criticism engages instead in the multifarious ways how generations of Black intellectuals have understood their connection to the enlightenment heritage of the West, as one of their adoptive, parental cultures, and worked with, within, and most importantly against its limitations of eurocentrism, hegemony, imperialism, colonialism, and slavery. He thereby highlights the indispensable contribution of the Black intellectuals' writing and speaking in pursuit of freedom, citizenship, and social and political autonomy; an idea, which has been expressed more recently by Okpewho (1999: xiv) in all possible clarity in relation to US history:

"In its infancy, American capitalism needed Black labour. In its maturation in the twentieth century, American democracy needed the civil rights movement and deracialization to realize its founding concept that 'all men are equal.' It was the Blacks who held American democracy accountable to its own ultimate ideals. The echoes reverberated all over Africa as she struggled to free herself of centuries-old legacies of exploitation, stretching from the era of labour through the era of territorial imperatives."

Jamaican Cowboys, Ninja and Samurai en route to better theories of racism?

The black Atlantic concept as a countermodel of modernity correctly perceives racism in its overt yet also subtle forms as the most dominant obstacle to a panhuman idea of modernity. It explicitly repudiates "the dangerous obsessions with 'racial' purity which are circulating inside and outside black politics" (Gilroy 1993: xi). A complete break with racial thought and nationalisms, even in their reactive forms, is seen as a precondition to fulfill the unfinished business of global reason. Working his way through the record of systematic racism that allowed Europe/North America/"the West" to position itself at the highest stage of its selfconstrued evolutionist ladder and thereby to define itself as the legitimate leader/superpower of the globe, Gilroy co-attacks the reactive expressions of "cultural insiderism" of essentialist ideologies. In search of a black Atlantic culture that transcends ethnicity and nationality, Gilroy criticizes

(most) cultural studies for their inherent views of what he belittles as “Africentrism”. He accuses this ‘backward orientation’ together with Black nationalism for their shared absolute sense of ethnic difference derived from the idea of cultural nationalism. Such positions of “Black consciousness” contradict with his own aim to be both European and a Black British intellectual who has something to contribute to a full realization of modernity. Thus, he interprets afrocentric and Black nationalist politics as based on overintegrated conceptions of culture that present immutable ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories of “black” and “white” people. His own vision of modernity rather seeks to establish a bridge over the different experiences in modern history which were characterized by extreme atrocities:

”If this appears to be little more than a roundabout way of saying that the reflexive cultures and consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the ‘Indians’ they slaughtered, and the Asians they indentured were not, even in situations of the most extreme brutality, sealed off hermetically from each other, then so be it” (Gilroy 1993: 2).

Obviously the field of dancehall Reggae with its own specific hybrid logic supports the overall paradigm of the instability and mutability of identities. But can the inescapability of hybridity and intermixture of ideas following the Diasporization of African people through slavery in turn support the emancipatory expectations inscribed in the “black Atlantic”? Does it suffice to have “always unfinished, always being remade” (Gilroy 1993: xi) identities? The field of dancehall Reggae with its contested forms of symbolic capital perhaps provides a good example to test the presupposed preference of intermixture against some of its afrocentric, Black nationalist counterparts. Ideas and performative attitudes of some dancehall Reggae artists and parts of their audiences adapt the imagery of dominant structures that were transmitted through the channels of cultural imperialism into their own particular environment.

Certain models of adequate comportment and ethic behaviour go with them. A ready-made habitus of the “Bad B(w)oy”, “Rude B(w)oy” or, more recently, the “Gangsta” becomes incorporated from cinematographic portrayals of “rebels” such as the Outlaw in the Western or other equally mythical figures like the Samurai, particularly of the Ronin type (Samurai without a lord he owes loyalty and allegiance to), or the Yakuza clan member in the Eastern

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films. These fictional characters and their encoded practices make sense in the concrete circumstances of a Kingstonian “Wild West and East” with its anarchic resort to individual and collective violence. Their hybridization with the historical experiences of slavery, colonization and poverty not only fuels the practical erosion of the rule of law, which may be deemed still “colonial” anyway, but also threatens conscious political action with its “Black against Black” violence and “poor against poor” division. Numerous dancehall lyrics celebrate the ignorance and insubordination to secular authorities as a “freedom” of fear from sanctions. Lyrical death threats to so-called “informers” – those who report to the police or give evidence in front of judicial institutions – have become commonplace in performances and on recordings. But this “freedom” remains politically vague and fictitious like the characters it assembles and puzzles together from a variety of sources.

The hybrid identity formation mixing bits and pieces of the lonesome gunman of the Wild West, the member of an Outlaw “Posse”, the Samurai or Yakuza member along with the opposite idea(l)s of the social rebel and real world Rastafari critics of Babylon (with their own code of honour and defiance) reappears as a pluralistic “freedom” from, or rather absence of clear critical standards. Yet reflexivity and consciously shaped positions of critique could alone promise better theories of racism and of Black political culture that Gilroy hopes for. But his selectively chosen empirical examples from Black music provide only a partial evidence in this regard. Those picked from the extensive Reggae catalogue, such as Apache Indian and Macka B, indeed seem to validate the potential of hybridity and intermixture (cf. Zips 2003c). Those selected textual examples are raised as evidence for a necessary severance of black Atlantic culture from its “African roots” that Gilroy concludes from his reading of literary work by Toni Morrison and other Black authors. This rupture serves as a precondition for the elaborated countermodel of modernity. One gets the impression that Africa either lacks the condition of modern thought or remains in the premodern domain as some of Gilroy’s (1993: 222-223) final conclusions to “his black Atlantic” seem to suggest:

”Their work accepts that the modern world represents a break with the past, not in the sense that premodern, ‘traditional’ Africanisms don’t survive its institution, but because the significance and meaning of these survivals get irrevocably sundered from their origins. The history

of slavery and the history of its imaginative recovery through expressive, vernacular cultures challenge us to delve into the specific dynamics of this severance. The conclusion of this book is that this ought to be done not in order to recover hermetically sealed and culturally absolute racial traditions that could be content forever to invoke the premodern as the anti-modern. It is proposed here above all as a means to figure the inescapability and legitimate value of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture en route to better theories of racism and of black political culture than those so far offered by cultural absolutists of various phenotypical hues.”

What makes the slip from selective empirical examples to the theoretical level of a theory of emancipatory political action, literary and musical production based on the legitimacy of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture somewhat snappy is the contingent reliance on the selfcleansing and –healing forces of hybrid cultural expressions. Are they not in many or most cases confronted with a strong undercurrent of hegemony, dominance, and profound suppression, particularly in the (neo)colonial case of the African Diaspora? Mutation, hybridity, and intermixture are of course legitimate in the sense that no one has the right to deny the artistic and intellectual freedom to choose and develop a form of expression derived from and integrating divergent cultural sources and historical experiences. It would be very difficult indeed for any “Africentric” (in Gilroy’s terms) to argue against the integral dynamism of most West African and Diasporan “traditions” which were arguably based on a productive principle of reproduction with a variance (or *difference*). Such a structural “repetition with a difference” applied apparently a concept of authenticity linked with innovation. “Authenticity” in this sense therefore actually included dynamism (cf. Gates 1989: 124).

For many artists in the larger field of Caribbean and Black music production, Africa serves as a dynamic, interactive, and proactive inspiration for creative solutions towards existing and persisting ills following the original severance from the “Motherland” through enslavement and total reification. The (concept of the) black Atlantic postulates the productive necessity of this perseverance of these African “roots” perhaps too rigorously and too hastily on the basis of its anti-essentialist campaign. Notwithstanding Gilroy’s sound dismissal of a response to racism that reifies the concept of race and his elucidating critique of an ethnic absolutism that tries to fix ethnicity absolutely, instead of seeing it as an infinite process of identity construction, the

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“black Atlantic”-theory appears to underrate the creative possibilities rooted in the exploration of old and new meanings of the African heritage in the Diaspora. Furthermore the emphasis on the absolute severance from Africa comes problematically close to stereotypical images of Africa as stable, authentic, and traditional, locked into its past, and unable to create viable “modern” solutions, which allows to suspect those promoting a recollection of the African past in the presence of the African Diaspora as backwards oriented or “anti-modern” (Mutabaruka 2006a: 33-36).

One does not have to go as far as to Maroon societies who survived slavery with their strong reliance on their earlier African experiences of political, legal, and social systems²⁰, or to the neo-African creativity of various Rastafari expressions, to question the hypothesis that African ideas and practices have been “irrevocably sundered from their origins” by their fragmentation in the black Atlantic. Civil society discourses to decolonize and re-Africanize the constitutional bodies of Caribbean societies presented an alternative vision that appeared more convincing for a large majority as the case of Jamaica showed – though the reform process was perhaps brought to a halt because of its decolonizing intentions (Zips 2002: 78-101). From the critical perspective of many Caribbean intellectuals, social activists and movements such as Rastafari the reorientation towards Africa does not suit a small dominated/dominant elite. The delaying tactics of the latter – for instance on the level of constitutional reform – counteract the reestablishment of the complex relationship (between Africa and her Diaspora) that has been cut by violent means during colonial times (Shepherd 2002: xvi-xviii). In contrast to other’s decolonizing attempts in questioning creolization discourses in Caribbean culture, Gilroy’s pretension to authors such as Toni Morrison, W. E. B. Du Bois or Richard Wright are explicitly motivated by the wish to document a literary break with the past and thus to legitimize the logical necessity of an absolute severance from the African origins (of the Diasporan experience).

Of course he is right to highlight the global dimensions of Diaspora and to rebuke the purist idea of one-way flow of African culture from east to west, but the bashing of “Africentric” interests do not even find unanimous support in his own empirical examples (cf. Gilroy 1993:

20. See Zips (1998, 2002, 2003a, 2003b) for the social, legal and political history of the Jamaican Maroons.

95-96). Reggae artists like Macka B praised for his bridging the gap between Africa, America, Europe and the Caribbean seamlessly together (in the song *Proud of Mandela* (1990) have quite a few other releases that Gilroy eludes his analysis. In his 1991 release *Gone Home* the same Macka B promotes the return back to yard (Jamaica) and, ultimately, to the Rasta village of Shashamane in Ethiopia. Would he then not qualify as an “Africentric” or could the two seemingly contradictory textual examples not merely pass as alternative, yet equally potent strategies of the critique of racism?

What functions in Gilroy’s reading of Black musical and literary traditions as a means to create a dummy of an essentialist/racialist absolutism becomes even more questionable when turned into an almost ritual reinvention of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture as a value as such. The sacrificial offering of “cultural absolutists” on the altar of (counter)modernity serves the purpose to redefine a possible intellectual position attractive for a Black British academic into an inescapable predicament for Black Diasporan thought and action. All these social processes of hybridization are accordingly presumed as historical necessities. The point here is of course not that mixing is questionable because it leads to “impure” traditions. It is rather if the hybridization and so forth necessarily have to make the same sense for someone born and grown in Rae Town (a ghetto district of East-Kingston) and for academics such as Gilroy (and, readily admitted, also myself), some authors, musicians and other artists interested in bridging diverse cultural contexts and the experiences arising thereof.

For the former, such as for instance the Rastafari poet and activist Mutabaruka, “fusion” comes with an earlier denigration of and forced alienation from the African cultures and thus inevitably leads to “confusion”.²¹ He therefore interprets mutation, hybridity, and intermixture from the perspective of a potential victim of cultural imperialism, a role he refused to play. The “legitimate

21. As for instance in the following excerpt from Mutabaruka’ poem Thievin Legacy from the album Any

Which Way ... Freedom (1989), Shanachie:

„Gimme mi dis, gimme mi dat...
gimme mi reggae, gimme mi blues
gimme mi musik dat yuh confuse.“

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value of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture” (taken from the quote above) is accordingly denied its validity in his Reggae supported poems?²² Some of these poems scrutinize such valuations for their embedded self-interest. Academics, authors, musicians and others regularly empower themselves by crossing over. In the strive for viable positions in their respective field of action a hybrid cultural capital possibly invests its owner with a relative power to influence the (narration of) history and (the shaping of the) future of the particular field and thereby gives access to the profits returned from this intervention. The oppositional critical positioning towards the centuries long deprogramming of (dynamic) African experiences, worldviews, and philosophical concepts must therefore not be confounded with the romanticist and even discriminatory conceptualization of African “traditions” as static, uncreative, ahistorical or even authentically pure and “uncontaminated” (cf. Mutabaruka 2006a and 2006b). In fact, the vast majority of Reggae lyrics support the reconnection with Africa and criticize the indoctrination with Western traditions without an emphasis on purity of whatever sort.

Philosophical currents such as Rastafari that strongly influenced the cultural creativity and political contents of the entire genre of Reggae, from which Gilroy chose selectively some of his examples, would unequivocally and eloquently contest any concept of modernity or countermodernity that denies the dynamic relationship of African Diaspora people to Africa. A league of Reggae artists from the 1960s onwards combined their recovery of the African roots with a critique of Western concepts of modernity as essentially eurocentric. For these actors, arguably, the representations of Africa, the African Diaspora and the Black Atlantic as oppositional concepts to grasp the post-slavery experiences pose a false antinomy. Their aspirations for liberation have of course little in common with the experiences, interests, strategies, and forms of capital available to an academic in Britain (or Austria). I am not aware of any examples from the huge catalogue of Reggae productions over the past four decades embracing a reifying concept of race to create a theory of ethnic absolutism. Yet there are many disputing the postulate of the inescapability and legitimate value of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture. The creative search for shared experiences, political cultural links, and

22. See the film. *Mutabaruka. The Return to the Motherland*, by Werner Zips (2004b).

common future visions between (Mother) Africa and “her” Diaspora does not imply a racist, culturalist, ethnocentric, or even essentialist notion of Africa and its historical dynamics (i.e. “traditions”). Between the zinc fence and cartoon box shacks of some parts of Kingston, the dump area of the violent actions of modernity and the direct heir to the structures of slavery, the reappraisal of the African experiences has a lot to contribute to the Black critique of (Western) modernity. This may be radically different from the (luckily) increasingly colour-blind field of transatlantic academic exchange. Seen from the experience of the disprivileged, which employs much room in the chosen empirical field of Reggae music, Western modernity contains a promise of emancipation that was broken by successive practices of “genocidal violence”. This may be not so far away from an excellent analysis by Enrique Dussel:

“Modernity includes a rational ‘concept’ of emancipation that we affirm and subsume. But, at the same time, it develops an irrational myth, a justification for genocidal violence. The post-modernists criticize modern reason as a reason of terror; we criticize modern reason because of the irrational myth that it conceals (...). The myth of origin that is hidden in the emancipatory ‘concept’ of modernity, and that it constitutes to underlie philosophical reflection and many other theoretical positions in European and North American thought, has to do above all with the connection of Euro-centrism with the concomitant ‘fallacy of developmentalism.’ The fallacy of developmentalism consists in thinking that the path of Europe’s modern development must be followed unilaterally by every other culture” (Dussel 1995: 66f.).

In relation to Dussel’s critique of modernity, the black Atlantic concept narrows its horizon with the insistence on an irrevocable severance and a sundering from the African origins. By considering the great variety of pluralistic societies that belong to this African Diaspora and its internal heterogeneity, it should become evident that a conception of hybridity as the only legitimate value will not be valid for entire societies, much less for the Diaspora as a whole. Even within a particular field of action such as the Jamaican artistic field of Reggae and its subfield of dancehall, various perspectives will interact, oppose each other and claim validity. On the temporal scale these perspectives are also dynamic and evolve with current cultural-political trends in the field of dancehall Reggae and the musical scene at large. A close look at the individual biographies of actors in this field should suffice in this respect. Many young artists are attracted by the role models of Western and Eastern movies forged into the hybrid

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habitus of the Rude B(w)oy or Gangsta, but turn to the Africa-oriented philosophy of Rastafari “Peace and Love” in a later stage of their life and careers.²³ Let us briefly consider the possible correlation between the inscription of the Outlaw imagery into the habitus of adolescent Jamaicans and the preponderance of violence, which makes the Caribbean island to one of the global centres of homicide. In the light of mass culture symbolic violence re-enacted in local practices there seems to be little evidence to support a paradigm that upholds hybridity as a key factor for better theories of racism and of Black political culture. Cross-fertilization is but one possible outcome of hybridization, intermixture and similar processes that Gilroy believes to be capable of providing a countermodel for modernity with liberating potential. The example of the Western and Eastern (movie) role models demonstrates that all these descriptive categories should not be turned into social values as such, before their claimed “legitimacy” masters the test of a rational communicative procedure.²⁴

Conclusion

There are many good reasons to wholeheartedly embrace Gilroy's central aim to forge a Black counterculture of modernity. It is long overdue to dismantle the “particularity that lurks beneath the universalist claims of the Enlightenment project” (Gilroy 1993: 43). Ethnocentrism dwells at the root of this myth. Gilroy is therefore right to scrutinize ethnic absolutisms as rather constituting part of the problem than the solution. Following his concern to delegitimize the “tragic popularity of ideas about the integrity and purity of cultures” (ib.: 7), he epitomizes the “double consciousness” of the insider/outsider position of Black thinkers in Western traditions for a presumably inescapable “complicity and syncretic interdependency of black and white thinkers” (of modernity). However, the empirical evidence provided with this discussion does not support that the presumed “healing force” of legitimate hybridity is all that strong. Claimed

23. Such examples might be drawn from the Wailers themselves to the likes of Buju Banton and others.

24. In the sense of a consensual process involving civil society to reach an agreement, as for instance over the proposed value of hybridization and so forth (cf. Habermas 1992).

authenticity referring to rootedness (in Africa) poses no necessary opposition to routedness. Many examples from Rastafari dancehall Reggae appeal to cultural dynamics and an identity not all that fixed, though strongly Africa-oriented. Hybridity and authenticity may thus vary in their potential for a Black counter-modernity in relation to the particular conditions in space and time.

Some of the most hybrid appropriations of mainstream cultures to local contexts reveal very little emancipatory force, whereas some of the decidedly Africologic expressions appear to come much closer to a powerful deconstruction of the violence of modernity and the reconstruction of Black politics vying for an anti-racist rational design of counter-modernity. The “black Atlantic” concept of a superior countermodel to modernity (Gilroy 1993) rooted in a double consciousness finds insufficient evidence in the empirical example of dancehall Reggae. Part of its cultural production is highly globalized in its ideological frames of reference to images and models of the Cowboy and Outlaw taken mainly from the Western film or the Ninja/Samurai/Yakuza codes of behaviour taken from the Eastern. Whereas another sector of this heterogeneous artistic field is much less tolerant of mainstream dominant culture(s). Under the label of “Fire Reggae”, new generations of Rasta dancehall artists, such as Sizzla, Capleton, Anthony B, Turbulance, and Jah Mason (to name but a few) “burn” (verbally) all “corruptions” by enforced Western idea(l)s of cultural, social, political, economic, and religious development. In sharp contrast to these dominant values they praise an African identity of Black Diasporan people that may be considered “essentialist” in some regards (Zips 2003d). But by their mirroring of racist assumptions of European modernity and enlightenment, these musical attacks on “the Empire” of developmentalism open a reflexive space for the self-realization of the genocidal violence involved in the myth of modernity and invite to a discourse or “reasoning” on the participatory and procedural requirements for the fulfillment of its universalist promises (Zips and Kämpfer 2001: 365-376).

Perhaps surprisingly for a version of the black Atlantic modernity set against an Africologic approach, the former section of dancehall Reggae with its abundant re-enactment of hybrid imageries from the Western and Eastern film production tends to reinvent the fixture of identities to geographical and generic boundaries of a place of birth or residence – for instance a political

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party/Posse constituency or zone in Kingston – and its attendant political belonging. Rasta influenced dancehall Reggae on the other hand counterfactually negates the existing divisions that were created by the accumulated history of suppressive and hegemonic cultural encounters (Zips 2004). Hybridity and even flexibility as obvious factors in the transcultural production and dissemination of musical forms such as Reggae do not seem to lead automatically to the prospected de-essentialization of identities and the dissolution of geographical and generic boundaries. The descriptive, empirical categories of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture may therefore occupy an ethically overburdened status in the concept of the black Atlantic. Yes, they are legitimate and they are perhaps ubiquitous following the post-slavery spider web of crossroads linking the African cultural forms and the political cultures of Diaspora Blacks in varying intensities over time. But this condition does not realize much more than stating the obvious. If the fusions are reinterpreted as ideological frameworks to gain a Black theory or countermodel to modernity their heuristic usefulness appears overstretched.

Openness to and acceptance of intermixture and cross-fertilization are certainly moral rights, but should they also constitute ethical duties? In my view, partly based on the reading of the empirical example of dancehall music, the politics of fusion do not represent absolute values of legitimate agency. After all, their ontological existence tells very little about the power structures behind their back. By far not all fusions are caused by deliberate free choices. And furthermore, many of the pressures in their support are artfully hidden in the liberal myth of the free market. Legitimacy therefore needs parameters that are free from contingent preferences that necessarily differ from (power) field to (power) field. A turn to Habermas in this regard may be helpful, once his project becomes unleashed of its ethnocentric limitations. Gilroy's countermodel of Black modernity may have a lot to contribute towards this aim. His focus on the antiphony of the call and response structure in Black music could serve as a possible link to a notion of communicative rationality that is based on the underlying participatory procedures of consensus building (Zips 2002: 177-234).

To sum up on the substantive contents of dancehall Reggae music in a transatlantic/transcultural perspective: Mutation, hybridity, and intermixture as well as syncretism,

bricolage, fusion, and transculturalism at least in the Jamaican context do not necessarily lead to a more universal concept of modernity, which includes all humanity and deconstructs eurocentric self-perceptions of modernity and enlightenment. All these phenomena possess no conclusive emancipatory quality. In fact, in numerous empirical cases they rather take the shape of orderings defined by unequal relationships of a dominant and coercive nature. This is an important reason why Rastafari voices, made transnationally audible through Reggae music, confronted the modern concepts of syncretism and fusion with their critique built around discursive elements such as mental slavery, brainwashing, and confusion. Rastafari philosophy with its Africa-(re)orientation and its Black nationalist, Panafricanist slogans in turn may offer more (“ital”) food for a universal unfolding of equal rights and justice, as core imperatives of a truly transcultural idea of “enlightenment”. Their counter-colonizing appeal to global audiences may perhaps partly be found in the reflexive possibilities that the apparent essentialist notions used by Rastafari offer for the self-realization of the irrational myth that the “fallacy of developmentalism” (Dussel 1995) employs. Many of these Africa-oriented versions of identity formation however refrain from trying to fix ethnicity absolutely and remain open to infinite processes of identity construction in the philosophy of universal “One Love”.

This view points to the African procreations of “modernity”. Certainly notions like modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are of European making, but the contents these notions describe and define may indeed be much more native to the African experiences of discursive consensus building, participation, basic equality, and individual freedom constrained by the collective interest of the living and the “unborn” (the generations to come), at least over a reasonable temporal and spatial diffusion of the past 500 odd years. Whereas the predominant experiences of the African Diaspora were marked by suppression and exploitation against the proclaimed (mythical) ideals of European modernity. Some of these myths became extrapolated in the transatlantic Outlaw (and similar) re-enactments in the Jamaican dancehall field, where they clash with the profound critique of other artists who draw on the Rastafari philosophy with its strong commitment to rehabilitate Africa along with her dispersed people and their violated rationality. At least from the comparative empirical perspective of dancehall Reggae, the “Rasta Rebels (with a Babylon cause)” seem more inspiring for a critical countermodel

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to eurocentric modernity, than the Cowboy/Outlaw/Rude Boy hybrids that rather resemble other cinematographic patterns (of the “Rebel without a Cause”). Hybridity and its presumed counterpart authenticity – as facts or as mere political claims – are thus both questionable signifiers for “better theories of racism and of black political culture”. Their vying potentials for a counterculture to (Western) modernity ultimately lead to the false antinomy of the “black Atlantic” and “Blakk Africa”. But the pragmatic level of a meaningful search for useful strategies in the ongoing struggle for equal rights and justice, as the “eternal” utopian promise of modernity, requires the entire spectrum of the Black experiences.²⁵ I therefore regard the complementary use of all stakes based on hybridity and authenticity as the more promising exercise en route to better theories of racism and of Black political culture.

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25. Utopia in this context of course implies nothing more than unsuspecting, absolutely possible alternatives to eurocentric, violent, and racist versions of „enlightened“ Western modernity.

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