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Langue, musique et crise de la nation jamaïcaine

Hubert Devonish and Byron Jones

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Jamaica: A State of Language, Music and Crisis of Nation

by

Hubert Devonish (University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica)

Byron Jones (University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago)

Abstract: The paper examines the evolution of language use in popular Jamaican music over six decades, between the two coexisting and simultaneously competing languages of Jamaica. English, a colonial linguistic inheritance, the official language of the post-colonial Jamaican state, competes for a place in music lyrics with the Jamaican Language (Jamaican Creole, Patwa). This is the native language of the mass of the population and the de facto national language. The paper discusses how this battle plays out in terms of which language varieties are predominantly associated with which Jamaican popular music genres. It culminates in examining the role which the Jamaican Language came to play, via its use in music, in the most significant challenge to the existence of the Jamaican state since independence, the military confrontation in West Kingston/Tivoli Gardens events of May 2010, around the arrest and extradition of Christopher “Dudus” Coke.

Keywords: *Jamaica – Jamaican – language – creole – patois – patwa – reggae – dancehall – deejay – mento – calypso – ska – rocksteady – Dudus – Christopher Coke – state-nation.*

Résumé : Cet article s’intéresse à l’évolution de pratiques linguistiques rivales dans les musiques populaires jamaïcaines, des années 1950 à nos jours. Deux langues coexistent et rivalisent en effet en Jamaïque : l’anglais, héritage linguistique de l’époque coloniale, et langue officielle de l’État jamaïcain postcolonial, dispute sa place dans les paroles des chansons avec la langue jamaïcaine (le créole jamaïcain, ou Patois). Ce dernier est la langue maternelle de la vaste majorité de la population, et constitue *de facto* la langue nationale. Cet article analyse la façon dont cet affrontement se déroule, et le type de langue qui en vient à être associé avec les différents genres musicaux jamaïcains. Son analyse culmine avec l’examen du rôle que la langue jamaïcaine a fini par jouer, par l’intermédiaire de la musique, dans le défi le plus important que l’État jamaïcain a dû affronter depuis l’indépendance : la confrontation militaire qui se déroula à Kingston Ouest/Tivoli Gardens en mai 2010 pour l’arrestation et l’extradition de Christopher « Dudus » Coke.

Mots-clefs : *Jamaïque – jamaïcain – langue – créole – patois – patwa – reggae – dancehall – deejay – mento – calypso – ska – rocksteady – Dudus – Christopher Coke – État-nation.*

Since gaining political independence from Britain in 1962, Jamaica has managed to capture an unusually prominent place in the international public imagination. In addition to a fourth leg, athletics, this prominence stands on three legs, its music, its language and political conflict associated with international crime. We seek here to understand the nexus between these three areas of Jamaica's fame/notoriety on the international scene. At the core is Jamaican popular music and its relationship to the languages used in Jamaica.

In order to understand the role language plays in Jamaican popular music, we first have to understand the elements which make up a musical piece. One is the musical element itself, made up of sound organised according to pitch and rhythmic sequences, and reducible to a musical score. Another is the actual production and performance of these sounds whether by musical instruments or other technology, and/or the human voice. For music involving the human voice, performance might come by way of singing, chanting/deejaying or other oral performers, with or without musical accompaniment. For music that does include within it the human voice, which is almost all of Jamaican popular music, it is words that are sung or otherwise performed by the voice.

Words, of course, belong to languages. In the Jamaican language situation, two languages exist side by side. There is English, the official language, the main language of writing, education, public formal communication and the organs of the Jamaican State. Coexisting uneasily with English is the Jamaican Language (Jamaican

Creole, Patois/Patwa, Dialect), the native language of the vast majority of the population, and of everyday private, informal interaction. These two languages are complementary in function for speakers who know English. The ability to speak and understand English to any high degree is linked to one's exposure to the formal education. Thus, those Jamaicans able to function in both languages tend to be from the privileged and highly educated classes. For them, both languages are complementary, in diglossic relationship to each other, with English being used for situations which are most official and/or most public-formal, and Jamaican for ones which are least so, which are private-informal. For monolingual speakers of Jamaican, the relationship between the languages is antagonistic. Such speakers may find themselves excluded from, or discriminated against, in official and public-formal situations, precisely those where English is the expected language of discourse. It is this relationship between the languages, both complementary and competitive, which we seek to capture in this examination of language in Jamaican popular music. We intend, as well, to study the impact that language use in music has had on the development of mass based national consciousness, and the effect this consciousness has had on how ordinary Jamaicans view the legitimacy of the post-colonial Jamaican State. We link this to the May, 2010 events in West Kingston, in which an entire area of the capital city was made into a no-go area by criminal gangs in defiance of a court order for the extradition of a community strongman wanted in the USA to face drug trafficking charges. This

constitutes, arguably, the most significant threat to the Jamaican State since political independence in 1962.

Language Foundations: Jamaican Popular Music in the Pre-Independence 1950s

The canonical situation in which language is used is that between two people facing each other within the same time and place, in spoken conversation. A major weakness of language in this situation is the ability to recall a language text which has already been uttered. Like the sped arrow, once uttered, the spoken word is gone. What has been uttered only has a continued existence if it exists in the memory of someone who heard it. Music enhances one's ability to remember language texts. When these texts are embedded in an aesthetically pleasing musical medium, they are more easily remembered than a simple everyday spoken utterance. As a result, music can and is used as a technology for enhancing the ability of humans to remember language texts embedded within music. If, in turn, one can apply to such music further technologies, notably those of amplification to reach large live audiences, broadcasting to reach out across space, and recording technologies to reach out across time and space, we have language texts whose communicative power is massively increased. These already technologized language texts, such as those which constitute Jamaican popular music, are traded widely as commodities in a mass market for music

and entertainment, making their continued production economically sustainable.

In this context, the only real barrier to access is the ability to understand the language in which the musicalized texts are encoded. All who understand the texts' language have access. Those who do not understand the language are barred. Languages create communities within which these texts can easily circulate, while creating a communication wall around each language community. Out of this comes an increased sense of identification with the language in which the text is encoded. Knowledge of this language now gives one a special identity, which includes some people and excludes others. The boundaries of this community can correspond roughly to a geographical area, or to people originating from that area, and who see themselves as having much in common. The conditions are thus created for the emergence of the particular speech variety employed as a national language, the linguistic symbol of a nation. It is against this background that one can understand the Jamaican music scene during the 1950s, the decade prior to the emergence of Jamaica as an independent State.

Material collected and displayed online at <http://www.mentomusic.com>, functions as a digital archive of sources relevant to early Jamaican popular music. It contains reminiscences of the early Jamaican popular music pioneers, in particular Ken Khouri, Ivan S. Chin and Brian Motta, son of pioneer Stanley Motta. This material provides a rich source of primary data on the early development of Jamaican popular music which will be used in the ensuing discussion.

Up until around 1951, all music recordings sold commercially were imported into Jamaica from North America and the UK (Katz, 2004; “Take me to Jamaica” liner notes, 2006). Within this music were imported language texts, mainly in North American and UK varieties of English. This reflected the integration of Jamaica into British colonial and US networks of language communication, characterised by the consumption of language texts in music from these sources. Since the vast majority of the population did not speak or understand much English, the language text component of this music would have communicated effectively with only the tiny English speaking elite in the country. It is *their* integration into the Anglo-Northern American communication network that this imported music largely represented. This reality conflicted with the operations of the mass market created internationally by the technology associated with record stamping plants involved in the mass production of gramophone music records. Colonial, foreign and elite control over the language of texts circulating through the popular music medium was in conflict with the need for products with a mass appeal. In Jamaica, the merchants involved in the commercial distribution of music records, in close contact with the consumers and their tastes, had a clear sense of what the mass market wanted. They saw a gap and a business opportunity. By 1951, they had moved to become creators of the music records they distributed. They applied, without perhaps being conscious of it, the import substitution model of development being pursued by Jamaica at the time (Katz, 2004; “Take me to Jamaica” liner notes, 2006).

Motta Recording Studio (MRS) was a striking example of backward integration involving merchants engaged in the production of the commodity being sold. MRS was set up by the Motta chain of electrical goods stores to record music which would subsequently be sold in its stores. Up until 1951, the Motta stores had only sold imported gramophone records. That year, MRS began recording musical performances in local studios, recordings which they described as calypso music. They sent these recordings overseas to be used to mass produce gramophone records which were then imported for sale in Jamaica (Hawks, 2006). At that point, the element of import substitution involved was at the intellectual property and creative levels. The content recorded on the gramophones, previously exclusively the product of foreign producers, was being substituted for by locally composed, performed and recorded music. However, the actual gramophone records carrying this locally recorded music were imported commodities.

According to Katz (2004) and Hawks (2006), Ken Khouri and the companies he set up went a step further. As is the case with MRS, Khouri describes the local music he started recording as calypso. He claims, however, that he preceded MRS in the business, starting as far back as the late 1940s. As with MRS, the resulting recordings were sent to the UK to be stamped onto gramophone records which were then shipped back to Jamaica for sale. Also like with MRS, the records were produced for sale in a store—in this case Times Variety Store. His first record label was, not surprisingly, called Times Records.

So far, Khouri's trajectory resembled that of MRS and other recording studios in Jamaica at the time. He, however, went a step further. He imported the pressing equipment needed for manufacturing gramophone records in Jamaica. Khouri (Katz, 2004) seems to suggest 1954 as the date that that occurred, and that he manufactured, under licence, recordings originating in North America and elsewhere, as well as Jamaican material. His manufacturing operation, under the name Federal Records, moved to the Industrial Estate on Marcus Garvey Drive in 1957. Khouri has claimed that his record pressing plant was the first enterprise to be located on the industrial estate. His recording and manufacturing operations were eventually sold to the Bob Marley owned Tuff Gong label in 1981 (Hawks, 2006).

The music scene in Jamaica during the early development of local recorded music was dominated by a musical genre and/or cluster of related genres presented as "calypso." There was, however, a rival, overlapping term, "mento," to describe largely the same music. Occasionally, as on one of the very first local records produced, one by Motta's Recording Studio in 1953, by Dan Williams and His Orchestra along with Lord Fly, the compound term, "mento-calypso" is used on the record label itself, as if it were a single genre. At other times, the term mento-calypso is applied to Jamaican folksongs converted into the generic popular music style, calypso, whereas the newly composed songs are often referred to plainly as calypso. On the same Dan Williams 10 inch mento-calypso recording, there are some obvious folksongs with titles such as "Yuh no yearly weh de ole man she,"

on the side which has the term "mento-calypso" on the label. This contrasts with the label on the second side of the record, consisting of a composition by Gerard Lyon(s), "Whai, Whai, Whai." This is described on the label as simply "calypso," even though it is sung by the same voice, backed by the same band and in what sounds like the same musical style. The general and generic use of the term "calypso" for popular music at the time is confirmed by the fact that the father of music recording in Jamaica, Ken Khouri himself, in an interview, described the music he recorded during that period as such (Katz, 2004).

Newspaper advertising during the period further gives us a sense of the breadth of music covered by the term "calypso." In a *Jamaica Gleaner* (1952) newspaper advertisement, we see MRS, set up the previous year, promoting its entire catalogue under the heading "Jamaica Calypsos." The music covered by the advertising ranged included obviously recently composed songs such as "Glamour Gal" with references that were at the time very current, as well as traditional folk songs such as "Chi Chi Bud Oh." The musical accompaniment ranged from the so-called urban with brass section and guitar, such as Lord Fly along with Dan Williams and His Orchestra, to the rural involving musical accompaniment using traditional instruments such as the banjo and rumba box, as represented by the Ticklers. To further complicate matters, traditional folk songs were not restricted to being performed by instruments of the traditional and rural sort. Lord Flea along with Dan Williams and his Orchestra have

recordings of traditional folk songs such as “Linestead Market” in the “urban” musical style.

The Jamaican language was the dominant one in all styles and forms of 1950s popular music labelled “calypso.” What follows is a contemporary account of the record producer’s understanding of the language situation and how the outsider should relate to the language of and in the music. These are liner notes to a record album produced by MRS, probably the fifth one it produced, MOTL 105. It is entitled “All Jamaican Calypso” performed by Monty Reynolds and His Silver Seas Orchestra, and provides the following statement on language. Worth noting is the fact that the Jamaican language is described as a dialect, appealing to the reader’s sense of that which is rural, quaint, exotic but simultaneously subordinate to a the “real” language, English. With the language described as being in and of itself musical, there is the suggestion that it adds to the musicality of the Jamaican calypso within which it occurs as sung lyrics. The dialect description is justified on the ground that it is “basically English” though unintelligible to non-Jamaicans.

It [Jamaican Calypso] is a music with a distinctive character that marks it as unmistakably Jamaican. Its distinctiveness is a combination of the musical dialect of Jamaican speech, the unique sound of the native instruments and the subtle rhythm that marks it and separates it from the music of other West Indian islands. The musical dialect of back country Jamaicans is basically English but English so interwoven with colloquialisms and the burr of local accents that it is almost unintelligible to anyone not familiar with the island’s speech. It is the distinctive Jamaican accent that gives added interest to the Jamaican calypso. There is also a

unique character to the music which derives from the hand-made instruments played by calypso troubadors (All Jamaican Calypso, 1957, liner notes)

Actual language use is easily illustrated from the song titles in the same MRS advertisement mentioned previously. These titles include, “Yuh no yearry weh de ole man sey,” “Dog war a Mattus Lane,” “Big big samba gal” and “Come we go down a Unity.” In fact, the language of the musical texts in 1950s Jamaican calypso is not unvarying. As might be expected, the traditional, rural, folksong type pieces are consistently sung in Jamaican. However, at the other extreme of the continuum, composed modern songs, often with orchestral accompaniment to match, are sung in a mix of English and Jamaican, with the former often being used as an attention grabber in the first verse of the song and in the chorus.

Towards the end of the decade, the indigenous music recording industry, set up around the making of local calypso music records and their sale, took a hit as musical tastes shifted. The shift was to rhythm’n’blues records imported from the USA. According to a quote from Brian Motta in liner notes (Take Me to Jamaica, 2006), by 1957, the demand for Jamaican calypso style recordings had fallen dramatically. According to these same liner notes, MRS, whose entire existence and recording catalogue was based on this kind of music, went out of the recording business. MRS was an arm of Stanley Motta’s chain of electrical stores, selling its records in branches of that store. According to Brian Motta quoted in liner notes (*Ibid.*), as the popularity of calypso/mento faded in the period around 1957, “sales were not

there anymore in Jamaica. All of the Motta's stores had record departments but I can't remember selling any Mento at all." When the demand pattern shifted, Stanley Motta had simply replaced, within its distribution network, the local product with an imported one. Linguistically, the language of the song texts of this new wave of imported music was entirely English, replacing a genre that was largely in Jamaican, albeit with a significant presence of English.

There was a several year-long transition period from the old music to the new. Once the transition of popular preference from calypso to rhythm'n'blues was complete, however, English had (re)asserted itself as the primary and dominant language of popular music in Jamaica. This is true even though, unlike the competing pioneering MRS and Chin recording operations, Ken Khouri's recording studio along with his record pressing plant, under the name of Federal Records Ltd, continued well beyond the pioneering calypso/mento period. It bridged the gap between that era and the succeeding one which produced local substitutes for the rhythm'n'blues imports (Henry, 2003). The same continuity existed amongst singers and musicians of both eras (Chang & Chen, 1999: 14, 24, 30). The music performing, recording studio and record production infrastructure established for calypso was firmly in place to support local production of rhythm'n'blues music and its adaptations and derivatives.

The emerging new Jamaican popular music, ska, represented a Jamaicanisation of a North American musical genre, rhythm'n'blues, rather than the Americanisation of Jamaican calypso/mento. Ska

represented rhythm'n'blues with a somewhat modified beat (Chang & Chen, 1999: 30-31). There was, therefore, little opportunity for carry-over of Jamaican language into the song texts of the new form. The local substitutes stuck to English, imitating the original music. A fading calypso musical tradition, competing with rhythm'n'blues and local offshoots, with English as the dominant language of lyrics, was the soundtrack to which Jamaica became independent in 1962.

The Nationless State

Between 1958 and 1962, Jamaica was part of the Federation of the West Indies, a grouping of ten territorial possessions of Britain in the Caribbean that were scheduled to achieve independence as a single federal unit. In 1961, a referendum was held in Jamaica on the question of whether the country should seek political independence within a federal state, or whether it should leave the federation and achieve independence on its own. Jamaica voted to leave the federation. The result was that the two major territories within the federation, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, each proceeded to independence as separate States in August, 1962.

Even though Jamaica had ceased to be a British colony, the social and economic structures of the colonial State persisted in post-colonial Jamaica. Those whom the State governed in favour of, foreign investors from North America and Europe, and their local allies, had not changed. The mass of the population, in spite of the political elite's

populist rhetoric, had not achieved a State that had legitimacy in their eyes or one that governed in their interests. Yet, they had an identity as Jamaicans, formed by a collective resistance to colonialism and shared cultural values, transmitted in large measure by a common language—Jamaican. From the very beginning, therefore, there was crisis of the State. The newly independent Jamaican State did not represent the Jamaican nation.

The alienation between nation, on the one hand, and State on the other, is neatly captured in the two most popular songs for 1962. The most popular was one adopted as the official independence anthem, that by Trinidadian Lord Creator, “Independent Jamaica.” It was produced on Chris Blackwell’s Island Records label, and is often cited as that label’s first production, which came later to be associated with Bob Marley and the Wailers (Lindsay, 2012). The second most popular song on the music charts for the year, also on the theme of independence, was Derrick Morgan’s “Forward March.” Ska was a Jamaicanised version of rhythm’n’blues which, in both name and musical beat, differentiated itself both from its US predecessor *and* from the generic Caribbean identity associated with music that could be labelled as calypso. Although n°. 2 in popularity relative to Lord Creator’s calypso, “Forward March” represented the musical wave of the future. Importantly, given calypso’s history of being predominantly sung in the Jamaican language, both independence songs, the calypso and the ska, were in English. In spite of the dominance of Jamaican in the lyrics of popular music of the previous decade, Jamaica became independent in 1962 under the

hegemony of English within the popular music field. The nation’s language, Jamaican, was neither represented in the music most popular at the time, nor in the State which ostensibly was to govern on behalf of the nation. The only language in which the newly emerging Jamaican State carried out all its official functions, including public communication, was English. It functioned as the *de facto* exclusive official language in the manner of States of Anglo-Saxon influence, by general consensus, and in the absence of any legislation granting it official status.

The Making of the Nation Through Language in Music

The October, 1968 mass protests and riots, associated with the banning of university academic and political activist Walter Rodney, the 1970s democratic socialist reforms associated with Prime Minister Michael Manley and the rise of Rastafari in the same period, represent important milestones in the life of independent Jamaica. They were all attempts to address the alienation that existed between the newly independent State and the nation. Arguably, however, the most consistent and politically potent force attacking this alienation was the changing linguistic attitudes and practices. Inexorably and relentlessly, the Jamaican language was expanding into domains previously the preserve of English. A national language attitude survey showed that, by 2005, the Jamaican language was accepted as being a language by 80 % of Jamaicans, and as worthy of official status alongside English and as a parallel and equal lan-

guage of education alongside English, by approximately 70 % (Language Attitude Survey, 2005).

At the level of the music, a similar process was taking place. This can be studied using a database by Jones (forthcoming) on the top 20 songs in Jamaica in the first 50 years following independence (1962-2012). Because Jamaican is a Creole language which derives the bulk of its vocabulary from English, the area in which the two languages are most distinct is in morpho-syntax. Jones, therefore, coded the lyrics of 1,051 songs which were in the top 20 for the 50 year period, in relation to the eleven most frequently occurring morpho-syntactic variables that distinguish between English and Jamaican. This produced a total of 27,274 instances where the performer had a choice between an English and a Jamaican form. The following statistics come from the statistical analysis of the database as presented his work.

The percentage of use of Jamaican forms in preference to English across all genres within the data set rose from approximately 3.7 % in songs belonging to the first decade, through 19.8 %, 47.1 % and 56.9 % for the next three decades, to an all-time high of 63.4 % for the final decade. One reason for the rapid increase in Jamaican language use was the emergence, in the second decade (1972-81), of a musical genre, dub/dancehall, with a deejaying (chanting) delivery style. This musical genre had a uniformly high frequency of use of Jamaican, 70.1 %, as did the style of delivery associated with it, deejaying, at 77.4 %. By contrast, if we look at the singing delivery style dominant in the musical genres of ska, rocksteady and reggae, there is also an increase in Jamaican Language use, from

3.9 % in the first decade, through 30.5 % in the middle decade to 45.8 % in the final one. Reggae, the preeminent musical genre performed through singing, in the first decade showed a 3.8 % use of Jamaican, increased to 26.1 % in the middle decade and to 34 % in the final one. Dub/dancehall and its associated delivery style, deejaying exercised pressure on singing-dominated genres in favour of Jamaican language use.

The lyrics of popular music, at the beginning of the independence period, were largely the preserve of English. This was so given the origins of the music forms in English-speaking/singing USA. Whilst informal speech was predominantly in Jamaican, the public performance of popular music was, given its peculiar recent history, predominantly in English. This was merely a play out of the larger societal diglossia in which public formal domains were the preserve of English, in contrast to private informal ones that were that of Jamaican. With language attitudes generally changing, there was an influx of Jamaican language use into areas where only English was the norm. Some of these included call-in radio programmes discussing news and current affairs, the writing of “serious” newspaper articles, radio news broadcasting in Jamaican, the language of formal instruction in schools, etc. (Westphal, 2010).

One can regard Jamaican music as made up of a series of internal domains—musical genres and associated delivery styles. It is difficult not to view the dub/dancehall genre and the associated deejaying delivery style, as a Jamaican language, speech-based innovation within the music, designed for a special purpose. This was to act as a battering ram

to knock down the barriers preserving English as the dominant language of Jamaican music. These barriers had been erected through the mimicking of USA rhythm'n'blues music, along with its language. Even though a process of Jamaicanisation has been occurring for decades, the area of language in the music has arguably been the place where this process has encountered most resistance.

National identity in the era of print tended to be reinforced by literary works, in the form of the printed book. However, orature—oral performances of poetry and/or song—have served the same function historically. Popular music is the orature which fashions and reinforces national identity in the Jamaican context. Dub/dancehall and deejaying are the means by which the Jamaican nation, albeit without a State, has taken control of this orature domain, which contributes in defining national identity. It has done so by way of imposing its language within that field. The result is that Jamaican music lyrics have shifted towards a greater use of Jamaican, the language of the nation, in preference to English, the language of the State.

Nations develop a sense of their “nationness” through the production of revered spoken or written texts in the national idiom. At the level of linguistic form, these texts serve to represent the beauty of the national language as well as its values and world view. In societies without writing, such as Mycenaean Greece or the Mali Empire, these bodies of language are in the form of oral texts which are performed to music. Such is the case with the originally oral Greek epics, the *Iliad* and

Odyssey, attributed to the mythical oral poet-performer Homer, and the “people of the mouth” Sundiata epic of the West Africa Mading people, historically linked to the Mali Empire whose glory they celebrate in poetry performed to musical backing. With the invention of writing and later the printing press, nations and accompanying States that emerged did so around great works of printed literature; for England, for example, the classics of written and printed the English vernacular, notably those of Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare and the King James’s Version of the Bible. In the emergence of nation-States in Western Europe from the xvth century onward, the printing press played an important role. Through colonial expansion by European powers since the xvth century, the modern, European notion of nation-State has come to predominate globally. This notion, therefore, rests on ideas about identities and communication networks produced by the technology of writing, aided by another technology, that of the printing press (Illich, 1981; Ong, 1982).

Cooper and Devonish’s argument (1995) was that the Jamaican dancehall deejays had rediscovered the power of spoken language performance with musical backing, that of orature, recorded and published/broadcast electronically. The version of national consciousness which was being forged by the official post-colonial State, based on writing, literature and print in English, was under challenge. The challenger, by the 1990s, was an alternative, mass national consciousness, based on oral texts performed in the dancehall genre in deejaying style, in the Jamaican language. Among its major themes was the glorification of violence carried out by non-

State actors, specifically gunmen operating as part of unofficial armies from economically deprived communities across urban Jamaica. It is here worth noting that, even though across all the themes covered by the 2,000 song corpus stretching across 50 years by Jones, Jamaican language use accounts for only 45.9%, the themes associated with violence, those of “Badman” and “War” respectively, show 77.6% and 79.6% for Jamaican language features. Given that the State takes on to itself a monopoly of the use of violence, a popular body of Jamaican language orature with a heavy emphasis on the justification and glorification of violence by non-State actors, is a threat to its security.

“Prophecy”: The Stateless Nation will Seize the Nationless State

The self-narrative of the Jamaican nation, as captured in Jamaican popular music orature, and particularly dancehall, was that of an African and slave descendant, black, economically deprived, “sufferer” population, speaking Jamaican, and constantly in conflict with the organs of the post-colonial State, notably the police. To the extent that “normal” nation-States rely for their legitimacy on their being accepted as a genuine expression of the nation’s identity, the post-colonial Jamaican State was illegitimate. The prediction made by Cooper & Devonish (*Ibid.*) was that the State would eventually be seized by an insurgent military formation, led by “dons” or “community/area leaders” with foot-soldiers recruited from these leaders’ armed followers. This formation would have its origin and base in economically deprived “garrison” commu-

nities, and be primarily funded by the international trade in narcotics, deemed illegal by the official post-colonial State and its international allies. To gain legitimacy, the new formation would, in its public communications, express itself in the language of the people, Jamaican, and be justified and praised by that people’s electronic orature—dancehall performed by deejays. Jamaican dancehall’s electronic orature would, as we argued, play the same role as the Mycenaean Greece and the Mali Empire oratures, both of which functioned to elevate to heroic epic status the violence perpetrated by their States’ founding fathers/heroes.

The prediction was based on the ongoing crisis of the Jamaican State ever since the 1962 independence. The inherited post-colonial European-descended Jamaican State had no legitimacy amongst the mass of the Jamaican population. This State functioned in English, to the benefit of the linguistic and cultural minority who had inherited State power from the British. Meanwhile, a mass-based national identity, technologized and focused around music, particularly dancehall music, and that music’s language, Jamaican, could find no expression in the State.

Christopher “Dudus” Coke: Challenging the State in the Name of the Nation

In 2010, McGreal (2010) managed to capture both events which threatened the survival of the Jamaican State, and their background. Christopher “Dudus” Coke allegedly inherited leader-

ship of the Shower Posse gang in 1992. This was a group widely believed to be linked to cocaine smuggling to the USA. He supposedly inherited this leadership position from his father who died in prison in mysterious circumstances while awaiting extradition to the USA on drug trafficking charges. Christopher Coke is reputed to have consolidated the illegal international business network developed by his father, as well as control over the Tivoli Gardens community where his operations were based. Tivoli is a poor, working class urban community linked to the then governing political party, the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), and widely considered in Jamaica as “the garrison of garrisons,” the community most effectively ruled by armed groups loyal to one of the political parties. Christopher Coke came to be known euphemistically as the “area leader” of the Tivoli Gardens community in West Kingston, allegedly maintaining law and order locally, with a local system of justice which tried and punished those accused of crimes within his zone of control. Business activities proceeds, both legal and illegal, were reportedly used to carry out “good” works such as helping with educational expenses and food for the needy. It has even been suggested that when the police wished to visit the area, they had to seek Coke’s permission. His operations had assumed many of the features of a State within a State. In fact, in and around West Kingston, Coke was simply known as “The President.” He, in addition, had established alliances with similar leaders or “dons” across the poor urban communities in Jamaica, developing the reputation as “the don of dons.” Thus, in 2009, when the USA issued a

request to the Government of Jamaica for Coke to be extradited to the USA for him to face drug trafficking charges, this was bound to create a major crisis for the Jamaican State. This was particularly true since Coke controlled the political constituency represented in parliament by Bruce Golding, who was then Prime Minister. After initially refusing the extradition request, but under increasing pressure from the USA, it was acceded to in May, 2010. In the months between the initial request and the government’s final capitulation, the Tivoli Gardens community was reportedly heavily fortified, with reinforcements brought in from other “garrison” communities around Jamaica that had alliances with or connections to Coke. There were also public demonstrations by women promising to die in defence of “Dudus.”

In late May, 2010, the Government of Jamaica declared a State of Emergency in the Kingston area. The police and military, on 24 May 2010, launched a concerted attack on Tivoli Gardens to arrest Coke. This was in response to what seemed to be pre-emptive strikes against police stations outside the siege area made presumably by Coke supporters. There are many indications that the operations were assisted by USA and other foreign security forces (Drayton, 2010). In the end, there may have been more than 70 deaths; Coke escaped during the assault, though he was later captured and extradited to the USA, where he faced the charges and was convicted (Geddes, 2010).

Prior to this, Coke had exercised considerable power and influence over the music and entertainment industry. Through one of his business enterprises, Presidential Click, he had been responsible

for the promotion of Passa-Passa, one of the biggest street dances in Jamaica during the early 2000s. In addition, his Presidential Clique/Click business organisation promoted two of the biggest stage shows in the country, Champions in Action and West Kingston Jamboree. One of these shows was usually held in August of each year to serve as a fundraiser, whose proceeds went towards covering the “back to school” expenses of Tivoli Gardens and surrounding poor communities children. Respect for Coke’s charitable work was expressed, both within West Kingston and beyond, as “big-ops”, *i.e.* ritualised verbal recognition in the course of a public performance, or in full musical performances. The praise songs, whose content can be very often judged by their titles, included “Top a Top” by Buju Banton, “Dudus a Hero” by Cutty Corn, “Don’s Anthem” by Alley Cat, “Nuh Tall Talking” by Alozade, “Dads of All Time” by Alozade and “President” by Elephant Man. These praise song/“big op” performances by deejays to the “President” served the role of oral tributes to the ruler of an incipient State, rooted amongst the poor, black, Jamaican language-speaking communities.

“Dudus” Coke’s power, both in and out of the music business, can be seen in 2009. There had been an ongoing war—both lyrical and physical—between the camps associated with the two leading dancehall deejays, Gully linked to Movado and Gaza with Vybz Kartel. The conflict which had raged since 2006 had become so serious that, as Dreisinger (2009) put it, “the country’s two most-high-profile men” intervened. The then Prime Minister, Bruce Golding, who was the

parliamentary representative for West Kingston, which included Tivoli Gardens, requested a face-to-face meeting involving both artistes. The meeting reportedly involved four cabinet ministers and a bishop. Dreisinger (2009), however, suggests that this intervention was not effective. According to him, the conflict was only resolved when a figure of even greater influence became involved. At the West Kingston Jamboree 2009 stage show, Movado and Vybz Kartel performed together. Movado States (0:06) “*A di prezident aada wi a work wid*”—[It is the president’s order we are working with] (Movado, 2009). The top leader of the existing State, with a political base in Tivoli Gardens, and the embryonic one, with a base in the identical community, both sought to exercise influence. It was the writ of the embryonic State, however, which won out.

The predictable challenge to the Jamaican State, via a dancehall-connected embryonic State, had happened. The international community, led by the USA, supported the Jamaican State in defeating this challenge. The original prediction was based on an assumption that, like in the historical situations where orality-based States had emerged, there was no significant external support in favour of the challenged status quo.

The Fire Next Time?

There is an interesting contradiction in this whole situation. The very international context which blocked the embryonic “dancehall State” from emerging in Jamaica, at least for now, has created

the context for the internationalisation of the cultural symbols of that State-in-the-making. Riding on the its music *riddim*, the cultural products of a subordinated Jamaican language-centred nation, developed to represent and reproduce it symbolically, has an international market. This market is made possible through internationalisation and globalisation, the very forces which acted to block the Christopher “Dudus” Coke-led challenge to the Jamaican State in 2010. The nation, whose aspiration to have its identity expressed through the power of a State was suppressed that year by the international community along with its local allies, is rising in international prestige. This prestige is expressed through its soft power, international admiration for its language, music and dance. Inevitably, if, within Jamaica, the existing State continues to fail to represent the nation, it will again be challenged. This time, it will be confronted by a nation reinforced in its sense of self by the global spread of its cultural power. The very same forces of internationalisation and globalisation which acted as a hindrance in 2010, are increasing the chances of the Stateless nation, rooted in the Jamaican language and its orature,

successfully seizing the English-medium nationless post-colonial Jamaican State.

According to a reporter for *The New Yorker* present at a May, 2011 memorial for one of the Tivoli community members killed the previous year, Buju Banton’s “Top a Top” tribute to the dons or community leaders, including Dudus and his father Jim Brown, was played, evoking the following response: “*Blau! Blau! Brrrrr-au!*” three young boys shouted, spraying the street with imaginary machine guns.” (Schwartz, 2011).

It goes without saying that one way of avoiding the fire next time, is for the Jamaican State to heed the signs of times, and make peace with the nation. Easily the most important measure is accepting as an official language and language of the State, the nation’s language—Jamaican. Failure to do this leaves the nation to aspire to a State which would be a truer manifestation of itself. This aspiration is expressed by way of an orature in the Jamaican language, which, as is illustrated with Buju Banton’s “Top a Top” dancehall performance, makes into heroes those who challenge the monopoly on violence claimed by the existing State.

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