

BLACK  
POPULAR  
CULTURES  
INTO THE  
TWENTY-  
FIRST CENTURY



# LANGUAGE, RHYTHM, AND SOUND



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set to English lyrics, and then reimported into Malawi. Thus, we see cultural products appropriated from the periphery by colonial powers to the center (metropolitan sites), reproduced and reconstructed in the colonialist image, and returned to the source for consumption – a process not unlike that described in Berrian’s discussion of *zouk* music and its producers and not unlike the triangular transatlantic trade in African slaves, textiles, and rum during the period of slavery. The circle, indeed, remains unbroken.

And we have come full circle in this volume. Essays in part 1 establish an African-based aesthetic of nuanced verbal and visual expression as the foundation of contemporary global black popular culture. Studies in part 2 further articulate this aesthetic as it occurs in representations of black popular culture among U.S. blacks. Finally, part 3 explores the diasporan-Caribbean experience and concludes with an essay on the politics of sound in southern Africa.

In part 4 (chapter 16), Tricia Rose addresses the current realities of existence for Africans and African diasporan peoples at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The new century will be inescapably dominated by technological advances and an ever tightening noose of international, electronically interconnected, capital-driven economies – economies in which, one suspects, the capital of diasporan blacks will continue to be physical labor, intellectual labor to a lesser degree, and the ongoing production of language, rhythm, and sound.

## 12

### The Sound of Culture: Dread Discourse and Jamaican Sound Systems

**LOUIS CHUDE-SOKEI**

*I exalt thee oh Jah  
and live by my faith,  
work power in sound  
for Jah name is great.*

– Danny Red<sup>1</sup>

*Outta dis rock,  
shall come  
a greenna riddim,  
even more dread,  
dan what  
the breeze of glory bred.*

– Linton Kwesi Johnson<sup>2</sup>

Now that the dust has settled around that grand event, that spectacular black cultural explosion called Rasta, and an entirely new generation of diaspora articulation has come swaggering out of its mythic shadows (ashes?), I think we can finally ask the question: what was Rasta anyway? For to ask this question, freed of the *zeitgeist* of the cultural nationalisms of the seventies and freed of the rhetoric of repatriation and ethnic authenticity – in short, freed of negritude and its utopian myths – is to face the raw present of black diaspora, a present that is clearly in the process of inventing new myths, definitions, and stratagems for African cultural continuity. Indeed, new fundamental definitions of Africanness (Wilmot Blyden’s “African Personality” or the negritudinist “Présence Africaine”) can be heard all around us; they are there, present on what I

call the roughneck street level of black diaspora where myths are spontaneously constructed and deconstructed as black peoples navigate the complex postcolonial maze of late Babylon culture.

For despite the provocative stance of Rasta and the issues and contexts that it thrust into the mainstream of black popular discourse in Jamaica, Europe, the Americas, and then back to Africa, its most significant criticism has come from within its own cultural, symbolic matrix. It is a criticism that destabilizes the racial authority of dread mythopoeia, yet in my view allows us to use the dynamics of subcultural history making to comprehend how continuity (or discontinuity) is narrated outside the towers of literacy. Certainly criticisms of the racial essentialism and patriarchal assumptions of Rasta have come from all fronts and date back to its initial moment, paralleling its influence. But today, as we see the rise and dominance of a new vision of sound, politics, and culture, manifested in a distinctly raggamuffin vision, we are forced to not only reinvestigate Rastafari wisdom and its use of sound as history, but also to interrogate how post-roots reggae – dance hall – in more sophisticated ways poses the reality of contemporary black movements and migrations against the nostalgia for authenticity and precolonial wholeness that dominated dread knowledge and the sound of roots.

In his *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston Baker writes, “A nation’s emergence is always predicated on the construction of a field of meaningful sounds.”<sup>3</sup> I would qualify this by saying that the emergence of distinct sounds *within* this same field – or perhaps on the margins of the emergent nation, like black seeds within it – fractures the nation and relentlessly questions its fundamental assumptions. In the context of an African diaspora, secondary soundings loosen (and adjust) some of the nation’s essential conceptual moorings. Baker continues: “Conglomerates of human beings seeking national identity engage myriad sounds in order to achieve a vocabulary of *national* possibilities.”<sup>4</sup> It is this notion of a vocabulary of national possibilities that most appropriately describes the process of subcultural and preliterate history making that can be witnessed in Jamaican sound culture and its global progeny. Culture as an inexorably emergent (always “just-come”) space of resistance and survival in the black diaspora is, following Baker, a sounding, an establishment of boundaries in a separate ontological space.

The mechanics of sound, after all, operate independently of the strictures and structures of literacy. In colonial and postcolonial Jamaica, it was always suspected by the illiterate ghetto “sufferahs” that the written

word not only belonged to an elite class of “downpressors” but also produced an orientation to the world that was much different from the wisdom of precolonial magic, which resided as much in drum-speak as it did in the rituals of possession. For the Rastafari, “word sound” had immense power, and that power was in the sound itself, not just in the syntactic or logocentric properties of meaning. Sound itself was pregnant with semantic and – as the tiny nation moved toward independence – national possibilities. Sound, especially in the Rastafarian appropriation of atavistic African “Burru” percussion, produced a vocabulary of meanings, a discourse of belonging. Tropes, images, and symbols of “African-ness” seemed to consistently emanate from the “funde” and “repeatah” drums; and a myth of a continent, a dream of absolute plenitude – Rastafari “fullness” – was conjured up to possess the dispossessed.

Benedict Anderson’s very influential *Imagined Communities* connects the rise and spread of nationalism to the technology of literacy – writing, reading, printing, and the dissemination of such texts.<sup>5</sup> The current don of black diaspora cultural studies, Paul Gilroy, has rightly criticized that view.<sup>6</sup> In his reading, modern black nationalisms have also organized themselves and spread their sense of community by way of music and sound. Gilroy, despite acknowledging the nationalist parochialism of many of those who produce and consume these sounds, knows more than most that the very mechanisms of sound are diasporan. This means that sound itself cannot be limited to one space, one community, and one ideology of liberation, or even one geographically defined nation. The central irony here is that sound is also where authenticity and identity are ritually invented. It is the mechanism by which one group in the black diaspora distinguishes itself from others – whites and middle-class blacks, for example – by its music and the representations of self and community that attend it. This process of inventing authenticity applies widely, from the intimate rituals of Rastafarian “groundings” to contemporary dance hall and hip-hop subcultures, where belonging requires that each subject be fluent in the “vocabulary of national possibilities” as expressed in style, language, gestures, demeanor, and (of course) knowledge of and specific responses to communal sound. Also, the boundaries between “hard-core” insiders and “wanna-be” outsiders are always fiercely patrolled, despite the fact that sound travels promiscuously. Today’s market-media complex complicates and ultimately reifies this authenticity-hybridity paradox by disseminating elements of a particular national vocabulary, forcing it to

hybridize on the level of consumption. This almost never occurs with the sanction of the originators.

### Bass History

*Bass history is a moving  
is a haunting black story.*

—Linton Kwesi Johnson

In preindependence Jamaica, it was the entire country that was to be impregnated with a new vocabulary of national possibilities, one less saturated with Anglo-colonial conceits and more open to the liberating possibilities of black majority rule. Before 1962, the tensions between race and nation, the aching space between ethnicity and political power became especially charged by a particular use of sound. After all, it was on the eve of Jamaican independence that sound systems (known as “sounds” or “sets”) began to establish themselves as the preeminent media structure for the island’s black urban masses. In the years leading up to 1962 individuals like Clement Coxsone Dodd, Duke Reid, and the mighty Prince Buster strung up homemade, self-modified speakers and amplifiers in community halls, private homes, street corners, and empty lots in and around western Kingston; it was in these volume-defined spaces that a discourse of specifically black identity was celebrated and articulated. Perhaps I should say that the discourse of black identity was both remembered and invented in this context.

Until the sounds gained legitimacy as a space for cultural discourse, *Africa* as a primary source of positive personal and cultural affiliation was not a part of the official narratives of the nation. Indeed, *black* was never acknowledged as a suitable description for the island nation which, as Rex Nettleford so well argues in his *Mirror Mirror*, dodged and disempowered its black majority by facile talk of non- or multiracialism.<sup>7</sup> Africa had not been forgotten, but it had been submerged by the official narratives that stressed mimicry and a slavish dependence on the British “mother country” and the increasingly significant American Atlantic empire. Despite its continuing relevance to ex-slaves and the continuum of oral expressive culture, *Africa* had no medium to disseminate it that could challenge the media structures that were controlled by the middle brown and white upper classes. As dread scholar Amon Saaba Saakana writes:

Middle and upper Jamaica controlled the cultural fate of Jamaica, if only ephemerally. They defended their inferiority complexes by inun-

dating radio with their American heroes, and looked contemptuously on the “noise” that was being made by local Jamaicans. Since local (and poor ones at that) Jamaicans possessed no example of “culture” or “history” it would be an impossibility to accept that they had anything meaningful to say to them.

Middle Jamaica was ashamed of the new strivings for Jamaican cultural identity and viewed the musical expression with ridicule.<sup>8</sup>

The musical expression that Saakana is talking about here is *ska*, the indigenous sounding of Jamaica, which erupted out of the initial attempt to mimic African-American rhythm and blues, the first music to be popular on island sound systems. Ska was the first “authentic” Jamaican cultural product to be birthed in the sound systems, and it occurred there on the eve of national independence. This is clearly an example of what Homi Bhabha means when he describes colonial mimicry as a radical departure from Western mimesis: for him, it is a subaltern political gesture that terrorizes authority by using the same to produce difference, using the *authentic* (labeled as such simply because it is dominant) to produce the hybrid: “The display of hybridity – its peculiar ‘replication’ – terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery.”<sup>9</sup>

Edward Kamau Brathwaite, theorizing about Afro-Caribbean sound, calls ska “the native sound at the yardway of the cultural revolution” in Jamaican aesthetics.<sup>10</sup> Although its historical context has never been foregrounded, this native sound was densely coded with meanings particular to the movement from mimicry to hybridity, from slavish imitation to the moment of cultural maturity and self-authorizing voice that occurs in all struggles for independence from the British empire. All of this, by the way, was accomplished by way of an initial attempt to mimic African-American music. This particular brand of mimicry has often been valorized because race is the governing principle of this cross-cultural appropriation. As Saakana goes on to emphasize, “It was rare that the music was played over local radio, because of the predominance of foreign [American] music. The main outlet was, of course, the sound systems.”<sup>11</sup> Sounds provided the space: in short, village drummers became “selectors” (or DJs in the American context) who provided the beats in which a new culture could remember (and invent) ancient roots.

However, in Saakana’s reading, the “American heroes” are dismissed as icons of hegemonic indoctrination. As mentioned above, these foundational influences are specifically African-American: they are products of the culturally distinct discourse of resistance, ethnicity, and group

identity that can be located in the American civil rights movement. In its own historical context, rhythm and blues was produced out of a politicized marriage of the sacred (gospel music) and the secular (blues). For Saakana to so casually dismiss the racial dynamics of this Jamaican appropriation of black American sound is to neglect the intricate postcolonial politics of black sound in the United States. It is also to neglect the centrality of race in the cross-cultural dynamics of the modern black diaspora. Duke Reid, Prince Buster, and their generation carefully selected “race records” in their sojourns to America as migrant workers. Even Saakana suggests that “Perhaps the similar rural/urban conditions in Jamaica and America (leaving the plantations/farms to go and live in slums and continued poverty in the city) caused Jamaicans to identify with Afro-American music.”<sup>12</sup> This was certainly the case. But also the racial politics of America (especially during the 1950s and 1960s) were seen as similar, if not identical, to the racial problems of preindependence Jamaica. Rhythm and blues not only reflected those North American issues, but also put forth an image of self-confident blackness, of progressive and capitalist black cultural values that were even more appealing to a Third World country where black inevitably meant poor.

Remember, this all occurred in the country that spawned the militant brand of pan-Africanism that was made global by one of Rastafari’s central prophets: the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey. However, it all took place in the same cultural context where Garvey’s name was anathema to the island’s cultural elite who, a generation earlier, had forced him to carry his discourse of “Africa” to the United States, which proved more receptive to his message than the still colonized island. Although silenced by the official media and suppressed in the educational system, the Garveyite message survived. Garvey’s discourse of remembering, of recovering a source of national identity in race – race as the space of the nation, ethnicity as geography – was dangerous to a society still smarting under the wounds of slavery and the painful attempts to eradicate any positive associations with the African continent. Yet it survived and flourished. Indeed, it was through the sound systems that recordings celebrating a positive sense of black ethnicity and explicit Garveyite messages (as in the work of Count Ossie, Don Drummond, and so many others) were first recorded and played.

In the early 1960s, these thematic preoccupations (in addition to explicit depictions of ghetto life) appeared on the most popular recordings, yet were never played on the radio. Both Brathwaite and Saakana acknowledge that ska challenged and questioned the status quo in radical

ways. I would add that without the sound systems as alternate or underground media structures, this radical questioning could never have happened. With the influence of Garvey and the cross-currents of African-American radicalism, sound not only challenged the oppressive limits of a colonial and neocolonial sociopolitical structure, but also reached out to invent an alternate space of national affiliation, one rooted in race but organized and ritualized by sound.

“Race,” especially in the black modernist context, signifies the space of the nation. Sound systems, ska, and roots reggae exist in that “iffy” historical and aesthetic space known to scholars as modernism. Saakana makes this connection clear by referring to Bob Marley, Bunny Wailer, and Peter Tosh as modernists. Houston Baker’s reading of Harlem’s soundings makes the point that black modernism “seeks community and self-consciously pursues democratic advantage through the medium of race.”<sup>13</sup> And of course no accurate or respectable discussion of African-American modernism (or postmodernism, as with hip-hop and dance hall) can exist without a hefty amount of space and time devoted to the central influence in New York of Marcus Garvey and West Indian immigration over the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, the African-American discourse of “Africa” and its distinct modernist tendencies depend much more on the cross-cultural process that is diaspora than is usually recognized. And before ska, there was Jamaican jazz in which New Orleans-style horn sections were translated into a local idiom; in fact, the first major Rastafarian recording was not reggae or ska, but jazz and poetry.<sup>14</sup>

However, in the modern African diaspora, race is not as susceptible to fragmentation and scattering as are music and the various technologies of sound that concern those who study and theorize about the diaspora and cultural dissemination. As a product of the nineteenth-century biological evolutionism, scientific categorization, and the social theories of logical positivism, the concept of race stresses a coherence among peoples of vastly different cultures and experiences. Indeed, it was constructed largely as a method for organizing and reducing the apparent chaos of a non-Western world to a knowable and governable singularity. But one of the side effects of this understanding of race was that among the black populations dispersed by the slave trade and controlled by the mechanisms of colonialism, the concept generated a resistance to European domination on those very terms. Race, as a radicalized mechanism of coherence empowered by the myth of Africa as a homogeneous source of diasporan traditions, gave birth to the discourse of identity that prefigures

and finds its fullest expression in Garveyism and in the pan-Africanism/Ethiopianism of W. E. B. Du Bois. This is the theoretical and political foundation of Rastafarianism. It was and is a response to what Nettleford describes as “the captivity of a protracted diaspora.”<sup>15</sup>

For the Rastafari, as with Du Bois, Garvey, and many of their generation, diaspora was the problem and race the solution. Race allowed the diaspora to be transcended for a discourse of ethnic and cultural similarity; and tradition (“roots and culture” in reggae music) was often articulated as an unchanging continuum. In Rastafarian aesthetics, every invention of “Africa” was a return to authenticity; every attempt, in Bongo Jerry’s words, at “brain-whitening” and every effort to “SILENCE BABEL TONGUES; recall and recollect BLACK SPEECH,”<sup>16</sup> was in effect a remembering and a return to a precolonial African cultural state. It must be stressed, though, that the dynamics of diaspora remembering, especially among the Rastafari, is more accurately an inventing of authenticity via an inventing of “Africa.” The image of Africa as an ethnic homeland, as a monocultural landscape littered with pyramids, noble and just rulers, and edenic fruitfulness is an invention born out of a sense of exile that is as biblical as it is romantic and ahistorical, despite its obsessive historicity.

Although born out of the inexorable cultural fragmentation and dissemination that is diaspora — that process of radical difference that operates within the structure of “race” — Rastafarianism was less concerned with what blacks in the diaspora had become and more obsessed with what they essentially were. Like various black nationalisms, the concern was with what existed beneath cultural variation. As a vision of post-colonial black identities, a theory of culture, it fell victim to what James Baldwin noted as the pitfalls of *négritude*; it did not realize, to paraphrase his words, that in relation to Africans, blacks in the West had been made and mangled by another machinery altogether.<sup>17</sup> The attempt at psychic and political reconnection would inevitably fail precisely because culture was subordinated to race and history was subsumed by a mythic vision that, I would argue, is the product of an oral ontology. But the primary resistance to this radical view of national identity came from Jamaica’s elite, who opposed it on two main counts. First, the acceptance of the Garveyite and Rastafarian view (prefigured in other island cults like the short-lived movement of Alexander Bedward) would force the neocolonial elite to accept black majority rule. Second, in an ironic turn, to celebrate race as nation, and Africa as homeland, would be downright

unpatriotic to emerging nationalist tendencies. The doctrine of social rejection by the Rastas, writes Nettleford, was deemed

a threat to the security of the fledgling nation which had committed itself since 1944 to building up a harmonious society from its transplanted diversity. To many, the Rastafarians were retrogressive and their cause was seen as political separatism, a betrayal of the movement towards self-government and a disrespect for the carefully nurtured Jamaican nationalism.<sup>18</sup>

So a Jamaican nationalism was in some quarters antithetical to a *black* nationalism and clearly at odds with a discourse that located Africa not only in historical memory, but also dead ahead in terms of a legitimate political destiny. Yet the Rastas persisted, and by the late 1960s their views had become almost status quo, despite the fact that the color-class structure only slightly altered and the locksmen were socially still held at arm’s length.

It was in the late 1930s that the Rastafarians began to gain a significant presence in Kingston, and by this time the pre-Rasta Burru peoples (a culture of people in rural Jamaica who were known for their drumming rituals a century ago) had fully settled in the slums. Unlike the scenario in America, drumming in the Jamaican plantation system was officially tolerated, and the Burru-men, in addition to their role as timekeepers for slave labor, were keepers of African sound. In their search for “anciency” and cultural roots, the Rastafari knelt at the feet of the Burrus, appropriated their looks, style, and musics and, in return, imparted to them a political theology of race. But what was most important to this union of the Burrus and the early Rastafari were the rituals of sound that both communities instituted in the colonial ghettos of Kingston. Saakana has traced the Burru drumming ritual back to a Ghanaian ceremony that took place around Christmastime. In the 1930s, the ritual of drumming was a customary way of welcoming discharged prisoners back into the folds of the ghetto community.

When the Rastafarians took over the ritual, they modified it, adding their own thematic obsessions to the African songs of insult and praise. From this came the ritual of the *nyabinghi*, which was said to mean “death to black and white oppressors” and became a term also used to describe the most orthodox members of the Rastafarian creed. In the sacred space of ritual, members of the faith meditated, reasoned with each other, debated Old Testament doctrine, and soundly criticized the

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sound

exploitative and racist system they were living in. And they beat the drums, chanting down Babylon and conjuring up an alternate space of black community called “Africa.” They did this in the yards of West Kingston, the same spaces that decades later would provide the genesis of the Jamaican sound systems.

Many believe that the indigenizing tendencies in Jamaican music – the eruption of ska from African-American jazz and rhythm and blues – came out of *nyabinghi* percussion. The beat that distinguishes ska has been attributed, by Saakana, Dick Hebdige, and others, to the drums of the Rastafari. It is true that in the early days of Jamaican sound culture, musicians like Don Drummond, Rico Rodríguez, and Roland Alphonso lived in the same ghettos as the early Rastas, and many of them had accepted the philosophy of the black redeemer. These jazz and blues-trained musicians played with and learned from original Burru disciples like the great Count Ossie. And in this early time the influence of Rastafarian spirituality and morality always existed as a counter to the more crude excesses of ska music which, like today’s dance hall, often tended to wallow in carnality; this can be seen in the lyrical content of ska and early reggae music. This context for dread sound, this history of Rastafarian cultural soundings, will (I hope) make one of my main points clearer. By the time of Duke Reid, Coxsone Dodd, and others, the Rastafarian movement had cleared a cultural space for sound systems by way of *nyabinghi* and by linking African oral traditions with the new technologies of dissemination. Ruth Finnegan, Marshall McLuhan, and others have argued in very different ways that contemporary popular culture – twentieth-century media structures – depend on oral ontologies and mechanisms of perception, communication, and knowing that are distinct from the logics of literacy. In other words, with the continuum from the Burrus to the beat-boxes, the griots to the DJs (or MCs), we find not simply the resilience of the African oral tradition; certainly this is the case, yet all too often a monolithic “African oral tradition” is evoked as a crude and romantic answer to diasporan complexities. Also at work here is a conscious attempt on the part of sound culture to force new technologies to address forms of knowledge that are precolonial in origin but continually produced and modified by a racist system in which literacy is a privilege and the written word the signifier of official (white or elite) culture.

It is worth repeating that the original Rastafarian music was not ska or reggae and that the earliest Jamaican musics were not Rastafarian. Even in Bob Marley’s time his use of multitrack technology, popular musical

forms, and Western recording techniques was seen among the orthodox as heretical because it fomented an intimacy with Babylon (especially its capitalist tendencies) that the faith was sworn to reject. However, the generation of “roots and culture,” which established itself out of the rock-steady rude-boy era of the mid-1960s and reached its deepest sonic mysticism in “dub” (experimental, largely instrumental, reggae remixes), embraced the new technology. Producers and mixers like King Tubby’s, Lee Scratch Perry, Scientist and Prince (now King) Jammy transformed Babylon’s machinery and employed self-produced vinyl discs as the new site of orality. These producers and mixers all owned or operated sound systems. A more poetic way of seeing this process of roots cultural-sounding is this: in dread eyes, the nation was continuously growing, and the nation-peoples were cursed by diaspora, dispersing what *négritude* poet Aimé Césaire once described as an infinite rain of stars. Drum-speak and word-sound had to adapt to suit this widening community. Sound had to be made to reach the far-flung corners of what Paul Gilroy calls “the Black Atlantic.”

Many sound men of the roots reggae generation were committed to the new technology of (to make better use of Homi Bhabha’s fantastic Derridean pun) “dissemiNation.” Deep inside roots reggae wisdom was the assumption that the sounds that were produced – heavy bass, steady drums, and a relentless rearranging of mix elements within the space of a version – consistently represented a dread world view and an “African” sensibility. Very rarely, though, did this sound appropriate or even attempt to connect with contemporary Africa’s postcolonial soundings like Nigerian high life, Zairean *soukous*, or continental music. Yet there was the very sincere faith that “Africa” spoke in sound, not language. Where language expressed a microcultural specificity, sound transcended and ignored the fragmented context of a cultural diaspora. There was a sincere devotion to the notion that “Africa” was conjured up and disseminated in dread sound. This “Africa,” as I have said, was a space of cultural being that was defined essentially; it was rooted in the biological definition of race and authorized by the historical experiences of slavery and the color-class context of colonial and postcolonial Jamaica.

Rex Nettleford noted in the 1970s that over time, the notion of a literal Africa in opposition to a Babylonian exile as the primary source of the Rastafarian ideological struggle was resolved. Literalness, as stressed by early twentieth-century militant black nationalism, emphasized the necessity of large-scale black repatriation to the continent’s western coast. This was a central theme in roots reggae. But for very obvious reasons,

repatriation was impractical as a reality and clearly impossible as a political strategy. Instead, the “Rasta wa’an go home” narratives functioned as an allegorical gesture, one describing a deep-seated rejection of western culture and an overwhelming desire for a pre- (or post-) industrial “elsewhere.” Nettleford writes:

Many Rastafarian brethren have resolved the ideological conflict and have emerged with a concept of the “Africanization” of Jamaica. Just as the Kingdom of Heaven is within you (instead of somewhere in the clouds), Africa is in Jamaica, goes the reasoning. Some argue that Jamaica is Africa. The fact that the majority of the population is African is used as tangible support. But some claim that they have reached their decision by divine revelation.<sup>19</sup>

I include this point here because clearly this shift in doctrine has much to do with the new technologies of sound as employed by the ghetto producers and Rastafarian-oriented culture workers who came to power in the sound systems in the late sixties and throughout the seventies. If dread sound was “roots and culture,” and if “Africa” was in, and produced by, dread sound, then Black Uhuru was correct when they sang that “the whole world is Africa.” This is especially so since sound is so mobile, volume so powerful, and the “culture industry” so dynamic in its mechanisms and so far-reaching in its desire to sell and to make connections. The “divine revelation” was experienced in the rituals of sound system culture where the problematics of identity in a racist Babylon could be abandoned for a moment, buried in the womb of “bass and drums”; individual subjectivity could be lost in the pounding volume of a sound system that was devoted to freeing the body from the oppressive imbalance of black labor and white capital. There, in sound, was a space of community that was not geographical but was coded with the tropes and topoi of a specific invention called “Africa.” As South African poet Willie Kgositsile once said, “Home is where the music is.” For the roots reggae generation, sound enabled racial authenticity to travel and provided a space for historical memory to intervene and interrupt the contemporary discourses of race and nation, class and politics, there on the island and out there in the diaspora.

#### *“Wickedness Increase”: The Psycho-Geography of Dance Hall*

*Jamaica: fragment of bomb-blast, catastrophe of geological history (volcano, middle passage, slavery, plantation, colony, neo-colony) has somehow*

*miraculously – some say triumphantly – survived. How we did it is still a mystery and perhaps it should remain so. But at least we can say this: that the secret and expression of that survival lies glittering and vibrating in our music. – Edward Kamau Brathwaite<sup>20</sup>*

*Ring the alarm,  
another Sound is dying.  
– Tenor Saw<sup>21</sup>*

In *Mirror Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica*, Rex Nettleford comments that “Jamaicans have . . . been a migrating people ever since the late nineteenth century when the first Panama Canal project was started.”<sup>22</sup> He then connects the Rastafarian and Garveyite dream of repatriation to the desire in Jamaican society as a whole to immigrate to a better “else-where,” especially to London, New York, Miami, and Toronto. The Rastafarian “outernationalism” in this text is compared to the labor-oriented movements to various colonial metropolises. Without dwelling on the reductive features of this comparison, suffice it to say that Rastafari simply changed the pole of authenticity in a colonized psyche; like the literary movement of French *négritude*, they reversed the paradigm established by colonialism in which Anglo-American culture was the pinnacle and replaced it with an explicitly romantic construction. However, in a neocolonial economy like that of Jamaica, the pull came always from the major Western economies that needed labor and offered work. There was no economically viable reason to go to Africa – although many West Indians have returned – and no real sense that there would be room made for them if they went there. In fact, the most important thing that returned to Africa was the discourse of “roots and culture” as articulated in Jamaican sound.

But as West Indian communities began to establish themselves in Western metropolises and the market for reggae music became less and less centralized on Jamaica (with the rise of sound systems in Britain and New York), Rastafari wisdom had to contend with a specifically Jamaican diaspora. This was a diaspora fueled by the postwar labor shortage in England and the greater financial opportunities in New York and Canada. As Nettleford says, this Jamaican diaspora goes back to the nineteenth century, but by the late 1970s, these communities became more and more complex and variegated. And in the face of a discourse of Jamaican musical and cultural authenticity, where the originators tried to control and monopolize the trope of the “real,” the communities of the Jamaican diaspora began to be more self-assertive. One of the main ways they did this

was by establishing sound systems and their attendant cultural structures and economies. In catering to the communities produced out of this new experience of exile, the music became less universal in its thematic concerns and more distinctly – sometimes obsessively – Jamaican, or “yard.” In this context, “home” is whittled down in specificity from “Africa,” and even “Jamaica,” which – it could be argued – is a figment of the nationalist, bourgeois imagination. Instead, it becomes specific to the yards of Kingston.

Although it has never been acknowledged – and those devoted to the black nationalist monolith of “race” are still loath to admit it – one of the reasons that roots reggae lost its force in the 1980s was partly because of the dynamics of this specifically Jamaican diaspora. As is common, exile foments a fondness for “home” that was never there when one was at home. “Africa,” for example, exists largely as a trope and a construction in the diaspora; those on the continent conceive of themselves according to more specific tribal-linguistic structures. By the eighties, after the deaths of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Mikey Smith, and so many others, and in a new cultural context, Jamaica itself became susceptible to the mythopoëia of exile, the romanticism of distance. “Africa” became instead the signifier of the previous generation’s revolutionary desire while “Jamaica” became the authorizing trope for even “true” Rastafarianism. As a popular phrase went, “You haffe dread a yard, before you dread abroad!”

Even though the “hard-core” or “authentic” sound still came from Jamaica, it was produced by and for people who perpetually circulated through communities in London, New York, Miami, Toronto, and back to Jamaica. Indeed, by the late eighties, major sound systems and performers (not to mention cocaine mules and entrepreneurial posse gunmen) spent most of the year traveling in this circuit. The new music reflected this transnational landscape. It became less concerned with a romantic black universalism primarily because West Indians were more and more intimately aware of their own cultural specificity in relation to the various other “blacknesses” encountered in the postcolonial metropolis. Other types of colonial experience, other types of racism, other types of black history made Jamaicans (and other black, Third World peoples) aware of difference within that nationalist monolith that the Rastafari worshipped so passionately. Nowhere was this more deeply experienced than in New York, where West Indians and African-Americans had existed in tense, often violent relationships since before Garvey arrived in 1914. Feeling overwhelmed by the black Yankee majority and always careful to be dis-

tinguished from them, Jamaicans passionately guarded not a homogenizing “Africa,” but a culturally and linguistically particularistic Jamaica.

On the island things had changed as well. Whereas the regime of Michael Manley in the 1970s always leaned toward the left and depended on the old tensions between the West and the Soviet Union, the new prime minister, Edward Seaga – a former reggae producer – was always explicitly procapitalist. His policies were clearly aimed at making Jamaica into a suburb of the United States and his ties to posse politics were an open secret. Where Manley attempted to mobilize the grass roots in Jamaica by manipulating Rasta and its symbols in the late seventies – claiming at a certain point to have been blessed by Haile Selassie – Seaga’s moments in the political spotlight featured a severe lack of tolerance for the kind of culture criticism that came out of roots music. Today’s ragga-muffin dance hall music emerged from this context, one in which many a dread hero died in gang shootouts and political assassinations. The status quo that had been successfully challenged and in some senses changed by dread sounds and their cultural apparatus had become severely repressive with the Seaga-Reagan-Thatcher triumvirate. Moreover, the dynamic structure of capitalism that allowed the tiny island to generate such a lucrative cultural product and market it internationally required that the music cater to the tastes of its dispersed market. In Seaga’s Jamaica, dire necessity and government austerity measures helped drive the music into a new aesthetic and political space, one where rejecting or questioning capitalism was a luxury that very few could afford. With the coming of tourists in the sixties and seventies, Rasta had become a plaything for racist whites who paid for an exotic and erotic island fantasy. Rasta Rebels became “Rent a Rasta,” and the seriousness and authority of the movement were severely compromised. The themes of Rasta became not just dangerous to express in this climate, but also old and tired for a generation that had fully immersed itself in the perverse sprawl that is Babylon culture. The music of roots found itself static, stagnant, and losing its claim on a black diaspora mythos.

Rather than forwarding the utopian myths of the seventies and moving sound deeper into the pseudo-authentic “African roots” style typified by Marley, the new sound systems began to modernize (or perhaps “post-modernize”) reggae. Producers began to manipulate the latest in digital computer technology bought in New York and London, turning the music into a rhythmic hybrid of calypso, soca, rhythm and blues, and classic dub. What came out of this revolution within reggae is a sound that is

informed not by a diaspora based on a romanticized memory, but a diaspora that is truer to the experiences of a necessarily mobile, transatlantic working class. Unlike Rastafarian reggae, racial origins are not celebrated in this aesthetic; what is more important to depict is what I elsewhere call a sprawling, urban, Third World geography in which the various points of Afro-Caribbean disembarkation become incorporated.<sup>23</sup>

Origins, as I have said, are now celebrated as specifically postcolonial – that is to say, specifically Jamaican. The language used (*patwah*) is articulated as a product of a particular history and experience that is grounded in Jamaica but disseminated throughout the diaspora via the commodity production of the music industry. “African roots” are much less important to this generation because the vagaries of diasporan life have taught them that roots are transitory and ever shifting; they circulate and reconstruct themselves like the flow of labor and capital, like the structure of memory itself. Here, to appropriate Iain Chambers, roots become “routes” in a postcolonial matrix. “Race,” then, recedes in the politics of contemporary dance hall music and culture is foregrounded – not culture as in “roots and culture,” as a product of the nationalist slippage between race and culture. Instead, culture is located in the rituals, language, and responses of peoples for whom sound systems are the focal point for a nomadic sense of authenticity. “Race,” I must stress, is not gone from this discourse of sound, but difference has entered that monolith, and issues like class, gender, and individual power have become much more prominent.

### *“Rewind and Come Again!”*

I have attempted to map out how the street-level critique of black nationalism entails a transformation from one mode of cultural organization (“race” in the case of Rastafarianism) to another. The “massive” international dance hall sound and its cultural apparatus – specifically the sound system that has been transplanted and translated throughout the various points of black disembarkation – function as a principle of organization that foregrounds disjunction and difference in the global economy of blackness. This transformation, this aesthetic and political shift, is in many ways paradigmatic of much of contemporary black sounds and their respective cultural apparatuses. From hip-hop to black British junglism, from roots reggae to ragga, cultural-historical specificity crashes against global dispersal and the attendant myths of racial solidarity. For

the Rastafari, sound was culture and culture was “race.” With today’s black underground media complex, sound is closer to culture than “race” ever was. “Race,” of course, is not out of the picture; it has not been banished from the discursive mechanisms of Jamaican sound culture. What has happened is that without the use of “Africa” as a centralizing logos, as a focal point for postmodern black destiny, “race” is deconstructed as a universal principle and is fragmented by culture and the differential histories of colonialism. This transformation features instead the reification of separate and distinct historical blacknesses, each migrating around each other, trapped in an orbit like planets around the dim memory of a sun. Arguing via Lyotard’s *The Post-Modern Condition*,<sup>24</sup> here the “master narrative” of a nation based on race has broken apart, yet the shards retain an intimacy and glow with essential and independent light.

Perhaps this movement was inevitable as reggae music became more intimately connected to the new technologies of digital sound production. Whereas King Tubby’s and Lee “Scratch” Perry examined the furthest reaches of dread mysticism by way of multitrack analog recording, in the 1980s ragga dance hall reimagined community through digital sampling and modem-oriented communication. Both the assertion of roots and the critique of roots are central to – in fact are constitutive of – a diasporan discourse that necessarily flickers between myth and history, form and void, race and cultural dispersal. Contemporary dance hall sound culture is not free of this self-reflexivity; it is the lasting legacy of the Rastafari and is kept alive by the continuing oppression of black peoples. But the question raised most trenchantly by the new sounds is this: how can roots even be contemplated in digital, nonlinear space? After all, the history of black cultural resistance and black cultural soundings is a history marked by manipulations of the major technologies of the era. To take this a step further, how can nationalism – race-based or otherwise – exist in the context of multinational corporations where Babylon itself – late capitalism – is increasingly mobile and decentered? Indeed, is the postmodern the end of “race” as a necessary structure and the beginning of more specific, culture-based articulations of ethnicity? Where now is the site of struggle, and how is resistance to be formulated?

These questions, I think, are what confounded the Rastafari, many of whom retreated further and further into the realm of rhetoric and myth (“roots and culture”) and only made small inroads on the far margins of capitalism. Dance hall sound, although it has not answered these ques-

tions or solved any problems, has engaged with them. In doing so, it manifests a ruthlessness and violence that celebrate both the liberating possibilities of diaspora and the horrific excesses of capitalism. Dread sound had a distinctly moral vision that was intended to free black culture from such a conflict. Dance hall sound and culture, however, exult in this paradox, this glorious aporia.

# 13

## “An-ba-chen’n la” (Chained Together): The Landscape of Kassav’s *Zouk*

BRENDA F. BERRIAN

*The land gives direction but confers ownership on those who establish a relationship that is both economic and moral.<sup>1</sup>*

The success of contemporary French Caribbean music can be traced to two popular musical forms – the biguine and mazurka<sup>2</sup> – and two traditional drum rhythms and dances (*gwo ka* from Guadeloupe and *bel air* from Martinique). Among the black elite and the *béké* (white) urban population, the popularity of the biguine and the mazurka began to decline during the 1960s. This was largely due to the disappearance of the *punchs en musique* (morning punch parties), the *thé dansants* (afternoon tea dance parties), and the *bals* (evening dances). Haitian *compas*, Latin American salsa, and Dominican cadence-lypso became the popular and preferred sounds. When the local bands, like Perfecta and Malavoi from Martinique and the Vikings de Guadeloupe from Guadeloupe, wanted to be hired to perform at major hotels or in other venues, they either imitated the Haitian sound and/or incorporated the Cuban-Latino sound into their repertoire. As a result, pride in local culture ebbed drastically as Guadeloupean and Martinican musicians functioned within a creative void.

Given their legacy of slavery, the population of twentieth-century Martinique and Guadeloupe is still divided into *béké*, *mulâtre*, *nègre* (white, mulatto, and black) social and racial categories. Prime land in Martinique and Guadeloupe, two economically dependent French *départements d'outre mer* (overseas departments) since 19 March 1946, is still owned by *békés* (descendants of French planters). The civil service and other professions are primarily filled by light-skinned blacks; and the

forged a new discourse for its listeners to rediscover the specificities of French Caribbean culture, history, and language through a celebratory union between body and music. Finally, with its multiracial group of musicians, Kassav' proudly demonstrates that *zouk* overcomes and encompasses social and cultural ties that are not yet possible in the colonial political arena.

## 14

### Mas' in Brooklyn: Immigration, Race, and the Cultural Politics of Carnival

RACHEL BUFF

Contemporary scholarship on racial formation points out that race is a social construct, shaped by a confluence of discourses about policy, local politics, and cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> Less clear in this analysis is the role that popular cultures play in this always dynamic, always dialogic process. Focusing on the history of West Indian carnivals in New York City, this essay examines the many intersections of popular practice and official policy. Carnival, a Caribbean hybrid of African and European cultures, migrated with West Indian people to New York in the twentieth century and it changed along with their lives. Blending European Lenten festivals with elements of African, East Indian, and native popular cultures, Carnival has always displayed the hybrid practice of daily life in the Caribbean. Revelers dance and costume themselves, in a nineteenth-century imitation of European masquerade balls that now give Carnival its slang verb: to *play mas'*. Carnival expresses, at various times, national, cultural, racial, and ethnic identities.

My contention here is that West Indian Carnival in New York is neither a planned diffusion of pressure, a release valve for the oppressions of everyday life in a race- and class-stratified society, nor is it simply a time of inversion, where those on the bottom seize moments of revolutionary opportunity. At different times, it is both of these. But Carnival, with its diffusion of grass-roots forms and high culture, its anarchy and moments of unity, its creative invention and invented tradition, is most of all a space of identity formation.

Carnival in New York combines the diverse forces that give race and ethnicity meaning: the police, the media, spectators, both black and white, rumors of raids by the Immigration and Naturalization Service,

immigrant and native-born revelers, Caribbean people in town from all over the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. Here, West Indian immigrants in Harlem present their pride in their decolonizing homelands to their African-American neighbors; here Trinidadians and Vincentians dance down Eastern Parkway behind banners touting “Historic Africa,” while Haitians and Jamaicans party to their own systems on the side streets lining the parkway; here Jesse Jackson announced his presidential bid in 1984; here in 1992, the quincentennial year of Columbus’s first voyage to the Caribbean, city police dressed in riot gear because they anticipated racial tension cautiously advanced up a road, confronting peaceful black revelers dressed as Mayan gods. Transnational and local practices converge, drawing on recent experience and the long reach of hemispheric memory. In order to celebrate Carnival in New York, Caribbean people struggle against forces arrayed against them as new immigrants and as black citizens in a racist society. Carnival, then, is a snapshot of a moment in the process of racial formation, in the history of Du Bois’s famous color line as it is enforced, circumvented, ridiculed, and endlessly reinvented.

This essay focuses on the confluence of hemispheric migration, colonialist discourse, and grass-roots cultural forms in West Indian Carnival, in its metropolitan incarnations in Harlem and Brooklyn. Through the pageantry, music, and revelry of Carnival, Caribbean people, their children, and their African-American neighbors have responded to changing geographies, revising and updating their stories of exile and affiliation. At Carnival, people assert identities different from the ones prescribed by federal immigration and municipal policies. Taking over Eastern Parkway every Labor Day, these transmigrant peoples imagine sovereignties and affinities that correspond with their historical experience rather than with the dictates of cold war liberalism and neocolonialism. Here, traditional and revised practices invoke a changing same, and old friends meet on unfamiliar ground.

### *Places Like Home: Carnival in Harlem, 1920–1964*

Carnival in New York began in Harlem in the 1920s, when immigrants from Trinidad and Tobago began to hold private dances to celebrate the pre-Lenten festivities as they had back home. In 1947, a Trinidadian woman by the name of Jessie Wattle organized a carnival celebration on Labor Day, obtaining a permit from City Hall to parade on Lenox Avenue from 110th to 140th Streets. This Carnival parade ended after the riots of

1964 resulted in a two-month ban against free speech and organized demonstrations in Harlem.<sup>2</sup> Rufus Gorin, a Trinidadian immigrant who had “played mas” in New York since 1947, then attempted to organize a carnival in Brooklyn in 1965. Along with Carlos Lezama, whom he had met in a New York steel band, Gorin was one of the founding members of the West Indian-American Day Carnival Association (WIADCA), which today sponsors not only the massive Labor Day Carnival on Eastern Parkway but also steel band, calypso, and reggae concerts, costume and music competitions, and a “kiddie karnival” at the Brooklyn Museum.<sup>3</sup>

This short history of Carnival traces the various formations of Afro-Caribbean identity in New York City. During the first half of the twentieth century, Caribbean immigrants to New York maintained cultural and political links to their home islands. This first generation of sizable West Indian immigration to the United States responded to the extreme racial segregation they encountered in this country by maintaining dual identities. Entering a society that saw them primarily as black regardless of their class or regional origins, West Indian immigrants lived, worked, and often became politically active in the African-American community while stoking economic, political, and imaginative ties to their home islands.<sup>4</sup> Orienting themselves toward returning home rather than assimilation, they used these dual imaginative loyalties to resist the metropolitan racial order. In 1920 only 4 percent of West Indian immigrant men and 18 percent of the women had taken U.S. citizenship, as compared to 49 percent of European immigrant men and 53 percent of the women.<sup>5</sup>

First-generation West Indian immigrants in New York drew on their cultural identity to distance themselves from a society they saw as racist. At the same time, as immigrants they struggled for economic success in the United States. Tension in Harlem over racial hierarchy and internal divisions coexisted with contemporary efforts at black political and cultural unity. Such conflict between immigrants and native-born workers is an ongoing component of the history of capitalist development on both sides of the color line. In the case of black West Indians, race overrode ethnicity in its hegemony over their lives. Race determined where immigrants and their children were permitted to live and work and what political organizations would allow them membership.

At the same time, ethnicity and national identity remained important to these early immigrants, taking the form of voluntary associations, social ties, and active involvement in the politics and culture of their homes. Costume balls and Anglophilic celebrations, like a mock coronation for King George VI in Harlem in 1937, marked immigrant cultural

distance and their desire to maintain this distance from mainstream black life in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Carnival maintained immigrant connections to home, insisting on ethnic and national identities for people recognized in the dominant racial hierarchy only as black.

Indoor costume balls in Harlem in the 1920s paralleled contemporary trends in Trinidad. After the Canboulay riots in the 1880s in Trinidad, the colonial administration as well as the colored middle class favored the decorum of costume balls and calypso tent performances that offered safer, commodified Carnival leisure.<sup>7</sup> The black working class and colored middle classes celebrated Carnival simultaneously, but the middle class, pressured toward anglicization, was ambivalent toward the display and licentiousness they saw in street processions and barracks-yard celebrations until after the Second World War. Colonial and police administration of Carnival continued to suppress the grass-roots, Afro-creole aspects of Carnival in favor of more manageable and commercially propitious forms of celebration throughout the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> During the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, the grass-roots or black working class in Trinidad again gained a foothold in the ongoing struggle over Carnival. Steel bands emerged from inner-city neighborhoods like Laventille, Port-of-Spain, to challenge the sway of calypso singers as the musical backbeat of Carnival.<sup>9</sup> Loud, large, and mobile by nature, steel bands provided a road music that animated street processions and drew an increasingly diverse crowd of Trinidadians.

In Trinidad, this “recreolization” of Carnival provided cultural anthems for decolonization and nationalism. In New York, the move of Carnival out onto the streets of Harlem allowed an expanded population of Caribbean immigrants, their American-born children, and their African-American neighbors to participate. Jessie Wattle founded the outdoor Labor Day parade in Harlem the same year that the popular *Les Amants* Ballroom burned down in Port-of-Spain.<sup>10</sup> Although coincidental, the simultaneous occurrence of these two events – the burning and inauguration – is nonetheless instructive about the transnational circulation of culture. Errol Hill argues that in Trinidad the burning of *Les Amants* was part of a larger shift in Carnival that saw the merging of fancy costume balls with popular processions. At the same time, the founding of Carnival in Harlem marked the beginning of a public pan-West Indian identity in New York.

Between 1932 and 1965, immigration from the Caribbean slowed; Kasinitz notes that between 1932 and 1937, return migration exceeded the number entering the United States.<sup>11</sup> Fewer new immigrants and

the difficulty of travel during wartime limited the circulation of Caribbean people between home and the metropolis. During this period, record companies and traveling calypsonians brought West Indian music to New York. Trinidadians like Rufus Gorin, Lionel Belasco, and Wilmouth Houdini popularized Carnival music to mixed black and white, immigrant and native-born audiences.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the U.S. civil rights struggles in the 1940s and 1950s brought people of color together; West Indian immigrants participated in black politics at the same time that institutions like the NAACP consistently called for reform of the quota system instituted by the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952.<sup>13</sup> Adam Clayton Powell, the popular congressman from Harlem, supported civil rights within the United States while also proposing unlimited immigration from the British West Indies.<sup>14</sup> In 1948, West Indians and African Americans helped elect the first black member of the New York State Assembly, Bertram Baker.<sup>15</sup> Caribbean Americans like Hulan Jack and Shirley Chisolm rose to power through African-American political institutions.

Although West Indians were partially integrated into African-American public life, stereotyped ideas about hardworking Caribbean immigrants succeeding where native-born blacks could not continued to cause divisions between American blacks and those of West Indian ancestry. Sociologists like Thomas Sowell perpetuated the myth of West Indian exceptionalism, arguing that limited West Indian success in the United States is proof that culture, not race, impedes African-American economic progress.<sup>16</sup> Kasinitz points out that statistically West Indians of this first generation were economically closer to African Americans than to white immigrants or native-born people.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Basch and colleagues point out that this cultural-pluralist model, bounded by the political geography of the nation-state, fails to account for the global and hemispheric racial orders that keep black immigrants everywhere mobile and poor.<sup>18</sup>

The transformation of New York Carnival from small homeland balls<sup>19</sup> to a Harlem street festival embodies the multiple tensions of Caribbean immigrant social life in the 1940s and 1950s. While they struggled alongside African Americans for equal rights, Caribbean people were emotionally and politically compelled by the struggles for sovereignty taking place in their home nations. The dual affinities of the previous generation could be resolved through popular pan-African, anticolonial discourses of Caribbean, American, and African figures like George Padmore, C. L. R. James, Amílcar Cabral, or Franz Fanon. However, such

narratives of liberation in the U.S. context sometimes maintained tension between native-born and immigrant blacks.<sup>20</sup> As with tensions between Caucasian immigrants and native-born workers, ethnic division based on economic competition was only partially absolved by the discourse of race.

The context of common struggle at home as well as in New York, however, brought West Indians in New York closer together. At Carnival in Harlem, West Indian immigrants celebrated their common origins along with a nascent ethnic pride that paralleled the growth of nationalist sentiment back home. Caribbean culture in New York could symbolize national, ethnic, and/or racial pride. Carnival in Harlem and Brooklyn became a space where dominant meanings of race and ethnicity were contested and reinvented through collective action and personal expression.

While contemporary accounts place steel bands at Harlem Carnival in the early 1950s, Victor Brady claims to have led the first Carnival steel band in New York in 1959. He felt that his music defied anti-immigrant prejudice. "I played in Labor Day Parade in Harlem in 1959," he recalled, "when they still used to call West Indian people 'monkey' in this country."<sup>21</sup> Steel bands in the Harlem Carnival, alongside more military colonial-style organizations like St. Martin's Cadets Civil Defense Unit and the Junior Monarch League Batons, asserted a nascent Caribbean cultural and ethnic pride. Although U.S. and British flags flew over Harlem Carnival in 1958, the festival, like the national formations represented, was in the midst of great changes.<sup>22</sup> Kasinitz points out the importance of Carnival in the development of a pan-West Indian identity in New York; while steel band or pan, particularly in 1959, was a Trinidadian form, its incarnation in New York came to signify *Caribbean* cultural identity.<sup>23</sup>

Brady recounted another incident from his experience playing pan in Harlem during this period. His steel band performed for Nation of Islam leader Elijah Mohammed; in that context, Caribbean steel drums became a symbol of black pride and innovation: "Elijah Mohammed called me a genius," he recalled. "He put me on stage and said, 'We don't need the white men, this boy can make music from these cans.'"<sup>24</sup> Carnival practices took on diverse kinds of symbolic weight in New York, becoming at the same time a component of metropolitan identity formation.

### *Decolonization, Race, and Immigration, 1965–1972*

By abolishing the national origins quotas of the McCarran-Walter Act, the Hart-Cellar Immigration Reform Act opened the door in 1965 to a

dramatic increase in immigration from the Caribbean. The foreign-born black population of the United States doubled between 1960 and 1970, and increased by more than two and a half times between 1970 and 1980. By 1980, almost 20 percent of New York's black population was foreign-born.<sup>25</sup>

Along with the tensions around Caribbean performance in Harlem, this massive influx of immigrants helped move Carnival from Harlem to Brooklyn. Caribbean immigrants clustered in the more spacious and cleaner streets of Flatbush and Crown Heights, renting and buying property as the area was opened up both by antidiscrimination housing regulations and white flight.<sup>26</sup> The avenues and hills of Brooklyn "looked like home," Lezama told me. As the area gradually filled with immigrant residential and commercial enclaves, it became the site for New York Carnival after it was banned in Harlem.

The post-1965 immigrant cohort confronted a long-standing and highly developed black community in New York, along with a smaller population of older Caribbean immigrants. New immigrants experienced racism in some respects that native-born blacks did not: in dealing with the immigration and naturalization process; in the parallels they drew between U.S. racism and the racism that had caused them to leave the neocolonial Caribbean; in their discovery that their adjustment to their new country would be mediated by race in a way different from back home. While the experiences of transnational migration and settlement, along with the politically charged climate created by decolonization and civil rights struggles, provided ample grounds for solidarity between West Indian immigrants and African Americans, these experiences also created rifts and tensions that still exist in New York to some degree.

As settlement patterns for Caribbean immigrants in New York increasingly resembled ethnic enclaves, Caribbean peoples (at home and abroad) and African Americans debated the relationships possible among black peoples. In the wake of the black power uprising in Trinidad in 1972, Stokely Carmichael was banned from entering several Caribbean nations, as were leaders of the Trinidad and Tobago Ten and of the Trinidad uprising. Carmichael was prevented from crossing into Canada in 1972. "I don't know why they banned me in the Caribbean," Carmichael responded. "I have done nothing. I am from the Caribbean. I thought I was fighting against oppression of Black people. Maybe this is why they banned me, because I am fighting against people who oppress Black people."<sup>27</sup>

The pages of New York's *Antillean Echo* debated Carmichael's pan-

hemispheric, transnational concept of black power. On the one hand, some writers used this notion of black power to call for “healing the split” between African Americans and West Indian Americans. On the other, some debated the usefulness of black power as a political ideology in the multicultural Caribbean. Particularly after East Indian students in Guyana protested the focus of black power on Afro-Caribbeans by walking out on Carmichael in 1970, many questioned the relevance of pan-African unity to Caribbean political struggles. Some writers doubted the use of a United States-based ideology, even for West Indian people in New York. Civil rights leaders, the *Antillean Echo* reported, had told Carmichael that he could always go home, since he was not really American anyway. West Indian involvement in U.S. civil rights struggles, some argued, did not represent their interests as black or West Indian people so much as it represented feelings of humanitarianism and a developing attachment to their new country.<sup>28</sup>

The logic of the ethnicity paradigm, where new immigrants worked hard for a stake in the American dream, worked against black unity. Of course, this ethnicity paradigm has a deeply racialized basis, providing assimilation into a dominant conception of whiteness and offering upward mobility only on those grounds. But West Indians had long tried to use the tools of racialized hegemony with which to acquire some kind of economic security. In Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Seifert Yearwood argues with Deighton, who refuses to save money and has an African-American mistress:

“Remember,” he began, his restive eyes stilled for a moment. “When we first came here in 1920 we was all living in those cold-water dumps in South Brooklyn with the cockroaches lifting us up?” He gave a high wheezing laugh but his eyes burned with outrage. “The white people thought they was gon keep us there but they din know what a Bajan does give. We here now and when they run we gon be right behind them. That’s why, mahn, you got to start buying. Go to the loan shark if you ain got the money.”<sup>29</sup>

While the rhetoric of decolonization and pan-Africanism celebrated grounds for Third World unity, both in the United States and abroad, paradigms of ethnicity and nationality provoked conflict between immigrant and native-born black people in the United States. Proud of their newly liberated homelands, black West Indians in New York were torn between the claims of multiracial societies at home, nationalist rhetoric unheard both in the Caribbean and New York) touting black power as uni-

fying and liberating people around the globe, and the day-to-day facts of life in a racist country that promised upward mobility based on ethnic empowerment and solidarity.

### *Carnival on the Parkway, 1969–1991*

Stories about Carnival’s move from Harlem to Brooklyn after 1964 are emblematic of the tensions surrounding this process of identity formation. The mainstream New York press – including the *Times*, the *Daily News*, the *New York Post*, *New York Newsday*, and organs of the African-American press, such as the *Amsterdam News* and the *Daily Challenge* – tends to write the history of Carnival in New York as based on the innovations of Gorin and Lezama, with pre-1969 Harlem history serving as a historical footnote to this colorful narrative of ethnic celebration and pride.<sup>30</sup> Some writers maintain that Carnival moved out of Harlem after a “small disturbance” in 1964,<sup>31</sup> while others link the change of venue to tensions between West Indian celebrants and “dissident elements in the Black Power movement.”<sup>32</sup> The *Amsterdam News* recorded a brawl at the West Indian Day Parade in 1961 and speculated in 1978 that Carnival had been thrown out of Harlem, losing its permit, because the organizers could not control rioting and looting. Carlos Lezama, for many years president of the West Indian-American Day Carnival Association, declined to talk about the move, dramatically asserting: “I don’t think there is anything to say about that. What I have been through is too terrible.”<sup>33</sup>

Certainly the antiriot injunction, effective after the Harlem riots early in the summer of 1964, foreclosed possibilities of a Labor Day festival that year. The Harlem riots marked the discovery of northern black America by the mainstream press. *Time* magazine’s cover story about Harlem states:

No walls surround the ghetto except the invisible ones that can be the hardest of all to surmount. Harlem’s Negros have withdrawn behind the invisible walls, almost out of necessity, into a world of their own, complete with its own pride, its own lingo, and even its own time. In Harlem, CPT means “Colored People’s Time,” and it runs one full hour behind white people’s time.<sup>34</sup>

Such legal prohibitions against holding a festival would have been familiar to Caribbean immigrants because of vivid memories of struggles over Carnival in the 1880s, as well as a growing consciousness of police repression of black culture in the United States and Canada. However, the

injunction does not explain why Carnival could not have resumed in 1965, as it had been celebrated in Harlem for almost twenty years. The many apocryphal stories surrounding the end of Carnival in Harlem indicate the difficulties of narrating West Indian immigrant history along the lines of racial, ethnic, or national loyalties. These difficulties bear on struggles for municipal power and cultural sovereignty.

Although the West Indian-American Day Carnival Association obtained a permit to parade in Brooklyn in 1969, since that time there have been many debates over whether Carnival should remain there or move to Fifth Avenue, like other "ethnic" parades. But Carnival is not a parade; Carnival culture does not move down the parkway in an orderly procession, and the Labor Day festivities serve as much to symbolically conclude a week of performance and partying for the Caribbean community in New York as they do to celebrate an ethnic identity. Both the form of Carnival and, more broadly, its capacity as an ethnic symbol, have been the subjects of much debate in the history of Carnival in Brooklyn.

As early as 1973, Shirley Chisolm, then state representative from Bedford-Stuyvesant, called for Carnival to be moved to a grander setting. "We want eventually to have our parade moved to Fifth Avenue, like all the other grand parades, specifically St. Patrick's Day and Columbus Day. We deserve as big a celebration as the other ethnic groups."<sup>35</sup> In 1974, a group who wanted to move Carnival to Fifth Avenue held a separate parade; groups like the New York Carnival Council, Inc., and the Committee for Concerned West Indian Americans have put pressure on WIADCA to move the Carnival as well. WIADCA responded by asserting that Carnival needed to stay in Brooklyn to maintain its cultural identity and community spirit.<sup>36</sup> By 1974, Chisolm had switched her position, advocating Brooklyn as the true home of West Indian Carnival. "Brooklyn is a great borough," she said, "and I'd like to see it stay the home of this great parade."<sup>37</sup>

During the 1970s, the mainstream white press emphasized the ethnic and national aspects of Carnival. A *Daily News* headline in 1976 proclaimed, "It's Trinidad in Brooklyn!" and *New Brooklyn* magazine reported that more West Indian people inhabited Brooklyn than any one Caribbean nation. As Caribbean immigrants migrated to Brooklyn, attendance at Carnival approached one million. Carnival during the 1970s expanded; WIADCA worked to upgrade the festival, holding fundraisers and working with local officials to provide health and maintenance services. Debates over the location of the festival indicate pressures within the Caribbean community over ethnic identification and municipal rec-

ognition during a time of community expansion and redefinition. Advocates of the Fifth Avenue parade saw West Indian people assimilating in a model of urban ethnicity displayed by Irish Americans and Italian Americans in their parades; this, they felt, was the deserved place of a hard-working immigrant population.

At the same time, many in the Caribbean community were seeking political and cultural alliances with African Americans. In 1972, the editor of the *Antillean Echo*, Neville Butler, was among the founders of the National Organization of West Indian Americans, a group dedicated to Caribbean integration into black communities while maintaining "West Indian cultural traits." In their policy statement, the group emphasized the common origins of people in the African diaspora. "As to relations between blacks from the Caribbean and black Americans, the fact to be borne in mind is that it is sheer chance that the ancestors of the one lay his bones in the Caribbean and the ancestors of the other in North America."<sup>38</sup> The *Antillean Echo*, while written from a distinctly Caribbean perspective, promoted such pan-black alliances, commenting on the racism of federal immigration policy and debating the representation of West Indians on television at the same time that it reported on events in the transnational Caribbean community in the United States and Canada. Carnival could play a specific role in this construction of Afro-diasporan unity. "When we join the hearts, hands, and resources of all the people of Black America, Africa and the West Indies in a permanent demonstration of our economic and political self-sufficiency and humanity, the 'oneness' we celebrate on the Parkway will be fully justified," commented Horace Morancie in the *Amsterdam News*.<sup>39</sup>

Efforts to move Carnival to Fifth Avenue, to earn for it the recognition accorded to other ethnic groups in New York, continue to this day. Randy Brewster is the well-known and popular costume designer of the Culture of Black Creation mas' camp, one of many locations where people come to buy thematic costumes and march together. He told me that he feels the Carnival deserves to march down Fifth Avenue, that this would constitute recognition of his culture in New York City. Lezama commented: "It is not fair for us to be living in a place and to be rejected for so long from a place in Manhattan."

At the same time, as Manning points out, Carnival is not an ethnic festival; the tradition resists assimilation even though the community seeks economic and political integration, demanding "full civic, political and economic rights and opportunities."<sup>40</sup> In looking for these opportunities, the new cohort of immigrants confronted the rapidly changing

structure of opportunities in New York during the 1970s and 1980s. While Kasinitz follows William Julius Wilson in arguing for the “declining significance of race” consonant with the emergence of a permanent under-class in context of deindustrialization,<sup>41</sup> the history of Carnival in the 1980s and 1990s suggests to me that contemporary Caribbean immigrants, as much as their predecessors, consciously confront a profoundly racialized urban landscape.

In 1979, there were several violent incidents at Carnival: muggings, chain snatchings, and one homicide. Rumors flew as to the cause of the violence. Lezama claimed to have received anonymous telephone threats informing him that there would be trouble on Carnival Monday. One potential source of violence, according to these anonymous sources, was the Reverend Herbert Daughtry, who had supposedly planned to lead members of the Black United Front to confront Hasidic Jews on Eastern Parkway. Daughtry publicly denied these charges.<sup>42</sup> Police arrested a Rastafarian named Noah Robinson for the homicide and made public their assumption that the shooting must have been over drugs. The *Daily News* conflated an increasingly racialized representation of crime with an ignorance of Afro-Caribbean cultures, explaining that the Rastafarians were “a drug cult believed heavily involved in selling marijuana and cocaine, police said.”<sup>43</sup> Chain snatchings and muggings were attributed to roving bands of youths, but assertions about organized violence diminished as WIADCA and the Caribbean community in general attempted to put the event behind them and recover the public image of Carnival.

In the wake of violence at Carnival, Chief Robert Johnson of the Brooklyn police, working with WIADCA, implemented new restrictions. While this move purportedly responded to the incidents at Carnival in Brooklyn, it paralleled contemporary efforts in Britain to contain the Notting Hill Carnival in London. Police raids on the Mangrove Restaurant, a gathering place for panmen as well as multicultural residents of Notting Hill, together with an amplified police presence at Carnival in 1976, resulted in confrontations between the force and Carnival celebrants. Such repression polarized Notting Hill Carnival along lines of race and politics: the London Carnival was increasingly seen by whites as dangerous, while Afro-British participants became more involved in a political, pan-African interpretation of the festival.<sup>44</sup>

Since 1980, the official parade time is from 8 A.M. to 6 P.M. Street discos are prohibited, vendors are required to register and obtain licences from WIADCA to sell their wares, and each mas’ band must have its own marshals to keep the parade route clear.<sup>45</sup> The Police Department has ampli-

fied the number of officers present at Carnival, maintaining a force of about 2,000 throughout the 1980s. To contain the revelry to the parade and the ending time of 6 P.M., marchers are met at Grand Army Plaza, the end of the parade route, with a large complement of police, in military formation. In 1991, the first year I attended Carnival, the force was attired in riot gear, as it would be for years to come, probably in anticipation of “violence on the parkway” after a summer of incidents between black and Jewish residents of Crown Heights.

Such efforts to contain Carnival parallel municipal responses in cities like Rio de Janeiro, where Carnival takes place in an elaborately maintained and monitored sambadrome, and in London, where Police Chief Robert Mark commented in 1976: “We are not opposed in principle to the concept of an annual festival, which seems to us to be a remarkably happy occasion. But the police would prefer that in future it should be held in a stadium or some other controlled area.”<sup>46</sup> Heightened police presence at Carnival amplifies existing racial tensions over the festival. While the official rhetoric emphasizes the safety and security such a force provides, it also ensures a hundred small incidents that dramatize the everyday tension felt by an urban minority community toward the occupying forces. For every newspaper photo showing a beat cop festooned in Carnival attire and enjoying the music, there are thousands of unsnapped photo opportunities of minor scuffles, arguments, and the ongoing hostility between police and neighborhood.

Many of the Caribbean-American people I talked to in Crown Heights have accepted the limitations on the official Carnival celebration. When I asked if the restrictions on Carnival affected the festival, Joyce Quiñoma, a WIADCA official, put it this way:

Well, yes and no. Yes, because it goes on [at] night, we could have gone until we leave, at least nine o’clock at night. But no, because in view of the fact of all that is going on, it’s best to be safe then be sorry, like my mother told me. You’re better off doing it that way and having peace of mind.<sup>47</sup>

Others in the community object to the restrictions on Carnival. Mighty Sparrow, a calypsonian who lives in both Brooklyn and Trinidad, wrote the popular Carnival hit: “One More Jam, Mr. Officer”: “People want to jump up / People want to wail / We come here to mash up / We not in jail.” As early as 1973, Knolly Moses linked police surveillance of Carnival to other government apparatuses of repression against black people: “They are so meticulous in their questioning about the upcoming cele-

brations," he wrote in 1979, "that one might think they were working with the immigration authorities."<sup>48</sup> Some link contemporary police and civic repression of Carnival in Brooklyn with Caribbean history, like the Canboulay riots of the 1880s.<sup>49</sup> In any gathering of over a million people, reasoned a neighborhood activist, some violence will occur. Why, he asked, does crime at Carnival result in official restrictions?<sup>50</sup>

As I interviewed this activist, I was struck by the historical continuity of contemporary restrictions on Brooklyn Carnival and the dialectics of hemispheric social formation. While Carnival is a unique event, it is difficult to imagine any Euro-American festival being concluded by police dressed in riot gear. Some criminal activity took place on the parkway in 1979, fourteen years after the Immigration Reform Act allowed for the dramatic increase in immigration from the Caribbean. Caribbean immigrants took their place in a newly deindustrializing service economy in New York, Boston, and Miami. And, as Lee Bridges notes, "The policing strategy required to uphold the monetarist economic and social order, in which the new technology and Thatcher/Reaganite policies of enforced inequality combine to produce mass unemployment, growing social polarization and spreading urban decay," required in turn a rearrangement of the urban politics of race and class.<sup>51</sup> In this context, the struggle to represent Carnival and the Caribbean community along ethnic or racial lines is charged with new and contradictory meanings.

### *The 1990s: Popular Resurgence and Urban Conflict*

In the early 1990s, some pan players and mas' camps began to revive the tradition of J'ouvert (from the French *to open*), the early morning festive procession that starts off Carnival Monday. Historically a site for the most African, most repressed elements of Trinidadian culture, J'ouvert in Brooklyn comes out of some of the "rebel" panyards and "ole mas'" camps in East Flatbush that try to wear "traditional" Trinidadian costumes, using less color and invention and more face and body makeup than other mas' bands currently wear. Responding to limitations on Carnival hours and the heavy police presence restricting access to the procession on Eastern Parkway, J'ouvert is an unregulated Carnival parade. A member of the Juju mas' camp, which dresses in the black and white colors of ole mas', told me that his costume band did not always make it to the parkway for Carnival Monday, because they sometimes met police who turned them back. Nonetheless, he said, J'ouvert and ole mas' are

the heart of traditional Carnival, the most important aspects, and worth missing the official parade for.

Leslie Palmer describes J'ouvert in London in this way:

The place was Trinidad where I come from and all of we does get that feeling in the morning of the 1st day of the Carnival. I find you does only get that feeling when the pan on the road; so when we living in another country and we attempt to put the pan on the road – is the same feeling we looking to get for man to feel free with himself and get in tune with them rhythms that come through the bamboo and forge demself in steel clashing steel to shock you into the rhythmic excellence of blackness that does make you hair stand up when the tune-bum call from Africa.<sup>52</sup>

The resurgence of J'ouvert indicates, on one level, the continuity of the struggle over grass-roots cultural forms so central to Afro-Atlantic Carnival traditions. In a metropolitan context, however, the increased policing of Carnival that has lead to the renewed popularity of J'ouvert may represent a new trend in West Indian ethnic identity. J'ouvert has historically been a site where grass-roots Carnival revelers challenge more acceptable and easily appropriated kinds of celebrations. The experiences of both legal and illegal immigration, as well as the alienation of being black in a white-dominated society may, as Nancy Foner points out, transform "vague feelings of common ethnicity into a more articulated cultural and political consciousness," thus responding to top-down pressures on racial definition by reimaging grounds for community coherence.<sup>53</sup>

In both the black and white press during the 1980s, Carnival was interpreted variously as an expression of black unity and of emerging ethnic identity. In the aftermath of the deaths in 1991 that made Crown Heights a nationally recognized symbol for conflict between Jews and blacks, Carnival has been increasingly represented, by African-American and Jewish leaders and the media, as well as by a component of the West Indian community, as a black event. This most current representation of Carnival is an important moment in the ongoing processes of racial and ethnic formation in the metropolitan context.

I will briefly review the conflict in Crown Heights here and suggest an alternate reading of its origins and ongoing valences. In August 1991, a car driven by Yosef Lifsh, a Lubavitch Hasidic Jew, went out of control in Crown Heights, fatally injuring a seven-year-old Guyanese-American

boy, Gavin Cato. Lifsh was part of a Hasidic motorcade that was returning from escorting the Lubavitch leader, Rebbe Schneerson, on his weekly visit to his wife's grave in a cemetery in Queens. Several hours later, a crowd of black youths surrounded a Hasidic yeshiva student, Yankel Rosenbaum, and stabbed him to death. These incidents together became a focal point for deeply rooted social and economic tensions among the predominantly Caribbean black community and the largely Hasidic Jewish community in Crown Heights.<sup>54</sup>

Because of the specific history of Crown Heights, as well as Jews' access to white privilege, many feel that the Hasids have had undue influence in local struggles over schools, police attention, and control over federal grants for urban development. According to Jerome Mintz, this happened when Hasids filled a demographic vacuum in the area in the early 1960s, a time when other white ethnics – predominantly other Jews – were fleeing the city and before African Americans and Caribbean people had moved into the area in sizable numbers.<sup>55</sup> As Jewish groups left the city, the Lubavitch Hasids gained control of the Jewish Community Council of Crown Heights and were for a time the only effective neighborhood organization able to take advantage of government loan programs initiated to fight urban decay.

The incidents that came to be called "Crown Heights" exacerbated deep tensions between Hasidic and black residents of the area over access to everything from housing to municipal funding and power. In this sense, the conflict in Crown Heights is part of a larger conflict between blacks and Jews that evolved as a component of postwar racial formation in U.S. cities; Jews, though discriminated against in other contexts, have gained access to white privilege and used it, while blacks, regardless of their ethnic or national origins, have been forcibly maintained at subordinate social and economic levels.

Whereas this conflict clearly reflects the dynamics of racial antagonism, stories told on both sides of the issue both complicate and refine this understanding. The Hasidic community, devoutly religious, considers itself separate from the mainstream American Jewish community. This alienation from other Jews, along with the focus on daily life in the Lubavitch community, leads to an intensely closed cultural identification, perhaps parallel to that of the Caribbean community in New York during the period of the costume balls in Harlem. At the same time, Hasidic Jews, having escaped the Holocaust, see themselves as an embattled minority. Conflicts in Crown Heights, from the murder of Israel Turner in

1975 to the more recent events of 1991, evoke memories of Kristallnacht and other violent incidents of Nazi anti-Semitism.<sup>56</sup>

Jacob Goldstein, a Hasidic man active in community politics, told me a common Lubavitch story about relationships between blacks and Hasids in Crown Heights. "We all get along," he said, "our children play together. But I won't let my children go into the houses of their black friends, or of any non-Jewish friends, for that matter. Not because of race, but because they might eat something that isn't kosher."<sup>57</sup> By identifying themselves as an embattled religious minority, the Crown Heights Hasids, in their perception, are exempted from accusations of white racism. This does not mean that they do not benefit from white privilege – their ample clout with police and city officials, despite their minority status, indicates the contrary. By 1981, for example, although whites were only 9.3 percent of the population, they controlled 33 percent of Community Development funds.<sup>58</sup> And protestations about kashrut seem disingenuous in light of the difficult racial history of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and New York City in general. But Hasids do not think of themselves as assimilating into white America or into a more or less powerful Jewish establishment.

Similarly, the politics of racial identity on the other side of what Anna Deavere Smith has called "Fires in the Mirror" turn on culture and nationality as well as skin color.<sup>59</sup> About a week after the events of August 1991, while I was working in a mas' camp in Crown Heights helping to make costumes for the upcoming West Indian Day Carnival, I overheard a conversation among three Trinidadian women. Angered by Lifsh's lawyer, who had publicly implied that the Afro-Caribbeans in Crown Heights were not Americans and therefore had no claim to equal municipal services, the women objected to this distinction among ethnic communities. "*We're not American!*" one woman said. "*They [Jews] don't even bury their dead here!*"

While a portion of this exchange reveals a lack of knowledge about Jews that parallels Goldstein's certainty that the black families on his street could not possibly learn to respect the dietary laws of their children's friends, the woman's main concern for citizenship and claims to home reflects the deep uneasiness of immigrants of color in the United States. Correctly, they perceive that access to citizenship, to becoming American and having the right to bury their dead here, is limited, restricted on the basis of race. At the same time, they resent the entitlement of Hasids – many people in mas' camps and panyards complain of Hasids' double parking and blocking traffic on side streets, of extra police protection the

Hasidic community received during Schneerson's weekly procession to the cemetery.

In this charged context, Carnival 1994 fell on Erev Rosh Hashona, the beginning of the Jewish High Holidays. Tension between the two communities mounted when Police Commissioner Ray Kelly asked Carlos Lezama if he would consider moving the Carnival to Sunday. Rabbi Joseph Spielman of the Crown Heights Jewish Community Council requested and got the city to cordon off a corridor of Crown Heights to facilitate access for Hasidic visitors in town for the High Holidays; this plan was roundly condemned by the New York chapter of the ACLU as creating ethnic separatism. Rumors accumulated on both sides: that anti-Semitic Carnival revelers wanted to urinate on synagogues; that the Hasidim planned to harass West Indian women as they made their way down the parkway. According to Peter Noel, a long-time writer about Carnival, several meetings between Lezama and Rabbi Spielman of the Lubavitch community, including some open town meetings, only amplified fears on both sides of this conflict.<sup>60</sup>

While the conflict between Lubavitch and WIADCA officials was taking place, the Brooklyn police, operating under Rudy Giuliani's newly implemented "quality of life" campaign, began to move on panyards and mas' camps. They raided late night rehearsals and parties in the name of neighborhood quiet and order. Cecil Mitchell of Hawks International, one of two of the most popular mas' camps in Brooklyn, reported that membership in Hawks, as well as attendance at parties, had dwindled because of police intimidation. Not surprisingly, a target for such intimidation and harassment has been J'ouvert.

Such harassment is not new. In addition to the long history of repression of Carnival forms in the Caribbean, Brooklyn police have been active in monitoring and restricting Carnival activities, both on and off the parkway. In 1992, I interviewed Sargent Caramonica of Brooklyn's Sixty-seventh Precinct. Before the restrictions on Carnival hours, he told me, Carnival in the 1970s had gone from being a festive occasion to incorporating a "criminal element." Raids on panyards came about because some panyards were occupied by "squatters" who did not belong there; in other cases, neighbors had asked that the noise from practice be kept down late at night.

In the context of Crown Heights history, police repression of Carnival is likely to be read in the frame of ongoing black-Jewish conflicts. Tensions between blacks and Jews, between Hasidim and Caribbean people, take place in the context of struggles for local power and eco-

nomic mobility. And, in turn, these conflicts operate in a racialized urban and regional political economy.

### *Diasporan Citizenship*

In its multiple diasporan incarnations in New York, Carnival has been a place where West Indian people create themselves – as foreign nationals, as proud citizens of newly decolonized nations, as striving new immigrants, and as black people. The different incarnations of Carnival in Harlem and Brooklyn, at dance halls, on Eastern Parkway, and on quiet side streets in the early morning hours have both responded to and created definitions of race, ethnicity, and nation. Caribbean and Caribbean-American people come to Carnival from all over the East Coast and Canada; some travel from the Caribbean to jump up on Eastern Parkway on Labor Day weekend. At Carnival in Brooklyn today, old friends from the Caribbean encounter one and other, Caribbean-American children who have never been "back home" discover a sense of place, and African-American neighbors come to see and participate in the Culture of Black Creation mas' camp brought to them by the ongoing circulation of capital, labor, and culture.

Carnival has also been a place where the forces of state and capital – the INS, police, municipal regulations, candidates for office, corporate ad campaigns – attempt to inscribe Caribbean people as either dangerous inner-city denizens or potentially upstanding citizens. This dialectic between grass-roots imagination and colonial administration has long informed the creative strategies of Afro-Atlantic culture. While Carnival "refuses to speak in one voice," everyone who "jumps up" on the parkway is involved in a broad politics of diasporan denizenship, where transnational people stake a claim to their homelands abroad and to their rights in the new countries where, perforce, they live and work. The multiple narratives of this diasporan denizenship challenge racialized discourses of citizenship and assimilation. They provide a context for ongoing struggles against municipal and hemispheric colonialism, in their equally myriad forms.

Whether mas' bands celebrate "fancy Africa" or proclaim loudly that "Columbus lied" – their performance of the cultural richness of the Americas repudiating the idea that any European could have "discovered" a wilderness here – they mark a stake in history for denizens of the continuing diaspora in this hemisphere. Carnival has always maintained the links of memory between the exigencies of the present and

memories of the past. And in maintaining these links, Carnival has been a site for articulating identities not yet recognized or authorized by official institutions.

Throughout the history of Carnival in New York, Caribbean and African-American people have debated the possibilities for unity between them. As politicians and the media recognize the demographic power of “Black Brooklyn” in the 1990s, local activists and community leaders negotiate the fissures of ethnicity and nation. Just as Caribbean people are pressured to assimilate in a model of ethnicity designed by the experiences of European immigrants a century ago, they struggle alongside African Americans for access to dwindling municipal services, for entrance to a depressed job market, for places in a public educational system that is underfunded and constantly under attack. As Carnival has been increasingly identified by participants, police, and the media as a black festival, it has become larger and larger. This means that the very agencies that enforce the daily exclusions of racist culture – the police, the media, mayoral and gubernatorial initiatives that blame urban underdevelopment on the people who benefit least from it – may well help Caribbean and African-American people to recognize common enemies and goals. Certainly the popular arts of memory so central to Carnival are already engaged in writing an account that resists the daily exigencies of life in a city so stratified by race and by class.

## 15



### Popular Music, Appropriation, and the Circular Culture of Labor Migration in Southern Africa: The Case of South Africa and Malawi

LUPENGA MPHANDE &

IKECHUKWU OKAFOR NEWSUM

*When rhythm and blues lost its sensuality for me  
i fell in love with a woman named gospel. we  
met secretly in the churches of harlem, and  
made love at revival meetings in mississippi.  
and loving her as i did, i found a great yearning  
to know of her roots. and i found them, and they were in  
africa. and they left me breathless.*

– Neil Diamond

In this discussion, it is assumed that the meanings behind the social and political trends within subaltern nationalities give way to the interest of transnational capitalism via the migration and appropriation of cultural expressions that serve the consumer fetish of capital and subliminally disrupt colonial discourse with the intrusion of the Other. The relationship between the cultural institutions of transnational capital (the entertainment industry) and indigenous Third World cultural expressions demonstrates the tendency of hegemonic institutions to absorb and control Third World images and the tendency of these images to puncture popular notions of pleasure. In conflict in this collaboration is the ideological frame of reference represented by the agency of transnational capitalism, on the one hand, and that of indigenous cultural expressions born out of local traditions and a culture of resistance to colonial subjugation, on the other. The conflation of these dialectically related ideological frames of reference poses a threat to the subaltern/indigenous self-image and to its ideologies of resistance. Robbed of their historical and political meanings, these cultural expressions in the form of

commercialized commodities appeal to the pleasure zone of the social anatomy, while the political and social context of their origins is sublimated by a false altruism that masks the cannibalistic nature of capitalism.

Labor migration all across southern Africa, and in South Africa in particular, has not only served as a site of labor exploitation, but also has produced a means of adaptation and socialization by fostering cultural expressions that are marked by their ability to transform the aesthetic sensibility of a rural cultural-scape (a landscape of culture) to that of an urban worker community. The demands of metropolitan capitalism and its corresponding labor migration, therefore, have subordinated rural communities (labor colonies) in an uneven relationship wherein these communities serve as both the primary producers of culture and labor and as the consumers of their converted labor power and cultural capital in the form of commodities. The conversion of rural folk culture through migration, and the appropriation of urban-township music by the trans-national entertainment industry, reveal an immense and complex system controlling the dissemination of images and meaning in the global marketplace.

### *Labor Migration and the Diffusion of Local Culture*

The basic paradigm of colonial domination and colonial subjugation foreshadows the presence of indigenous, Third World cultural expressions in the global cultural economy. It is, after all, the economic imperative of the colonial and neocolonial *metropoles* (mainly the nations of Europe and the United States), and their need for raw materials, labor, and consumer markets, that have given rise to the proliferation of cultural identities and divergent cultural expressions in the era of late capitalism. The monopoly of technologies and the processes of appropriation and cultural reproduction are in part responsible for capitalism's resiliency.

During the early period of European expansionism in southern Africa, the colonialists subdued the cultural imagination of indigenous populations by identifying dominant native cultural groups and appropriating their cultural expressions so as to create the overarching image of a national culture that would facilitate the socialization and proletarianization of the people through indirect rule. In this instance, appropriation constitutes a process of social conversion driven by the economic demands of colonialism. It is a process whereby native culture becomes the property of capital and serves the reproduction of social-economic relationships necessary to maintain the colonial state. The appropriation of

indigenous culture at this early stage in the history of colonialism in southern Africa used those aspects of traditional culture that perpetuated an existing social hierarchy and division of labor appropriate for capitalist production and reproduction. Such is the case of the Ngoni, a major cultural group in Malawi. The Ngoni, having established domination over the indigenous Tumbuka through invasion and conquest in the 1850s, paved the way for the British, who in their turn of colonial conquest and domination condemned the indigenous Tumbuka culture for its matrilineality, claiming it was dysfunctional, and helped to impose the Ngoni language and patriarchal social structure through which the English mediated their colonial rule.

Since the appropriation of the indigenous culture served the colonial project, and since colonial invasion was heralded by Christianity, it is not surprising that the most contested spaces of cultural appropriation were the religious centers of the native populations – these being seen as the most resistant to foreign invasion. It is no accident that the invading forces, to effectively dominate and undermine the bedrock of the people's religion, not only invaded the shrines, but also appropriated other cultural expressions such as songs and dances and the means of producing these cultural entities, xylophones and drums.

In *The Ngoni of Nyasaland*, first published in 1956, Margaret Read describes an encounter that took place in the 1930s to illuminate the process of the appropriation of African cultural expression through the missionization of Ngoni culture. She relates a typical example of appropriation of the recreational cultural expression of the Ngoni called *ingoma*, which is the generic core of the nguni choral styles, *isicathamiya* and *Baqanga*, performed by such internationally famous groups as Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Read writes that when a party of Europeans "watched the rhythm and dignity of the dances, they were so favourably impressed that they asked the Paramount Chief to send senior men to teach the songs and dances to the boys in the mission schools; . . . the songs were used in the churches of the Scottish mission with different words written for them."<sup>1</sup> With *ingoma* and other indigenous cultural expressions, the site of appropriation was usually the rural periphery and sacred places such as the *kraal* (the cattle enclosure where important ceremonies took place). It is important to note that in this process of appropriation the chief's "senior men" did not have to convert to Christianity before their culture could be taken over. Thus the initial aim is not to convert, but to take over the production of cultural expression and through it establish domination.

The Ngoni's own religious beliefs and the lofty and persuasive nature of their language and poetry made it more tempting for the Christian missionizing forces to appropriate and adapt the *izibongo* (praise poetry) for their proselytization.<sup>2</sup> Through this appropriation process, indigenous cultural expressions became the property of the Church of Scotland and the European colonial establishment. The following song, for example, has become a popular feature of church gatherings in the Ngoni-Tumbuka territories of northern Malawi, and is regarded as a prized addition to the Livingstonia church hymnal:

The earth does not get fat. It finishes off those in houses old as the fig tree.

We shall die on the earth. Nhi hi hi hi!

The earth does not get fat. It finishes off those who are fleet-footed.

Shall we all die on this earth, then? Nhi hi hi hi!

Hearken, O earth! We shall mourn them. Hearken, O earth!

Hearken, O earth! Shall we all die on this earth, then?

The earth does not get fat. It finishes off kings.

Shall we all die on this earth, then? Nhi hi hi hi!

The earth does not get fat. It finishes off queens.

Shall we all die on this earth, then? Nhi hi hi hi!

Hearken, O earth! We shall mourn them. Hearken, O earth!

Hearken, O earth! Shall we all die on this earth, then?

The earth does not get fat. It finishes off noblemen.

Shall we all die on this earth, then? Nhi hi hi hi!

The earth does not get fat. It finishes off noblewomen.

Shall we all die on this earth, then? Nhi hi hi hi!

Hearken, O earth! We shall mourn them. Hearken, O earth!

Hearken, O earth! Shall we all die on this earth, then?

The earth does not get fat. It finishes off common people.

Shall we all die on this earth? Nhi hi hi hi!

The earth does not get fat. It finishes off beasts.

Shall we all die on this earth? Nhi hi hi hi!

Listen, you who are asleep, who are left tightly closed in the land!

Shall we all sink into this earth, then? Ho ho ho ho!

Hearken, O earth! The sun is setting tightly!

We shall all enter into the earth.

This song is usually sung at mammoth evangelizing rallies by the Umanyano, a women's choir dressed in black and white. As we have mentioned, changing original words and substituting new ones based on English

melody, indicates that cultural products appropriated from the periphery to the center were reprocessed, reproduced, repackaged, and sent back to the periphery for the expansion of capital, of Christianity, and of political domination. In the process, traditional indigenous discourses were disrupted. The native population had to be indoctrinated and reconditioned to a capitalist cultural mode of consumerism so that they would crave the acquisition of the “new” products. As a consequence, today we find that even a traditional wedding among the Ngoni is not considered complete without the presence and performance of the local accordion band dressed in the full colorful leisure attire of the South African gold mine worker.

It is not just Europeans and the evangelizing missions who have learned how to dominate and control indigenous African people through their cultural expressions; in the accumulation of political capital, African leaders themselves now practice a degree of appropriation. Hastings Banda, former president of Malawi, for example, systematically revalorized the precolonial “authentic” cultural values of the Ngoni and used selected phenomena taken from their traditional cultures. Banda, once president for life, appropriated and effectively used the Ngoni oral tradition of *izibongo*. Banda employed the oral institution of the *imbongi* or praise poet so that his authority could be legitimated through orally transmitted recitations (praise songs) lauding his accomplishments. Banda institutionalized the oral tradition of the praise poet to reach a wider audience in a country that UNESCO has rated as one of the most illiterate in the world. In return for their services, Banda provided the praise poets with food, Java-print clothes, employment, free beer, and sometimes money and modern brick houses. Banda also provided transport to and from his political rallies, usually by air, in a country where such luxury is out of the reach of even senior employees. Thus Banda demonstrates that it is not just the cultural expression that can be appropriated, but the performer as well. From his first political campaigns, beginning in 1958, Banda was often accompanied on the stage by such famous musical performers as Dorothy Masuka. Even South African singers like the Dark City Sisters composed and sang his praises.

The function of appropriation is determined by what is appropriated, who appropriates it, and for whom appropriation takes place. Its value, thus, is determined by capitalist market forces. It is usually the melody, intonation, and the meaning-bearing unit that are first appropriated because it is the linguistic essence that contains the cultural trait marking its category. Words can be strung to the melody later, depending on the

intended audience and political exigency. If the church appropriates the cultural expression, words suitable to the proselytizing mission will be substituted for the original words. A similar process is undertaken if the appropriating agent is a politician. Thus politicians like Banda and Zulu Chief Buthelezi appropriate and subvert the phenomenon of *izibongo* itself.

The political efficacy of the indigenous praise song can be seen in how this expression is taken over by the local opponents of colonial occupation, and also in how they are repossessed by African neocolonialists, once the leaders of the national independence movement. The song “Mtwanami Washona,” about colonial farm policies and performed by the Mzimba Ngoni in northern Malawi, is a good example:

My son has disappeared  
Because of forced banding  
Hiyoo! Ayee! Eeh!  
Because of forced banding.

The song is about the unpopular agricultural policies imposed by the colonial government on rural farmers as part of an attempt to control soil erosion. It criticized the colonial agricultural practice of contour banding, which meant the abandonment of traditional farming methods and the subsequent dissolution of the family.

In this song, a migrant worker leaves his homeland because of the excessive burden of agricultural work imposed by the planters. The song criticizes the breakdown of the rural African family where now the son is depicted as opting out, a coward deserting his communal responsibilities. The ChiNgoni word *washona* or *kushona*, which ordinarily means disappear and refers to the migrant workers who do not return, may also refer to death – and the nonreturn of a migrant worker is, in a way, a form of death.

After independence in Malawi, performers quickly substituted “Kamuzu Banda” for *mtwana wame* (the errant son), and a new meaning surfaced when the Tumbuka-Ngoni performers were forced to dance for Kamuzu Banda, at the time president of the country, and a neocolonial agent in the service of Pretoria (South Africa) and the former Rhodesia. The song was a very popular radio request until, predictably, the Banda regime got wise to the peasant counterdiscourse and banned it in the early 1970s. In the version with substitutions, it is clear that the *ingoma* performers regard the colonial expatriate officials as different from the local bourgeoisie, the chief of the district, or the president of the country. They

expect social responsiveness and reciprocity from the native authorities, but the kind of relationships they sought to objectify and mediate with the colonial officials were different because they were of a more generalized structure and cognitive order, since the colonial officials were never regarded as members of the peoples’ immediate social structure. This form of subversion reveals that in their resistance to domination, the subjugated population will usually apply the same methods of appropriation that the invaders used to construct their domination. The African National Congress’s counterappropriation of their anthem, “Inkosi Sikelélé,” is perhaps the best example.

The cultural reproduction of Ngoni praise songs, initially brought about by the missionization of indigenous cultural expression, marks the beginning of a system of regional integration wherein Malawi, like Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, functions as a reservoir of surplus labor for the urban metropolises of South Africa.

The creation of commercial and industrial metropolises in the southern African region, namely South Africa and the former federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, gave rise to the influx of migrant labor from the rural outerbelt (border states and the so-called homelands) to the urban townships, which served as domestic labor colonies supplying the mining and manufacturing industries of the two colonial states. Migrant laborers brought their bodies and their cultures. Their music, dance, and theater became the raw material of a new kind of cultural production and, as such, vehicles of adaptation to the urban environment.<sup>3</sup> The process of adaptation is not the mere conversion of the rural to the urban; it also means immersion into the capitalist economy. In his analysis of Zulu choral music and its place in the evolution of migrant music in South Africa, Veit Erlmann identifies the conversion from rural to urban, the loss of alternative sources of livelihood after World War II, and the urbanization of the “homelands,” as aspects of a “restructuring of pre-capitalist forms of social organization that occurred simultaneously, both in the cities and in the countryside. Music and performance are part of a complex network of production and reproduction that spans towns and countryside.”<sup>4</sup>

Colonialism and neocolonialism allow for the “indigenization” of capitalist relations of production and reproduction on the site of culture so that the rural-urban conversion becomes normalized – that is, a normal part, the stitching, if you will – of social and economic life. While it is clear that migrancy has been created to respond to capitalist demands and fosters relations that disrupt the precapitalist development of indige-

nous communities, these new relations of migrancy replace old patterns of production. Displacing indigenous communities by the geographic encroachment of the colonial state altered the traditional relationship of the native people to the land. Precapitalist agricultural production gave way to more attractive forms of livelihood in the growing urban centers. Because of their eviction from their ancestral land to less arable locations, farming was replaced by wage labor. Small-scale farming, for instance, was replaced by agri-industrial complexes. Such geographic dislocation established migration as a permanent, rather than temporary, solution to the procurement of livelihood. The normalized condition of migrancy is manifest in the transformation of cultural expression; the expressions of rural local cultures encounter the popular urban forms of entertainment, creating a hybrid culture of leisure.

### *Township Music and the Globalization of African Culture*

The regional circulation of local expressions in southern Africa belongs to a larger global circulation and integration of African culture that inscribes a pattern moving from the periphery to the center and back again. In this context we can say that the transport of Africans from their homelands to the “New World” during the transatlantic slave trade marked one of the major migrations of African culture from the geo-economic periphery to the geoeconomic center.

Borne on the bodies of Africans, captured and carried to the New World, traditional African forms of song and dance encountered European musical instruments and forms of leisure culture in the U.S. settler communities, creating a hybrid culture expressed in the form of work songs, Negro spirituals, minstrel shows, and ragtime music. However, the coded resistance strategies of the spirituals, to be specific, were usurped by a process of cultural reproduction so that when they were infused into the popular culture of South Africa (during the 1890s and the early twentieth century), they were received as American Christian music serving the missionization of the black indigenous population. Often performed by white troupes, African-American cultural expressions circulated from the geoeconomic center back to the geoeconomic periphery and, specifically for our purposes, to South African townships and the rural outerbelt, as missionized forms. Hence, cultural expressions born out of an antagonistic relationship with American capitalism – that is, the transatlantic slave trade – were appropriated by white artists for “civilizing” purposes, exported to South Africa, and embraced as American culture. The efforts

of the civilizing missions, however, did not elude the critical consciousness of black South Africans, specifically during African-American performances of Negro spirituals in the colony.

On one such occasion, in August 1890, in Kimberley’s town hall, the Virginia Jubilee Singers “not only sang the Negro spirituals, the heart-piece of the oppressed culture of America’s black slaves, deep into black South Africans’ hearts, the tours also set ablaze the minds of South Africa’s black population with a vision of black pride and dignity more powerful and clear than had ever been voiced before from a South African theatrical stage.”<sup>5</sup> This observation by Josiah Semouse, a young clerk at the Kimberley post office and prominent local choir member, reveals in a local newspaper the liberatory efficacy of the Negro spirituals, giving testimony to their original intent as resistance songs. The particular intonation and quality of voice that could be delivered only by African-American performers was possibly the single most important element of subversion operating in these tour performances. In this instance, the Negro spirituals, which had been appropriated from one marginalized black community located in the center, were restored to their original political intent in the marginalized periphery of the empire.

Notions of periphery and center grow more complicated when one considers marginalized rural communities thought to be of the periphery and urban proletariat communities, townships, thought to be in the center. The township of Soweto, peripheral in terms of its relationship to Johannesburg, is seen as a part of the center when the cultural scape is the rural outerbelt. The specific vantage point from which the site of cultural production is experienced explains the utility of the “landscape” metaphor employed by Arjun Appaduri in his essay, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” – that is, the lay of the land looks different depending on the position from which we view it. The global circulation of African cultural expressions, therefore, blurs distinctions of periphery and center, since the actual location of various African communities, continental and diasporan, rural and urban, exists within the colonizing metropoles as marginalized communities, and in the peripheral Third World as members of the colonial empire.

The late twentieth century finds an even more complex network of global cultural production than any model of center and periphery will allow. Appaduri writes, “The complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctions between economy, culture and politics which we have only begun to theorize.”<sup>6</sup> He offers a description of the relationship between five interrelated and interdependent

dimensions of cultural flow based on the metaphor of land-“scape,” a model that is both fluid and perspectival. He calls these dimensions ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. Ethnoscapes refers to “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers and other moving groups and persons [who] constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations.”<sup>7</sup> Included in this category are the human cargo of the slave trade, representing the shift from kingdom to modern empire, and the migrant laborers of southern Africa, who represent the transition from precapitalist agricultural production to the wage economy of the colonial state.

The shifting reality of the rural and urban landscape of southern Africa can be viewed as ranging from the Mahotela Queens’ touring of the Mzimba district in northern Malawi and Dorothy Masuka’s sharing a platform with Banda in a Chewa village, to the intervention via Radio Zambia of the exiled South African cultural activist and composer of the traveling show, *King Kong*, Todd Matshikiza. The “tourists” from the center brought to the periphery not only the accordion and the blues musical style with which to renovate the rural cultural output, but also, upon their return to the South African center, brought back innovations for forms like *isicathamiya* and *Baqanga*.

The evolution of modern technology has determined to a significant degree the economic, political, and social development and organization of the global cultural economy, differentiating populations according to their degree of development of technological knowledge and instruments, and also inscribing differential access to technological monopolies. These fluid and changing “technoscapes” that have been developed by the big capitalist nations provide the means for the entrenchment of multinational commerce by establishing a heterogeneous yet hegemonic global culture. Air travel, satellite transmission of music and images, high-tech electronics, as well as the electronic flow of capital (Appaduri’s “finanscapes”), dissolve geographic barriers to accessible markets. By the time of the Harlem Renaissance and the Second World War, in the 1930s and 1940s, the American styles of the minstrel shows, ragtime, the blues, and swing had taken on the aura of a popular “world beat” music. Consequently, in South Africa, we see the emergence of dress and choreographic styles reflective of a proletariat leisure culture, such as the likes of one South African vocal quartet who called themselves the Manhattan Brothers.

As can be seen at this juncture, the circular flow of cultural production began early with the instruments of warfare and travel that facilitated the

movement of African bodies and culture to the New World; later the process of cultural dissemination used more efficient technoscapes with the advent of radio, recordings, and phonographs. Talent competitions, once performed in hostels and township meeting halls, were appropriated by the entertainment industry and commerce. The technological know-how and instruments of local record companies and U.S. subsidiaries (such as Bantu Batho, Gallo, Columbia, and Decca) facilitated the rapid dissemination of the migrant cultural expressions of the townships and workers’ complexes. But as we have demonstrated, it was not the entertainment industry that gave rise to this cultural reproduction, but rather a confluence of forces emanating from the social organization of an industrialized wage economy. The affiliation of this cultural reproduction with “political and union militancy illustrated an important aspect of early working-class consciousness” in South Africa before the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> Despite the assumption that some township music was an example of “co-opted working-class consciousness,” the subversive potential has always been an integral part of its production and performance. Erlmann points out, “Until the late 1940s, politically motivated *imbube* songs such as the Dundee Wandering Singers’ ‘Poll Tax’ or [Solomon] Linda’s ‘Yethul’ Isigqoki’ [Take off your hat]<sup>9</sup> were even aired from the Durban studios of what later became the South African Broadcasting Corporation (S.A.B.C.).”<sup>10</sup>

The cultural flow moves back from the South African periphery to the U.S. center in the 1960s and 1970s in the musical presence of such South African performers as Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, and Abdul Ibrahim. Their association with such entertainment luminaries as Harry Belafonte and their appropriation by the Black Arts Movement of the time were signs of a growing pan-Africanist consciousness. Their presence in North America followed the state-sanctioned apartheid policies imposed in the late 1940s and the massacre in Sharpeville in March 1960. In 1976, the boycott against Afrikaans education sparked a violent retaliation from the South African government in Soweto and fueled opposition to apartheid in the United States. While the music of black South African artists did not enjoy broad-based popularity in the United States, their songs were frequently aired in alternative radio programming and enjoyed some international exposure through the British Broadcasting Corporation.

In the situation of southern Africa, radio is a key example of what Appaduri calls “mediascapes,” that is, both the “distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios), which are now

available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media.”<sup>11</sup>

The interrelatedness and interdependency of these “scapes” (ethno-, techno-, finan-, and media-) suggest a web of relations in which differential capabilities give rise to the uneven and antagonistic exchange between communities competing for state power. The hegemonic and global cultural industry at the present moment absorbs images and streams of meaning that originate from the margin, creating not only profits, but also a heterogeneity of concepts representing the ongoing tensions that exist between and within the center and the margin. These media-deployed concepts are what Appaduri refers to as “ideoscapes,” that is, “concatenations of images . . . often directly political and frequently hav[ing] to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it.”<sup>12</sup> This heterogeneity of ideas has bizarre consequences as seen in the “Coca-Colazation” and Disney World fetish of Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Their appropriation by the global cultural economy of capitalism perpetrates both consumer and commodity fetish, on the one hand, and an aesthetic sensibility that can be associated with the antiapartheid movement, on the other. As depolitized as their performances are, their association, even if imaginary, with the political struggle of black South Africans and the simultaneous endorsement of the commercial product cannot be escaped.

The multimedia project mounted by “Little Steven” Van Zandt and Artists United Against Apartheid, “Sun City” (1985), represents an action on the part of alternative mediascapes to strategically deploy streams of meaning in the service of the oppressed South African masses, causing problems for U.S. international policy. In Ullestads words:

“Sun City” emphasized communication of hard information and relatively shocking images of the situation in South Africa: the communication of truth to educate. The degree of attention to the educational aspects of “Sun City” is noteworthy in itself. The record album [was] stuffed with flyers and fact sheets; while the carefully prepared paperback book (Penguin), written in part by Dave Marsh, provides a no-nonsense portrait of apartheid and an entertaining view of the production of the event. The video (Karl-Lorimar) is a breathtaking example of how entertainment, reality and commentary can be effectively fused.<sup>13</sup>

Paul Simon’s album *Graceland* (1986), composed with South African artists, called global attention to the antiapartheid struggle,<sup>14</sup> but its im-

port in the late history of apartheid follows the antiapartheid intervention of Van Zandt’s “Sun City,” which pricked the consciousness of many musical artists, including Simon. The distinction between “Sun City” and *Graceland* is apparent in terms of the embrace, in the United States, of Van Zandt’s stance and the incredulous contempt articulated toward Paul Simon by Howard University student activists shortly after his album’s release.

A precursor to Paul Simon’s *Graceland* is Neil Diamond’s *Tap Root Manuscript*, released in 1970.<sup>15</sup> In the liner notes, Diamond asserts that the “African Trilogy” (side 2 of the album) is “an attempt to convey [his] passion for the folk music of [the] black continent.” *Tap Root Manuscript*, as a sign of appropriation, enabled Diamond to make a grand comeback, having fallen into a brief period of obscurity. Diamond was able to capitalize on his version of East African rhythms (from Kenya) without having ever visited the African continent. Diamond’s appropriation of the sign was superseded by Simon who not only appropriated an African cultural expression (the sign) but also its producer.

The appropriation of Ladysmith Black Mambazo by Paul Simon for his album *Graceland* and subsequent “Born at the Right Time” tour represents an occasion of political opportunism on the part of agents of the multinational capitalist cultural economy, including some white South Africans. The success of this collaboration in the concrete sense made Simon’s *Graceland* “one of the most popular international releases ever in [South Africa],” going triple platinum with the sale of 150,000 copies while “bringing this country’s township rhythms to world prominence.”<sup>16</sup> “More importantly, *Graceland* gave township rhythm a level of respectability it no longer had among township people themselves. In the ’70s and early ’80s, most black acts leaned toward U.S. funk and dance music, believing it to be superior to the local musical brews. Today, that pendulum has swung back toward [township] rhythms.”<sup>17</sup>

The embracing of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, ostensibly as ambassadors of South African culture, enables white South Africans to identify with African cultural expressions and, by expressing a claim on indigenous black traditions, to legitimate their position as locals. Louise Meintjes, in her essay on Simon’s *Graceland*, suggests, “By incorporating traditions and other signs of indigenous, subordinated groups into their own identity, they . . . establish a place for themselves in South Africa, . . . [and] diffuse the potency of those traditions and signs for the subordinated groups.”<sup>18</sup> Hence, they “affirm” their solidarity with indigenous forces leading the current process of political transition.

The utility and interrelatedness of mediascapes, and the strategic deployment of ideoscapes, can be detected in their ability to legitimize the political project of the white South African power structure in the form of broadcasts of the politically coopted Ladysmith Black Mambazo's early work and the celebration of their "collaboration" with Paul Simon on the state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and Cape Town's CCV-TV.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout this discussion, we have attempted to describe the global flow of African cultural expressions as they move from the peripheries to the center and back again. We suggest that the globalization of African culture is directly related to the impact of the colonial project of domination and the corresponding flow of finance capital and labor migration in the colonial and postindependence periods. Arjun Appaduri's landscape metaphors are useful in articulating the processes that predicate the heterogeneity of the hegemonic global cultural economy, wherein disjunctions and difference are the driving forces of global cultural and economic exchange. We have also sought to exemplify, as Appaduri suggests, the ways in which these various landscapes, "from the stabilizing perspectives of any given imagined world are in fundamental disjunction in respect to one another."<sup>19</sup> It is hoped that our approach to a general theory of cultural processes, and specifically a theory of the global production of African cultural expressions, can help to address deliberations regarding the production of cultural expressions in the black world with a view toward understanding cultural output, not as random or isolated events, but rather processes directly associated with the evolution of colonial domination and transnational capitalism. To this end, the forces of disjunction and difference are viewed not as merely destabilizing elements but as overlapping configurations of cultural forms. Appaduri argues:

These cultural forms, which we should strive to represent as fully fractal, are also overlapping in ways that have been discussed only in pure mathematics (in set theory for example) and in biology (in the language of polythetic classifications). Thus we need to combine a fractal metaphor for the shape of cultures (in the plural) with a polythetic account of their overlaps and resemblances.<sup>20</sup>

The events of colonial domination and appropriation of African cultural expression by the forces of colonialism and neocolonialism have

served two functions – exploitation and innovation – which any analysis should seek to explain, reconcile, and renovate. These processes simultaneously subjugate marginalized communities on the one hand, and rejuvenate indigenous cultural expression for liberatory purposes, on the other. The success of the latter is the most honorable work of black cultural activists.