

Racialisation in Jamaica

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Introduction

The processes of racialisation in Jamaica reflect a complex and sustained ideological grounding upon colonial logics which actively repress perceived racial otherness. Despite the insistence of governmental institutions and the projected image of a raceless nation, contemporary Jamaica is still subject to overt and entrenched forms of racist discourse. The island's racial climate *must* be seen within the context of a potent and active colonial legacy, through which social values of worth and economic racialisation are fundamentally determined by skin colour. The class structure of Jamaica is inexorably tied to racialisation, as such it enduringly pervades and dictates all elements of Jamaican life. Specific studies of Jamaican racialisation have been limited, in conjunction with a government unwilling to explore its domestic race problem, the operation of a racial machine is left unchecked and in no small way contributes to Jamaica's stagnant economy and warring society. It is the purpose of this essay to explore the racialisation of post-colonial Jamaica and to expose how 'the social regulation of race'¹, enduringly limits its Afro-Caribbean population in economy, society and to a certain extent politics. This focus shall not be at the expense of other races, however, black Jamaicans are at a nexus of racial judgement.

The perceived identity of Jamaica

The picture painted by Jamaican governmental institutions is one of harmony in an ideologically raceless society. This post-raciality was not sought through any definitive steps to absolving racial difference, rather, the government conscripted the concealment (not removal) of racial boundaries; this is reflected in Jamaica's national Motto — "Out of Many, One People." The desire to strip the nation of a globally perceived race does not reflect the unification of race through assimilation, rather, it serves to strengthen the divide between Jamaican 'races.' Despite this, the racial diversity of the island has been seen to reference an environment of *equality*, multiculturalism and diversity. Wardle describes a 'globalized image of a racial consciousness which defines a land of free-choice.'² This image of Jamaica, must be seen in the context of a government dependent upon its tourist industry which 'has become, in recent years, the most vital component of the Jamaican economy.'³ The instability of contemporary Jamaica's economy is attributable to the decaying foundations of a plantation economy which favours white Jamaicans over blacks. As a result of this selective presentation, there is little external recognition of race hate within Jamaica. More alarmingly and certainly symptomatic of the true nature of Jamaican race, there is little *internal* administrative recognition of domestic racism.

The general assessment of Jamaica is inexorably linked to the globalized identity of

¹ Salih, Sara, *Representing mixed race in Jamaica and England from the abolition era to the present*, New York, Routledge, 2011) p.14

² Wardle, Huon, *An Ethnography of Cosmopolitanism in Kingston, Jamaica*, (New York: Edwin Mellor Press, 2000)

³ United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development, *An assault on poverty: Basic Human Needs, Science and Technology*, (Ottawa: International development Research Centre, 1997), p12

(predominantly black) Jamaican citizens. Hence, a prevalent global expectation to be quintessentially Jamaican; and to conform to a black dreggie phenotype exists. *Whilst global expectations such as these seem trivial, in a country whose 'people acquired globalized world views,'*⁴ this expectation is imported and takes hold in Jamaica.

The construction of a racially driven masculinity has significant ramifications internally and internationally. A popular view exists which attributes an inherent 'super masculinity' to males of Afro-Caribbean origin. 'African Caribbean boys are hard, stylish and to be admired, but they also carry an image of aggression and disdain for others.'⁵ Research amongst youth populations in both Britain and USA indicates an entrenched perception of 'black men of African Caribbean descent... as 'super-masculine.'⁶ This arguably has agency in Jamaican racialisation, insofar as an affirmation of identity through abandoning imposed whiteness has proven an effective way of reconstituting an autonomy which was robbed.

Despite such perceptions of the island, there is a simultaneously negative image of Jamaican culture which imposes views of criminality upon the black Jamaican population. Jamaica's largest city, Kingston, has the title of 'murder capital of the world' and is riddled with gun crime and gang culture. The predominantly black, urban population is somewhat demonised in this perception which does not attribute responsibility to Jamaica's lack of social reform. Jamaican acquisition of world views again plays a significant role here, over representation of Jamaicans in England and other Western countries arguably concrete the negative perceptions of black criminality internally. This is exhibited in that Yardies are perceived as archetypal Jamaicans. Internationally renowned Dancehall artist Buju Banton questions 'Why everyting weh gwan a foreign di yardie get de blame.' Afro-Caribbeans elsewhere in the diasporic population, prompt new definitions of blackness. The notion of a synergetic absorption and expulsion in the islands make up has significant consequences; the ambivalence, and demonisation from external nations is reabsorbed by Jamaica and serves to re-inform expectations of race. This depreciation arguably feeds cyclical processes of expectation.

Despite the prevalence of racism, there is a wealth of sources which suggest, race as the dominant form of discrimination has been supplanted by class. Jamaica is a 'society structured primarily by class,' where 'England or America are structured primarily by race.'⁷ A view pertaining to Jamaican segregation on a classist basis, seems unwilling to tackle the huge complexity of the domestic race *problem*. Rather, the belief that 'the legacies of colonialism... created a society divided on two closely coinciding axes: race *and* class'⁸ conveys more accurately the interwoven relationship of the two. Moreover, race has agency in determining social mobility, as such, Jamaica's class structure is primarily built upon race; a fundamental determinant of economic expectation and success.

Consequently, the machine of binary logic positing good and bad in alignment with white and black, is rarely recognised thereby, allowing it to thrive neither tested nor negated. The perception that a racially neutral state has emerged does not bear weight under scrutiny. The government's emphasis upon a positive projection of image, comes at the cost of tackling the race issue in any substantive way. Consequently, 'the legacy of more

⁴ Miller, Alexander, *Backlash and West Indian Return Migration : The case of Jamaica*, (Carolina: University of South Carolina, 2007) p.12

⁵ Squire, Corrine, *Culture in Psychology*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p47

⁶ Ibid. p47

⁷ Miller, p.57

⁸ Water, Anita M, *Race, Class and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics*, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1989), p.8

than three centuries of slavery persist to this day in Jamaica...⁹ Upon contacting the Jamaican High commission, it transpired that no records of racially motivated crime are kept by the governments statistical body. This proof of a detached or even distorted body of research gives credence to the belief that Jamaica's image is established upon a code of ignorance and concealment for the purposes of tourism. Despite the concerted attempts to transpose the country's racial problem into a less damning class structured one; 'class is [still] aligned with race.'¹⁰ To take a post-racial image as gospel (as occurs often), is to diminish the daily existential conflicts which transpire between classes *and* thereby races.

The racial identity of Jamaica

The truth of perceived Jamaican races is far more diverse than the homogenous black perception of the west, rather presents 'a situation of considerable racial ideological complexity.'¹¹ Miller suggests 'Racial groups intermarried to produce Jamaican society from a varying mixture of Europeans, Jews, Africans, Indians and Chinese races.'¹² However, these interactions were mediated through a colonial and caste system of judgement. Needless to say, the relationship between the first white and African inhabitants was one of white superiority. The arrival of east Indians and the shadist caste-system under which their society is structured, compounded the degradation of African-Jamaicans; widening the void between blacks and other Jamaican ethnicities. This process of racialisation seems to conform to Goldberg's relational methodology which suggests; 'colonial outlooks, interests, dispositions and arrangements set the... frameworks for... engaging and distancing, exploiting and governing, admitting and administering those conceived as racially distinct and different- and relatedly for elevating and privileging those deemed racially to belong to the dominant.'¹³ Certainly, the importation of an Indian caste system had the potential to disrupt such a reading, but their subservience to whites and denigration to blacks, meant that this system correlated neatly with sustained colonial philosophies.

The colour-based classification of race, which characterizes racial relations throughout the Caribbean has evolved into a number of categories which oversimplify the genesis of racial distinction in the country; White, Brown and Black. These divisions are seen to correlate with 'the socioeconomic categories of upper class, middle class and working class.'¹⁴ 'This colour scheme characterizes the social, economic and political institutions in Jamaica today, even though over time the colonial prejudices have been hidden behind education and social class.'¹⁵ Again, Miller's lexical choice is a significant one; *hidden*, the effects of governmental concealment are pervasive. There have been superficial social reforms, but increasing poverty and subsequent criminality; leads to the increase and fortification of a rich-poor divide.

⁹ Senauth, Frank, *The Making of Jamaica*, (Bloomington USA: Authorhouse, 2011) p.22

¹⁰ Austin-Broos, Diane J, *Urban Life in Kingston, Jamaica: The Culture, Class and Ideology of two* (Montreux: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1984) p. xx

¹¹ Alleyne, Mervyn C, *Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean*, (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies, 2002) p194

¹² Miller, p.11

¹³ Goldberg, David Theo (2009)'Racial comparisons, relational racisms: some thoughts on method', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*,32:7, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870902999233>>

¹⁴ Alleyne, p.193

¹⁵United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development, *An assault on poverty: Basic Human Needs, Science and Technology*, (Ottawa: International development Research Centre, 1997)

As a country with out singular lineage, the processes of racialisation and the notion of a racial identity are complex, but key determinants in Jamaican daily experience.

The colonial value-judgement of colour prevalent during the slavery era, has been perpetuated and sustained post-emancipation resulting in 'one of the world's worst income disparities between the rich and the poor.'¹⁶ Sterling argues that at work in Jamaica is 'a neo-colonial, neoliberal system that marginalizes poor black men and in turn poor black women.'¹⁷

This view is not universal however, with scholars sustaining that 'Blacks have achieved much upward social mobility, primarily through entrepreneurship and education.'¹⁸ However, this view overlooks the restrictive nature of Jamaican society; few blacks are classed as middle-class and a diminutive number reach upper class, thereby severely limiting subsequent generational prospects in education and work. Furthermore, the structural constraints born of economic racialisation, render the prospects of *domestic* social and economic improvement unachievable and are evidenced in the vast number of black transmigrational workers.

The racial experience of black transmigrational workers, differs greatly to their domestic treatment, finding that their 'distinctions of coming from different islands, and being of different shades did not matter.'¹⁹ Miller's work suggests that the stratification of race through shades of blackness are traits exhibited within the Caribbean; which have been mostly discarded elsewhere. External to such context, these racial differences are razed and a conglomerate 'black' figure is established by majority white countries, thereby confirming to some degree, the uniqueness of Jamaican racialisation.

Colonial legacy has been sustained in contemporary Jamaican society; lighter skinned Jamaicans are posited in realms of economic status whereas darker skinned afro-Caribbean are economically and socially repressed. 'Economic power... continues to elude the black majority'²⁰ and consequently, the upward mobility of blacks is almost negligible, at present failing to instigate any qualitative economic/social reform. As such 'the role of race has been fundamental in the shaping of Caribbean identity, which serves to hide a racialized division of labour and a racialized allocation of power and privilege.'²¹ A governmental concealment of a deeply entrenched racial machine, directly affects the racial identity of Jamaicans.

A reflection of the complexity of Jamaican racialisation, is the variation in statistical recordings of ethnicities and race. The CIA world factbook suggests Afro-Jamaicans constitute over 90% of the island's population, whereas UWI recorded figures of 76.3% African descent, 15.1% Afro-European, 3.4% East Indian and Afro-East Indian, 3.2% Caucasian, 1.2% Chinese and 0.8% Other. The variation in figures could be attributed to the fluidity of personal classification, as acknowledged in a report on the 2001 census. 'In Jamaica, questions on ethnicity and race are considered to reflect more of people's perception of themselves rather than ascription to a particular racial group on the basis of

¹⁶ United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development

¹⁷ Sterling, Marvin, *Babylon East: Performing Dancehall, Roots Reggae and Rastafari in Japan*, (USA: Duke University, 2010), p141

¹⁸ Satchell, Veront, Jamaica, (Africana.com, 1999)

<<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43/130.html>> [date accessed: 28/03/2012]

¹⁹ Miller, p.48

²⁰ Satchell

²¹ Dikotter, Frank, *Why Racial Discourse Became Global*, (2011)

<http://www.humanities.uci.edu/collective/hctr/trans-scripts/2011_01_05.pdf>

physical appearance.²² Exact numbers aside, it is certain that the majority of the island's black population inhabit Jamaica's over crowded, deprived cities and towns. The prospects of economic and social improvement which elude blacks, have *to a certain extent*, been afforded to both Indians and Chinese, allowing freedom to avoid such poverty. Coupled with a concerted white absence from such areas, this contributes to the racial secularisation of the Jamaican economy, further destabilising these urban areas. This suggests that an ethnocentric system has agency in distributing economic power and opportunity.

Interestingly, the white population of Jamaica is one of the proportionately smallest in the Caribbean and relative to the black population is receding. Alleyne argues that in practice this suggests 'white' has become more of a concept than a daily racial encounter.²³ However, this does not quite satisfy the questions arising from ongoing racial conflict. Moreover, in spite of the decreasing white population, they still preside over the vast majority of assets and wealth in Jamaica.

Evident in the racialisation of the island, is the insistence upon fracturing genetic heritage. Each racial phenotype is implicated in a shadist judgement of others; reinforcing the call for cultural and social insularity. Inter and intra-ethnic conflict is rife and reflects the complex blend of paradoxical, overt and entrenched forms of racism which are thriving unbridled.

Jamaican racialisation has established a number of modes of racist interactions. Firstly, racialisation from above; the imposition of racial categories and therefore judgements of worth, by a light skinned minority upon majority populus. Secondly, the notion of associational race, a majoritive judgement whereby a persons social status and resultant associations define their racial identity. And finally, self- racialisation; the individual's ascription to 'characteristics' defining ethnicity and their personal judgements of them.

Racialisation from above, is arguably the basis for the other two modes, in that it is the mode which establishes a racial hierarchy. However, of increasing significance in contemporary Jamaica are the latter two. Associational race in particular factors in the interactions between 'Brown' Jamaicans and blacks.

The illegitimate offspring of absentee plantation owners were often left in positions of authority, with benefits of such status; hence, they 'emerged as the elite class within Jamaican society after emancipation.'²⁴ Inheritance for mixed race Jamaicans, *and* their perceived success through associations with a white world, further enforced the dominance of fairness and perpetuated the racial alienation African-Jamaicans. Protection for the offspring of whites was written into the original colonial charters, showing that *de jure* and *de facto* racism, were literally written into the hierarchy of the island.

Alleyne alleges that 'in Jamaica, "brown"... has become the more active pole of opposition and antithesis to black.'²⁵ This rift was reflected in Marcus Garvey's judgements of 'mulattoes.' He stated, 'they [mixed-race Jamaicans] train themselves to believe that in the slightest shade the coloured man is above the black man and so it runs up to white.'²⁶

²² Capacity Development Programme (CCDP) National census Report Jamaica: 2000 ROUND OF POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS DATA ANALYSIS SUB-PROJECT (Caricom <<http://www.caricomstats.org/Files/Publications/NCR%20Reports/Jamaica.pdf>>

²³ Alleyne

²⁴ Gabriel, p.7

²⁵ Alleyne, p.192

²⁶ Gabriel, p.41

This view typifies the racially fractured infrastructure of thought which reacts to oppression by supporting the stratification of race. Contrary to Garvey's assertion, mixed race citizens are not training *themselves*, rather are subject to a pervasive and prevailing system which favours fair skin. Consequently, Jamaican mixed race citizens (in accordance with global precedent) suffer a state of suspension between poles, denied full integration to either. Considering the breadth of Jamaican mixed-race heritage; this reflects the implosive depreciation of individual race.

However, the same notion of associational race does not factor in the final mode of racist interaction; self-racialisation. Both of the other modes through essentially force blacks to apologise for their racial otherness. Hence, the need for self-affirmation emerges, an identification with and celebration of racial allegiances. That being said, alongside this positive affirmation there lies 'a pernicious internalized form of racism which involves prejudice, stereotyping and perceptions of beauty among members of the same racial group, whereby light skin is more highly valued than dark skin.'²⁷

The interaction of black-on-black racism, conveys how instrumental the depreciation of blackness is in Jamaica. The semantic adequacy of auto-racism has been questioned, leading Hutton to adopt the term 'Acquired Anti-own race syndrome (AAORS).' He suggests the syndrome is 'characterized by self-denial and self-negation... AAORS pervades 'the sub-consciousness of masses of African people in Jamaica and manifests itself in attitudes that are like second nature to them.'²⁸

The continued self-depreciation of African origins, is effectively conveyed in a study by Ferguson and Cramer, which identified 'similarities in the way that colourism manifests itself in both black north American and Jamaican societies. Both societies have, they argue 'a shared negative attitude toward dark skin and a culturally valued preference for fair/ white skin.'²⁹ It is pertinent to return to the study by Squire which identified the popular view that Afro-Caribbeans 'act sort of bigger and louder and more confident'³⁰ in demonstrating how misguided perceptions of Jamaica are.

The tripartite of White, Brown and Black does not fully encompass the complexity of Jamaican phenotypes or racial ascriptions. Within each category there are further stratifications; for example within Brown, there lies a sub-category of Red. In an anecdotal source Austin-Broos, isolates a microcosmic event which typifies racist interactions between brown (red) and black. A mixed race landlord unhappy with the state of one of her buildings, calls a tenant 'dirty nigger' who replies "dem call ye red woman, red woman noh fe shame me." "red" people with copper coloured hair and freckled skin are looked down upon as the ugliest combination of white and black.³¹ This interaction reflects the divisibility of shades, conveying too the mental conditioning of Jamaicans to exhibit distaste for blackness.

There is certainly a failure to recognise the gravity of race; even those who explore the importance of race in Jamaica have overlooked the fundamental links between race and society. On the subject of skin bleaching, Mutabaraku dismisses it as 'ju anodda t'ing. Dem jus' deh deh. Ten years time dem stop do dat.' This relegation of skin bleaching to a passing fad, fails to recognise the psychological and sociological implications of

²⁷ Gabriel, p.11

²⁸ Gabriel, p43

²⁹ *ibid*, p45

³⁰ Squire, p.51

³¹ Austin-Broos, Diane J, (*Urban Life in Kingston, Jamaica: The Culture, Class and Ideology of two Neighbourhoods*), (Montreux: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1984) p.58

bleaching.³² It is certainly symptomatic of a *de facto* preference for whiteness.

To solely explore the racisms of black and white is to largely diminish the multi-faceted complexity of Jamaican racialisation. Whilst fair-skinned Chinese are generally grouped as 'whites' in Jamaica, they too have been victim to *specific* racial discrimination; resulting in the departure of 'many members of the Chinese community... due to racial unrest in the nation.'³³ Their arrival (along with Indians), introduced *foreign* religions and languages and delineated new racial chasms. The Chinese population has been subjected to '3 riots... in modern Jamaica'³⁴ in which violence and intimidation was utilised to alienate them. Evident too is the use of government legislation in the limitation of Chinese economic improvement (through retail). These events do not equate neatly to racism against blacks. Firstly, this action was conducted by a majority racial population, whereas racism against black Jamaicans, is propelled *largely* by a fair skinned minority. Secondly, Chinese populations had prospered economically and gained some social mobility, in fact, the income disparity between the two groups, has been cited as a point of ignition. That coupled with the suggestion that the Chinese themselves 'were to blame', for racially and culturally 'isolating themselves'³⁵ reflects that, it is not solely the identity of the Chinese, but that racial integration too, is key in determining racial interactions. This in-itself cannot sufficiently explain the cause of Jamaican racism; black and Caucasian communities *have* been seen to integrate in public spheres, yet the possibility of a racial peace-pact is absent.

Somewhat ironically, Jamaica has since emancipation, been a racially active state in supporting the struggles of numerous African liberation movements, including the antiapartheid movement, and the search for black rights elsewhere in the Diaspora.³⁶ This investment can be seen to reflect that 'Jamaicans understand themselves as global citizens... who have the potential for making social and cultural connection with many parts of the world.'³⁷ Equally, this can be seen as a buttress to a global perception that Jamaica is race-free. Jamaica's recognition of a role as a global nation and their reaction to world views highlights the cyclical nature of this relationship. That being said, this interest in global racial liberation has not extended to internal freedom struggles.

Consequently, 'colour lines and ethnic barriers still exist in the country.'³⁸ The refusal to tackle Jamaica's race problem has resulted in the division and concretion of separate racial cells, which themselves divide into conflicting units. This descent into a racial meiosis is fundamentally grounded on the permafrost of colonial racism again supporting a Goldbergian relational model. This coupled with the introduction of an Indian caste-philosophy through indentured workers, *and* the abilities of a fair skinned Chinese community to prosper economically, solidifies and agitates the inter-ethnic barriers of Jamaica. The continued dominance of a white economy and its influence in politics and policing, fractures racial communications further. It is essential to note, the racial climate of Jamaica has not become stagnated and static; on the contrary it is alive and well and continuing to marginalise members of its communities.

The findings of studies by Hutton and Gabriel 'confirm that a stigma against dark skin in Jamaica does exist.'³⁹ Whilst elements of Jamaican racism are hidden, the daily

³² Cooke, Mel, Singing About Shaka - Zulu's Musical Role Changes From Ugly To Warrior, <<http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20120219/ent/ent1.html>>

³³ *Jamaican Racial Frictions*, (2011) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OfFO5wmMQ>>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Satchell

³⁷ Wardle, p.4

³⁸ <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OfFO5wmMQ>>

³⁹ Gabriel, p46

experience of predominantly Afro-Jamaicans is the product of an established and thriving machine of discrimination from jobs, services and social stratum.

Whilst as single elements the above interactions are not phenomenal to Jamaica, this combination is unique in that the entire social structure of Jamaica is established upon a colonial system which despite proportionately decreasing numbers of white citizens, is still thriving. In essence, society is not a construction which then became racialised, it is fundamentally racial. The process of erasing a colonial framework, would in practice render the country's economy more stunted than it is now, and would not solve the racial conflicts which have arisen since emancipation.

The cultural identity of Jamaica

As evidenced, the experiences of Black Jamaicans, have been subject to a restrictive and oppressive system which affords little in the way of public freedoms. Evident too, is its convergence with issues of race; insofar as elements of culture (popular and otherwise) are reserved for racially defined stratum. 'the even broader problem for the attempt to escape racialization is that ethnicity itself signifies race even without further mediations.'⁴⁰ Again, this reflects the complexity of the Jamaican climate. Modes of racist interaction (outlined above) have infiltrated the culture of Jamaica as a result of a fair skinned minority enduringly controlling the economy.

Much of the concretion of Jamaican culture and the internal racialisation of the island, can be traced to a distinct cultural legacy largely informed by Colonialism. Significant elements of public Jamaican culture are enduringly informed by the anachronistic philosophies of external authorities. 'In the absence of African frameworks... Caribbean citizens learned to establish their social status... by being part of a colonial church... colonial schools... [and] by purchasing British status markers such as organs and pianos.'⁴¹ This cultural ascription to English symbols impregnated culture with another route of aspiration to white signifiers. It also severed black Jamaicans from their ancestral languages, religions and social practices.

The feeling of racial decapitation is reflected in cultural and racial movements of Jamaica, who sought example in Black Power movements of America and Europe using it as a point of reactionary departure. The desire to be repatriated, reimbursed with that which was taken can be witnessed in the emergence of a following of Garveyism and pan-africanism, of which 'one of the principle tenets... is the belief that our individual experiences are inextricably linked to the experiences of africans on the continent and elsewhere in the Diaspora.'⁴²

It is evident that the strategic theft of raciality through the imposition of a culture, disenfranchised Jamaicans of an identifiable heritage through cultural signifiers, resulting in the attempt to establish a cultural model as distant from Englishness as possible. Conversely, and incidentally at a root of the island's racial complexity, is a simultaneous deference and damnation for distinctly black cultural heritage.

'The media and popular culture play a part in reinforcing the notion that light skin equates with beauty.'⁴³ The socially mediated hatred towards African origin is reflected prevalently

⁴⁰ Alcoff, Linda, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and The Self*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p.241

⁴¹ Miller, p.54

⁴² Gabriel, p.8

⁴³ Gabriel, p.42

in areas of culture, notably in the beauty pageants seeking 'Miss Jamaica in which the vast majority have been white or brown, a consequence of which is the belief that 'texture and length of hair are linked to... femininity and feminine beauty.'⁴⁴ Further, music too has been breached by a widespread desire for whiteness. Vybz Kartel, the infamous Dancehall artist nicknamed 'the Portmoor Vampire' by his nemeses, on account of his radical skin bleaching stance, celebrates the effects that 'cake soap' (bleaching agents) have upon his daily life. The level of condemnation he has received is matched only by a *demand* for similar products; to the extent that Vybz is bringing out his own range of cake soap. This manifestation of auto-racism is not phenomenal to Jamaica, but is a widespread tendency as evidenced in the global success of skin-bleaching agents such as metasol.

The emphasis on cultural exclusivity defining the identity of Jamaicans is exemplified in the problematic treatment of the returnee migrant. The island has a huge number of transnational migrant workers who, due to a perennially weak economic structure and further racialisation of it, are forced to seek employment elsewhere.⁴⁵ Miller argues that 'they became English men and women and are regarded by Jamaican countrymen as oddities who speak, walk dress, shop and go about daily tasks in peculiarly English ways.'⁴⁶ This exclusivity of culture circumscribes what is perceived as authentically Jamaican and serves to highlight that race and class *in conjunction* with an understanding of Jamaican culture defines Jamaican citizens.

The belief that 'race is not a strong determinant of identity and success'⁴⁷ in Jamaica, fundamentally falls short in acknowledging the reality of life for the discriminated majority, and fails to offer any alternative explanation for the secularised machine that is Jamaica. The island's most acknowledged export; music 'reflects the intense competitiveness brought about by the island's economic difficulties. It is one of the few opportunities many poor, black, young Jamaican men see for socioeconomic advancement.'⁴⁸ The notion that racial identity is not a central aspect of music and culture is countered firstly by the use of African motifs in Jamaican cultural output, and secondly by the multitude of songs which tackle the significance of heritage in racial identity.

The progression of roots dancehall paralleled reggae until the deaths of superstars such as Marley, at which point, Dancehall gained widespread recognition; its hybridisation with forms of American music such as hip-hop resulted in a music identifiable not only to African-Jamaicans, but also to blacks throughout the Diaspora. The novelty of dancehall and its use of patois, reflects a shift in consciousness, a shift in cultural realisation, the affirmation of roots, and establishment of a lyrical and musical uniqueness.

A popular view is that Dancehall and reggae culture, is a solely black prerogative. This is beginning to change however, the international success of artists and producers such as Sean Paul, Chan Dizzy (Kamar Ho-Shing) and Tarik 'Russian' Johnston, reflect a shifting consciousness; a progression from blind racial exclusivity towards a *cultural* exclusivity. The belief that 'if they were born and raised in Jamaica, I don't see much of a difference'⁴⁹ is encouraging and the unique culture of Jamaica may be an important aspect in the search for racial and social improvement.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Miller, p12

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p66

⁴⁸ Sterling, p.105

⁴⁹ "Racial Frictions in Jamaica"

Conversely, whilst the seeds of *cultural* change maybe sown, they are still inchoate and as such can do little to improve the *racial* barriers which exist. Mutabaruka argues 'we schizophrenic in Jamaica,⁵⁰ this is certainly symptomatic of Jamaican culture. Whilst change is desired, there is an isolationist element of culture which is readily deployed by cultural figures. Bob Marley, an ambassador for Jamaican culture and global superstar, did not solely preach a positive message; on the contrary his work at times exhibited a reactionary pro-stratification.

The music of Jamaica features and epitomises significant elements of Jamaican racial identities. Jamaican linguistics, for example, are often overlooked but are *key* in racial and cultural determinism. Whilst perception would suggest there is only one model of speech in Jamaica, there are numerous, each of which is indicative of class and hence race. Gabriel argues Jamaican society is contingent upon a dialectical tension between 'Jamaicans who subscribe to the "superiority" of British culture and...a people's culture... [in] defiance of the "super-culture."⁵¹ and this can be perceived in the existence of both Standard Jamaican English (SJE) and Jamaican creole (JamC) or 'patwa' (patois). The latter of which is available to all Jamaicans, whereas SJE is not. This speech form has become popularised world wide (largely due to Dancehall's international success). In the formation of a distinctly Afro-Jamaican culture, the significance of JamC cannot be overstated it is a 'language of ethnic identification' for Jamaicans, the use of which 'has...consequences for education, economy, and psychological independence.'⁵²

That being said, the construction and widespread adoption of a quintessentially afro-Jamaican language, saw its degradation by racial minorities as a 'speech form of the Jamaican poor.'⁵³ Thus Jamaican creole is relegated to a language of the black masses, whereas fairer skinned Jamaicans with financial access to educational provision, speak a language reserved for elite; SJE, a reinforcement of the rich-poor, fair-dark divide. Finally, dread talk, which has to a lesser extent gained widespread recognition through dancehall, is a 'relexification of patwa: represents an attempt to bend the lexicon of Jamaican Creole to reflect his social situation and his religious views.'⁵⁴

Incidentally, Religion is a central theme to much dancehall and reggae. Free from official British imposition, the rapid rise of Rastafarianism occurs. Certainly the genesis of the movement was rapid, taking influence from Garvey, the Maroons and the spirit of the Black Panthers, however, its adoption was not widespread. The religion is split into twelve mansions, all of which convey Ethiopia as the home of the holy mount Zion and Emperor Haile Selassie I as prophet. This is pertinent to the question of race, not only because the overwhelming majority of rastas are black, but because the faith is fundamentally different to white religions. Moreover, Rastafarians directly challenged the 'downpression' they were subject to. It also reflects the uniqueness of Jamaican culture, 'Rastafarianism is a unique phenomenon, in that it appears unrelated to European or even African cultural antecedents.'⁵⁵

Nonetheless, the misguided perception that Rastafarians constitute the mainstay of Jamaican religion, fails to acknowledge the ongoing suppression of black independence. The truth is that Rastafarians are a marginalized and minority element of society. The

⁵⁰ Cooke, Mel

⁵¹ Gabriel, p.40

⁵² Schneider, Edgar, *The Americas and The Caribbean*, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter), p.608

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Pollard, Velma, *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari*, (Kingston: Canoe Press, 2000), p.4

⁵⁵ Ibid. p xiii

religion constitutes less than 1% of the island's population⁵⁶ and are amongst all races, 'the most alienated group in society.'

The mass-availability of Rastas' challenge to the government was crucial in its changing priorities. 'It has been noted, Jamaican political parties... used Rastafarian symbols and reggae music in their electoral propaganda.'⁵⁷ In terms of race, this reflects the belief that Rasta's despite their marginalisation, represent a core of authentic blackness; the establishment of culture in the affirmation of race and the questioning of authority.

As with control of the economy, Jamaica's white and to a lesser extent brown populations, were until very recently in absolute control of island politics. Afro-Jamaicans, have been afforded some space for mobilisation in politics, however, this is arguably superficial; as a white minority engineer change. The artificiality of such action is reflected in that only *three* prime ministers have been black. Increasingly, Political support for the island's two parties, (JLP and PNP) is decided by 'the parties support for the struggles of Black nationals.' Each party, either 'tries to present Jamaica as a... homogenous nation'⁵⁸ or remind the black population of their ongoing support for African liberation movements and puts forward 'a greater number of darker candidates to stand' in elections. This embodies a step toward social improvement; but is arguably part of a manifesto for political power. Neither party fully engages with domestic racial conflict, this refusal to acknowledge heterogeneity and its racial implications, cannot yield any meaningful improvement. Unless issues such as the economic disparity and social barriers are addressed, the tension can only escalate.

In essence, racialisation in Jamaica contributed to and was in turn informed by a strong cultural identity bound to a racial one. Thus, Jamaican identity is not entirely defined by race but the learnt behaviour of a culture, within which is a manifest system of class judgement which attributes certain cultural traits to specific stratum. For example, the prevalence of Blacks in dancehall culture directly reflects the refusal of whites and browns to integrate into black culture.

Economic and social self-determination is impeded in every respect for African-Jamaicans, as a result culture has been the only avenue for autonomy and potential upwards mobility. The concretion of a distinctly Jamaican culture, is a key manifestation of a racially restrictive system. Dancehall in particular, reflects the urgency, and competitiveness of citizens with few opportunities to escape Jamaican framework.

Conclusion

It has been the intention of this essay to tread some damning ground, which Jamaica's government and scholars alike seem unwilling to acknowledge. The ongoing prevalence of racism, predominantly targeted towards blacks, represents a systematic failure of a nation to upkeep its projected standards of racelessness. A failure to arrest the descent of a system weighed down by a living colonial legacy, has ensured the division of boundaries between races. The strictly ethnocentric nature of the economy, means that it reflects accurately the intentions of those in real power; the repression of Black citizens and the favouring of whites. Consequently, 'class distinctions based on skin colour have been hard

⁵⁶ Capacity Development Programme (CCDP) National census Report Jamaica: 2000 ROUND OF POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS DATA ANALYSIS SUB-PROJECT (Caricom <<http://www.caricomstats.org/Files/Publications/NCR%20Reports/Jamaica.pdf>>

⁵⁷ Water, p.3

⁵⁸ Ibid. p229

to eradicate'⁵⁹ and arguably expose an unwillingness to effect change or even to confront the race problem in Jamaica.

Racism is often seen as something that happened in Jamaica. A finite phase, a dark epoch in the island's history. However, under any examination this belief cannot be sustained. Prescriptive racism is still a blight upon the daily experience of black Jamaicans. The transition from slave colony to free economy is at present virtually static, and far from reaching resolution. The lack of a cohesive and broad support for any one nationalistic movement only amplifies the crushing immovability of entrenched race relations.

This essentially begs the question how well did Jamaica secede from colony to free land? In short; it has not. Race is a cornerstone in the structure of class, culture and thus daily life in Jamaica. Although tentative steps have been made towards progress (mainly through culture), the situation is not likely to change absent a governmental readiness to acknowledge a problem and instigate social reforms; to ensure sufficient education for Jamaican youth populations, to encourage the growth of small businesses in *all* racial categories, and to monitor the strictly pro-white sentiment of elements of popular culture. Of central importance is a recognition that neo-liberalism makes progression to a post-racial state near impossible.

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⁵⁹ Gabriel, p.40

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