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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Music gonna teach: Decolonising IR through a musical exploration of knowledge

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Abstract

There is a growing body of literature calling for the decolonisation of International Relations (IR) theory. This literature, which includes perspectives from the Global South, Indigenous, and feminist approaches, has explained how the colonial thought and White supremacy of early IR scholars like Wilson, Reinsch, and Schmitt shaped the contemporary field and is still reflected in mainstream understandings of core concepts like peace, sovereignty, and security. The need to decolonise IR is well established, but the way to do so is not always clear. This paper explores how engaging with the global politics of Afro-Caribbean Rebel Music serves the decolonisation effort. We can understand Rebel Music as a form of knowledge that emerged in dialogue with, and continues to reproduce ideas embedded in, global and anti-colonial Black approaches to IR theory. Textually and sonically, Rebel Music critiques the nation-state as the primary agent of peace, security, and identity, imagines a transnational Black identity, and is one of the primary forms in which we can hear the voice of the marginalised communicate their understanding of world politics. Engaging with Rebel Music is thus one avenue to decolonising contemporary IR.

Keywords: colonialism; decolonisation; epistemology; music; Pan-Africanism; race; White supremacy

Introduction: Colonial and anti-colonial forms of knowledge

Decolonisation is not finished. In 1937, Marcus Garvey advised a primarily Black audience in Nova Scotia to 'emancipate yourselves from mental slavery'. At that time, the transnational Pan-African movement had been engaged in a decades-long global struggle for Black emancipation from colonial rule in the Caribbean and the African continent, and from the United States's version of Apartheid rule in the Jim Crow south. As Garvey argued, the colonial system of racial hierarchies was made possible by a system of thought that normalised White supremacy, embedding it in the common understanding of what made the world function. Thus, full emancipation required changing the way society at large thought about global relations.

Forty-three years later, Bob Marley sang[1] these same words in 'Redemption Song'. In some crucial ways, the colonial system that marked Garvey's time had changed. In 1960, the 'year of Africa', 17 Black majority countries on the African continent followed Ghana into independent rule. Legal segregation in the United States was on the way out, and most Black-majority countries in the Caribbean were self-governing by 1968. However, in the decades since the end of formal colonisation, authors such as Walter Rodney, C. L. R. James, Kwame Nkrumah, Charles Mills, Ngugi

[1] As Lutan Fiyah said, 'I never heard a music so sweet / I repeat / It's the heartbeat.' To help the reader listen to the heartbeat of Rebel Music, I have assembled a playlist of the songs included here on YouTube, available at: {https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLFAXMrbMNCwo9Y4_kiaLHAN08w1s-LfTB&si=z9yFqBbxJwprjfn6} and on Spotify, available at: {https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3JSdEBTdN5frhs9tRA0xx6?si=5176a37f3b4b4a36}.

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wa Thiong'o, and Angela Davis have continued to call for decolonisation in political practice and thought alike. As these and other authors have pointed out, the still present racialisation of international power, the global flow of wealth from poor to rich, and the externalisation of socioeconoimc and environmental insecurity and harm from rich to poor in the contemporary world echo historic colonialism in much the same way that Marley echoed Garvey in 1980.

Taking Garvey's and Marley's lead, this paper focuses on the coloniality of thought or 'mental slavery' embedded in global systems of knowledge. Specifically, this paper is intended to contribute to the ongoing process of decolonising international relations (IR) theory, which emerged as a field out of the White supremacist epistemologies of its founders.[2] In particular, I argue that certain forms of Black music comprise a body of decolonial knowledge that can and should be incorporated into the study of IR. The music I discuss below challenges common IR understandings of the nation-state as a site of order and identity, questions how IR conceptualises terms like *peace* and *security*, and imagines a transnational Black diasporic solidarity that challenges conventional notions of international identity and personhood as circumscribed by state sovereignty. As with the rest of the literature on 'decolonising the discipline', the goal is to build a more analytically rigorous, equitable, and holistic IR.

In order to recognise the long history and present of decolonial and critical IR, I am using Cynthia Weber's term 'Disciplinary IR'[3] throughout to refer to the (still-mainstream) IR scholarship that – consciously or unconsciously – reproduces the White supremacist epistemologies of its founding and resists calls to change. Most of the decolonial IR theories I am drawing on here come from Pan-Africanism, Critical Race IR, and what Vitalis dubbed the Howard School of IR.[4] Because of its connection to the racialisation of international politics and the creation of contemporary racial categories, including Black and White, I will use the term 'Black IR' throughout to distinguish this collection of thought from the Disciplinary canon.[5] As such, I locate Black IR in the broader pantheon of Critical and decolonial IR, which includes scholarship from and about the Global South,[6] as well as scholarship centred on Indigenous,[7] Queer,[8] and feminist[9] perspectives.

Engaging with music and other forms of knowledge is not something Disciplinary IR commonly does. However, there are important ways in which music serves as a body of knowledge about

[2]Robert Vitalis, 'The noble American science of imperial relations and its laws of race development', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52:4 (2010), pp. 909–38; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Kelebogile Zvogbo and Meredith Loken, 'Why race matters in International Relations', *Foreign Policy* (2020), available at: {https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/19/why-race-matters-international-relations-ir/}.

[3]Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[4]Errol A. Henderson, 'The revolution will not be theorised: Du Bois, Locke, and the Howard School's challenge to white supremacist IR theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 45:3 (2017), pp. 492–510; Vitalis, 'The noble American science of imperial relations and its laws of race development'.

[5]I also want to distinguish Black IR from the overlapping Howard School of thought, in that several of the writers discussed here (including Marcus Garvey, Roger Mais, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o) were not part of the Howard School.

[6]Amitav Acharya, *Rethinking Power, Institutions and Ideas in World Politics: Whose IR*? (London: Routledge, 2014); Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Zeynep Capan, 'Decolonising International Relations?', *Third World Quarterly*, 38:1 (2017), pp. 1–15; Zvogbo and Loken, 'Why race matters in International Relations'.

[7]Maureen Konkle, 'Indigenous ownership and the emergence of US liberal imperialism', *American Indian Quarterly*, 32:3 (2008), pp. 297–323; Sheryl Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2016); Sheryl Lightfoot, 'Decolonizing self-determination: Haudenosaunee passports and negotiated sovereignty', *European Journal of International Relations*, 27:4 (2021), pp. 971–94; Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1:1 (2012), pp. 1–40.

[8]Melanie Richter-Montpetit and Cynthia Weber, 'Queer International Relations', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017), available at: {https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.265}; Weber, *Queer International Relations.*

[9]Carol Cohn, 'Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12:4 (1987), pp. 687–718; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics. Completely Revised and Updated* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); J. Ann Tickner, 'You just don't understand: Troubled engagements between feminists and IR theorists', *International Studies Quarterly*, 41:4 (1997), pp. 611–32.

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world politics. First, how we think and talk about music is historically embedded (deliberately and explicitly) in broader ideas about race, political citizenship, and the nation-state. Indeed, the fact that music is raced as 'Black' or 'White' de facto connects musical knowledge to world affairs, as our contemporary understandings of Black, White, and other racial categories were constituted by global and international politics. Second, the Black music I discuss below emerged in dialogue with and has been used as a site for the dissemination of Black IR from the late 19th century onward. Finally, Taylor reminds us that the decolonisation of IR knowledge requires 'focusing attention on ordinary people's experience of the international',[10] rather than simply reproducing the perspectives and interests of the formally educated elite class. Black musical forms have historically been dominated by economically and politically marginalised people and have served as a conduit for the voices of 'ordinary people' explaining their experience of the international to people who would otherwise not listen.

This is not the first musical interrogation of political science. Kevin Dunn in this journal,[11] Steve Smith,[12] and Damascus Kafumbe[13] have spoken about the way in which music produces knowledge about the world. Ubaldo and Hintjens discuss how music can and has been used to build community and promote peacekeeping in post-conflict situations.[14] Music both speaks to and is a product of politics.

I explore these themes by focusing on what Maysles describes as *Rebel Music* of the Afro-Caribbean, although I do also mention other Black forms, such as jazz, Afrobeat, and hip hop. In the context of this paper, *rebel music* includes reggae, dancehall, dub, and dub poetry as musical forms that 'return to imaginary African roots … implicate the musically ritualized history of African origins, exile, enslavement, and spiritual survival [and] invites a confrontation with the forces of Babylon'.[15] To trace the connection between *rebel music*, Black IR, and decolonial knowledge, I engaged in extensive archival research of scholars from the Pan-African movement, including analysis of special collections of Walter Rodney and Roger Mais at the Robert Woodruff Library at Atlanta University Center, and the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica. I conducted first-hand interviews with some of the original reggae artists from Trenchtown: Rozah Rose, Junior Moody, 'Blakka' Ellis, and Alton Ellis Jr., as well as with Jah9, a contemporary artist and disciple of Burning Spear, one of the most prominent Rasta musical intellectuals. I supplemented these with recorded and transcribed interviews of other musicians in the *rebel music* tradition, including Bob Marley, Burning Spear, and Mortimo Planno. Above all, I listened to the music.

Disciplinary IR and white hegemony

To understand what it is about Disciplinary IR that *rebel music* challenges, it is worth having a brief review of how it is that colonialism is embedded in the field. Disciplinary IR, which includes both realism and liberalism, focuses on the nation-state as the core unit of analysis. The nation-state, as understood, is a rational actor in an otherwise anarchic, potentially dangerous, and insecure *state of nature*. Consequently, the field has explicitly state-centric interpretations of concepts like *security, peace, conflict, sovereignty*, and *anarchy*.

[10] Lucy Taylor, 'Decolonizing International Relations: Perspectives from Latin America', *International Studies Review*, 14:3 (2012), pp. 386–400 (pp. 397–8).

[11] Kevin C. Dunn, 'Never mind the bollocks: The punk rock politics of global communication', *Review of International Studies*, 34:S1 (2008), pp. 193–210.

[12] Steve Smith, 'Singing our world into existence: International Relations theory and September 11', *International Studies Quarterly*, 48:3 (2004), pp. 499–515.

[13] Damascus Kafumbe, *Tuning the Kingdom: Kawuugulu Musical Performance, Politics, and Storytelling in Buganda* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2018).

[14] Rafiki Ubaldo and Helen Hintjens, *Music and Peacebuilding: African and Latin American Experiences* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

[15] Philip Maysles, 'Dubbing the nation', *Small Axe*, 11 (2002), pp. 91–111.

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As scholars like Vitalis and Lynch have pointed out,[16] the early 20th-century founders of IR, namely liberalists like Woodrow Wilson and realists like Paul Reinsch and Carl Schmitt, developed this framework of understanding international relations because it fit with and reinforced a White supremacist understanding of politics and world processes. In the first place, the way in which these scholars described the *state of nature* drew from ahistoric but well-established racial ideas about non-White society that were embedded in the work of earlier philosophers, like Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Hegel, and Rousseau. Despite differences in how they thought about the role of the nation-state, all of these thinkers agreed that Black and First Nations people lived in a 'savage lawlessness' that they were either incapable or unwilling to escape from, at least without the tutelage of enlightened Europeans.[17] Although several African systems and First Nations were, in fact, organised political units, with functional and varying kinds of government, art, and society, the fact that their systems were not equivalent to those of Europe meant *ipso facto* that they remained stuck in the *state of nature*. As Schmitt explained, not only did the *state of nature* distinguish African and First Nations from European state, it also meant they were inferior:

> People and countries unable to forge an organizational apparatus characteristic of a modern state are 'uncivilized' … Security exists only in the state … Everything outside of a state is therefore a 'state of nature'.[18]

As such, the expansion of the state form through colonialism would foster 'the creation of civilized life where none existed before'.[19] This had important implications for understanding international relations. Since 'security exists only in the state', the state is the only appropriate actor that can create international peace. For example, Woodrow Wilson stated in his '14 Points' that the 'peace-loving nations of the world' would be the ones to form such 'arrangements and covenants' as would be necessary in the inter-war period to '[remove] the chief provocations to war'. The German realist Carl Schmitt agreed, arguing, 'international law [is] possible only between states, and can be promulgated by states ordered only "as such"'.[20] Finally, because the state provides order and security, and because the state is the locus of analysis, we can understand violence and insecurity on a global scale by focusing on the presence or absence of conflict in the relations between sovereign states. We can consider, for instance, the way in which Disciplinary IR measures *peace*. For example, in describing world politics at the turn of the 20th century, Paul Reinsch noted that the creation of the Concert of Europe and the end of outright war on the continent meant 'the rankling hostilities that were constantly endangering the world's peace [have] given way for the time to broader interests'.[21]

The problem of course, is that the security, peace, and law described by Reinsch, Schmitt, and Wilson were only for White imperial powers. The late 19th and early 20th century was a time of increased and increasingly violent colonial exploitation, particularly in the African continent. Some of the first Holocausts of the 1900s, that of the Congolese people in the Belgian Congo, and of the Nama and Herero people in German West Africa, defined this time. This was an era of globalised and systematic violence through international politics. Yet this violence was invisible in the discipline of IR, precisely because it was conducted against people of colour.

To be fair to Reinsch, Schmitt, and Wilson, it should be noted that this racial myopia in understanding 'peace' is not restricted to pre–World War II Disciplinary IR. Later scholarship, including

[16] Cecelia Lynch, 'The moral aporia of race in International Relations', *International Relations*, 33:2 (2019), pp. 267–85; Vitalis, 'The noble American science of imperial relations and its laws of race development'.

[17] Charles Wade Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[18] Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 47–8.

[19] Paul S. Reinsch, *Colonial Government: An Introduction to the Study of Colonial Institutions* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1902), pp. 12–14.

[20] Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, p. 47.

[21] Paul S. Reinsch, *World Politics at the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Adamant Media, 1900), p. 254.

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by Morgenthau,[22] Waltz, Doyle,[23] and Mearsheimer,[24] describes either the Concert of Europe, or similar arrangements of White imperial domination, including the pre-1960s Cold War, as 'peaceful'. Contemporary databases on international violence, such as the Correlates of War Project (CoW), also do not classify early European violence against organised, but non-White political systems as 'international war' because, like Hegel, Locke, and Rousseau, pre-colonial non-White political systems are still not commonly understood as international persons, or legitimate forms of political organisation. As Dancy argues, from her study of the international conflict typology used by the CoW:

> it would appear that … Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia [were] vast lands of small tribes not yet able to consider themselves at the capacity of a state. Such an assertion is simply not true and is deeply embedded in the racist, civilizing ideology of the colonizing powers in the preceding centuries.[25]

Thus, Disciplinary IR is founded on a very narrow interpretation of what international personhood, peace, and political agency look like. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Whiteness in the framework of the field is reflected in the disproportionate Whiteness of the people that produce knowledge about the world. Despite the fact that White male scholars from the settler-colonial and colonial great powers comprise a minority of the world's population, data on assigned readings on syllabi,[26] publication and editorial offers at 'elite' or 'top-ranked' journals and academic presses,[27] and citation practices[28] illustrate a Disciplinary IR that is dominated by them. It is this hegemonic Whiteness at which the decolonial effort is aimed.

Black IR, Black music, and the decolonial effort

There has always been decolonial IR, and decolonial IR has always had a relationship with music. As described above, this paper engages primarily with Black IR, centred in part on the Howard School between the 1920s and 1950s, and its later offshoots in the broader Pan-African and Critical Race IR scholarship.[29] To be clear, the intellectual field of Black IR is diverse. The literature includes speeches, pamphlets, and texts between the late 19th century and the present day, including work from Marcus Garvey, Amilcar Cabral, Amy Jacques Garvey, Frantz Fanon, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Anna Cooper, Alain Locke, Walter Rodney, and Kwame Nkrumah, as well as later scholarship on the racing and gendering of the global political economy by Angela Davis and

[22] Hans Joachim Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), p. 358.

[23] Michael W. Doyle, 'Kant, liberal legacies, and foreign affairs, part 2', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 12:4 (1983), pp. 323–53; 'Liberalism and world politics', *The American Political Science Review*, 80:4 (1986), pp. 1151–69; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

[24] John J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security* (1990), pp. 5–56.

[25] Hope Dancy, 'False success? A re-evaluation of war data framed by territorial sovereignty' [Paper presentation] (International Studies Association Annual Meeting, 2023: Montreal, Canada), pp. 9–10.

[26] Nathan Andrews, 'International Relations (IR) pedagogy, dialogue and diversity: Taking the IR course syllabus seriously', *All Azimuth*, 9:2 (2020), pp. 1–15; David Lake, 'White Man's IR: An intellectual confession', *Perspectives on Politics*, 14:4 (2016), pp. 1112–22.

[27] Yong-Soo Eun, 'An intellectual confession from a member of the "non-white" IR community: A friendly reply to David Lake's "White Man's IR"', *Political Science*, 52:1 (2019), pp. 78–84; Branwen Gruffydd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Lake, 'White Man's IR'; Daniel Maliniak, Susan Peterson, Ryan Powers, and Michael Tierney, 'Is International Relations a global discipline? Hegemony, insularity, and diversity in the field', *Security Studies* 27:3 (2018), pp. 1–37.

[28] Molly King, Carl Bergstrom, Shelley Correll, Jennifer Jacquet, and Jevin West, 'Men set their own cites high: Gender and self-citation across fields and over time', *Socius*, 3 (2017), pp. 1–22; Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne, 'Citation matters: Mobilizing the politics of citation toward a practice of "conscientious engagement"', *Gender, Place, and Culture*, 27:7 (2017), pp. 954–73.

[29] Vitalis, 'The noble American science of imperial relations and its laws of race development'.

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bell hooks. While acknowledging the diversity among these various authors, what they have in common is a belief that (1) the world as constituted is built on a global political project of White supremacy, and (2) in the service of this project, dominant modes of education have rationalised and normalised White hegemony. One of the clearest explanations of this is another 1937 speech by Garvey, this time in Windsor, Ontario, on the importance of developing an 'African Philosophy':

> This present civilisation was intended for you so that you should be subservient to it. … You will understand what I mean when I say African Philosophy. It is the peculiar and particular philosophy that is to emancipate you and me from the thralldom of other … philosophy as probably Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and more recent philosophers have taught. When you and I go to college and read the text books we come out just good enough slaves intellectually and mentally to serve the masters.[30]

The connection between these ideas and the ideas embedded in Black music, especially *rebel music*, comes from over a century of cross-pollination and communication between philosophers in the Black IR orbit and emerging musical communities. Music has always played a role in Black political communication. Storytelling and the oral tradition are part of a centuries-long tradition of knowledge production that enslaved Africans brought to the colonised world.[31] During colonialism, music became one of the few forms of communication and knowledge building available to Black people. In tracing the construction of the Black Atlantic, Gilroy notes that within the Black Diaspora, the 'power and significance of music' grew out of the fact that 'slaves access to literacy was often denied on pain of death and only a few cultural opportunities were offered [for autonomous self expression]'.[32]

Thus, when the Pan-African movement began in the early 20th century, scholars and activists in Black IR built on this pre-existing history of Black music as a politically engaged form of knowledge, by fostering connections with musicians in the Black Diaspora. Significantly, at the first Pan-African Conference in 1900, the invitees included among the scholars and activists musical acts like the British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and the Fisk Jubilee Singers.

For the attendees, the presence of these musical acts was warranted, due to their visible position in and importance to the global Black struggle. At that time, Coleridge-Taylor had come to prominent for using African motifs in classical music compositions, which often centred on themes of Black emancipation and Black Pride (like *Toussaint L'Overture, Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*, and *Song of Hiawatha*). Because of the unapologetic Blackness in Coleridge-Taylor's music, and the fact that he performed at sold-out music halls in the UK and USA during the turn of the century, 'in the decade up to 1910 Coleridge-Taylor's music [became] a rallying point for Black consciousness groups and American black activists'.[33] Shortly after the conference, in 1903, Andrew Hilyer of the NAACP wrote to Coleridge-Taylor, saying:

> In composing *Hiawatha* you have done the coloured people of the USA a service which, I am sure, you never dreamed of when composing it. It acts as a source of inspiration for us, not only musically but in other lines of endeavour.[34]

Similarly, throughout the early 20th century, Du Bois wrote passionately about the importance of music in Black consciousness and knowledge production in *The Souls of Black Folk*, where he stated: 'I know little of music and can say nothing in technical phrase, but I know something of men, and

[30]'Speech by Marcus Garvey – September 1937', available at: {https://www.druglibrary.net/olsen/RASTAFARI/GARVEY/blackman3712.html}. The mention of Aristotle is particularly apropos, given Aristotle's clearly stated belief in *The Politics* that the 'natural slave' was fit for no other purpose than slavery, a view widespread in White political philosophy during colonialism.

[31]Sonjah Stanley-Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010).

[32]Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 73.

[33]George Revill, 'Hiawatha and pan-Africanism: Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912), a Black composer in suburban London', *Ecumene*, 2:3 (1995), pp. 247–66 (p. 252).

[34]Revill, 'Hiawatha and pan-Africanism'.

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knowing them, I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world.'[35] After starting *The Crisis* magazine, Du Bois gave a speech at the NAACP in 1926, saying:

> all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda.[36]

In writing about the connection between Black music and Black political thought, it is worth acknowledging the tensions between cosmopolitanism and particularism in various genres of music. On one hand, the styles of Black music that have been embedded in political movements and political thought since the late 19th century are sometimes understood as particular to certain national contexts. These include jazz, hip hop, and spirituals, which are identified as products of the USA, while dancehall, dub, and reggae are from Jamaica, calypso from Trinidad, and Afrobeat from Nigeria and Ghana. This might suggest that music from one country would have little to say about Blackness and Black identity in another. On the other hand, these musical traditions developed through a long history of borrowing, syncretism, and cross-pollination, such that the local particularism of each musical tradition has clear influences from and on the others.[37] However, I draw from Gilroy's work to argue that the apparent Caribbean-ness of *rebel music* in no way prevents it from functioning as an articulation of a global Black identity, especially in an era where technology has facilitated the globalisation of music.[38] Conducting a full genealogy of Black music and Black IR is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting the breadth of musical styles and artists in this tradition.

Rebel music and Afro-Caribbean consciousness

Turning back to Afro-Caribbean *rebel music*, its intellectual origins are rooted in the same milieu of global Black identity that led to the emergence of Pan-Africanism. Harlem of the 1920s was a crucial locale for the emergence of *rebel music* and of Black political thought, and a place in which the global Black diaspora began creating what Alain Locke described as 'the New Negro'.[39]

One of the relevant figures during this period was Leonard Howell, an avid follower of Garvey, who synthesised Garvey's statements and speeches from other Black street preachers in Harlem in a text called 'The Promised Key'. After being deported to Jamaica in 1932, Howell started Rastafarianism, a social and religious movement named after the emperor of Ethiopia, which drew on the anti-colonial philosophy of Pan-Africanism, and of Garveyism in particular. In the late 1930s, the socio-politically active Rastafarians became one of the major groups engaged in the anti-colonial and labour movements in the Caribbean.[40] In 1938, a year of widespread regional labour riots in the Anglo-Caribbean, a trial judge remarked on 'the undoubted nuisance the Ras Tafari people were becoming' to the colonial system.[41] In the 1950s the Rastafarians, described

[35] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1903).

[36] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Criteria of Negro art', *The Crisis*, 32:6 (1926), pp. 290–7.

[37] Steven Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Charles Alex Patrick, 'Contradictions and misconceptions in the life, music, and philosophy of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti', *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis*, 4:3 (2021), pp. 164–77; Stanley-Niaah, *Dancehall*.

[38] Paul Gilroy, 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at … The dialectics of diasporic identification', *Third Text*, 5:13 (1991), pp. 3–16; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Paul Gilroy, 'Diaspora', *Paragraph*, 17:3 (1994), pp. 207–12.

[39] Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 6.

[40] The importance to the Black liberation movement of the image of Ethiopia as a symbol of Black anti-colonial resistance and pan-Africanism has been described by the early writings of Garvey, the text *The Promised Key* by Howell, and by Du Bois. See W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Inter-racial implications of the Ethiopian crisis: A Negro view', *Foreign Affairs*, 14:1 (1935), pp. 82–92.

[41] K. W. J. Post, 'The politics of protest in Jamaica, 1938: Some problems of analysis and conceptualization', *Social and Economic Studies*, 18:4 (1969), pp. 374–90 (p. 387).

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in newspapers as a 'bearded cult',[42] were opening meetings by proclaiming Garvey's Pan-African slogan, 'Africa for Africans, at home and abroad'.[43] By 1960, the *Times of London* described Rastafarians as people 'left behind by the rest of the community in the educational, cultural, economic, and political advances since the last war … gathering in depressed areas … building up resentments against the progressive elements of society and still dreaming of a return to Africa'.[44]

For the emerging Rasta movement, music played a key role in community building and the construction of this anti-colonial Pan-African identity, both before and after Caribbean independence. In the 1940s, the Nyabinghi branch of Rastafarianism adopted *burra*, a drumming style formerly used to welcome released prisoners back to their communities. They changed the name of the drums from *burra* to *akette*, and, as they attracted more people, 'the emphasis on drumming increased' as a means of outreach and community building.[45] When reggae music and other forms of *rebel music* later developed, it kept the tradition of Pan-African thought in Rastafarianism, melding African drumming styles, Afro-Caribbean mento music, and rhythm and blues, to carry on the musical tradition as a 'form of communication [to] meet the needs of a section of society searching for self expression and self organization'.[46] In 1968, the Pan-Africanist Walter Rodney travelled to Jamaica, and by that time, the politically conscious Rastafarians already constituted a 'social movement in Jamaican urban communities of the poor'.[47] As Rodney stated in a recollection of his time in 'groundings', (informal workshops and dialogues with the urban poor_:

> I got knowledge from them. Real knowledge. You have to speak to the Jamaican Rasta … and then you will hear him tell you about the Word. And when you listen to him, and you can go back and read [academic texts] and you say, goodness, the Rastas know this, and they knew this before.[48]

Rebel music performers have also commented on the importance of music as a form of political communication among the urban poor. In 1978, Bob Marley said about the purpose of reggae music:

> This music deal wit a reality. The other half that has never yet been told. The yout dem a tell it thru music, and dem choose reggae music … Reggae music is like the news. Reggae music is the people music.[49]

This narrative of Black music serving as knowledge dissemination was also famously echoed later by Chuck D of the American rap group Public Enemy, who stated in 1989 that 'rap music [is] the CNN that Black people never had'. Similarly, the dancehall artist Bounty Killer adopted the moniker 'the Poor People's Governor' because of his centering of the political conditions of poor Black people in his music:

> I did songs called 'Man a Suffer', 'Babylon System', 'Mama', and 'The Lord is My Salvation'. I guess I'm putting it all on record – what I see, what I saw, what I come across. I'm not holding back anything … The ghetto experience is unemployment, violence, political issues, and all

[42] '"Selassie no god," Ethiopians told', *Pittsburgh Courier (1950–1954)*, Dec 9, 1950, p. 30, available at: {https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/inaugural-session/docview/202258693/se-2}.

[43] George Eaton Simpson, 'The Ras Tafari movement in Jamaica: A study of race and class conflict', *Social Forces*, 34 (1955), pp. 167–71 (p. 167).

[44] 'The Rastafarians Dream of Africa', *The Times*, 54811 (1960), p. 9.

[45] M. G. Smith, Roy Augier, and Rex Nettleford, 'The Rastafari movement in Kingston, Jamaica. Part 1', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 13:3 (1967), pp. 3–29 (p. 14).

[46] Horace Campbell, 'Rastafari as Pan Africanism in the Caribbean and Africa', *African Journal of Political Economy/Revue Africaine d'Economie Politique*, 2:1 (1988), pp. 75–88 (p. 75).

[47] Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney: 1968 Revisited* (Kingston, Jamaica: Canoe Press, 1994), p. 1.

[48] Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (New York: Verso Press, 2019), pp. 72–3.

[49] 'Bob Marley Rare Interview: What is reggae, why smoke marijuana?' (2010). In standard English, this would say: 'This music deals with a reality. The other half that has never yet been told. The youth tell it through music, and they chose reggae music. Reggae music is like the news. Reggae music is the people music.'

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> types of things … The people them branded me the Poor People's Governor 'cause them know seh' nuff man come and talk a ghetto tune and [then] them stray. Mi never stray. Mi always have a ghetto concept [in my music].[50]

Having sketched the connection between *rebel music* and Pan-African thought, the next section explores how the music critiques Disciplinary IR by (1) challenging Disciplinary IR's focus on the nation-state as the locus of theorising about global politics; (2) critiquing Disciplinary IR's understanding of international peace; and (3) reproducing decolonial Pan-African philosophy in ways accessible to the marginalised poor. Importantly, while this paper will explore a textual analysis of *rebel music*, the quality and style of the music itself functions as decolonial knowledge. Decisions about instrumentation, rhythmic arrangements, and melodic choices are all embedded in pre-existing and globalised understandings of race, national citizenship, and identity. As Ubaldo and Hintjens point out, the power of music is that it is a form of communication that can 'generate place-based experiences in identities are experienced as embodied' in *non-verbal*, as well as verbal/textual ways.[51] In order to understand this, we should think about how it is that musical instrumentation becomes raced, and thus how *rebel music* critiques the racial (and hence, global) knowledge of White music.

The clearest articulation of the connection between musical instrumentation and race is visible in the work of the music theorist Heinrich Schenker.[52] In short, Schenker developed his eponymously titled mode of analysis of musical arrangement by studying the tonal and melodic choices of German composers (including purely instrumental pieces by Mozart and Bach). His analysis consisted of studying how groupings of notes in the melody of a selected piece indicated a deeper layered tonal structure, or *Ursatz*, that constituted the foundation of the piece. In a logically hermetic argument, Schenker stated that the musical tradition of Mozart, Bach, and other German composers represented the pinnacle of musical achievement, proving German superiority in the 1920s, and the reason that Mozart and Bach were musical geniuses is the fact that they were German. As he stated, 'no Anglo-Saxon, French, or Italian mother could ever carry in her womb … a Bach, a Mozart, a Goethe, a Kant', which meant that 'of all the nations living on the earth today, the German nation alone possesses true genius'.[53]

The corollary of this is that musical traditions that differed from those that came out of 18th-century and interwar Germany were, as a result of being different, by definition inferior. Schenker had particular distaste for music that was raced as Black, especially the jazz and Afro-American spirituals so beloved by Du Bois, Locke, and others. Jazz markers such as syncopated rhythms or the use of the 12- or 32-bar structure taken from the blues (another Black musical tradition), or syncopation and counter-rhythms in Black spirituals were not only specific cultural markers of Black people, they were at best 'completely falsified, dishonest expropriations of European music',[54] and thus evidence of Black cultural degeneracy. Schenker explicitly stated that his musical understanding was consonant with his belief in White supremacy. He warned in the 1920s of the dangers

[50] M. Peggy Quattro, 'Bounty killer: The Poor People's Governor. 1997 interview & 2020 update', available at: {https://reggaereport.com/2020/06/11/bounty-killer-the-poor-peoples-governor-1997-interview-2020-update/}. In standard English, the last part would say: 'The people branded me the Poor People's Governor, because they know a lot of people will talk about ghetto issues, but then abandon the struggle. I never stray from the struggle. I always have a ghetto concept [in my music].'

[51] Ubaldo and Hintjens, 'Music and peacebuilding', p. 7.

[52] Philip Ewell, 'Music theory and the white racial frame', *MTO: A Journal of the Society for Music Theory*, 26:2 (2020), available at: {https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.ewell.html}; Adam Neely, 'Music theory and White supremacy' (2020); Carl Schachter, 'Elephants, crocodiles, and Beethoven: Schenker's politics and the pedagogy of Schenkerian analysis', *Theory and Practice*, 26 (2001), pp. 1–20.

[53] Leon Botstein, 'Schenker the regressive: Observations on the historical Schenker', *The Musical Quarterly*, 86:2 (2002), pp. 239–47 (p. 239).

[54] Ewell, 'Music theory and the white racial frame'.

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of 'inferior races', noting with incredulity that 'even negroes proclaim that they want to govern themselves'.[55]

Schenker is not the only one to state that Black musical forms were evidence of Black inferiority, by virtue of *being* Black. The aforementioned Coleridge-Taylor's music was condemned by White critics who viewed the incorporation of African-influenced melodies in his work as 'simple, unanalytic' albeit with 'plenty of colour … appealing to his half-brothers of primitive race'.[56] While elaborating on the 'low stage of civilization among the African negroes', Reinsch, as one of the founders of Disciplinary IR, observed that 'the art sense of the negro is rudimentary … His chief pleasure is the dance and the entrancing sound of the tom-tom'.[57]

During the 1930s, White nationalists in the USA, UK, and Germany similarly described the musical stylings of jazz as evidence of the degeneracy of the Black race,[58] who, along with Jews, corrupted the 'beautiful melodies' of good, White classical music with 'degraded negroid cacophony'.[59] Now that jazz has become Whiter, and by extension more respectable, similar sentiments about cultural-political degeneracy have been applied to newer forms of Black music, including reggae, dancehall, and hip hop.[60] Conversely, classical music, which is still very much raced as White, is held up as an exemplar of the achievement of White civilisation. As Gilroy later pointed out in an analysis on Black music in national identity, White nationalist racial politics consistently 'approach the complex dynamics of race, nationality and ethnicity through … precise, culturalist [musical] equations'.[61]

With that in mind, the first way in which *rebel music* functions as decolonial world knowledge is in how the musical stylings of the performers are chosen to be unapologetically Black. This unapologetic Blackness serves two primary and interrelated epistemological functions. First, it reproduces the idea of a global Black identity that transcends the borders of the nation-state in ways central to Pan-Africanism. Second, it undoes the assumption of Black inferiority in the White Racial Frame, by centering, highlighting, and valorising the markers of Blackness.

The importance to the global Black decolonial project of unapologetically valorising Blackness through culture cannot be understated. Du Bois's early 20th-century writings on Black music and art emerged precisely because he understood that the denigration of Black cultural markers was tied to the process of Black political marginalisation. As he stated:

> Of what is the colored artist capable? We have had on the part of both colored and white people singular unanimity of judgment in the past. Colored people have said: 'This work must be inferior because it comes from colored people.' White people have said: "It is inferior because it is done by colored people.' But today there is coming to both the realization that the work of the black man is not always inferior. Interesting stories come to us …[62]

In the post–World War II period, scholars like Cabral, Fanon, Thiong'o, hooks, Ewell, and Gilroy have similarly recentred markers of Blackness in art, music, and language as part of the programme of Black uplift.[63] In *rebel music*, we can hear Black signifiers in the use of traditional

[55] Ewell, 'Music theory and the white racial frame'.

[56] Revill, 'Hiawatha and pan-Africanism', p. 251.

[57] Paul S. Reinsch, 'The Negro race and European civilization', *American Journal of Sociology*, 11:2 (1905), pp. 145–67 (p. 152).

[58] Mark Christian Thompson, *Anti-Music: Jazz and Racial Blackness in German Thought between the Wars* (Ithaca, NY: SUNY Press, 2018).

[59] Graham Macklin, '"Onward Blackshirts!" Music and the British Union of Fascists', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 47:4–5 (2013), pp. 430–57.

[60] Such sentiments are visible throughout the popular discourse, as illustrated in a 2021 video by the musician Adam Neely (Neely, 'Music theory and white supremacy').

[61] Gilroy, 'It ain't where you're from...', p. 7.

[62] Du Bois, 'Criteria of Negro art'.

[63] Amilcar Cabral, 'National liberation and culture', *Transition*, 45 (1974), pp. 12–17; Ewell, 'Music theory and the white racial frame'; Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Points French, 1971); Gilroy, 'It ain't where you're from...'; bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

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African drumming patterns and drums like the *akette* in songs like 'Rastaman Vibration' by the Wailers, ''Til I'm Laid to Rest' by Buju Banton, 'Fire Pon Rome' by Anthony B, and 'One Away' by Sizzla Kalonji. In the 1980s, Jimmy Cliff recorded a documentary titled *Bongo Man*, clips of which are available online showing Cliff with Earl 'Chinna' Smith and Mortimo Planno (the man who brought Bob Marley to Rastafarianism) beating away on the bass drum in a Nyabinghi drumming circle.[64] Black consciousness is audible not only in the use of African rhythms and instruments, but also in the way each drum represents a specific idea of global African identity in the post-colonial world. The steady, heavy downbeat of the bass and *funde* drums, accentuated by the higher-pitched improvisational sounds of the *akette* 'symbolize the death of oppressive society [and] is the music of adoration [and] a call to Africa'.[65] You can hear this sonic threat against the unjust world order made explicit in the song 'Kette Drum' by Beenie Man and Determine, who sing:

> Kette drum, kette drum, mek mi hear the sound
> Beat kette drum and mek we bun down Rome [oppressive society]
> Kette drum, kette drum, mek mi hear the sound[66]

As Walter Rodney stated after he left Jamaica: 'You have to listen to [Rasta's] drums to get the message of the cosmic power.'[67]

Of course, not all *rebel music* relies on Nyabinghi styles and instrumentation to convey Pan-Africanism. Most reggae, even in the 1970s, used the Western drum kit, and later forms like dub and dancehall relied increasingly on electronic music instead of live instrumentation in their recordings. Yet even these forms create new sonic invocations of Black identity through the use of other raced stylings, like the off-kilter, backbeat guitar arrangements, heavy, emphasised basslines, and the one-drop drum and bass form popularised by musicians like Aston 'Family Man' Barrett. In a 2007 interview with *Guitar World* magazine, Barrett explained the role of drum and bass performance in the meaning of reggae music:

> Reggae carries that heavy message of roots, culture, and reality. So the bass has to be heavy and the drums have to be steady … we decide to come on the downbeat, and feel it on the one-drop, which is the heartbeat of the people – the reggae music. It's a feel within the Jamaican concept of calypso, niyabinghi, kumina, samba, and soca, with soul and funk inside. Reggae music has all of those.[68]

Similarly, dub music, which is primarily instrumental, uses the heavy and 'dread' use of drums and bass (which Lee 'Scratch' Perry described as the heart of dub) in songs like King Tubby's 'Great Stone' to create a sonic message of Black consciousness as a site of resistance in an unjust world. In tracing the evolution of dub, Philip Maysles explores how 'Scratch' Perry, King Tubby, and Scientist de-emphasise or remove the vocals from songs, remixing them to emphasise, distort, and manipulate the drum and rhythm section in ways that sonically:

> reveals an ethic of self that is composed of ideas and beliefs retained by the Jamaican peasant, unemployed, and working classes. It is a consciousness marked by the historical experience of migration, alienation and degradation, political and police abuse … Dub resounds these concepts through 'voiceless' depths, across great aural ranges, and pushes the form to its outer limits.[69]

[64]'Mortimo Planno in Jimmy Cliff's "Bongo Man" Documentary' (2020).

[65]Leonard Barrett, *The Rastafarians* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 193.

[66]'Kette drum, kette drum, let me hear the sound / Beat the kette drum, and let us burn down Rome.'

[67]Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers*, p. 82.

[68]Bill Murphy, '"Reggae carries that heavy message of roots, culture, and reality. So the bass has to be heavy and the drums have to be steady": An interview with Aston "Family Man" Barrett', available at: {https://www.guitarworld.com/features/aston-family-man-barrett-interview}.

[69]Maysels, 'Dubbing the nation', p. 99.

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Musically speaking, this tradition of instrumentation and stylistic choices call into being an inter-subjectively understood transnational Blackness. In so doing, we refocus our attention on the impact of race, and by extension colonialism, as the founding principle of the modern world order.

Of course, while the meaning of *rebel music* is embedded in its musical stylings, it is also important to engage with the textual and lyrical content of the art form, to get a fuller understanding of its decolonial logic. Of particular importance are the ways in which metaphors and imagery reconstitute Blackness as resistance to the dominant world order. First, *rebel music* regularly refers to the Black Caribbean man or woman as a spiritual African in ways drawn directly from the Garveyite branches of Pan-Africanism. Returning to *Bongo Man*, one scene shows Jimmy Cliff heading to the drumming circle with Planno, singing about being a 'Jafrican' – African in Jamaica. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, reggae musicians like Burning Spear, Buju Banton, and Anthony B likewise referred to themselves as Africans, dislocated from the homeland in the post-colonial world. In the 21st century, the dancehall musician Vybz Kartel described himself as embodying a cosmopolitan Africanness, as someone who is: 'born Jamaican / deh yah from slavery as an African'[70] in the song 'Poor People Land'. In the interviews conducted by this author in Trenchtown in 2022, Rose and Moody spoke directly about the importance of early reggae bringing the meaning of Africa and Black pride in the music.

Even in songs that do not explicitly mention Africa, musicians like Burning Spear would invoke historic traumas of slavery in presentist forms, connecting the state of contemporary Black people with the colonial and imperial history of the continent. For example, in the song 'Slavery Days', Burning Spear asks the listener in a repeated call-and-response pattern: 'do you remember the days of slavery? / My brothers feel it / Do you remember the days of slavery? / Including my sisters too'. In 2013, the musician Jah9 released the song 'Steamers a Bubble', which uses classic reggae music stylings to locate the nation-state of Jamaica in the political orbit of the African continent:

> One thing to overs' 'bout Jamaica[71]
> We are the confidence of the African continent in Rastafari
> No influence is greater

This connection between the Black subject in Jamaica, and the continent of Africa was one of the core contributions of Pan-Africanism. As scholars like Du Bois and Malcolm X stated, the political destiny of Black people in Africa was intimately connected with that of Black people in whichever national context, both before and after colonialism. It is this idea to which *rebel music* speaks:

> [The] problem of the American Negro must be thought of and settled only with … reference to the problems of the West Indian Negroes, the problems of the French Negroes, the English Negroes, and above all, the problems of the African Negroes.[72]

> To the same degree Africa is independent and respected, we are independent and respected. But to the degree we are disrespected, the Africans are also disrespected. Our origin is the same, and our destiny the same, whether we like it or not.[73]

Second, one of the central metaphors in *rebel music*, present throughout dub, dancehall, reggae, and dub poetry, is a condemnation of *Babylon* (sometimes described as 'Rome', as in the song 'Kette Drum'). To be clear, *Babylon* is a term that was in use among Rasta communities before the invention of contemporary reggae. Babylon is understood in *rebel music* as composed of multiple actors at the local, transnational, and international level, who function in different spheres of power to maintain a global system of racialised power. As iterated in songs like 'Babylon System' by the

[70] 'Born Jamaican, here since slavery as an African.'
[71] 'Overs" is a concatenated version of the word 'overstand', a Rastafarian word roughly equivalent to 'understand.'
[72] W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Opinion', *The Crisis Magazine*, 27:2 (1923), p. 57.
[73] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary* (Montreal: Pathfinder Press, 1970).

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Wailers, 'From Mi Born' by Vybz Kartel, and 'Fire Pon Rome' by Anthony B, Babylon encompasses local police and state violence, the formal education system, the church and religious institutions, the national government, Western powers, and international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since the 1940s. As described in a 1967 ethnographic study on the Rasta community in Kingston:

> Babylon really covers the Western world. … In its local form, Babylon is explicitly represented by the Government, the Police and the Church. [They] are the agents for the mental enslavement of the black man … The worst people in Jamaica are the priests, the police and the false prophets who form the Government, [agents] of the imperialists, merely concerned to facilitate foreign capital.[74]

This is an explicitly Gramscian and Pan-African way of describing power. It sees local political violence in the post-colonial world as a phenomenon reinforced through the manufactured consent by the ruling class, and as a necessary byproduct of the global functioning of capital, in the same way as did Eric Williams, C. L. R. James, Angela Davis, and others.[75]

Consider, for example, the following commentaries on the colonial and post-colonial world. To Marcus Garvey, the dominant mode of education was so attuned to White supremacy, that even Black people who were formally educated could no longer be trusted to act in the interest of Black liberation. As he argued, 'the traitors among the Negro race are generally to be found among the men highest placed in education and society, debase [their] race in the worst form, humiliate [their] own manhood, and thereby win the sympathy of the "great [White] benefactor"'.[76] Similarly, 'the islands produce colored men of great intellectual brilliance', C. L. R. James observed in 1938. 'They grumble at racial discrimination, but their outlook is the same as that of the rich Whites, and indeed their sole grievances are that they do not get all the posts they want, and that the Whites do not often invite them to dinner.'[77] For Walter Rodney, 'a Black man ruling a dependent state within the imperialist system has no power. He is simply an agent of the Whites in the metropolis, with an army and a police force designed to maintain the imperialist way of things in that particular colonial area.'[78] In religion, we can read Malcolm X's critique that 'Christianity was used in America on us, on our people, not to take us to Heaven, but to make us good slaves.'[79]

Compare those statements to the following critiques in *rebel music*. In 'Fire Pon Rome', Anthony B laments that the 'metropolitan officer … [that] take yuh hustling outta yuh hand' to perpetuate the Babylon order is none other than 'yuh own Black man'. In 'IMF', Terry Lynn opens the song condemning IMF structural adjustment policies and loan conditionality. Later, she transitions to local politics, linking internationally derived austerity politics with police violence and the disciplinary function of the Jamaican state:

> We shout solidarity
> And we can't get no help from them policy
> Our plight is not their priority
> All we see is just partiality
> From government and police brutality

[74] Smith et al., 'The Rastafari movement in Kingston, Jamaica', p. 20.

[75] Verso Books, 'Angela Davis on International Solidarity and the Future of Black Radicalism', available at: {https://lithub.com/angela-davis-on-international-solidarity-and-the-future-of-black-radicalism/}; Angela Y. Davis, 'Women and capitalism: Dialectics of oppression and liberation', *The Black Feminist Reader,* ed. James, Joy and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Press, 2000), pp. 146–82; C. L. R. James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Chicago: PM Press, 2012); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

[76] Marcus Garvey, Amy Jacques Garvey, and E. U. Essien-Udom, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, or, Africa for the Africans* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1967), p. 23.

[77] James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt*, p. 97.

[78] Rodney, *The Groundings with my Brothers*, p. 12.

[79] Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary*, p. 156.

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In 'No White God', Sizzla points out that the White image of Christ is part of a 'system designed' to perpetuate 'White man oppression'. Finally, the 1979 song by the Wailers referenced at the start of this section clarifies that the result of the 'Babylon System' in religion and education is that the power structure will continue to '[suck] the blood of the sufferah'. Rebel Music is a body of knowledge that critiques the international system and articulates a counter-hegemonic narrative of how global power truly operates.

Given the alienation of the post-colonial Black subject in Jamaica, it is unsurprising that the *rebel music* tradition also has a strong element calling for the repatriation of Black people out of the Babylon system of Jamaica, and back to Africa. In 1961, Mortimo Planno led the first delegation to the African continent, 'to find if there is any African state willing to take back Black people in Africa on a repatriation basis'.[80] The idea of repatriation out of Babylon is a constant theme in songs like 'One Away' by Sizzla and ''Til I'm Laid to Rest' by Buju Banton, which vary in their understanding of where, exactly, in Africa the homeland is – either in Ethiopia, or in the continent writ large – but which are clear that due to the legacy of colonialism, 'there's no life in the West'. Thus we have Banton singing about his sojourns to the promised land of the East:

> Buju go down a Congo
> Stop in Shashamane Land
> The city of Harare, where Selassie come from
> In Addis Ababa then Botswana
> Left Kenya, end up inna Ghana

Finally, we should recognise the way in which *rebel* musicians have continued to engage with Pan-African political thought and have used music as a site for the dissemination of political philosophy. The importance of Garvey cannot be overstated, as his words and image can be found in Buju Banton's ''Til I'm Laid to Rest', the Wailers' 'Redemption Song', 'Marcus Garvey' by Burning Spear, and 'Propaganda' by Midnite, but it should be noted that engagement between political thought and music did not end with him. For example, when Rodney arrived in Jamaica in the late 1960s and started his 'grounding' sessions with the urban poor, he immediately attracted a following among the Black proletariat because of their interest in post-colonial political thought. As Robin 'Jerry' Small recalled:

> The news spread about this young African doctor, everybody describing him as an African doctor who come to get involved in the black struggle. Him was a doctor of philosophy but people just used to refer to him as African doctor, and you know how powerful a title that is.[81]

As Rodney gathered a following among the dispossessed Black poor, he became the target of hostile attention from the Jamaican government. In 1968, one of Rodney's followers presciently wrote: 'I don't doubt that he'll soon be deported and made persona non grata. This young Guyanese is aware of the threat and this has increased the intensity of his living.'[82] Shortly thereafter, Rodney was banned from re-entering Jamaica from a trip abroad, and demonstrating the importance of his outreach to the masses and to the post-colonial Black movement, Rastas and the urban poor joined university students in citywide protests in what is now called the Rodney Riots. 'Horsemouth' Wallace, former drummer for Burning Spear, Prince Far I, Inner Circle, and one of the Rasta musicians who attended the Riots remembered it thus:

> Hugh Shearer, the Prime Minister at that time, tell [Walter Rodney and his people] they can't come off the plane, because they don't want [to] see them in Jamaica. Because Dr. Rodney deal with the Black people struggle, and he's a historian and a doctor to show us [the way].

[80] 'Mutabaruka interviews the Iconic Mortimer Planno. A cultural experience with Mutabaruka part 1' (2023).
[81] Lewis, *Walter Rodney*, p. 15.
[82] Lewis, *Walter Rodney*, p. 35.

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> And those days people were moving on to more social[ism], more than the colonial type of right-wing system. I just ears hard and listen to this man … and just follow him and end up in a revolution.[83]

Post-exile, a small group of Jamaican academics from the University of the West Indies started *Abeng* magazine, a weekly journal distributed to the mass public, which reprinted speeches by Garvey, Rodney, and Malcolm X, critiques by Trevor Munroe and George Beckford on the global economy, and commentary by Rastafarians on political violence. After Rodney was assassinated in 1980, two pieces that lamented his passing were the reggae song ‘Walter Rodney’ by Louis Lepkie (quoted below), and the dub poem ‘Reggae Fi Radni’ by Linton Kwesi Johnson, which commemorated his death by improvised explosive device (IED):

> Dem kill Walter Rodney
> Mek me tell yuh how it hurt me so badly
> Cause if one Black man come to teach us the right
> The whole a dem mek up, and dem out him life
> …
>
> Right yah now mi vex
> Because dem kill Malcolm X
> …
>
> They kill off mi prophet, Bob Marley
> They kill mi prophet, Marcus Garvey[84]

Much later, Jah9 described in a 2019 interview the impact of Rodney’s writing and Pan-Africanism on her growing consciousness about global Black identity:

> That was a big path of my education, learning about Walter Rodney. The fullness of what it meant beyond just ‘Africa [is] over there’. … What does it mean [to say that], ‘I am Africa over here’? Those questions really started with what I was reading and who I was meeting and what was coming out of me at the time.[85]

Burning Spear, who was an avid proponent of using music to spread Garvey’s message, also engaged with the writings of other Black scholars, in particular Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, in songs like ‘Subject in School’. As he stated in 1997:

> I was listening to other people in the music business with what they were saying and who they were saying it about. I didn’t hear anything about Garvey or Martin Luther King or Malcolm X or any of these great black people doing constructive things. There was nothing about them in the music. That is really what inspired I to get into Marcus Garvey, just to get some lyrics and music together and present him through the music.[86]

Given these connections throughout, it is unsurprising that *rebel music* constitutes decolonial knowledge. It is a body of knowledge produced primarily by the urban poor in the post-colonial world. Sonically, lyrically, and thematically, it is oriented around a construction of global Black

[83] I Never Knew Tv, ‘Leroy ‘Horsemouth’’ Tells Crazy Story Of Getting Arrested During The Walter Rodney Riots In 1968 Pt.2’ (2021), available at: {https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxvDlhA0fMg&ab_channel=INeverKnewTv}.

[84] ‘They killed Walter Rodney / Let me tell you how it hurt me so badly / Because if one Black man comes to teach us the right way / They all get together and end his life / Right now, I’m vexed / Because they killed Malcolm X / They killed my prophet, Bob Marley / They killed my prophet, Marcus Garvey.’

[85] Jah9, ‘Author interview in Kingston, Jamaica’ (2019).

[86] Jason Gross, ‘Burning Spear interview: Perfect Sound Forever’, available at: {http://www.furious.com/perfect/burningspear.html}.

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awareness and solidarity. This solidarity is constituted by the identity of the Black subject as a post-colonial subject, whose position in the 'new' world is due to the historic practice of imperialism, which violently remade the world under an extractivist and White-supremacist political-economic order. In so doing, it challenges the idea of the nation-state as the bringer of civilisation and order and highlights the unrecognised violence of the post-colonial system. *Rebel music* has consistently reproduced Pan-African thought and philosophy since the 1960s. It decentres the nation-state as the locus for understanding security and identity, linking White supremacy and colonial and post-colonial violence in the African continent with White supremacy and colonial and post-colonial violence around the world. Finally, whereas Disciplinary IR understood and still understands *international peace* as the absence of war among great powers, *rebel music* knows that the quest for world peace is a global process, not an international one, and understands that, as was the case in colonialism, the absence of war among states is entirely compatible with the global use of state violence against the unruly dispossessed in the service of the global order. Peter Tosh made the distinction between Disciplinary understandings of *peace* and real emancipation clear in 1977:

> I don't want no peace
> I need equal rights and justice …
> Palestine is fighting for
> Equal rights and justice
> Down in Angola
> Equal rights and justice.

Conclusion

Decolonising the discipline will improve the analytic utility of IR. In looking at the historical record, Disciplinary IR's use of the terms *peace, security, sovereignty*, and *liberalism* is unintelligible until you realise that what those theories *really* mean is: 'peace, security, sovereignty, liberalism, for White people in the colonial centres of power, and violence for everybody else'. Disciplinary IR does not explain *the* Big Picture of international relations. It explains *a* picture pretty well, but it is a picture centred on Whiteness.

More than a decade ago, Dunn noted:

> I am repeatedly struck by our inability to speak to the people whose lives are affected daily by the issues we are supposed to be studying. More importantly, I am struck by how irrelevant we and our work can seem to the world's population.[87]

As a scholar from the Global South, and one who has taught undergraduate students from the Global North and South, this inability to communicate is not mysterious. As my Global South students have expressed, and as I have experienced, it is very unsettling to be introduced to a school of thought in which 'the Big Picture' is one where the voices of the marginalised are not heard, and in which global White domination over Indigenous lands and people of colour are accepted as positive outcomes in the quest for international peace. Despite their theoretical differences, the dominant paradigms of realism and liberalism alike agree that the continued domination of global affairs by American and European interests will bring order and stability to international relations. However, while subaltern knowledges about global affairs are poorly incorporated in Disciplinary IR, they exist. The *rebel music* of the Afro-Caribbean is one such body of knowledge, and one that has long articulated the discontent I felt in my first encounters with IR.

[87] Dunn, 'Never mind the bollocks', p. 193.

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Next steps

So, what is to be done? In general, we as educators we should be clear to our students at the introductory level that Disciplinary IR came from explicitly White supremacist understandings of world politics. We should specify how Disciplinary IR accounts of *international peace* are racialised, and how the discipline was constructed to justify a colonial world order. We can be clear that the implications of both realism and liberalism continue to be that the former imperial powers of the Global North should do whatever it takes to maintain a political world order that serves their interests.

More fundamentally, as people curious about the world, we should engage more seriously with bodies of knowledge like *rebel music*, which are built around alternative epistemologies. Recall that these function as a site of knowledge of the dispossessed. If we want to learn and teach about how global processes affect the vulnerable majority of the world's population, we can listen to, read, and watch art produced by these communities. To the extent that any of us feel equipped to analyse and discuss music, graffiti, and art, we can bring songs and poetry to our classes, to say: 'see, this is how IMF austerity continues to affect Black Jamaicans', or 'the peace of the status quo is not the same thing as justice', or 'narratives about Black people are globalised in such a way that people who are racialised as Black are systematically victimised by political power'.

We should engage with music and art as sites of curiosity and critique of dominant understandings of the world. Here, I will add a personal anecdote that formed the kernel of my interest in this topic. In the late 2000s, I attended a panel at the institution I was employed at addressing the future of the international order in the post-9/11 world. I was the only Black person in the audience at this panel (none of the presenters were Black), and as far as I could tell, the only one from the Global South. As the discussion proceeded, it was clear that the fundamental question at hand was 'how could the United States best maintain the current world order', taking it as self-evident that the post–World War II *pax Americana* was universally beneficial and beloved.

I could not understand what I was hearing. I thought about the legacy of CIA intervention and IMF structural adjustment policies in my country and the rest of the Global South. I thought about Vietnam and the current and historic violence against the stateless Palestinians. Was this the kind of peace they wanted to maintain? At the time, I was very early in my academic career, and since this was before the decolonial literature was as prominent as it is now, and years before Vitalis's *White World Order, Black Power Politics*, I as the only Black person in the room (not only was I untenured – I was not even on the tenure track) did not feel I had the wherewithal, or even the vocabulary, to ask: 'what on earth are you talking about?' I recall that in my frustration at the time, I turned to music after the panel was over. I listened to Anthony B, Sizzla, Capleton, and Buju Banton and was reminded of the reality of the world situation. I was not crazy. I was just in Babylon system, hearing again the voice of power, normalising the continued post-colonial division of the world. For me and hopefully for others, music can and should serve as a site of grounding, and as a reminder to interrogate the perspectives from which we build certain kinds of privileged knowledge about the world.

If political scientists understand global security in the same way that scholars did during the founding of Disciplinary IR, as something that happens in relations between states, then we will have a limited understanding of the way in which the world works. We will overlook important case studies of international conflict, because we will imagine that historic and contemporary global White violence against First Nations, African tribal communities, and other non-White systems are examples of state power against people living in the 'state of nature', rather than wars of aggression against what are or were politically organised international persons. We will ignore the way in which the international system creates global violence across borders. In contemporary global affairs, the anti-Black racism that informs European and Arab state violence against sub-Saharan African refugees (in contrast to their attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees), and US state violence against Haitian refugees, is reinforced by domestic anti-Black racism and White paramilitary violence. Today, the violent policing against Black bodies in the USA is linked in

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technological and ideological ways to violence against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank by the Israeli Defense Forces, Israeli police, and ethnonationalist Israeli paramilitary groups. We will imagine that structural arrangements that benefit the great powers are, by definition, periods of international peace for the world at large, rather than the maintenance of a status quo founded on extractivism, exploitation, and outsourced police violence. While I rarely read about Garvey, Du Bois, Rodney, C. L. R. James, and Malcolm X in the IR canon, I heard their words and ideas in *rebel music*. IR *is* relevant to the world's population. Just not the IR of the coloniser.

Video Abstract. To view the online video abstract, please visit: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000688.

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