

Listening to Gregory Isaacs

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Abstract

This research project examines the value, nature and workings of musical communication through the life work of the late, great reggae artist Gregory Isaacs. The research priority is the listening experience. An experience that is active, embodied, and in concert with the voice, where meaning is made and musical communication takes place. My methodology draws on listeners from the reggae music industry, academics and cultural commentators, and most importantly those who love Gregory. In-depth qualitative interviews, constructed listening sessions with focus group discussions, and radio programmes are treated as listening environments. The collective and individual experience is gathered and accounted for through his voice and sound which is used as a point of audition. This methodological approach facilitates the unification of hitherto separated dimensions of musical communication such as crystallisation of value, medium of propagation, recollection and reworking, the social, economic and political milieu and immediate experience. They are accommodated in the multi-dimensional, unfolding (Eidsheim 2019) practice of musicking (Small 1998) that unearths and confirms relationships of interiority, exteriority and agency. This emphasis embeds and appreciates the listening community in the process of explicating and analysing what is being heard, the affects and effects of this, what it affords and makes possible for the group and individual. This approach offers insights into the nature of musical communication that are likely to be found in other contexts with other genres of music.

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Chapter One

Introduction: The Border

"If I could reach the border

Jah know, I'd step across,

So please tek me to the border

No matter what's the cost."

(G Isaacs, 1976)

Embarking on this research project, I was frequently asked what directed my choice of artist and genre. The following sections contextualise this within the wide definitions, questions and understandings brought to the title track. Listening as a border defying practice is the intention and outcome.

Why Gregory Isaacs?

Gregory Anthony Isaacs (hereafter Gregory), as an artist was prolific. His productivity, beginning with his emergence in 1968 and ending with his last performance in 2010, is known across the community of listeners and the community of artists. Digital sources, print and word of mouth credit him with 500 singles and upwards of 70 albums, an impressive portfolio by any standards. Many of these are compilations and reissues across different labels. Concentrating on studio albums and those that compiled work originally released as singles,

I have identified 70.¹ This can be compared with the eleven albums Bob Marley made before his death and the eighteen credited to Jimmy Cliff who is still performing. He toured extensively and worked with all the musicians of note within his field and beyond. The single artist core of this project supports the experiences of listeners in the UK and enables this to be written through and into the reggae story. My choice of artist corroborates listeners' preferences and introduces this artist to the academic field of Media and Communications. Grounding these choices in empirical research expands current conceptualisations of celebrity and authenticity in musical communication and how this is best assessed.

Gregory was born in Fletchers Land, Kingston Jamaica in 1950. He was raised in Denham Town. The fact that he was born in town, distinguishes him from many of his early reggae contemporaries. Much is made of the fact that artists brought their feelings of dislocation from the countryside and the alienating nature of work into their lyric and sound. For Gregory, the city was all he knew, and his political, social and personal sensibilities were formed in this arena. This may account for his deep familiarity with and love of the dancehall.² Among artists he was renowned for appearances at and enjoyment of dances, as a patron as well as a performer. He understood which rhythms, styles and dances were capturing the imagination of audiences and honed the ability to both read a session and predict the direction of change. His early immersion within the burgeoning music scene also fed into his status as a beloved vocalist and connected badman.

To his listeners,

¹ See appendix 1

² The term dancehall is used in two ways. 1. To refer to the physical space in which a dance is held. 2. To refer to a particular type of reggae that followed the roots reggae phase and remains current today. In this instance I am using the first definition.

Edwin³

“He was a fashion icon, a trend icon but also, he had that revolutionary zeal...And that’s why we loved him.”

Additionally,

Fay

“We associate Gregory with lovers rock and this kind of thing, and I believe that the sensual is an important part, it’s part of the political too.”

The range of Gregory’s work encompassing revolution and love is heard within the overall complexity of reggae music.

Why Reggae?

Reggae gained United Nations status as a cultural treasure in November 2018. UNESCO, the nominating agency noted its contribution to, “international discourse on issues of injustice, resistance, love and humanity and its role as a champion of the people... This is at once cerebral, socio-political, sensual and spiritual” (Guardian 29 November 2018). Such recognition represents public international acknowledgement of what listeners to reggae have always known. At home in Jamaica, reggae (in the form of a series of music videos developed by the Central Bank and launched on the social media platform Twitter in 2019), has been harnessed as a communicative tool. Used to celebrate and inform the citizenry of the restoration of the island’s macroeconomic stability and return to growth over the last sixteen consecutive quarters. A situation under discussion in government and international

³ All interviewees have been given pseudonyms and identifying characteristics have been omitted. This is in order to ensure their confidentiality whilst maintaining their unique voices.

governance arenas. The videos are designed to bring the population into the conversation, and as a practical example and discharge of public accountability. The medium thus supports complex economic policy. The videos which 'went viral' also drew comment from other international monetary institutions which speaks to their global appeal.

These examples declare the influence of reggae music in fields not usually conceptualised as a popular music sphere. Such is its power. This, however, is not reflected in the status associated with the music globally and in the UK specifically. This thesis addresses some of the shortcomings of a lack of attention to reggae, as an originator and highly influential genre. As a cultural practice that embodies traditions, underlying sensibilities and that shape change individually and collectively. It does so through the sound and practice of an individual artist. It does this to expand the field which increasingly hails Bob Marley as the voice of reggae. This emphasis and methodology avoids space, place and type of listening restrictions and facilitates listening over time. The insertion of the listener prioritises experience and a first-hand contribution.

The project is guided by questions that unearth the value of the music as apprehended and understood by listeners.

Aaron

“Anywhere you go, people know reggae. This thing here, that we probably take for granted, other people take it and run with it. And it’s probably because of the power of it as well, that the necessary authorities and people, they can’t control it so they demonise it in certain areas.”

The importance of the voice and the role that listening plays in releasing worth and meaning are analysed. Ultimately, the nature of musical communication, its creativity and significance are unpacked.

Why This Research project?

The listener perspective is gathered and distilled around the voice, stance and performance practice of a single artist. An artist who though huge within listening and reggae industry circles is only recently gaining wider media and academic attention. The disjunct expressing, to some extent, the value accorded by listeners as distinct from wider recognition. A sympathetic methodology is employed capable of gathering engagement over a lifetime, complexity and variation in propagation methods, communal and individual listening modes. Comprising semi-structured qualitative interviews, constructed listening sessions with focus group discussions and making use of commemorative events and radio programmes, information is gathered at source. Though the listener perspective is prioritised, industry personnel and academic commentary is included as overlapping and integrated categories.

The project recognises and celebrates the influence of reggae globally. Its stature as a genre of popular music that has spawned independent country scenes and influenced genres such as hip-hop, drum and bass, grime and trap (White 2021, Charles 2016) is accepted and appreciated. The impact of reggae within the UK is increasingly acknowledged through scholarship, cultural output and commentary (Bradley 2000, Henry & Worley 2021). This is rarely explored from the perspectives of those who engage with the music as listeners.⁴ The prevailing conceptualisation is drawn from the fields of music journalism (Bradley 2000),

⁴ This deficit is detailed in chapter two. For example, Bradley 2000 and Palmer 2010 write about and analyse reggae in the UK through a music journalist and sub-genre filter respectively.

scholarship on sub-culture (Willis 2000) and black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993, Palmer 2010) cultural connectivity. Its importance and value are thus assessed in terms of its incursions into and influence upon the UK's musical offering and cultural congruencies uniting diasporic Black communities one to another, and with and within the African continent. These are useful and illuminating perspectives and form a bedrock upon which this project rests. However, an additional layer is offered. It is voiced by those who love and support the music incorporating it into their lives in fundamental and value ridden ways. Revealing experiential, analytical, guiding anchors and tools through which reality is grasped, acted upon and life is lived.

The analytical framework uses voice and listening practices, uniting them in the form of antiphony. The reciprocal and mutually supportive nature of this relationship is where meaning is made, and value realised. It is encapsulated in the concept of musicking (Small 1998) articulating the relationships that arise, are imagined and trialled. The concept is expanded to account for ongoing influence beyond the time span of the musical encounter including recollection, reworking and integration into everyday life, political and spiritual understandings. The breadth and depth of the musical offer is denoted through the reggae aesthetic (Dawes 1999) in its unification of the themes, archetypal influences, cultural traditions and transformative practices embedded and heard in the sound. We begin with a break down of this in the life work of Gregory. Detailed in part, this overview provides entry to themes, values and judgements raised and analysed in later chapters.

The Cool Ruler

Gregory's four decades in the music industry are loosely divided into 3 phases: initial development and dominance of the roots reggae phase – covering the late 1960s to early

1980s; dancehall/electronic phase – covering the early 1980s to mid 1990s; outernational (Henriques 2011, Henry 2006) phase – covering the mid 1990s to his death in 2010. These are not discreet categories, dancehall continues to the present day, albeit with adaptations and developments along the way.⁵ Similarly, the outernational phase started in the 1960s with reggae finding a place and gathering momentum in the British popular music scene. These phases are proposed in order to organise Gregory's body of work and allude to his contribution genre wide. They also accommodate analysis pertaining to the construction of voice and listening practices.

The third phase is not really a phase at all and certainly not one recognised by reggae music scholars and commentators. However, in order to tell Gregory's story and unpack his relationship with his listeners old and new, it is necessary. He continued to produce albums of varying quality and often with a mix of old and new material. He continued to experiment with new rhythms such as jungle and work with a variety of artists. He also continued to tour. In far flung places such as Japan, Ghana and South America, his status and longevity contributed to the development of local scenes and interpretations. His immersion in the festival circuit has meant that alongside dancehall's contemporary offer, the old guard has continued to find a place. This work is part of the "performance of place" (O'Brien Chang and Chen 1998) which is an important and integral part of reggae's global popularity. It has been adopted and adapted by myriad communities treating it as a mindset and philosophy that resonates with them.

⁵ Here I am using the term to refer to a type of reggae.

Phase one – Initial development

Gregory's career started through the talent show circuit, the selection medium for the Jamaican apprenticeship system of tried and tested value, in 1968. He won the competition held at the Queens Theatre, Spanish Town Road with a Sam Cooke song. Despite being selected by Byron Lee and issuing several recordings over the next few years, nothing captured the Jamaican public. He recorded with Winston Sinclair (on either side of a 45 single), as part of a trio named the Concords and under a pseudonym Joel Marvin. He was recorded by Byron Lee – *Another Heartache*. He released a few singles under Rupie Edwards' Success label, with none of these avenues providing commercial success. The Concords were disbanded, and Gregory continued alone. As was the practice with aspiring artists, he trod the studios of various producers working with Lee Perry on, *A Little Bit Lighter* and *Dancing Floor*.

Unlike other aspiring and established vocalists, Gregory in partnership with Errol Dunkley founded their own record label and store, African Museum in 1973. This proved to be a pertinent and shrewd business move for Gregory, who unlike Dunkley had yet to establish himself within the reggae music business. It indicates his assessment of the industry and his desire for business and creative control. His early offerings, whilst they produced no clear hit, document the emergence of his unique style. His work with the prominent producers of the day was also part of learning the emerging reggae craft and contributing to its development as a genre. Alongside the technical and musical skills imparted, this early gathering of artists participated in the reasonings and philosophy that are an integral part of this music and art form.

His early work defies narrow categorisation speaking instead to the concerns, and in many ways the voice of the emerging genre. These are love, the importance of music and

dance and it is a part of the vanguard ushering in reality songs with a socio-political slant and Rastafari philosophy providing words and concepts of wisdom. *Another Heartache*, as the title implies is his first recorded foray into the love ballad. It features his cool, leisurely style (albeit to a speeded-up soundtrack) with the lyrics capturing what would become his trademark vulnerability to, and in love. *A Little Bit Lighter*, is generally considered to be his first protest song. *Dancing Floor* extols the value of love and life, connections established through music and dance. In combination these early tracks embody reggae as a tool for capturing, understanding and celebrating all aspects of life.

Success came with one of African Museum's first releases. Produced by Gregory, *My Only Lover*, in 1973 was his first number one. A string of hits followed. He released his first album, *In Person*, in 1975. He was able through his creative and financial control, to allow his work to be released in the UK through labels such as Pyramid and Trojan. A large proportion of what are now considered Gregory classics were produced between 1973 and 1976. They certainly set the standard in terms of style and measure by which later tracks would be judged. Working with the great producers of the day Alvin Ranglin, Lee Perry, Gussie Clarke and Niney the Observer he was at the centre of the Jamaican music scene which was bursting with creativity. Artists, studios and producers were highly productive and competitive. Characterised as a culture that was open to new ideas (Barrow & Dalton 1997), it was also sensitive to developments and changes in the local social sphere and global arena. Gregory has spoken in interviews of the wide range of artists that inspired him, they include Sam Cooke, Frank Sinatra, Percy Sledge, Delroy Wilson, Alton Ellis, Ken Boothe and Dennis Brown. As well as the influences from cowboy films in the burgeoning movie scene.

Alongside the honing of his vocal style and stage persona, the essence of reggae must be understood as a beat (O'Brien Chang & Chen 1998). A danceable beat within which appeals to consciousness, Africa, equality, love and other messages and themes are integrated. The construction and intensity of the beat and its capacity to engender dance are key to its popularity. Gregory understood and executed this beautifully amassing hit singles that were gathered on albums such as *Mr Isaacs* and *Extra Classic*. Singles such as, *One One Cocoa*, *All I Have Is Love*, and *Lonely Soldier*, produced by Glen Brown, Phil Pratt and Randy respectively are credited with amassing his legendary female following. Landmarks such as, *The Border* and *Number One* were produced by Alvin Ranglin on his GG label.

Much has been said about Gregory's vocal, performance style and stance. A cool, relaxed, crooning delivery that can soften a harsh socially descriptive lyric have enabled him to move between astute political commentary, begging love ballads and exhortations to spiritually conscious living. His title, "The Cool Ruler," was bestowed on him by a trio of female, British performers as a description of his finesse and follows in the Jamaican tradition of awarding titles that indicate regard and reference practice. His stage persona is somewhat detached, observing and holding the adoration, whilst orchestrating and building the vibe. An adept performer such as Gregory, encompasses the roles of selector and MC in a sound system crew, anticipating, curating and controlling the crowd (Henriques, 2011). The combination of vulnerability, deep roots material wrapped in a driving bass line make him a favourite with both male and female audiences. His status as a reggae star is solidified by his brief appearances in the films, *The Harder They Come* (1972) and *Rockers* (1978). The former is generally agreed to be a vehicle for reggae music which introduced it to the world.

In order to exemplify and describe Gregory's contribution to the genre, three songs that express the expanse of the reggae offer at this time, its practices and innovations are highlighted. Firstly, *Loving Pauper*' released in 1973, following in the already established Jamaican tradition of versions, was a new rendition of a Dobby Dobson hit. One that is redefined in his mould. A quintessential lovers rock tune, both the lyrics and vocals melt the heart. The yearning vulnerability, economic and emotional, expressed in this track have come to exemplify Gregory's career. Secondly, *The Border*, released in 1977.⁶ Penned by Gregory himself, he frequently acknowledged the beauty and simplicity of this song. It is worth spending some time on this track as its status as a roots reggae, Rastafari anthem and listener favourite means that it resounds in various stages of the research process.

A musical analysis notes the initial keyboard riff which provides an immediate aural hook.⁷ The riff is partly echoed in the vocal and later provides counterpoint for it. The rhythmic driving forces of the song are present in the sophisticated and complex drum playing. The rhythm guitar with its strong emphasis on the second and fourth beats, the keyboards, which in addition to the opening riffs also at times provide quick, semi-quaver length cords that align with the bass guitar. This rhythmic instrumentation provides a steady, compelling, fast moving backdrop to Gregory's near ephemeral, floating vocals. The vocal moves step-wise and is varied by small leaps. The vocal range is small which invites and enables audiences to sing along. Gregory's yearning voice meanders and weaves across the strong, instrumental forces to provide rich rhythmic and sonic textures. The backing vocals (and harmonies) add further interest blending call and response and reinforcement of the song's sentiments. Based on two chords (Am and G) – a major and minor chord, this

⁶ The version referred to is the Gregory and U-Brown track.

⁷ Musical analysis provided by Dr W. Jordan

ambiguous tonality serves to express the longing and tension within the song. Gregory's unique grain is carried on his audible breathing pattern.

Lyrically, the song also provides an interesting affirmation. Asked about this much loved track in an interview with David Rodigan in 1982, Gregory describes it as an inspiration⁸. A gift that came through him. It speaks to physical, metaphorical and spiritual borders. Importantly its meaning is brought to bear on the music by the listeners themselves. How to define borders is a recurring theme. As is the need for borders. Conceptually they are porous and shifting, etched in sand. Listening as a border defying practice is suggested, incorporating inside/outside and over time process. This version of the song features the deejay U-Brown and indicates Gregory's comprehension of the landmark developments occurring in the reggae scene. Following the originator of the deejay style, U-Roy and expanding the field he provides a vernacular and conversational immediacy to the track. Initiated by his piercing scream, he raises the song to a new emotional intensity that is palpable within the stripped-down drum and bass of the instrumental version.

As a producer, Gregory was also innovative and current. He was the first to sign Big Youth, an emerging deejay in this tradition. As stated by David Katz (2003), this form that included fragments of highly valued vocals, supported by the deejay's take on the original message was a winning formula. "This was the format that would be most lasting in Jamaica, and would find greater resonance in the construction of American rap music towards the end of the 1970s" (167).

The third track, *Oh What A Feeling*, released in 1981 is described by Gregory as his tribute to the dance. As a strong music lover, the song recognises and celebrates the role of

⁸ Accessed through Rodigan's website as part of his tribute to Gregory following his death

music and dance in poor people's lives. It is an essential part of their happiness. Everyone needs a space in which they can feel and express joy. This beautiful track documents him at a high point in his early career. He is supported by rhythm twins, Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, with whom he had had a recent hit, *Soon Forward*, the first on their emerging Taxi label. The musical arrangement is innovative and tight. The prominent mechanised beat of Dunbar alongside the spacious fluid bass lines of Shakespeare, carry the cool vocals exquisitely. The texture is thick with a steady tempo varied by melodic and instrumental incursions. There is a smile in this salute to the dancehall scene. Savouring the feeling he's feeling; he names it wonderful. Comprehending this unifying and peaceful vibe, it is attributed to the flow of music, of liquor and herb in a dance free of aggression and tension. The implication being that this is what the dance is for.

Phase two – Dancehall/Electronic

The second phase expresses a change in emphasis in reggae music that is noted by many scholars and cultural commentators, though interestingly not by listeners. Bob Marley is dead. He died in 1981. In a post Marley world, and particularly one that benefits from hindsight, there is a creeping suggestion that the music is dying as well. Gregory has reached the peak of his career with studio album, *Night Nurse* and the international prominence of the title track for the British label, Island. This followed two albums with Virgin, another prominent British label making a firm foray into reggae. These labels, with their access to British markets and those further afield, in the old sites of empire as well as the new European market showed potential for taking reggae out of the "Jamaicans abroad" (second generation Black) niche. This had been achieved with Bob Marley.

The Rastafari infused lyrical and musical content of reggae is being overshadowed by the ascendancy of what is known as dancehall, a deejay influenced, slackness (more overtly sexual) and aggression informed lyric. Rather than aiming for the moral and spiritual higher ground, reggae seems content to document reality. The insular nature of the reggae offer is also explained in terms of the restriction and difficulty experienced in the social, political and economic spheres (Bradley 2000, Chin 2006). Dance moves, sound clashes and the populist rise of aspiring young deejay singers dominate the scene.

By the mid-1980s, the era of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the US and UK, Jamaica is experiencing social and political destabilisation. Caught in the cold war, with its clash of ideologies, the fuelling of local conflicts through the arming of the dons (local gang leaders often involved in drug crimes) raises the external pressure on and internal tension within the country. The inward looking nature of the music (Bradley 2000) is also related to the increasing production costs on the island. The Labour government preside over cuts in social services, the cessation of price controls on food, a rise in unemployment and decreasing wages. Within this environment the prominence of a more conservative reggae is recorded.

In Gregory's life and musical career, five albums on British labels meet with a mixed reception. They are interspersed with numerous arrests for drugs and firearms, several spells in prison and one in rehabilitation for cocaine dependency. Alongside this are several magnificent live performances, for example at Reggae Sunsplash in 1985 and Brixton academy in 1984. His prowess with a live audience is equalled by his mastery of the studio environment. However, the general feeling of a lack of progress for both Jamaica and reggae on the world stage is pervasive. In the usual manner of "looking for the next" international

reggae star (or Black football hero, or Black political leader), many are mentioned, found wanting and written off.

In 1988, returning to Gussie Clarke, Gregory releases the track, *Rumours*, as a single and on the album, *Red Rose For Gregory*. Rated by many as one of the most important tracks of his career. It returns him to the status of reggae giant and lays to rest whispers that he has peaked and has nothing left to offer. Riding the emerging tide of electronic reggae rhythms, he does so with his trademark cool and sardonic commentary. Barrow and Dalton (1997) describe the track as an advance in dancehall music that incorporates the dread feel of the decade wrapped in a high-tech sound. Based on original rhythms, professional songwriters and a “distinctly dread ambience.” (p 289) the track has immediate appeal. The sound track is hailed as, “technologically light years ahead of the opposition. Stark, brutal and beautiful.” (Greensleeves 2000)

The effort made by Gussie Clarke is described as the realisation of his ambition to run a Motown like studio, with in house musicians and writers. The Music Works Studio is the vehicle through which digital rhythms are given a glossy, more sophisticated feel, intended to appeal beyond Kingston’s dancehalls (Reggaezine 2001). And they do. Lyrically and musically, this track combines the earlier Rasta influence in ambience, dance moves and estrangement from current society. The loss of this much lamented outsider perspective also particularly suited Gregory’s recent history and in cultivation, one man against the world, persona. What is sometimes identified as his emerging paranoia is also captured and expressed on this album. It is demonstrated in love, in the music business and in society generally; through the title track, *Red Rose For Gregory*, *Mind You Dis* and *Rumours*. Together these three extend

his original concern with love, the dance and social protest, with the latter expanding into protest against his personal treatment that has both a political and social edge.

The chronicling of his life and observations through a socio-political and historical lens is not new, it can be heard on tracks such as *GP*, *Hard Drugs* and *Wailing Rudie* (which tells the story of a friend). However, it is brought together on this album in a form that leaves no doubt of the effect the current harsh societal structures are having on the population in general and Gregory in particular. The music and lyrics converge to tell a similar story, and this is matched and captured by the changes one can hear in his voice and vocal delivery. The album also features The Mighty Diamonds providing backing vocals, most emphatically on *Rumours* and *Rough Neck*. The full sound this produces, its antiphonal, conversational tone serves to emphasise the dread undertone and message and ensure this is directed at us. The album is a hit in dancehalls, sound systems and on the airwaves. It continues to be ranked as a genre changing effort.

Phase three -Outernational

The third phase is in part labelled outernational (Henry 2006, Henriques 2011) as Gregory appears to lose favour in his native Jamaica. This can be attributed to two main factors: the rise and dominance of the singer/deejay in dancehall music; the legendary harshness of the indigenous audience. This is not the case on the wider and developing outernational scene. The continuing relevance of Gregory is demonstrated through the influence of his music in emerging markets, for example in European cities, African hybrid markets and his continued commitment to touring. This enables him to introduce his back catalogue to a new generation of followers and perform a living legend showcase (uneven performances, increasingly frail vocals notwithstanding). He continues to ply his craft

producing albums, many based on live performances and collections, and touring until the end. His status as a legend in the industry has grown since his death. The following section briefly assesses Gregory's influence in North America, Germany and the UK.

Despite its proximity, and large Jamaican population, the United States of America proved to be a difficult market to penetrate and has been described by Gregory as his hardest break. Doctor Dread, (2015) provides additional dimensions to this story sharing that Gregory's criminal record often made his physical entry to the country problematic. Other possible reasons hinge on the musical creativity and productivity of African Americans which increasingly dominated the global popular music scene. This holistic and encompassing offer embraces and expresses elements of Jamaican (and wider Caribbean) musical traditions wrapped in a distinctly North American reality and performance relationship. This ownership may partially explain and has also contributed to, the failure to account for and acknowledge the roots of hip hop and the acceptance of dancehall.

Nonetheless, Gregory makes his mark in the United States of America. As a producer and music publisher, Doctor Dread (2015) represented him across the world. He writes, "After Bob Marley, Gregory is the most popular artist to ever come out of Jamaica. And with a prolific body of work that is unparalleled within reggae music" (p 20). Describing him as a genius, he partly attributes his addiction to his need to control his "finely tuned brain" (p23). He worked with Gregory and other reggae artists on a number of unusual projects in America, collections for children and Bob Dylan covers. In terms of Gregory's brand of reggae, he was able to carve a niche. The essence of his voice, his lyrical pertinence and phrasing punctuated with trademark groans and laments, (manipulating and fore fronting breath), continue to

appeal. His very last performance is at the Sierra Nevada, World Music Festival in California in 2010.

Documenting reggae's rise in Europe, Koehlings and Lilly (2012) take the rhythm from Gregory's *Night Nurse* track, show its remix as the *Doctor's Darling* in Berlin, which voiced by Tanya Stephens, becomes a hit in Trinidad (p 69). This global and interlinked production and reproduction process breaks down borders. It is characterised as an ongoing exchange. The nature of this exchange, initiated without the usual Caribbean community acting as host, is explained in terms of the development of the necessary infrastructure. "While in the early days, England functioned as reggae role model for Germany, reggae fans from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Poland and so on, now look to Germany" (p 72). Focussing on Germany, Koehlings and Lilly (2012) argue that Nazi propaganda discredited and undermined indigenous traditions, their actions silenced and slaughtered those traditions labelled ethnic. The results are that the young make a definitive break with the past. It is interesting to note the role that reggae music plays in creating a new persona, a distinct from the recent past, identity in Europe as well as its island home. Initiated through Marley, educated via Rodigan, Gregory provides an originality and authenticity that German youth can adapt, misunderstand and apply to their reality.

Reggae's support structures have developed to such an extent that Germany has eclipsed England's nurturing role. Significantly, infrastructural development is presented as of the same importance as the quality of the music for which no such comparative claims are made. The authors also make the salient point that both France and Spain, due to their individual colonial histories, have evolved related forms of reggae which are peculiar to, and tend to resonate in their own territories. Elements of the infrastructure that particularly

support reggae are identified as the closeness of the underground music scene with the music industry and the embracing of dub music whose deconstruction reverberates with the techno and house explosion. The growth and honing of the craft of sound system deejays, and their entry into the club system and its culture is another. The promotion of live music performances, a recording industry including producers and artists open to reggae, are all hailed as contributing to the growth of an increasingly involved and reggae educated audience.

The focus of this research is the UK, and it is here that one initially finds the most developed community ear, infrastructure and appetite for reggae outside of Jamaica. Whilst at least initially, this is centred with the Caribbean, African and immigrant populations, it is not exclusively the case. The most basic of infrastructural elements, as dictated by the original Kingston scene are the recording studio, the sound system and the “massive” I am referring to as listeners. These come together in synergy. Describing a session (in Jamaica) in which a Gregory tune is followed by its dub side, Michael Veal (2012) states, “The sound processing can make the political songs seem heavier and harder, the cultural songs deeper and more rootsy, and the spiritual songs more sublime” (p287). Writing about dub, he centres this in the genre, rather than assigning it a fringe role, a move that speaks to the listening experience. This positioning is based on the form in which reggae is heard, through the sound system. The centrality of the listener in his work is also present in his depiction of the transportational power of the music. It can take listeners to, “The far reaches of the cultural and political imagination – Africa, outer space, inner space, nature and political as well as economic liberation” (p 292). The power of this music to transport is returned to in later chapters of this thesis.

The UK developed its supportive components as the genre was emerging in Kingston Jamaica, its hometown. The conditions within the country also posed for its immigrant population, a harsh reality in which racism positioned them as “primitives” in an increasingly modern space. Veal (2012) analysing the influence of reggae concludes that it both changed the themes and production style of popular music. This change is filtered through the UK. In essential ways, early listeners functioned in the same way as they did in Jamaica. They were to an extent the same people, and thus required no intermediary, explanatory elements. Many of those associated with sound systems and the recording industry in Jamaica, worked to establish these structures in the UK (Bradley 2000, De Koningh & Griffiths 2003). Sound systems are the carriers and balancers of the reggae music experience functioning as much more than mobile discos. Henriques (2011) offers this definition, “A sound system is a unique apparatus – a musical medium, technological instrument and a social and cultural institution” (p 3). Reconstituted in the UK, it continues to express the value attached to music. In many ways they function as a counter to the isolated recording studio providing cultural grounding for the experimental sound (Veal 2012). The studio space is one in which engineers, producers and musicians combine their talent, spirituality and money for the conversion of a cultural mood into musical stylised sound (Veal: 2012, 288).

Focussing on the general influence of African Caribbean musical styles on British popular music and culture, Saakana (2012) traces this back to eighteenth century military music. He identifies it in the development of Jazz in the 1930s and in the output of iconic bands such as the Beatles. There are also some indications of a Black intelligentsia forming in the capital (Bradley, 2013) with musical and cultural links. The suggestion is that fragments of infrastructure emerge and are being nurtured in ways that facilitate the entrance and support of reggae. Naming the early labels that dealt with reggae such as Melodisc, Planitone

and Trojan, later Island and Virgin, Saakana (2012) shows that from the outset this niche sound generated sales that are comparable to mainstream genres, though this includes export markets in the Caribbean and West Africa. The increasing importance of radio as a medium of exposure is also advanced as a specific UK development. Reggae on the airwaves gains legitimacy in the UK whilst it is still largely censored in Jamaica. The first exclusive reggae station on the island was established by Black British entrepreneurs.

Returning to the reggae specific mechanisms, an intimate portrayal of sound systems in the British context is offered by William Henry (2006), who deciphers the role of the deejay. It encompasses a distinctive voice in terms of timbre and signature style, riding the rhythm of the musical track and vibe, guiding, informing and building the crowd (Henriques, 2011). Henry's (2006) perspective on this role is important in that it is afforded through the insider/outsider perspective he embodies. This exact positioning, being inside the culture one is studying, is one that I embrace. His consideration of "Black music as a site for the international exchange of alternative social, cultural, political and historical knowledge," (p17-18) is premised upon the lyricism of deejays and their use of reggae to name, resist and transcend oppression.

Gregory was a prolific and esteemed performer on the British scene. His music is a favourite with sound system selectors, his brand of lovers rock is a staple of the last dance. His sound continues to grace the air waves of radio and dances. His influence is felt in the wider cultural industry in television adverts, and as part of the soundtrack to television shows. His music, validated within Black British culture forms a part of the creation of a "transnational space," (Palmer 2010), a cultural opening in which counter narratives and possibilities exist and are reworked (Henry 2006). These spaces, sounds and sites embrace and enable

ideological, political, economic and social battles to be fought, reimagined and individuals and communities to flourish. The resonances and relationships between sounds, between sounds and listeners, how this is experienced and embodied and ultimately the meaning and value ascribed to these encounters is what this study uncovers.

Motivations and Interests

In order to contextualise my personal interest in reggae and Gregory as an artist it is necessary to articulate my values and ethical investment in this research. It informs my approach and choice of research instruments and is raised as a means of reflecting upon and questioning the norms, values and assumptions which underpin my work. For me, reggae performs an ongoing critique of elitist views of culture. Both European and African (in specific circles) culture are elevated and unachievable by the masses of Jamaica and Black populations in the UK. Reggae, as a vital cultural resource with lowly roots has impacted on the elite and the social structures of its country of origin and encompassing region. It has travelled back to Africa and onwards to Europe, challenging en route traditional conceptualisations of cultural flow patterns, and found resonance and a place.

Reggae is under theorised and its international and individual impact is down played, arguably due to the lack of power of its artists, indigenous home and those that form the base fans. This situation is changing. Two recent and notable contributions to raising its profile are the Reggae Research Network and Bass Culture platforms hosted by Connected Communities and Westminster University respectively. However, even within structural constraints, the global penetration of reggae cannot be denied. Jason Toynbee (2006) identifies three broad consecutive tendencies in the British media reception (as an exemplar

of European attention) to Bob Marley. He characterises them as the primitive gaze, Black politics reading and virtuoso artist. He notes the implicit acknowledgement of the power of the music which contradictorily forms part of its global marketing.

Global marketing and penetration, however, are not the same as economic value. Comparing Stockholm and Kingston, Dominic Power and Daniel Hallencreutz (2002) concur. They argue that though Jamaica has a bigger influence on popular music, is far more prolific in terms of artists and musical output and enjoys a wider reach (in short higher global commercial value) this has generated less economic rewards largely due to its social, economic, political and historical positioning in the modern world. The roots to other forms and genres that reggae provides and supports may be suppressed and denied for similar reasons.

Related to this is an underlying evaluation of reggae that relegates it to a “natural” – read simple and crude – offer that lyrically and structurally is basic and relies not upon creativity but essentialised capacities – read plaintive, primitive – “othering.” This view is not robustly challenged by the inclusion of Marley in the virtuoso artist camp. He remains an outlier, an example of individual genius. Many influencers in the cultural industry retain this restricted view of the music. Its complexity and sophisticated rhythm structure are misunderstood, and its revolutionary status is curtailed and restricted to alternative, diluted and bought off. My investment contributes in a small way to writing Black people into modernity, to claim a prominent space for reggae in popular music and balance the focus on the African American experience by including the Caribbean and UK as primary sources also. As stated by Rex Nettleford (1989)

The capacity to shape, innovate, and create such unique designs for social living should be acknowledged, recognised and given the respect and significance it deserves (p 6).

The under theorisation of reggae is illustrated by the relative lack of titles on the subject and restricted focus of the same. This is shifting and is evidenced over the course of the research project. Yet, it remains true in comparison to other genres of music such as jazz, blues or soul. It is also the case in relation to hip hop/rap which is more recent. This means that its background and history, evolution and departures in style are held in oral histories with written accounts providing competing versions of the drivers of change. It has been linked to new instruments, arrangements and producers. With 40 years in the music business Gregory, has been an integral part of this. Sometimes leading the way and at others following emerging trends. Importantly for this study, the reggae story is also held in sound systems' collective memories, individual record, tape collections and recollections, memories of life events unfolding within listening spaces. Whatever competing notions of evolution the production of music suggests, they all agree that the connections with the audience through concerts, sound systems, radio shows and private collections was and is paramount. It is timely that listeners are the medium through which Gregory and his music are assessed.

The practices I am analysing are approached through the channel of listening. The constituent parts include: dancing; valuing; theorising with and to the vibration of, practicing and performing sexuality, developing and engaging political sensibilities, social and cultural life emerging, changing, adapting; and ultimately living well (Crawley 2017). They provide and provoke a way of thinking the world. One that is not fuelled by whiteness as a dominant racialised view. It acknowledges the role of theology and religion in racializing sexuality, in controlling Black bodies as an intimate expression of slavery and colonial projects (Crawley

2017). Listening as a methodology and rallying point acts to interrupt what is considered valid, it contests who has the right to contribute to this discussion, even in the cultural field (as is it currently constructed) of popular music. I choose to elevate the general, the common. The body, flesh and thought are united, harmony is prioritised.

The voice, thoughts, theories of listeners are, as argued by Crawley (2017) materialised through music. Their breath, speech and responses to my questions are infused with and of the reggae aesthetic. The music informs their thought, which informs the music and therefore the life currents of those engaging with Gregory. This direct thread avoids the violence of the music industry's largely white rules and dualisms, and rituals for inclusion in elevated enclaves such as sociology, media, philosophy and music disciplines which theorise popular music. This project cuts across and delves into many fields. Like a magnet attracting off centre, edgy, resonant tendrils, discreet, separate spaces of deposited knowledge are refuted. This is the beauty of affect. It accounts for the amodal experience. The experience that is lodged and understood by entire bodily systems and experienced as a rush. This is the reality of reggae, dancehall and sound system culture.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter, Introduction: The Border, identifies Gregory as a point of audition. He is introduced, located and contextualised within the history and evolution of reggae in Jamaica and globally. Phases are suggested through which his musical production and performances, articulation, stance and style are examined. This chapter outlines the research project, my personal interests and background. It introduced the frameworks, contextual and conceptual within which the research is situated. A space is created for the perspectives of

listeners in ongoing conversations exploring the value of music. A breakdown of each chapter is presented.

The second chapter, *The Literature Review: Rumours*, journeys through the writings on popular music and music generally. It opens with the specificity of race and reggae music and considers the nature of its being - in terms of which musical features and processes are included and their relationships - as a ritual and mobilising force⁹. One that captures interior states, individual and collective practices, as well as considering its contribution to external outcomes. Gathering and exploring the descriptors used to interrogate reggae from scholarly and industry perspectives, it addresses the general issues concerning the emergence, role and influence of this genre of music.

The chapter then widens to encompass the general field of contemporary sounds. The conceptualisation of music as both an object and an activity, its associated links to human agency, alienation and forms of cultural production that suture the two, are explored in this arena. Listening and auditory culture are investigated as counterbalances to the asserted focal emphasis of modernity. An assertion which carries with it an implicit hierarchy of the senses that disadvantages the embodied nature of popular music.

In addition to providing an overview of how music is conceptualised and understood as a cultural product and human essential practice, reggae's position within this spectrum is surveyed. The failure to adequately consider music from the perspective of the listener, to contemplate whether and how it accomplishes the roles claimed for it and the meanings that arise from engagement with it are highlighted.

⁹ Following in the footsteps of Stuart Hall who argued that rather than narrowing the field, a focus on race permits the encompassment of all of humanity.

In the third chapter, *Methodology: One One Cocoa*, the methodological approach and tools that are used to gather, organise and interrogate the data are fully reported. A wide scheme is detailed that facilitates the capture of lyrical, musical, individual and collective experience. The construction of listening sessions hosted at audio venues and the use of radio is accounted for as central to the reggae experience. The purpose and aims of this encompassing approach are outlined drawing on the myriad functions ascribed to the music. The tools are gathered from many fields and reach into and acknowledge the precise and multifarious forms in which reggae is performed, engaged with, understood and made use of.

The voices of listeners and audiences are considered alongside those of academics, cultural commentators, and reggae industry personnel. In order to privilege the perspectives, experiences and knowledge of those who engage with Gregory and his music, their opinions are accorded the same merit as the latter two, far more vocal categories. This priority is carried through into analysis. Thematic analysis elevates and levels the data, permitting a subtle and nuanced listening. Listener expertise, through exposure and a personal relationship to the music, is validated. The UK, as a transnational space providing a gateway for Gregory, as well as a site for performing local roles, is encapsulated in the development of these tools.

In chapter four, *Theoretical Framework: Antiphony, as Sonic Embrace*, the component parts of the theoretical framework are offered and integrated. Though many sources are utilised the principal tenets are taken from the work of Nina Sun Eidsheim (2008, 2015, 2019), Kwame Dawes (1999, 2002) and Christopher Small (1998). It builds upon the work of Paul Gilroy (1993, 2004). Providing an analytical base for the themes that emerge from the data, it draws upon and expands topics from a wider literature than that dedicated to reggae and

popular music. A central theme of voice, that recognises sensory and physical properties, engages in the performance of relationships and through its categorisation, is implicated in the construction of race, is used. Listening similarly expanded, encompasses physical, philosophical, sensory, emotional and perceptual elements. These are culturally, collectively and individually cultivated, and act to direct attention and carve spaces for imaginative experience. Diaspora is released from strict bonds of ethnicity, race and geography and its construction as a process enabling multi-directional flow in the exploration and construction of cultural contact through sound is advocated. Musicking in its inclusive stance and assertion that what is created is a public sound of inwardly desirable relationships that are brought into existence temporarily, is harnessed to model the range of complexity that music can construct, hold and transmit.

The reggae aesthetic proposes an organising principle and entrenches the embodied nature of the music. It recognises the encompassing nature of the offer and its relevance across all aspects of life. The agency of the listener, the physicality of the absorption of sound and the placement of experience and practice at the centre of meaning facilitate the framework's capacity to make sense of the findings. The flexibility of the conceptual model that is offered enables the interrogation of the various types of data encountered. Biographical data from individual interviews alongside lyrical content and industry comment are treated in a holistic way. It also permits the crystallising of several events, for example consciousness, emotions, individual identity and political structures often expressed in a static form to be considered in motion. Thus, time is pondered within the music, over a life span and through developments and changes within the genre.

Chapter five, *Front Door*, is the first of three data chapters and it examines a cornerstone of the reggae tradition, antiphony. This is grounded in analysis of the voice and listening conventions, practices and beliefs as understood and articulated by respondents. The specificity of Gregory's orality, his tenor baritone voice, and the range of emotion identified within it is a recognised entry point for listeners. Components include language of expression, cultural imperatives embraced, demographic details, attitudes and it is implicated in the racialisation of artists. Combining lyrical, sound, persona and performance analysis, the data is explored as the voice of the group, without pitting this against the individual. The notion of song (as a collection of the elements), providing a platform through which object and subject are brought together, is advocated.

Reflections on the act of listening confirm that this is where the value of music lies. Analysis combines the perspectives of music practitioners, listeners and music scholars. This aspect of the auditory experience explores the nature of Gregory's music. It moves beyond the notion of a message communicated to another with whom it resonates, and shifts towards engagement with a state of being, a social force. What is heard draws on perception and perspective as much as sound. The role of music in personal, social and political life is documented and assessed. Elusive claims relating to living well and self-actualisation are explored, alongside possible mechanisms for the same. This engages what listeners bring to the listening space and what they take from the same. It includes the aims and objectives of those curating experiences for others, cultural differences that are perceived in audiences and the ways in which we learn to listen.

An emergent theme here is the articulation of lived experience of the music. The contribution of this music to the development of listening practices and popular music more

generally is advocated, outside of the confines of mere style. Gregory's contribution to the industry, his standing and impact is scrutinised. His public misdemeanours and falls from grace are probed as part of his persona and brand. How this is acknowledged and reconciled and its effect on the musical offer is discussed.

Chapter six, *Better Plant Some Loving*, is the second data chapter and it identifies a key value of Gregory's music is the creation of a loving space. This unifying theme provides for solidarity across difference. It unites music lovers, ethnicities, fosters listening across generations, genres and styles within the reggae offer itself. It provides the sound scape and means of coming together in rites of emerging and practicing sexuality. A space in which sexuality is released from the gaze and bonds of a racist society for whom notions of beauty, loving desire and pleasure as an aspect of spiritual and physical growth are not routinely configured in Black lives. Comprehended by both male and female participants, the differences in expectations, expression and use are analysed. Love as conceptualised and realised in this space is underpinned by ideals of justice and growth. It is expressed and understood as an essential component to life itself. The links between learning and emotional response are laid bare.

The role of the music in the private and public arena, as well as the links between the two is deliberated upon. The value of lyrics as common prose, the language through which they are expressed within a musical anchor is analysed as a route of practical engagement with the world. The public construction of the "Cool Ruler," his impact in the transnational space fostering a cultural and political state of belonging is probed.

Chapter seven, *Slave Master*, the third and final data chapter addresses the theme of self-love and through this tackles identity. Hailed as a primarily youthful arbiter of tribe, reggae

music is realised in far more fundamental and enduring examples. It is approached through an acceptance of the treatise offered by the reggae aesthetic reclaiming African and Caribbean diasporan history and rooting it in ideals of equality and justice. Through this format, identity becomes an anchor. The elements comprising this are detailed and a gendered examination is presented.

The interplay and dialogue between the music, the body and the artist are central to investments in meaning and shaping reality. Within this, the space that is integral to the music supports individual and collective needs. Malleable to experience and self expression, alignment over time and reaffirmation of continued allegiance is facilitated. Identification with the music is related to positionality and internal alignment, defying simple racial and ethnic boundaries. Sexual identities are contested and troubled with nuanced reflective capacity and emotional range advanced.

The final chapter, Conclusion: Send Me Back My Heart, draws together the material gathered from this study and provides answers to the research questions. The value of Gregory's reggae offering is inextricably embodied in the factors that comprise it and the relationships that are created within these musical encounters across space, time, medium and culture. From this very specific aural pivot, general points relating to the role and workings of music as a communicative tool are advanced and assessed. The main findings are elucidated and contextualised in current debates and global events. Bonds to belonging, detachment, transcendence, resistance, healing and love are presented.

The relevance and efficacy of the data collection tools, methodology and the theoretical model is explored with both shortcomings and benefits exposed. Methodological and scholarship contribution is deliberated upon. Music is located as an essential component

of community and collective sociality. Some thoughts on musical communication specifically and cultural development more generally and how it is encountered as part of the human condition are considered. The forms in which culture is cultivated, shared, reworked, made relevant and how it changes and adapts within and across communities is pondered.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Rumours

Rumours and rumours and rumours and rumours

Whole lotta of propaganda

Rumours a gwaan, Lord

Can't stop. No way. (C. Hines 1998)¹⁰

...A musical experience is not something that can be captured in notation, but an open ended and pluralistic negotiation with sound in all its physicality. Such a negotiation will also involve the images, myths and ideologies that shape how people think of sound in a given time and locale. (Eidsheim 2015b:106)

Outlining the literature

Human engagement in musical activities is a feature of all societies. This is so historically and current trends suggest no decline. Habits and trends within this vary across time and place. Musical sensibility is thus frequently considered to be part of what separates

¹⁰ This track was written by C. Hines from the Gussie Clarke, Music Works label. It is one of the tracks sung by Gregory that he did not write. The reprise quoted here is part of the orality that is his trademark sound. His practice in recording studios was to sing the verses, then the choruses and finally add in the groans and repetitious emphasis.

humanity from other species and elevates groups of animals when they are depicted expressing this capacity. It is in this essential vein that Gregory's music is approached. It necessitates a detailed examination of the trends, shortfalls and emerging routes present in the literature. Through the life work of an individual artist, I dissect the medium of the voice and the act of listening to probe the experiential relationships that are constructed and through which value is realised. Ultimately witnessing the communicative powers of music. Discourse on reggae most often takes forms that emphasise the hybridity of Black expressive culture. It arises from the general ways in which popular music is conceptualised, which acknowledge its theoretical power without examining the mechanisms for this in context. Revelation of these mechanisms enables access to the continuity, hidden depths and outward surge that are important for understanding Gregory.

Located in popular culture, music is often approached through subculture and style. I reject a process that starts with the general (popular music) and then moves to reggae (as a genre within this). Instead, I begin with the specific and then broaden the inquiry. Opening with reggae, I examine how it is discussed within academic fields, popular media and the industry itself. This provides an insight into the genre, artistry, specific performance styles and contributions. It addresses the relative lack (when considered alongside global influence) of scholarship on reggae specifically. Additionally, it confirms a focus on issues relating to its social, political and economic context, of origin, development and global scenes. I identify themes, sources and trends within the genre that have come to serve as explanatory forces in determining its value and relevance. Drawing on various disciplines, media and communications, cultural studies, sociology and anthropology this discussion is then extended to popular music more generally.

Perspectives are explored that use structural relationships (economic, political and geographic) to explain preferences, exposure and the underlying roles of music, raising issues of social power, cultural value and consumer culture. The growing listening tradition within the fields of phenomenology and auditory culture is similarly examined. Its relational orientation, physical and metaphorical link to emotions is considered alongside the tendency to concentrate on the functions of music, rather than the experience itself (Herbert 2011). Through this process the gaps that exist within the field are exposed. Whilst acknowledging that the forms of engagement with music that a community builds and sustains relay something of the nature of that community generally, a more nuanced apprehension is suggested.

Reggae Scholarship: The Atlantic slave trade

Reggae is inextricably embedded in Jamaica, its culture, history and increasingly, its place in the modern world. The genre and Gregory within this cannot be understood without recourse to the island's social, economic, political and cultural history. Recognising and celebrating this link scholarship has sought to explore and explicate the forces which combine to converge in this musical offering. A central strand is identified in the new world experience and folk culture of the slaves. The experience is noted for its brutal slave colonies (Bilby 2021), whilst the culture is located firmly in West Africa (and to a lesser degree East) where the majority of enslaved people were taken from.

Kamau Brathwaite (2003) asserts that the fundamental cultural influence was most evident after the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 and became more articulate and popular post political independence in 1962. He examines folk customs in relation to the life cycle and its rituals and beliefs. "Slaves, as in Africa, danced and sang at work, at play, at worship, from

fear, from sorrow, from joy. Here was the characteristic form of their social and artistic expression” (p370). Braithwaite makes three fundamental points that relate to this time period and emerge in reggae scholarship. Firstly, that music historically in Jamaica occupies an ambivalent position, it is both dismissed and feared; secondly, that public exhibitions of culture and secret variations exist concurrently; thirdly, that language can be conceptualised as the greatest site of imprisonment and rebellion. “Within the folk tradition, language was (and is) a creative act in itself; the word was held to contain a secret power” (p381). The use of language is an important indication of how and whether liberation or domination is assisted.

Identifying the tradition of historical reclamation as an important aspect of the role that music plays, Carolyn Cooper (1998) draws on Braithwaite’s work to address popular music specifically. She points to the use of the metaphor “bridges of sound” to call upon the links between Africans on the continent and those that survived slavery, as well as amongst Africans. This theme of unity following dispersion is prevalent in many cultural forms and lends weight to the assertion that dislocation in general and the middle passage and system of slavery in particular are central and enduring motifs in Caribbean life. The middle passage is conceptualised as a musical bridge. “And the Magnus Opus is the survival song of generations of Africans who have endured the crossing” (1998:153). The cultural weight assigned to music is echoed in its ubiquity.

Widespread, with memorialising and unifying characteristics, an essential function also identified within reggae is as a “site of resistance” that expresses diasporic heterogeneity and connection. Its role is not limited to creating identity through unifying musical sounds historically and physically, but it also serves as a rallying cry for justice and freedom and

provides a safety valve for the oppressed. This is found in the ideology expressed in the lyrics and uses of language, the sounds contained in the music, and the combined effects of these in performing and dancing (Cooper 1998). This function is also theorised for the reggae offering as it travels. The allusion is that a universal cry and understanding exist. This is investigated in later sections. We remain with the musical sounds.

Rhythms

Overviews of the evolution of Jamaican music have been provided by others,¹¹ summarised in chapter one and it is not my intention to duplicate that here. However, the identification of particular refrains that emerge from this and recur are central to the research project. Explicit in scholarship is the fact that the violent nature of slave society sought to obliterate links with Africa and its culture from which the slaves were wrenched. The implicit correlating idea is that elements of this were retained, and it is these vestiges that are palpable in reggae and form a fundamental part of its appeal and unifying call. An appealing assertion that is addressed repeatedly. An early depiction by Richard Rath (1993) documenting the rudimentary (in terms of instruments) music making of an enslaved group on a plantation in seventeenth century Jamaica enables interesting similarities to be drawn between characterisations of reggae's development as a musical genre and its international expansion. Rath asserts that rather than obliterating all traces of African culture, various elements of this as represented by enslaved people were taken and fashioned into a form relevant to their current situation. The emphasis on relevance and making something new is a critically important theme that is explored in different ways in much of the literature.

¹¹ See Katz 2003, Bradley 2000, and Cooper 2012 for discussions of the development of reggae in Jamaica as well as local international scenes.

It is used to suggest a specific model of transit to and transition within Jamaica, it can be used to illuminate more general aspects of cultural interchange and experimentation in music. Introducing the exchange, which is watched and transcribed by visitors to the plantation and an overseer, Rath describes,

“A remarkable scene: several languages – pidgin, English, French, at least two (and probably more) unrelated African tongues; three discrete musical styles recorded by someone versed in a fourth, participants ranging from slaves to gentry with connections to three continents – all thrown together for a moment in time” (Rath, 1993:701).

Importantly, though less attention is paid to this aspect, it also has implications for how language and other cultural barriers are transcended in music, stabilised and expanded to produce a new composite. Despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence, this unique glimpse is compelling. In addition to insights into how the music is constructed several other factors stand out that are worthy of note. The initial reception of the music by the planter spectators was perceived as discordant,¹² yet they became increasingly absorbed and seduced. The musicians’ refusal to continue the song they were playing once they observed they were being overheard. They continued by playing a new melody without lyrics at the order of the planters. These allude enticingly to how one learns to listen, notions of belonging and ownership facilitated by reggae, the construction of memory in music and the potential power of the spoken word. This rare early account of Jamaican music combines descriptions of dance and the gathering itself and is a beautiful portrayal of the communal nature of music.

¹² Planter is the name by which colonial settler farmers who used the labour of enslaved people on their farms were known.

Unification and credibility of the Caribbean region's cultural output are two important issues which are commonly raised and accredited to reggae (Dawes 1999, White 1998, Cooper 2012, Gilroy 1993). In an overview by Garth White (1998) depictions of the Caribbean as having no indigenous culture, merely corrupted fragments of European transplants and African scraps is recognised. Its physical location which place it in currents that contain the old and new world is acknowledged and much is made of this cultural borrowing. So geographically and creatively a liminal space is constructed. The evolution and growth of reggae are attributed with inverting this process to some degree. Jamaica has become a consistent exporter of culture, especially in music. Distinguishing the hybrid roots and home grown, parish based distinct traditions, reggae is audibly a new phenomenon. And one with depth. The cultural openness of musicians is part of the explanation offered. This is alongside the specific development of sound systems and changes in musical style accredited to system owners and personnel who lived or worked amongst their potential audiences.

Remaining with the development of reggae, but moving to the structure of the music itself, the emphasis on the off-beat is a widely recognised distinguishing feature. The prominence of drum and bass which provide the cornerstone of the rhythm are acknowledged as African inspired (Hitchins 2013). The importance of this unique trait warrant a detailed exploration of the explanations offered for it. Paul Kauppila (2006) provides one, gathering, critiquing and categorising them as accidental, purposeful or inherent. The various forms of American influence such as radio, touring bands, soldiers stationed on the island and farm working opportunities for Jamaicans are made much of. The incorporation of Latin sounds and slave society musical traditions including Burru drumming, vocal harmonies and percussion sounds are all identified. Curiously, the cross fertilisation detailed, flows into

Jamaica but never out of it. He concludes that an inherent tendency is the most likely explanation initially, with conscious application subsequently.

What might a purposeful explanation suggest? It could rest on spiritual consciousness. One such explanation is offered by Verona Reckford (1998) who utilising purpose and inference contends that the polyrhythmic base of reggae is part of a long tradition within the island that encapsulates African elements. Building on the drum as an ancient mode of communication, she asserts, "For Jamaicans, the *ridim* talks" (p232). This talk comprises the drum, percussion patterns and the tempo. Reggae positioned as the communicative vehicle of Rasta (Murrell 1998), expands and resonates with their philosophy.

"The Rasta mission in society is seen as one of deconstruction and reconstruction, of infusing and thereby replacing society's destructive, negative vibrations with positive ones and of undermining and altering evil with good" (Murrell 1998: 10).

Mapping the patterns of Rasta music with reggae, the three drums of Burru musicians, bass, *fundeh* and repeater are aligned. In the symbolic and very real confrontation, the bass beats down oppression. The *fundeh* inserts peace and love, whilst the repeater protests providing the creative, improvisatory application. This potent mix means,

"Rasta music is at once a music of peace and love, protest and hope as well as a music of attack. These aspects of Rasta music are even more clearly stated in the lyrics of the form" (Reckford 1998: 245).

The interplay and harmony between musicians is further elaborated by Ray Hitchins (2013) who explains that the one-drop drum beat requires the rhythm section to be collectively responsible for the establishment and maintenance of rhythmic motion and

stability. Whilst recognising the centrality of the drum and bass, he emphasises the role of the guitarist in providing a rhythmic anchor (holding together disparate elements) arguing it is underrated. His addition instrumentally, also supports an apprentice type learning mode. His ethnographic research describes his initial inability to play the required guitar riff. Despite listening, scoring, breaking parts down into harmonic, melodic and rhythmic sections this did not reveal the nuances, rhythmic and sonic which he concludes require an understanding of the senses and values upon which it is based. These values are expounded in nuanced rhythmic interpretation, which in turn is encoded in complex modes of performance. Rhythmic instability is created in order for it to be refocussed in the listeners' attention as it re-emerges. It is revealing to contrast the disparate origins of reggae as detailed by various writers with the grounded specific aesthetic granted to the mature product. Notably the narrative exploring the origins is focussed usually on the music, whilst the latter relies more on a musical and lyrical unification analysis. Both incorporate context.

Lyricature

A central theme within reggae discourse is the use of language within the genre. This is exemplified by its most well-known proponent, Bob Marley. His enduring example within reggae encompasses both origins of the music and (what is often considered) the peak. His legacy illustrates reggae's worldwide reach and most intense entanglement with international marketing and commodification and much has been documented about his practice, influences and status within the genre. In detailing the particular use of vernacular language that reggae imparts I am presenting Gregory as an artist renowned for his lyrical prowess and prolific compositions which compel this line of scrutiny. I also draw attention to the

community of artists working together to extol and expand the language of their daily lives into their creative public endeavours.

In describing the language style of reggae artists Kwame Dawes¹³ (1999, 2002) coins the term “lyricature” noting its emotional expressiveness and reliance on an expanded sensory perception.¹⁴ Four archetypal voices are identified within it: pioneer, prophetic, trickster/Davidian and post-colonial/post-modern. It is positioned as both driven by and part of the wider effort of cultural forms in the region, by the quest for voice itself. This creative impulse is an expression of the paradigm shift that took place in the Caribbean in the 1960s. Grounded in Jamaican sensibility reggae defiantly speaks in the language of the majority, to them. It does so prioritising popular issues, providing news and comment from a majority standpoint and in this way, language is treated as a weapon of liberation. Dawes (1999) identifies the historical retrieval that lyricature accomplishes in terms of its ownership of the slave past and its relevance to current poverty and struggle.

It is also notable that initially reggae, in large part because of its lyric and performativity, “was something to be disarmed” (King & Foster 2013: 249). Articulating a positive Black African identity and condemning the colonial state and government in Jamaica, its revolutionary stance was confrontational. Linton Kwesi Johnson (1976), describing the reggae lyric states, “It is the spiritual expression of the historical experience of the Afro-Jamaican” (p398). His mention of the spirit and experiential consciousness are elements usually excluded from analysis of music and culture, though arguably critical to the listening

¹³ Dawes’ work is examined across two chapters. Here in terms of lyricature and in chapter four the reggae aesthetic is explored.

¹⁴ Dawes also expands its reach into the regions literary structure. One can also add the important role that literature has played in explicating the culture of Jamaica and the individual contributions made by scholars from this field, such as Carolyn Cooper who started the International Reggae Studies Centre at the University of the West Indies.

public. The primacy of the first person narrative, the form in which others are brought in and through this a communal situation is born are also included as language practice. A practice that facilitates sharing feelings, making them universal with all listeners invited to participate.

The importance of 'lyricature' to reggae is clearly foundational yet cannot be isolated. Scholarship on dancehall (which is part of the reggae continuum) has examined and questioned the marginalised position it currently holds (Cooper 1993, Stolzoff 2000, Stanley 2005). Concluding that this is in relation to the rise of slackness, lyrical and performatively associated with it. This narrow approach is criticised by Stanley (2010) who advocates the insertion of "space, event and actors\acts" (xvii) to present a more integrated approach that includes the perspectives of all participants. Importantly, a lyrical analysis is considered inadequate for the characterisation of this form. She expands the base, again seeking to build bridges introducing qualities of African cosmology. In this vein directly addressing slackness and drawing on the embodied nature of the music, Stanley asserts, "No fall of the flesh, no basal abyss from which it is to be redeemed and no separation is made between body/flesh and body/soul" (2005:69). Uniting the spiritual and physical aspects of musical engagement facilitates nuanced, participant understandings to be included.

Performativity

The embedded nature of performance in African and Caribbean contexts and the ways in which art forms are combined and interwoven into life are themes that scholars and cultural commentators agree upon. As is the unity of performers and audiences and their joint focus on individual style. Gregory's unique performance style and stance are a central tenet of his appeal. Distinct and recognisable, they inform his status within the genre and audience appreciation. However, a tension between the performance practice that is present

in Jamaica and the wider diaspora is identified (Cooper 1993, Stanley 2010) and related to oppositional categories that are considered integral to the West, colonialism and capitalism. Reggae practice and performance contain, “A deep and primal connection to survival, performing subjectivity and agency” (Stanley 2010: 3) which is not readily recognised theoretically or outside of context.

Such tension is also detected in analyses of reggae located in a transnational space (Bradley 2000, Palmer 2010). In many ways this expansion can be viewed as a metaphorical bridge as well as a container. It expounds the idea of a site/mode of resistance exploring the ways in which opportunities are constructed to develop alternative discourses which affirm positive impressions of Black people in diasporan communities. An important work in this vein is offered by Lisa Palmer (2010). Drawing on the work of American feminist bell hooks (1992), in particular her concept of loving blackness as an act of political resistance, she relates this to the development of lovers’ rock as an integral part, albeit English and undervalued, of reggae.

Valuable work is undertaken by Palmer (2010) who in addition to exploring the construction of community norms and values through reggae, also addresses the selective focus of scholarship on elements within the genre, such as conscious roots reggae and slackness and their oppositional classification. Using Black feminist theorists, racist and dehumanising portrayals of Black sexuality are traced to slavery with its commodification and objectification of Black bodies. It provides for both gendered and racialized notions to be brought to the fore.

“Such myths have been a staple product of Western culture perpetuating harmful, dehumanising and enduring beliefs surrounding the presumed deviant nature and essence of Black male and female sexuality” (Palmer 2010:268).

The persistence of these myths can be partially attributed to the fact that they are reworked and updated to adapt to new and changing social circumstances. Through thought lines of respectability and class, sensuality is circumscribed in the Caribbean and its identification in the UK similarly pervades Black communities and spreads anxiety in relation to expressions of sexuality. This results in a critical and undermining gaze from within and without. Reggae has evolved into a setting where notions of respectability and acceptability in relation to sexuality are questioned. Much of this debate has been framed within dancehall culture and has particularly focused on the female body and social codes of morality, however, Palmer (2010) hones in on lovers’ rock which she considers instrumental in constructing a narrative that unites the physical, emotional and cognitive self.

“Lovers’ rock is one example where Black people have created an arena to reclaim and express in public spaces the erotic dimensions of themselves in ways that transcend corrupted notions of Black sexuality” (2010:274).

This achievement is somewhat undermined by the gendered reggae scene and sexist ideas within it. Yet it suggests, in tangible terms, how performative space and musical events are invested with meaning through and by participants. Several points of contention relating to the division of reggae into sub-genres and associated ownership claims; the importance of love songs within it; the role of the erotic and its relation to politically conscious lyrics and performance exist that I will return to. Despite these caveats, contributions credited with a substantive, creative role in constructing and reflecting Black community values, effectively

trailing a way of being for ourselves, which through the transnational space inscribes itself across divides are important. Palmer, in particular also challenges the boundary between “female erotic desire and male political aspiration” (2010:285). This false dichotomy is usefully explored through Gregory who is arguably the most important lovers artist of his generation, and he exemplified the political and social connections between love, justice and deliverance.

Sound Systems

In addition to formal scholarship the story of reggae has also been approached from a music media background (Barrow & Dalton 1997, O’Brien Chang & Chen 1998, Bradley 2000, De Koningh & Cane-Honeysett 2003). As well as providing a discrete nuance, it is this body of work (with the exceptions of Henriques 2011, Stanley 2010) that has raised and extolled the virtues of the sound system, arguing that it is through this unique medium that Jamaica’s relationship to the world changed. This encompasses both the artistry of musicians and the structuring of the listening environment. Conceptualised as the community heartbeat, it relays an untold story.

“Every twist and turn of Jamaican music for the last forty years has reflected what has been happening to the people, either politically or socially, and often it is the other way round, with the music and sound system influencing the country’s politics” (Bradley 2000:xviii).

The sound system gathered existing community strands and functions, such as the provision of social commentary, information exchange, opportunities to display fashion prowess, commercial activities and wrapped them in rare groove, exclusivity and satisfying audiences (Bradley 2000). Developments even if driven by new musicians, instruments and

arrangements are critically filtered through audiences and their responses. This is certainly the case in all popular music but the vital role of the sound system in showcasing and marketing artists, developing the studio system and its immediate and substantive relationship with audiences, is peculiarly Jamaican. The expanding market in records opened up the London connection, with its established tradition of cutting-edge musicians, and the gateway to the international market.

The force of the music unified first and second generations of Caribbean people, with more reggae sold in the UK than in Jamaica between 1968 and 1972, which also redirected the focus of the market (Bradley 2000). Yet, this remained distilled through sound systems, dedicated record shops and a series of independent record labels. Filters which connect it inextricably with Black audiences. A “roots internationalisation phase” in which roots is merged with lovers’ is also identified (Bradley 2000, De Koningh & Cane-Honeysett 2003) and for some (Bradley 2000) this crossover is epitomised by Gregory. This is not a shift in style and is more accurately depicted as one of emphasis as these strands exist in his earliest offerings. The economic, social and political context of Britain is also harnessed to explain the disaffection within the Black community and the role reggae played in providing a rallying call, spiritual and political lift through its community and communal format. As well as guidance, identification offered respite from a hostile host community. “It was enough to create a siege mentality with the sound systems as a way of temporarily pulling up the drawbridge” (Bradley 2000:31).

Detail on the social and embodying character of the sound system is provided by Julian Henriques (2003 and 2011) who distinguishes between bodies that are placed inside sound and sound resonating inside bodies. Auditory saturation here is understood and experienced

as both expressive and receptive, encompassing sensory effects, affects and encoded meaning. His assertion that the aural and sonic world is more important for understanding everyday life than is generally recognised is empathetic to a listening approach in which the themes of connection, combination and synthesis are raised. This is not just in relation to music but encompasses human senses. The sound becomes a source and expression of power, producing pleasure and joy which defy commoditisation whilst at the same time, the sound system converts cultural into commercial capital.

Industry descriptions and commentary encompass more than lyrical content or listening context. Emotional connections to reggae are harnessed and the real need exposed by artists and other industry personnel to develop an inclusive, cohesive, protective identity is expressed. The commercial aspects of reggae's production and distribution, the general growth of the music industry and the proliferation of small companies that allowed reggae to flourish are also included. These assertions are based on information gathered from interviews with musicians, producers, sound system operators, owners and those affiliated to the music industry. However, there is little from the perspective of the listener and record prominence, sales and personal positioning inform much of the ranking and influence attributed to sub-genres and individual artists.

The literature on sound systems outlined so far contains an implicit notion of diaspora. It largely attributes the expansion of reggae to the movement of Jamaican and Caribbean populations to metropolitan centres in the UK, America and Canada and centres on the listening and buying public. An alternative diasporic aesthetic used to trace the historical practices, power relations and movement patterns of the Chinese within and from Jamaica is advanced accounting for their dominance as producers, sound system owners, distributors

and managers (Chin 2006). This troubles the often asserted working class/poor origins of reggae bringing in the middle classes, merchants and small traders using family and kinship networks extensively. Key Gregory albums including tributes after his death have been released by one such label, VP.

The asserted Chinese role, (Chin 2006) includes building the entrepreneurial structures and mechanisms the music needed to move between and around different localities. This in turn is related to, if not reflective of, the position the Chinese in Jamaica occupy in terms of race, class and mobility in both geographic and social terms. Reggae as a commodity has been subject to new models and transnational strategies of production, circulation and consumption. Drawing attention to reggae's essential hybridity an evocative point is made regarding its travels and meaning in transit.

“The cultural meanings and identities that reggae embodies are anything but predictable. In such far-flung sites of consumption reggae's local difference still signifies, but how and what it signifies is a different matter entirely” (Chin 2006:122).

Thus far the similarities in the accounts of reggae can be acknowledged. The notion of a bridge, transnational space and creative platform are essentially unifying concepts that stress the ensemble, heterogeneous nature of the music whether we are dealing with its origins, international expansion or the earliest forms of Jamaican music. Related to the way reggae is conceptualised is a consistency in the various (sometimes competing) claims made for its role. Here we have ideas relating to the way sound experienced communally is constructed as capable of defining space, marking time, providing metaphorical parameters such as a drawbridge in order to protect and serve its listeners in building identity, resilience and spaces for pleasure and succour. All of these functions are deemed necessary by the

pressures of social, economic and political contextual factors that would otherwise dehumanise and destroy, or make life less bearable for the groups reggae is speaking to. A glaring omission is the lack of listener perspectives.¹⁵ This results in theoretical and descriptive accounts in which consensus is striking but empirical support rare.

The similarities so far noted reveal omissions and uncontested underlying assumptions. Firstly, there is inadequate consideration of how reggae achieves its bridging and unifying functions. Similarly, explanations of the construction and components of its alternative ideology and value structure, especially when its temporal and ambivalent nature is factored in, are omitted. These claims are asserted and justified but mechanisms for their realisation, or consideration of how this occurs, are not. None of these claims are considered sufficiently from the listening perspective, although it is on behalf of this group that they are made. Secondly, there is a focus on specific sub-genres, lyrics and performers and these are used as indicative and characteristic of the reggae offering. This reduction is compounded by complex arguments about ownership, key drivers of change within reggae, its commodification and marketing and the construction of stardom. The possible impact of such distinctions upon what is heard is not addressed. Thirdly, the depiction of the UK as an accommodating, innovative metropolis and a capitalist centre focussed on relations of exchange, again overlooks or conflates the audience perspective. The nuanced competing explanations offered for the mass recordings made and mastered here and the need for this to be brought back to the context and activity within and around the music itself is unexplored. Lastly, the selection of particular themes such as slavery, Africa and Caribbean credibility, whilst rightly emphasized are not sufficiently interwoven into current as well as

¹⁵ Henriques and Stanley throughout are noticeable exceptions.

historical experience. They do not account for the range and border crossings within reggae generally and Gregory specifically. There is a deficit of description and analysis of performance, which again can be considered as part of the experiential void created through overlooking both the communal and individual listening experience.

Music and identity

Many aspects of the relationship between musical meaning, social power and cultural value are conducted in the arena of identity. It is through this mode that listeners are most often included. This suggests processes of knowledge accumulation in which musical and other triggers relating to stance and style are absorbed and interpreted in specific ways. This element of collective and individual identity construction has appealed to many concerned with reggae and its development. Speaking at the memorial service for Gregory in 2010, His Excellency, Anthony Johnson, the then High Commissioner of Jamaica, spoke of the paramount role that reggae artists have played in defining the nation to itself and others and building connections to a wider world community. This sonic representation exists alongside the “edenic garden paradise” (Courtman, 2004) which foregrounds sensual and aesthetic pleasures downplaying the accompanying violence, invasion, economic exploitation and slavery. In fact, this mix is included in the music. The imaginary nature of the space that is created as Caribbean and the centrality of diasporic identities to the region are important elements in its formation.

The use of music to signify individuality, group affiliation and autobiography has to be considered alongside music’s capacity to enter the body both uninvited and unquestionably. A leading sociologist addressing musical meaning, Tia DeNora (2000, 2003) examines the various ways music is used within specific contexts as a resource in the construction of

collective and individual identity through musical practices and processes that are grounded in everyday life. “Interest in music merges with a more general interest in the interface between material culture, social action and subjectivity” (DeNora and Belcher, 2000:82).

Providing an insight into this process, Charis Kubrin (2005), uses content analysis to examine rap music. Though a direct causal link is not made with violence, the implication is that within the complex relationship that exists between the music and social identity construction; interpretive guidelines are formed in the way reality is constituted which accounts for and makes sensible violent behaviour. There are interesting parallels to be drawn between rap and reggae. Both forms chronicle the Black experience, use a street or vernacular code and were at least initially charged with transformation in similar ways. Emerging as protest and political forms, they are considered to have degenerated, in one case into gangsta rap and the other slackness and the ascendancy of the dancehall, with similar links to violence. Are interpretive guidelines and meaning then the key that links music and identity?

The question of what musical meanings arise and are afforded by reggae are more often addressed than how this occurs. The deeply social and collective nature of its production, and in particular early consumption, are examined by assembling individuals and associations into a more or less coherent field organised for the delivery of music. A prolific and important cultural critic writing on reggae specifically and Black British culture more generally, Paul Gilroy, explores the connections between the English speaking African diaspora. Enlarging upon the links to Africa identified in Jamaica, he asserts, “Post slave cultures of the Atlantic world are in some significant way related to each other and the African cultures from which they partly derive” (1991:113). Musically, the patterns of language use

and oral focus presuppose a distinctive relationship to the body. The emphasis on performance draws attention to “Dramaturgy, enunciation and gesture, the pre- and anti-discursive constituents of black meta communication” (1991:113).

Musical expression is thus conceptualised as a site of adaptation to new circumstances, a means of facilitating transition and of building connectives between different ethnic/nation groups, both nationally and transnationally. This is encapsulated in reggae. Factors including the political language of justice, equality and citizenship; work and freedom; retelling history; representations of sexuality and gender identity as well as the central position of music itself are used as evidence of the links amongst diaspora communities. The flexible, experiential model apparent in Black Atlantic music can be used more generally in understanding identity. “It remains the outcome of practical activity; language, gesture, body significations, desires” (Gilroy 1991:127).

“That all of these signs are contained in music is important. They produce the imaginary effect of an internal racial core or essence by acting on the body through the specific mechanisms of identification and recognition that are produced in the intimate interaction of performer and crowd” (1991:127).

Many of these arguments are consolidated in Gilroy’s classic text, *The Black Atlantic* (1993). The constructive role that Black cultural expression has had on diasporan communities and in colonising cultural industries more generally is outlined.

“The power of music in developing black struggles by communicating information, organising consciousness, and testing out or deploying the forms of subjectivity which are required by political agency, whether individual or collective, defensive or

transformational, demands attention to both the formal attributes of this expressive culture and its distinctive moral basis” (1993:36).

Detailing and exploring these attributes practically and philosophically is work that is required.

In addition to constructing and transmitting elements for identity building, music is also credited with encouraging formations that support community providing a healing and moral alternative comprising short term support in combination with a long term alternative (Gilroy 1993). Historically conceptualised as folk knowledge, it imparts philosophical discourse within the Black vernacular tradition. An interesting and troubling adjunct to the concept of diaspora as commonly understood is provided by Aisha Khan (2015). Encompassing encounters, transformations, self-reflexivity and the experience of current or past trauma, these elemental occurrences have become both building blocks towards and the end goal of new identities and culture. Critically, this celebratory exploration, conflates concept with lived experience. As such it is implicitly essentialist and homogenizing, freezing difference and at core relating to race, even when this is disavowed. She raises an important question, is there any reason that the ‘black Atlantic’ should be isolated from the Atlantic world as a whole, any more than the Atlantic perimeter from the Mediterranean, Indian Ocean, and Far Eastern regions with which it has long interacted? The question remains unanswered. She advocates exploration of diaspora as communication, with its peoples conceptualised as being a part of cultures rather than possessors of it. This fine distinction will recur throughout.

Widening the focus from reggae to music more generally facilitates a corresponding expansion of the search for an understanding of the value, meanings and role of this form of communication. This is a huge field from which I draw on particular components that are useful for understanding Gregory. In this trajectory also, music is embedded in culture, which in turn is located in specific historical, social relations and practices. It is appropriate to pay attention to what is gathered under the classification culture. Raymond Williams (1958) speaking of the English tradition, contends that the idea, as well as modern use of the term itself is associated with the industrial revolution and accounts for and explains the experiential responses to changes in society. Whilst recognising the fact that the activities comprising culture existed beforehand, the illumination and interrogation of a related set of key terms which have been changed by and define industrial society, suggest a general theory of culture might be possible. As such, culture represents “a theory of relations between elements in a whole way of life” (p xi). The ordinary nature of culture, the fact that its shape is expressed individually and collectively and is importantly tested and verified in experience is stressed. Conceptualising music in this way is immediately interesting. It is clear that music making as a human activity exists in all societies, modern and ancient and that individuals and groups have and continue to engage in myriad forms. These encompass traditional conservative elements as well as interpreting and performing disruption and change. The interaction between the cultural forms and practices and larger changes in societal structures, institutions, thoughts and feelings meet at a point of conjuncture. This is where general concerns and personal meanings intersect and it is significant.

Tension, as outlined by Chris Rojek (2007) is also a useful concept to introduce into the point of conjuncture, along with the idea of difference. Music involves local and global interaction and issues of knowledge and power. Struggles as well as shared aspects of popular reality are important as are civic and personal systems of representation, individual and collective agency. Music that has been codified, rationalised with the manufacture of standardised instruments to embed it, and objectified as a commodity with an exchange value involves a process that can shed light on how meaning is created, shared and resisted within communication. It can also reveal implicit issues of power and structural position with respect to resources and alliances (Rojek 2007).

An element of tension can likewise be heard in contested notions of music's origin and role in life, as argued by Elisabeth Tolbert (2001). Paradoxically it is conceptualised both as inessential, and as a phenomenon steeped in biology and attached to sexual selection as an indicator of reproductive capacity. These links to evolutionary theories are embedded in Western claims of humanity, rationality and knowledge. Musical capacity as well as being regarded as an intermediary between animal and human species, is allied with the feminine, relating to emotion and bodily associations, in opposition to language's male and therefore logical link (Tolbert 2001). Returning to Williams (1958), it is useful to retain the thought that all music is located within and carries connotations of representation and a social world and thus extends knowledge and practice beyond the merely musical.

The enigmatic nature of music hinges on the many claims that are made for its disruptive, multiple and contradictory voice. Romantic ideas of an essential free flow, a spiritually translated outpouring, remain very resilient, even in contemporary popular music formats. Two basic approaches commonly used are identified by Tolbert (2001) who notes

that both conceptualise music as an autonomous structure, restricting the debate to where meaning lies. This is either contained inherently in musical structure with responses in patterns of tension and release that are syntactically ordered. Or emphasis is placed in a referential approach, with meaning linked to socio-cultural context and social interaction. Both positions considered exclusively are problematic as meaning can be found in aspects of either and in their combination.

The role of music and the meanings it contains and exhibits can thus best be conceptualised as existing on a continuum, which is circular. One that ranges from frivolous past time to fundamental form of human communication. Around this scale the only element that can be assumed is its basic and universal nature. Where specific musical practices are positioned depends on global, societal relations, structures of economic and hegemonic power and influence and from whose perspective it is being examined. Positioning is also shaped by the types of uses to which music is ascribed, such as ritual, work, or leisure.

Addressing this ambiguity, William Roy and Timothy Dowd (2010) ask, “What is music, sociologically speaking?” (p184). In answering, they map this growing field of inquiry arguing that music is not easily defined, but rests to a large extent on social constructions and cultural assumptions that simplify what is included and excluded. These boundaries also relate to broader social distinctions. In order to reveal the hidden dimensions of the socially acceptable they discuss music conceptualised as an object and an activity. The former view facilitates examination of the uses, effects and affects of music; it assumes a stability across time, place and medium and implies a point of creation. Within this, different types of objects are conjured, for example, the structured system of tones associated with and ascribed to Western Europe set in acoustics and mathematics, and music as a commodity. “Both have

long histories and undergird the view of music as a written and/or recorded text that can be possessed, circulated and inspected.” (Roy & Dowd 2010:185)

The distinction between object and activity is of limited use. It is helpful in organising the material on music, but ultimately proves less valuable in analysis as music has elements of both and can be probed productively from either angle. However, a brief sojourn is necessary to highlight the roots of theories which stress the reification of music, its commodification and objectification. This overview provides a basis for understanding later, more nuanced interpretations and those that offer direct critiques to meta-narratives. It will also form the foundation upon which music’s relations to broad social distinctions and its collective uses are based. It is additionally presented here as one of the ideological undercurrents amongst many which play a contested, but undeniable role in the development of reggae and its links with voice as agency.

Social and Political Structures; Colonial Legacies

An important ideological undercurrent in the analysis of slavery, colonialism, identity, value and cultural expression in modern society is attributed to Marxism. In the first of *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Karl Marx (1975) outlines the issue of estranged labour, explaining three aspects that alienation takes. In order to labour and through our labour, humans create themselves. We do this mentally and physically. It is a basic facet of life. We are a part of nature and nature provides both the material through which labour realises itself and the means through which workers physically sustain themselves. However, under capitalist conditions of production demand regulates production and this is so even in the production of people. “The existence of the worker is therefore reduced to the same

condition as the existence of every other commodity” (p283). This occurs firstly, as the labour of the worker, in terms of the object that is produced, stands outside of their control, existing independently of them. Secondly, as labour power is sold, the productive process itself is alienating for the worker. It is not the direct satisfaction of a need, but a means of earning money in order to satisfy a need. Thirdly, though human beings are an integral part of nature, life appears as a means of life. Estranged labour therefore takes us away from our human essence. Despite being a species being, with life in all of its facets premised upon our relationships to other humans, we become estranged from one another. Lucio Colletti (1975), who writes the introduction to the collection, rightly argues that this conceptualisation is of a set of relationships. To oneself, ones’ nature, ones’ fellow humans, ones’ labour and the creation and recreation of society. These essential relationships are critical and referred to throughout this study and inform how value is ultimately apportioned.

The essence of humanity is also alluded to as coming into being through the existence of their objects.

“Man is affirmed in the objective world not only in thought, but with all the senses...Only through the objectively unfolded wealth of human nature can the wealth of subjective human sensitivity - a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form, in short senses capable of human gratification - be either cultivated or created” (p353).

Marx goes on to clarify the ways in which cultural development resolves theoretical antithesis such as that between subject and object, spiritual and material, active and passive and it does this in practical application. An essential aspect of his criticism of philosophy is that it treats this only theoretically, when it requires human energy to be applied. It requires anchoring in real life situations.

A critical perspective cognisant of racial distinction is offered by Cedric Robinson (2000) in his ground breaking text charting the existence and evolution of the Black radical tradition. He diverges in two very important ways from mainstream Marxism and scholarship sympathetic to the tradition. Rejecting a simple displacement of feudal relations for capitalist ones, he instead highlights the forms that were brought into and characterise the modern era. Early European slavery with its attendant antagonisms of race, nation and ethnicity is incorporated and built upon. Marking the shifts from geopolitical region, religion, race and then modern science, the essentialism of racial distinction and hierarchy are identified as an integral aspect of European and capitalist development. Slavery is rescued from its relegation to primitive accumulation of capital. Political and economic structures for exploitation and repression, including commanding the labour power of foreigners for state military machines, domestic service, agrarian and port labourers for merchants had long existed. It did so alongside financial networks across and between ports, territories and nation states. Differentiation was embedded.

Of equal importance to economic and political structures is culture. Comprising knowledge, cosmologies, language and thought, behaviours and beliefs, social organisation and structure. In short, “the terms of (their) humanity” (p 122). The terms also of consciousness. Robinson (2000) thus contests dominant versions of history and the struggles that are outlined in these narratives. Black consciousness is not accounted for in Marxist explanations of the processes and motivations that give rise to the modern world. This omission leaves it with property relations as the primary explanation for the brutality of sections of humanity. His explication of African consciousness that is enacted as sociality and lived reality is produced culturally.

Approached through the sounds of reggae, there is a versioning, a recreation of philosophy, of consciousness that is located in and makes sense of current situations whilst aspiring beyond them. Speaking of the Atlantic slave trade, Robinson (2000) credits the capacity of the African to survive to, “the ability to imaginatively re-create a precedent metaphysic while being subjected to enslavement, racial domination, and repression” (p 309). The tools of resistance include marronage – a tactic that both facilitates society on their terms and offers protection from the worst excesses of those from whom they escape. Arson; destruction of the tools of work; revolt; and spiritual preparation for the same through means such as obeah, voodoo, Black Christianity are also enlisted. The importance of cultural forms as preparation for the currently impossible task of separation, and the necessity of fortification of beliefs, expectations and vision is an exciting addition to the complex relationship between consciousness and material reality. It is one we will return to throughout this study.

What Robinson (2000) offers is an African centred, empathetic perspective on alliance, preservation of a people, the nurturing of radicalism and mass resistance through belief systems and ways of being. Ways of worshipping, celebrating, lamenting and living life counter violent and dehumanising systems imposed by external forces. The relevance and reality of internal and community reference points, and alternative world consciousness are absent from the proletarian revolutionary consciousness predicted by Marx. This omission renders the category class and the dimension of consciousness insufficient as explanations of individual and collective agency. Recognition of the ordinary allows Robinson (2000) to acclaim through his analysis of Black radicals, “whatever the objective forces propelling a people toward struggle, resistance, and revolution, they would come to that struggle in their own cultural terms” (p 315). Efforts to obliterate the African past and remove its enslaved

people from time, place or tradition is part of the making of the negro, the slave. Now comprehended only as a source of labour power, a different species, the alienation process ideologically constructs and positions Black people outside of humanity.

Many theorists working within a Marxist tradition have sought to conceptualise and explicate the ways in which culture as symbolic and material practice is embedded and interrelated within economic relations. Attention on the processes of commodification as they relate to the production, consumption and perception of culture facilitates consideration of the meanings and value attached. As explained by Simon Susen (2011),

“When we buy into the symbolic power of cultural commodities we are subject to both the powerful nature of the symbolic and the symbolic nature of power; we seek to acquire the value the commodity represents, and we aim to obtain the authority the commodity contains (Susen, 2011:180)”.

Distinguishing between symbolism and substance, monetary and other aspects of value is critical to interrogating voice and listening; both as concepts and practices within the reggae genre. Cultural forms considered in this way are fundamental to relations of domination, legitimacy, contextualisation and potentially emancipation.

There is a tendency to focus on effects which results in the neglect of social processes of producing meaning and value, highlighting instead the ways in which technology is modifying them. Imposing this upon a study of reggae suggests that investigation is restricted to examining its role in disturbing and providing an alternative to mainstream culture. This is a form that has dominated. The concept of cultural materialism, aligning social themes and representations in relation to the means and conditions of production, including the structure of feeling and cultural sensibility of an era as well as the materiality of signs, is offered by

Raymond Williams (1958, 1976). Cultural theorists have developed aspects of materialist themes to illustrate the impact and association between musical genres and social distinctions. The racialization and gendering of popular music are aspects of this.

In his classic text on subculture Dick Hebdige (1993) provides an exemplar of this. He explores Rastafarians through his interest in, “The expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonised” (1993:2). For him, style is a meaningful construction. “The tensions between dominant and subordinate groups can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture” (1993:2). He is interested in otherwise ordinary objects that are infused with meaning in a conscious symbolic dialectic encounter. Objections and contradictions are expressed through signs and rituals; class struggle is waged as a signification struggle. Whilst this is undoubtedly an aspect of cultural expression, it cannot simply be reduced to a reflection of class war or symbolic struggle. The meanings ascribed are brought forth in the processes participants engage in and are complex blends of individual, social, spiritual, political as well as economic reality and perceptions.

Discussing art generally as a concept that expresses a quality of meaning making, Paul Willis (2000), claims that as material conditions are remade continuously, so are our understandings of the world and our place within it. Culture is thus social and positional as well as individual. He notes both its transcendent and situated traits and locates creativity in a cusp where aesthetics encounter the social, and active sense is constructed. His sophisticated argument calls for a sensuous materialism which brings a common analytic frame to bear on the social and symbolic. Agreeing that our interactions with culture are largely through commodities and their relations he builds in a subjective moment of creative consumption. In this way usefulness and fetishism, though opposed, are united. Coexisting

they impact one another producing permanent instability. “This quality is one of actual or potential cultural meaningfulness” (2000:55). This relationship is further explained.

“While cultural commodities are provided in vertical relations of capitalist logic, they must be formed and made available in socially horizontal planes of prior communicative meaning and symbolic appropriation” (Willis, 2000:67).

Distinguishing between vertical and horizontal relations facilitates meeting points whilst conceptualising separate processes. The reggae music industry troubles this in aspects of production, dissemination, not just consumption.

To account for this Willis (2000) acknowledges sensual knowing as a potent force capable of penetrating and invalidating ideological models and behavioural prescriptions. Ultimately, however, he labels this knowing, “tragic irony” and argues it is limited by objective possibilities to a finite range of options. Creative consumption is treated in a similar way. Though recognised as a more grounded aesthetic with capacity for use and resistance, it relies on global commoditisation which in the final analysis, “Create new communities of meaning under capitalisms watchful gaze” (p 75). Willis therefore assigns a type of rigidity which I do not accept, partly as it fails to employ the perspectives and meanings attributed by participants and symbolic workers, and it apportions less weight to the humanising elements of what is termed symbolic work and more to the divisions and classifications based on material resources.

Scholarship specific to music offers more nuanced application. Simon Frith, a leading scholar in the field of popular music studies has documented the rise of mass culture (1996) contending that reconfigured forms of social activity, such as participation in music, gift aesthetic experiences with enhanced powers to define social identity. Paradoxically, it also both disciplines and loosens previously unrespectable and respectable groups. He ascribes a similarly mediative role to popular cultural processes in terms of class, group conflicts and values. The implications are that musical organisation requires social organisation and cultural context to be created, understood or imbued with meaning (Frith 1996).

Several ideas are documented that pertain to my research in his account of popular music. The mind body split and its association with fun and seriousness are regarded as part of the mechanism for establishing high culture in Europe and North America. The development of this hierarchical distinction through cultural ideology and racism produces ways of hearing music, which are not intrinsic to the music itself. He emphasises the importance of performance as an emergent structure that aligns thinking and doing and as such facilitates heightened communication which, incorporating verbal and bodily language, enables the creation of distance from content in order to consider form. The significance of rhythm and ultimately time as a container for expectation, attention and memory is conceptualised as a fundamental element of music and as the basis of its capacity to expand the moment and frame it (Frith 1996, 2007). Dance is integrated as an interpretive skill that allows the body to express and respond to music and in so doing helps us learn how to listen to it. These elements combined and perceived temporally allow music to express a contemplative principle; and this is experienced in an integrative form.

These elements identified by Frith concur with approaches identified within reggae scholarship. Musicology also presents strands through its commitment to a politicisation of music (Green 2002) enabled through analysis that links musical style with social and political processes. This facilitates as well as complicates the use of music in constructing meaning. Is meaning making best conceptualised as located in object or activity? Do text and lyrics or production and consumption contexts provide more useful categories? Roy and Dowd, (2010) refer to textualists and contextualists, treating the former as emphasizing object and the latter activity. Whilst this has a certain resonance, for my purposes it is better to acknowledge that contextual analysis still points to a musical object as the starting and finishing point. Activity accounts for the where and how of the objects existence, perhaps overlooking the why. This divide is somewhat artificial and arbitrary as in many instances it is a case of relative emphasis rather than the exclusive focus on one or the other.

Audiences and fandom

An important shift in popular music studies, As noted by Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2002), has been the critique of and move away from subculture as the primary means of understanding musical affiliation. This is particularly so in terms of audiences. As is clear from the material already cited, reggae encompasses many of the traits with which subcultures have been identified, for example, rebellion, alternative ideologies and distinct uses of language. Yet, I consider that in addition to the criticisms offered by others concerning the romanticised and overly politicised nature of the discourse; the lack of engagement with musical structure; the confusion of style and lifestyle with social class (Hesmondhalgh & Negus 2002) it is inadequate for this project concerned as it is with the listening perspective. From this standpoint reggae is “our” music, in that it is Caribbean, Black British, expressive of

our reality. Rather than deviant, (which requires an external gaze or point of audition), it is experienced as natural, ordinary and entirely comprehensible. Gregory exemplifies the fact that the reggae offer is less cohesive than subcultural theory suggests and is as focussed on heady physical and mental pleasure as it is truth, rights and justice. In this sense he also troubles the divisions between music that resists the social and economic systems of state and civil society in tangible forms and that which is considered complicit.

A further issue concerns the uses of and interactions with music throughout life. My research concerns tend towards everyday use encompassing both the ritualised group forms of engagement such as a concert and sound system dance, alongside the more mundane radio programme or CD listening which offers a background soundscape and everything in between. It is also focused on engagement beyond the span of youth. Thus,

“The use by young people of music to express difference, maintain self-identity and question abuses of political and economic power are important; but we might have a richer understanding of the politics and aesthetics of music if we were to consider its emotional and social significance for everyone” (Hesmondhalgh 2002: 118).

Hesmondhalgh (2002) contextualises this by pointing out that very few empirical studies exist on audiences. Much of the scholarship is based on “speculative interpretive work” (p 118) which does not address questions of value.

The term fandom is included in the section heading in order to capture the burgeoning online presence of those who appreciate Gregory. Whilst many who contribute to this platform would not necessarily label themselves in this way, I am using this term loosely to account for those who exhibit a “positive personal connection” to this body of music (Duffett 2013:2). Technology has enabled and encouraged new forms of fandom. The internet and

social media have impacted upon both how music is shared and how it is assessed. This has led to what some consider to be the empowerment of fans with a range of new roles and the associated necessity of different frameworks for understanding the new relationships (Galuszka 2015). This is interesting as this source of data (sound clouds, tribute podcasts, videos and commentaries) have increased since Gregory's death and provide a readily accessible source of audience/listener opinion on his contribution.

The particular notion of fandom that is implied rests on breaking the link and associated hierarchical relationship between artists and the recording industry and does not necessarily apply to reggae, particularly artists of his generation. Nonetheless, this evolution is considered under several headings. "The empowerment of audiences; the democratization of communication; and the facilitation of the building of fan communities" (Galuszka 2015: 27). What is clearly relevant is that listeners have direct access to each other and a wider community in forms previously unmatched and only accessible to professional journalists and cultural commentators. So, if the assertion that discourse about music impacts upon the music itself is to be believed, then this is coming from a much wider source than before.

YouTube plays a vital role in facilitating fans uploading and sharing clips, tracks, interviews, "sharing their cultural capital" (Duffett 2013: 236). This is alongside increasing the audibility and visibility of appreciative communities and facilitating global links. In addition to encouraging contributing, online attention can also be conceptualised as a form of listening (Crawford 2012). Albeit, one that has not been given much consideration in relation to voice. Arguing that it is a practice that encompasses "intimacy, connection and participation," Crawford (2012) asserts, "They contribute a mode of receptiveness that encourages others to make public contributions" (2012:81). Whilst this is difficult to quantify, the notion of

listening or tuning in represents a valid extension of older forms of musical participation to new online practices.

The final medium that I want to introduce in this section is that of the radio. As asserted by Jody Berland (2012) radio has not disappeared despite technological innovations, rather a renaissance has occurred with the growth of alternative forms. She does note its relegation to ambient sound. As a vehicle for the promotion of reggae it has played a pivotal role, particularly through its capacity to structure listening space and create, “A continuous enveloping rhythm of sound and information” (2012:41). This is currently pertinent in constructing spaces of remembering and gathering communities of listeners identifying with a particular classification, such as dancehall free Sundays. Importantly, radio alongside sound systems have engaged reggae enthusiasts in technological innovations that challenge cultural domination creating their own structures and participatory networks.

In the recent past, pirate radio stations in London have redesignated themselves as community stations. This format has likewise travelled to Jamaica and was instrumental in granting reggae official and constant airplay through the establishment of Irie FM. It has also utilised online platforms enabling global listening to local music. This “imagined community” (Hilmes 2012) diminishes physical distance, penetrating private and personal space with musical culture. Hilmes (2012) notes the boundaries such as race, class, language and tradition that radios’ immateriality allows it to cross. In its crossing of boundaries, it has contributed to reconfiguring them, not least through gathering audiences from far and wide and listeners who would not necessarily venture into the live experience of reggae.

Listening

The centrality of listening to this research project warrants its inclusion in various conceptual manifestations throughout the thesis. Music studies has a tradition of scholarship addressing listening and auditory culture (Bull and Back 2003, Ihde 2007, Nancy 2007) which tends to incorporate relationships in a significant way. It is embraced here. Overlooked in favour of the eye, the ear is considered capable of distinguishing relationships (Ihde 2007) to community, to ourselves (Nancy 2007), to the spaces and places we inhabit and to power (Bull and Back 2003). Auditory space is theorised as inherently democratic; partly as a consequence of the ears inability to shut out unwanted sound; the fact that multiple registers can coexist at the same time; and the assertion that the ear has no favoured focus (Bull and Back 2003). Focus in this sense means sound on which it rests or is drawn. Whilst the latter point can be debated, the previous two lend credence to the equal access claim. Sound is also considered symptomatic of physiological and social time which are mediated by rhythm and explored in movement (Filmer, 2003). Furthermore, the location of bodily responses to sound in the sympathetic and para-sympathetic nervous systems provides a direct link to emotions and engages both halves of the brain (Levitin, 2006, Carlyle and Lane, 2013).

Asking the question what is at play in listening? Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) suggests that it is to be on the edge of, and straining towards meaning. Both meaning and sound comprise referrals. Sound spreads and whilst doing so it resounds in the individual through vibration, which exists both outside of and within the body. In this form it is not simply a metaphor for access to the self but is the reality of this. Rhythm, timbre and the impulse to move provide part of the matrix within which meaning resonates. Nancy (2007) makes several key points that are valuable in application to reggae. He notes that, "A musical-becoming of sensibility

and a global-becoming of musicality have occurred” (p 12) and that this has no equivalent in other social areas. Music is a linking phenomenon. It is also a flexible one, both physically in terms of sound wave propagation and because its effects are felt throughout the body. He relates music to the logic of evocation, with presence brought to itself. There are spiritual and creation overtones in his work. These are also prevalent and resonant in reggae and how it is understood.

The emphasis on listening is also addressed by Don Ihde (2007) who incorporates language and dance in his conception of embodied listening. He describes the means through which technology has transformed the experience of listening and consequently our ideas of the world and ourselves within it. His trajectory of scientific development shows how view was extended whilst sound remained restricted. This is true in Western traditions but there is some evidence to suggest other possibilities. In Egyptian traditions, for example, spiritual knowledge was taught through voice and often sung, rather than written down. Mapping the field of sound Ihde (2007) also notes its relational qualities but extends this to include all forms of knowledge about the world and the self, the centrality of intention in shaping experience and the act of consciousness. He presents phenomenological methodology for apprehending and interrogating sound.

Some useful concepts and implicit analytical tools are introduced by Ihde (2007). These include the horizon of sound, of which silence is a dimension. It allows rhythmic pauses and tempo to be significant and accounts for the unspoken in speech. This is labelled “near silence” (p 162) which incorporates what can be said omitting what is already known “in a community with a history” (p 162). This partially reveals a structure for learning to listen and may offer explanations for groans, idioms and sighs being inherently meaningful. The

essentially voiced character of the world is also important as it brings with it a material (in the widest sense of the word including physical and spiritual, experience and passion) trace of the nature of the thing or person.

The association of listening with immersive contemplation, primary comprehension and orientation (Carlyle and Lane 2013) has leant towards assertions of truth. Sarha Moore (2013) in a discerning article challenges this through collating a number of different opinions on the flat second from both musicians and listeners from different ethnic groups and traditions. Responses range from normal to dissonant/dark and include descriptions of the effect on the body. The range suggests that history and experience are generative of particular sounds and the meanings ascribed to them. This may be something at play in reggae, drawn through the ages including the experience of slavery, colonialism and close proximity to Europeans. This angle is further explored by Peter Cusack (2013) in his account of the role and relevance of sonic journalism. For him, sound brings together geography, political context and personal response, and juxtaposed they are very powerful. The ear through providing our sense of spatiality, allows us to judge proximity to the event and facilitates our imagining how we might feel or behave in those circumstances. The inclusion of the imaginary in the orbit of reality is important.

Returning to the starting point of reggae, the literature confirms the universality of music and song, the various uses to which it has been put and the many meanings ascribed making it a slippery and multifaceted subject. A major omission is the failure to adequately consider reggae from the perspective of the listener. The history of the music relates to the history of listening and what is clear is that we learn to listen (Szendy 2008, Marshall 2011) and to appreciate appropriately. Within this listening can be both ambiguous and ambivalent.

How music accomplishes the roles claimed for it and the meanings that arise from engagement with it are also neglected. Essentially, comprehensive structural approaches are based on implicit assumptions regarding the relationship between economic and cultural processes and therefore the efficacy and independence of musical communication practices. Similarly, minutely focussed descriptive approaches are also based on implicit, ultimately restrictive, though different assumptions.

The divide between these approaches is potentially sutured by the concept of musicking advocated by Christopher Small (1998). It is signposted here, and its inclusive relational focus advocated as one that sheds light upon the processes of auditory imaginings in the various sites in which reggae is practiced. It offers a way of exploring the structures and forms through which reggae fulfils emotional, intellectual and social needs representing the unification of various aspects of life including structures. This is examined in detail in chapter four. The notions of a reggae aesthetic and lyricature reinforce proclamations of an outburst of creative energy and the transformation of sound, music and audio technology. This chapter raises themes and outlines approaches that are used in the study of both reggae and popular music more generally. The similarities in explanations of reggae lend credence to the claims made for it but require empirical research. The following chapter explicates my plan for this.

Chapter Three

Methodology: One One Cocoa

Any man who try hard will make it, just practice

Cos one one cocoa full basket. (Isaacs 1972)

“The illusion is that musical works and forms exist, but are only imperfectly described – in fact they exist only as imperfect descriptions, while the more immediate business of musical experience is denied serious attention.” (Clayton 2003, p57)

Methodological Overview

This chapter presents the methodological approaches and tools used to collect data for this study. It is guided by the following research questions:

1. What value (cultural, political, social and spiritual) is realised through the music of Gregory Isaacs?

The primary question is supplemented by secondary ones that probe the factors that comprise the reggae experience and explore the affects and effects of the same.

2. In what ways is Gregory Isaacs' voice of significance?
3. How does listening play a role in apprehending value?

The final question addresses a general concern.

4. What is revealed about the nature of musical communication?

The questions attend to the relative lack (though this is changing) of scholarship and analysis of this genre of music. And to the site specific, time bound, medium based focus that pervades the discourses currently available. This is apparent in the paradoxical ubiquity of Gregory's music and absence of recognition culturally or musically outside of the genre. It is addressed through the single artist emphasis that acknowledges his stature, longevity and the communal nature of the reggae offer. The use of an individual to express community exposes the false divide between the I and the we, the individual and collective nurtured and developed through and in the nature of music. Above all the body of work is assessed by those who live with it and without whom its rise, sustained impact and legacy would be impossible.

As alluded to in the opening quotes, the work of this chapter, is complex. It is so because the study gathers and assembles in a meaningful way, for study participants and the wider reggae and popular music community, practices, people, experiences, discourses and institutions integral to the propagation, dissemination and reception of the music. It requires an ear for hearing and attending to perspectives and impressions of reggae sound culture that are routinely overlooked, assumed or undervalued. And finally, it frames these in a form that enables analysis and makes sense of the reggae offer as it is lived. This is achieved through a case study of the value ascribed to the life work of Gregory Isaacs, by his listeners.

The decision to focus on a single artist rather than a time period, propagation method or subgenre is deliberate and multifaceted and incorporates distinction as a methodological way. The individual voice of Gregory has come to be associated with the voice of downtown Kingston, reggae and Jamaica. As well as lovers, crossover appeal and internationalisation. This is partly due to his prolific career and international repute but also the connections he forged between a community of musicians and a musical community. His work straddles styles and periods within the genre and his title, Cool Ruler, refers to his voice, stance and performance style as well as lyrical interests and musical arrangements. His trademark contribution thus enables both a unique and a general investigation, providing a distinctive (though changing) timbre tracked over time and across audiences.

Listeners include those who construct listening opportunities for others encapsulating what can be deemed an industry approach. It considers similarly the attitudes of academics and cultural commentators interpreting the music and contributing to how it is heard and incorporates listeners who work in other cultural fields. The priority, however, is those for whom this music is simply and integrally a part of their lives. This is the “earwitness” (Schafer 2012) the act of listening provides for. And in so doing, in recognition of the nature of sound to leave one body and enter another, to resound and reverberate within and around the human body, to take up space and dissolve then configure individual and collective boundaries, it affects and profoundly changes those in its range of influence and audition. Influencing and changing for much longer than the temporal sound can be physically heard. The methodological narrative therefore includes the modifications to design, enquiry, practice, analysis and write up that respondents have directed through their engagement and investment in the research. With this evolution in mind, the research context, areas of

interest, theoretical positioning, and research aims are offered before the research design, tools, methodologies of analysis and process.

The Research Context

Despite the very specific origins of the music in Kingston Jamaica, its worldwide proliferation and the growth of local scenes make an examination of the UK, particularly London, pertinent. The UK as a site incorporates production, consumption, traditional avenues of propagation such as the sound systems and site-specific ones such as night clubs, radio stations and festivals. It is recognised as the first outpost and an important transnational space (Bradley 2000, Palmer 2010). Gregory claimed a special relationship with British audiences, he spent a lot of time in the country and recorded five of his arguably most popular albums for Virgin and Island, both English owned companies. London is an important doorway to the rest of the world. Reggae's international status is often credited to this link and a pivotal time in the genre is identified when the market for Jamaican music was bigger in the UK than in Jamaica itself (Bradley, 2000). This has to be contextualised within the historical status of London as an innovative centre for Black music and one that relied upon its service to and feedback from its Black audiences (Bradley 2013).

The political and economic history of London and the UK provide insight into an enduring relationship with Africa and the Caribbean and a distinctive moment in Caribbean colonial experience. Many of the popular claims made for reggae music focus on the period of its emergence in Jamaica, (Katz 2003, Dawes 1999) the failure of the nationalist project and the possibilities that this revealed. The same is theorised for the political, social and economic conditions facing Black Britons in the UK (Hall 2006), the corresponding failure of the

integrationist project and the chasm this uncovered. The similarities and differences between these two situations, the links established and developed, all contribute to the cultivation and progression of the genre and its first outpost. Many elements in this history facilitate investigation of the connections to identity construction often posited in the literature as an important role that reggae played (Gilroy 1993, Bradley 2000). And support an exploration of how and in what ways themes, ideas, knowledge and structures that pertain to this are communicated and understood, invested with meaning and incorporated into individual and collective notions of self.

A clear objective of the study is to uncover whether, how and in what ways this collective endeavour from a tiny island in the Caribbean contributed to a “black Atlantic” (Gilroy 1993), reggae aesthetic (Dawes, 1999), “outernational” perspective (Henry, 2005) that galvanised and united immigrant populations in the UK, touched indigenous groups and appealed to those further afield. The context extends to and incorporates the time span of the research in all its stages. It also validates and builds in and upon listener perspectives of the same. Therefore, context refers to that into which music is thrown, and that which the sounds, people involved, and relationships enacted create (Gritten 2014). Additionally, the former changes as the music continues to be heard and engaged with. We are in this way, thinking with music (Burke 2018), centring the experience and the listener. Listeners are not juxtaposed or thought in relation to another. Knowledge is legitimised through experience.

Interrogation of the listening experience is assisted by emphasising a single artist. It incorporates the technological changes within the industry and concomitant importance of live or recorded sessions, radio, sound systems, clubs, concerts as performance outlets and individual and group considerations. It encompasses extrinsic and intrinsic values relating to

participation and considers how music is used on a personal everyday basis. Thus the minutiae of emotional and imaginative understandings and sensibilities as well as societal conceptions of identification and belonging are embraced. The breadth of claims made for music generally are examined through the sound of one practitioner. It is around him that I gather music personnel, specific DJs, fellow artists, and listeners. This attention also incorporates his introduction of key artists and their specialisms.

Changes in listening patterns, revenue streams, popular music industry practices and priorities impact the genre context. The most notable and relevant are the shift to streaming services and live performance at festivals. The demise in digital sales and local physical venues, linked to legislation and technological affordances, has seen benefits accrue to the most celebrated artists and the industry itself (Mulder et al 2020). This belies the proliferation and individualisation of the production and dissemination of contemporary genres with a sonic genealogy and kinship affiliation to reggae (White 2021). Alongside and related to this is what Paul Gilroy, (2021) has termed, “the waning of heart-I-cal philosophy” (p7). The suturing of music and politics in which alternative perspectives and radical critiques form a collective call to understanding and action is relegated to a past golden age. Cut loose from earlier anchors, contemporary sounds and listening practices are conceptualised firmly within neo-liberal sensibilities. Positioning that seeks redistribution within the confines of the economic and social system

The failure of economic, political and social structures, locally and globally to recognise and meet the human needs of the global majority is laid bare in the covid 19 pandemic, climate crisis and Black Lives Matter movement. They coalesce to reveal the deep fissures constraining racialised, economically disadvantaged populations in both the global north and

south (Andrews 2021). Disparities of wealth, health and regard grow wider. Through the frame of culture, experiences are mediated and made meaningful, (Gordon 2014), it is how life is lived. Implicated in the question of value, is the capacity of the music to rise to the challenges its listeners' face. In different ways these important contextual references for the research process all link a continuing transformation of listening. Its spaces, priorities and modes inform and explicate our ideas of the world and ourselves within it (Ihde 2007).

The thread linking artists and audiences is communication, yet the type, nature and role of this sharing is highly contested as are its historical development and cultural nuances. The impact of technology is profound and evident and particularly in the case of musical communication, has extended and challenged the relationship base upon which sharing and engaging with sound rests. Drawing on the work of John Durham Peters (1999), the changing form of what is considered ideal or authentic communication is noted. This ranges from pure dissemination, out of which recipients take what they will, through to a mutual baring of the souls, alongside spiritual and other dimensional interfaces. Peters (1999) makes two interesting and somewhat paradoxical assertions. Firstly, that self-definition and the person-to-person aspects of communication, prevalent and prized today, are products of mediated mass communication. Secondly, that the idea of words having intrinsic power has increased in the twentieth century. Though contrary to common sense notions of increasing societal rationalisation, this assertion expresses conceptualisations congruent with spirituality and the concept of affect.

My use of the term communication is inclusive of interior and exterior relations, individual and collective life, matter as well as spirit, concealment, revelation and interpretation. In relation to the voice, it is understood as individual essence and cultural

product (Connor 2004). Listening is similarly broadly constructed accounting for bodily attention to another, each other and oneself. To this end I utilise many forms of information capture associated with dissemination as well as dialogue, consociate and congregate assemblies, past and current experiences, directed and undirected responses, all of which relate the experience to the function and encompass the impactful and unfinished nature of meaning making.

It is of note that a general emphasis on listening is currently especially relevant. Recent years have seen the development and growth of initiatives such as the listening project on BBC radio 4, Classic Album Sundays,¹⁶ listening bars and clubs. Alongside this, the resurgence of vinyl records is evidenced by yearly sales increases over the last 13 years (Scarrott 2021) with increasing numbers of consumers requiring a physical as well as electronic copy of their favourite sounds. This is accompanied by the continuing and shifting debate over the relative merits of digital and analogue recording and playback systems. The expansion of festivals and live music performances as arguably one of the most commercially successful elements of the music economy (Frith 2007) all point to changes in listening priorities and habits and contribute to the relevance and timeliness of the project.

Areas of Interest

In carving a space for the perspectives of listeners in ongoing discussions regarding the value, uses and roles of music, room is also made for the reinsertion of reggae as a truly

¹⁶ Classic Album Sundays is an initiative developed by Colleen Murphy, a radio disc-jockey in which an album is selected and played to a paying audience. A vinyl copy is used, and the story of the album is told. High specification playback equipment is enlisted to enhance the listening experience. <https://classicalbumsundays.com/>

communal music by using Gregory Isaacs as a point of audition. Recognising him as a founder member of a much larger community of artists who work with their listeners, those who appreciate the music, to mutually articulate forms of Black existence, resistance and sociality. A reality that is not fully expounded or explained through any other medium, theoretical or political construct. The constitutive elements of this weighty musical encounter are suggested by scholarship that uses lyrical analysis, commercial success, and the historical origins and development of the genre as indicators of its value and role. This approach has a place and its relevance is noted. However, I am concerned with the capture and assertion of the full sensory experience. As expressed by Wendy Jordan (2011) "A dynamic construction of music as it is heard, experienced and performed" (p 9). This is to facilitate a comprehensive understanding as espoused by those who engage with reggae music. My interests are in uncovering the specific historical and social contingencies within which Gregory's particular combination of lyric, voice, melody and instrumental arrangement give rise to meaning and value, and in so doing, engross listeners who participate reciprocally.

Privileging the experiences, perceptions and knowledge of listeners does not mean disregarding other, often more public strands of commentary. Rather it provides a different experiential perspective. One that is central to the industry, community and artists but is little heard. Industry and its support network's perspectives are readily absorbed within Christopher Small's (1998) theory of musicking, which embraces the burgeoning band of academics, writers and cultural commentators interested in reggae. This whole population is regarded as qualified (Davies 2010), denoting their familiarity with the genre, styles, language, performance idioms and context within which it is heard and performed. Importantly this is not necessarily through formal training, but positions as experts those who through exposure

understand the music. Within this group, the bespoke contribution of this research study is to reveal the discourses emerging amidst the rubric of lived experience and evaluate these.

Researcher Positioning

My position as a listener steeped in the reggae tradition with a long-held love of the man and his music have proved an important entry point, to the genre and to respondents. It provides validation for industry personnel at all levels, many of whom confide their love of the work, rather than financial incentive as a motivation for continued effort. This is reciprocal as their willingness to share information and perspectives likewise validates the area of study as one that is overdue serious attention. My positioning permits a base understanding of the genre, sound culture, lifetime body of work and Gregory specific contribution from which nuanced, sophisticated claims can be launched. This contrasts with the well-worn narrative of outsiders exploiting the cultural (in addition to the human and physical) resources of the black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993).

However, this position carries its own consequences. In interviews I have to restrain my input, even when asked for it, developing strategies of offering this at the end of a session. When the recording has ceased and the interaction will not be included in the transcription, though it may be present in interview notes, the transference of my biases, or a spirited off topic critique are reduced. I have similarly been confronted with requests to cease recording whilst personal information relating to Gregory and respondents is revealed. I have honoured these promises and tried to absorb privileged perspectives as that which is already known in a community of interest (Ihde 2007). It has added depth to the question of value and troubled my original conception of what is brought to listening. It is the whole self.

Recognition of the largesse that is brought to listening has challenged the scope of the research study, for example in the reluctant embrace of affect and lyrics as explanations of impact and areas worthy of inclusion directed by respondents. The overall aims of the research have thus expanded. Privileging the voices of listeners reaches into the research approach itself. It impacts the questions asked, the themes under which analysis is framed, the ways in which the data is collected and ultimately presented. This has both increased the field of representation in that all of my respondents have staked implicit and explicit claims and it has fine-tuned the research in a form of distillation and heart.

It is commonplace in research degrees to speak of and write up process and practice with reference to epistemology and ontology. I have reservations and use these terms cautiously. Partly in recognition of the critique offered by scholars such as Lewis Gordon (2014), Robbie Shilliam (2013) and Ashon Crawley (2017) whose work sounds the ambivalence and restrictions of thinking with Western philosophical strictures. In the interests of thinking with music, with the relations of listening, with the unison of culture and reason and the reality that culture is life, I have chosen to foreground experience, practices and in this manner thought. And partly because of the discomfort experienced trying to distinguish what can be known from how, and who is considered capable of knowing. Ultimately, what is the nature of reality.

Of less weight, but similar uncertainty is the term data. I use it particularly in acknowledgement of the material gathered from respondents in the research process. I am aware of the numerical and scientific discourse the term upholds. The alternatives – information, material – do not do justice to the process or relationships through which opinions, ideas and practices are unearthed and shared. Or to the intention explicit in the

responses. Alternatives are used when speaking of combinations of information gathering. These processes are made manifest in the following sections.

Theoretical Positioning (Ontology and Epistemology)

The research questions, context and areas of interest outlined require an approach that is flexible and hybrid, as has long been recognised of the music itself. I locate this within the qualitative tradition, presenting a case study of an artist and his listeners. An in-depth, detailed and contextual account that utilises perspectives and tools from the traditions of phenomenology, Black radicalism, biographical research and thematic analysis. Employing diverse forms of data collection, this enquiry is approached from a variety of stances and predicated upon uncovering and validating personal experience, judgement and consciousness. A brief sounding of the key influences follows.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is defined by Ann Griffin and Vanessa May (2012) as, “An enquiry that places people’s lived experiences as the starting point for investigation and meaning making” (p448). In examining experience, intention plays a critical role (Ihde 2007). This is influenced and shaped to some extent by existence in the world. A world in which knowledge of the self and the world is relational. Consciousness combines primary experience and reflections on the same and includes feedback from structures and others in the world. The relationships that fuel and scaffold perception, along with feeling states, all have epistemological significance (Ihde 2007). Phenomenology also expresses an interest in the concept of voice with attention directed towards, “The experiences of such people, whose voice may

otherwise be suppressed by the prevailing assumptions that others may make about them” (Griffin & May 2012:448). This speaks directly to important claims made for reggae as the voice of the traditionally voiceless, for example, particular sections of Jamaican society, Black British society and emerging rebellions internationally. Though dominant in popular culture, voice is little explored from listener perspectives and its nature warrants examination.

In addition to the tilt towards marginalised groups, phenomenology has resonance for a study prioritising listeners, including a uniquely established tradition in the field of listening that I draw upon. Reggae can usefully be considered as a site of transformation of listening enabled through the electronic communication revolution (Ihde 2007). The unique nature of sound system culture and the wider reggae soundscape is supported here. Conceptualised as a site of collaboration between artists, operators with their specialised inputs, and listeners, sound systems exemplify the integration between the development of reggae as a genre and technological innovation. For example, the size, specification and configuration of the speaker boxes has a direct impact on how the musical sound is apprehended bodily and what is facilitated congregationally. Sound systems incorporate additional roles such as selector, deejay and engineer who tangibly and immediately work with and respond to listeners as well as generating and guiding the listening experience. They create and introduce new sounds rather than simply replaying existing ones (Bradley 2000, Henriques 2011).

A further strength of the outlined phenomenological approach lies in the importance that it attaches to subjectivity which is not treated as a methodological taboo. Correspondingly, neither are sensual dimensions assumed to be either uniquely individual or universal, and by implication pre-cultural, which is a prohibitive factor implicit in many other

traditions. To draw on first-hand experiences and weave them together suggests a movement from abstractions and theories to substances, habits, processes and feelings. “Such interests would be at once philosophical and poetic, explanatory and exploratory, analytic and evocative” (Connor 2000: 3). The point being that neither raw experience nor complete explanation can fully capture the processes of culture; rather, “it is experience becoming explanation” (Connor 2000: 4).

Black Radicalism

It is in this vein that Black radicalism is embraced and as a continuation of attending to experience. I expand the field to include activist, scholars and philosophers who name and celebrate sources of power, internal resources that are experienced and felt in Black cultures and communities (Gordon 2014). Understandings of the human world that are refuted, distorted and ignored but fuel change and animate the life force are heralded and included. Asserting spaces for intervention (Hall 1993), conditions of possibility (Gordon 2014) and internal satisfaction and aspiration (Lorde 2018).

This expansion is congruent with the work of Cedric Robinson (2000) who locates the origins of this tradition in the negation of Western civilisation. Rooting racism in the civilisation itself, not the era, the Black radical tradition offers consciousness of a different kind. Its development requires and expands with the use of many tools of resistance including spiritual fortification, cultural cover and everyday encounters of support. The drive for community and creativity is an aspect of a loving tradition. It is nurtured in language, through social sensibilities and world consciousness. Struggle is attended to in cultural terms.

Drawing on Robinson’s (2000) work, Dhanveer Brar (2012) utilises Black radicalism to inform the contextual, conceptual and methodological framework he constructs to examine

Black music. Borrowing from this, I agree that even when forms of sociality may not be recognised as political or revolutionary, through their metaphysical and epistemological forms of operation they shape and are shaped by our way of being. “It both works within and strains against these structures of thought” (2012:18). This extends from exposure and immersion in “lyricature” (Dawes 1999), to the stylistic and musical aspects of culture that also function hegemonically (Keil and Feld 1994, Henry 2002).

Biographical methods

In order to report subjectivity and celebrate individual agency in life, I have found it essential to incorporate practices that recognise the same, such as those provided by biographical methods. With a history that is steeped in oral traditions this methodology importantly allows the construction of the interview as interaction and dialogue. I have felt this keenly in the interview space. Conversations have the distinct feel of mutual appreciation of the artist and the music; a celebratory and affirming exchange, which has been so even in instances in which individuals express diverging and critical opinions. Indeed, I propose that this has been a neglected area in music consumption research.

It is so for artistic expression to a lesser degree. Here archetypal and stereotypical depictions offer crude explanations that suffice for cursory hearings. This method validates perspectives on life and experience that explain and correlate to political and social positions that are advanced. Personal circumstances gathered from those who knew Gregory, advance his story alongside their own. This is in conjunction with radio and video interviews that Gregory gave throughout his career. His practice of taking inspiration from life experiences for narratives encapsulated in song and remaining rooted in his communities attest to a specific inscription of reality. It also provides a way of writing him into this study on his own

terms as well as those of listeners. Hearing and including this range of stories which expand our knowledge implicating and explicating the relationships of individuals to the subject matter, the researcher, the past and present.

As outlined in chapter two, the focus of reggae discourse, both scholarship and industry generated, have primarily been concerned with collective uses of music and the public spaces for this. There is an implicit assumption that the everyday life practices incorporating and utilising music cannot address issues such as the symbolic space opened for political thought and engagement. My alternative to dismissing the personal as political is to gather data on individual practice and meanings as well as public, ostensibly political discourses, and to interrogate them both for general theories, explanatory details of process, similarities and differences. The biography of respondents and Gregory is critical to this process.

Thematic analysis

This form of analysis facilitates the organisation, interrogation and reporting of points and issues arising in the information gathered from respondents as expressed by them. Perspective, detail and complexity are incorporated in a manner that preserves theoretical freedom (Nowell et al 2017). It also lends itself to a multi-level approach. Initial loose groupings of interviewees into industry personnel, scholars and cultural commentators and listeners allows for issues and points from each to be elaborated and patterns of convergence and divergence to be identified. Topics are then integrated in a manner that attends to power relations and knowledge legitimisation. It is important, that a new paradigm is constructed in a study prioritising the experiences and understandings of listeners, rather than simply adding the missing perspective to an already existing dominant narrative. Deliberating on the

themes that structure and emerge from the data can better acknowledge the generation of, “logics, knowledges and relationships which are illegible and resistant to the dominant episteme.” (Burke 2018:12)

Thematic analysis likewise opens spaces for trends outside of already agreed theories incorporating experimentation and explanations of the spread and incorporation of ideas that are harbingers of change (Blackman 2014). Change that identifies the context in which music emerges, which it creates itself (Gritten 2014), and that which it continues to engage in and with. It encompasses oppositions and the refusal to accept givens, paying attention to other than what is expected (LeVan 2020). The decision to explore musical immersion and practices, feelings and political sensibilities outside of already constituted interpretive frames confers freedom (Nowell et al 2017). Freedom to determine how rich and complex data is treated across collection tools and a range of participant perspectives, whilst remaining true to the data itself.

The accessibility of thematic analysis is congruent with ordinary, everyday experiences of music. Relating this to stakeholders and respondents, credibility rests in part on listeners’ ability to recognise themselves, be surprised at the sophistication of their arguments and enlightened by others. The story that each theme tells in relation to the research questions (Nowell et al 2017), factors in subjectivity and experience as teacher outside of prevailing theories of basic cognition and change. It can confirm, critique and extend the literature bringing experience to bear on public reggae discourses. Discourses which increasingly feature “makers of listening,” (Szendy 2008) those who have influence within the industry and as cultural commentators, and set the tone and parameters for interpretation.

Primary data

The primary research instruments used are a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, and constructed listening sessions featuring his music and focus groups discussions.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conceptualised and divided for ease of description into three main constituent groups. Declared listeners or Gregory fans¹⁷, music industry personnel – which includes musicians, sound system operatives, disc jockeys (DJs), music journalists, producers, promoters and personnel from record labels, academics and cultural commentators – which includes cultural artists, critics and film makers. Clearly these groups are not mutually exclusive. There is no reason to assume that a listener cannot also be employed in the music industry or that a reggae DJ whilst happy to include Gregory on a playlist is necessarily a fan of his particular style. They represent instead, overlapping categories and interests. This is depicted in Table 1 below with declared primary interests first. In addition to providing flexible structures around data collection, it is fruitful to compare and contrast the similarities and differences in the material gathered from these groups. An example is the usefulness of interrogating the concept of listening both from an experiential perspective as well as with those who professionally create such sessions for others. It is also revealing to seek the opinions of those who would not consider themselves fans but are members of the reggae community and have had personal and professional contact with Gregory.

¹⁷ Some interviewees declared their dislike of this term and its connotations of capitalist appropriation.



Figure 1, Table 1

Individual Interviewees

Twenty-eight individual interviews were conducted and one double interview (also included in this group). The categories are abbreviated. Listeners = List, Music Industry Personnel = MIP, Academics, Cultural Commentators = ACC. Categories which overlap are led by the primary interest. Declared primary interest is depicted in the inner circle and secondary interest (where indicated) in the outer circle. The first of these was in June 2015 and the last in August 2020, with the majority taking place between 2017 and 2018. The duration of interviews varied from 60 – 90 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed either by digital audio recording or video conference. Conversation often continued after recording ceased. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, four using video communication systems and three via the telephone, with notes taken. Three phases can be identified. Phase one consisted mainly of purposively selected industry personnel, DJs,

cultural commentators and listeners who publicly express an affinity with Gregory's music. This is often through tribute broadcasts, using his music in presentations and commenting on his contribution.

Early interviews, alongside gathering data, have been used to explore and frame themes and issues arising from the literature and my research interests. The second phase used snowball sampling, advertisements, recruitment from cultural events and recommendations. The bulk of respondents were interviewed during this period. The third phase consisted of five interviews conducted in 2020. They represent respondents who either emerged after the main data collection period or contacts which had for a variety of reasons failed to culminate in an interview at initial request. These function as a means of ensuring data saturation, sharing and testing my key findings, inviting opinion and evaluation of these.

Respondents are drawn from many sources including relevant web sites, the radio, adverts in relevant magazines and newspapers, attendance at cultural events and snowballing. The capacity to feed into independent but related events such as the airing of a radio documentary have improved overall reach. The use of semi-structured interviews is designed to capture both current and past musical experiences and to allow for reflection on meanings that emerge and change over time. Meanings which incorporate different forms of listening, and by virtue of this, communication within them. All respondents across the three groups are provided with information on the nature of the study, the level of participation required, the potential uses for the information gathered and the steps that are taken to ensure confidentiality¹⁸.

¹⁸ See appendix 3 for the project information sheet and consent form.

The interrelating nature of the groups is reflected in the creation and development of the interview schedules¹⁹. Initial areas of enquiry are extracted from the larger research questions that frame the project, and from the issues and questions raised in the literature on reggae specifically and popular music and culture more generally. They are also informed by gaps in available knowledge, assertions made by prominent cultural theorists that remain untested and beliefs that are commonly espoused. The detailed questions derive from a wide reading of literature on culture and are not restricted to practices in any one field or subject. They are open ended and designed as prompts to stimulate thought and discussion and interviewee reflection on their own personal experience. In specific cases, such as a DJ who is known for her love of Gregory, or a tour manager with whom he worked closely detailed questions relating to their personal/and or professional experiences are also asked.

Areas of questioning are also informed by close examination of relevant research monographs, dissertations and reports written by others with similar or related concerns. Each group schedule is piloted and further refined in light of interviewee responses and my own reflections on the interview process. A core set of questions are asked of all participants across the three groups. They probe respondents' personal relationship to Gregory and reggae; musical practices and emotions associated with it; socio-political issues including voice, race, love and sex; listening approaches and practices; how music is incorporated into life and what is brought to listening and taken from it. The approach is to ask direct questions, however these are often redundant as respondents reach beyond the confines of categories of question and speak experientially encompassing wide areas. Follow up questions for clarity and expansion are inserted as needed. Specific group questions are also asked that direct

¹⁹ See appendix 2 for the core interview schedule from which standard questions are taken.

attention to the areas required. An example is what music journalists and commentators are seeking to convey in publishing their thoughts on a session.

For the music industry group their questions include providing personal opinions and depth to the material elicited from archival and statistical sources. This expert opinion is also used to evaluate the role and positioning of Gregory and his music within the genre and to highlight his individual style and indicate what understanding of musical communication emerges through his work. An example is that he is often credited with epitomising the crossover between roots reggae and lovers' rock and therefore facilitating reggae's internationalisation. This group also provides a professional and operational perspective on the role and uses of musical communication exemplified through Gregory, key themes addressed through his music, particularly important songs within his career development and that of the genre more widely.

The necessity of this technique is illustrated by my pursuit of sound system personnel. A major role in the development of the genre, both in Jamaica and the UK, has been facilitated by and focussed on sound system culture. This is widely acknowledged and represents one of the unique aspects of this tradition. As well as playing a vital role in the diffusion of reggae music, sound system personnel and their audiences have also functioned as sounding boards and filters for testing the viability and popularity of artists, specific rhythms, versions and directions in which the music is travelling. Thus, it is critical to gain the views of DJs, sound system operators, and owners. In many respects this stream provides a more detailed and relevant depiction of the lived experience of reggae culture than that which can be gleaned from more traditional media outlets, including access to regular listeners who request Gregory.

Oral testimony of this nature also affords an indication of the status of artists within the genre at specific times and over time which record/cd sales and tours alone do not reflect. This strand of examination extends to record companies and promoters with whom Gregory worked. In his long career he collaborated with many artists and session musicians and is known for the regularity with which he toured and his preferred use of particular session bands.

Individual interviews with listeners marginally form the largest group and are self-selecting. Attention is paid to the male/female balance (of the overall research project), with the strong male bias partially explained through the incorporation of music industry personnel and academics. This is depicted in Table 2

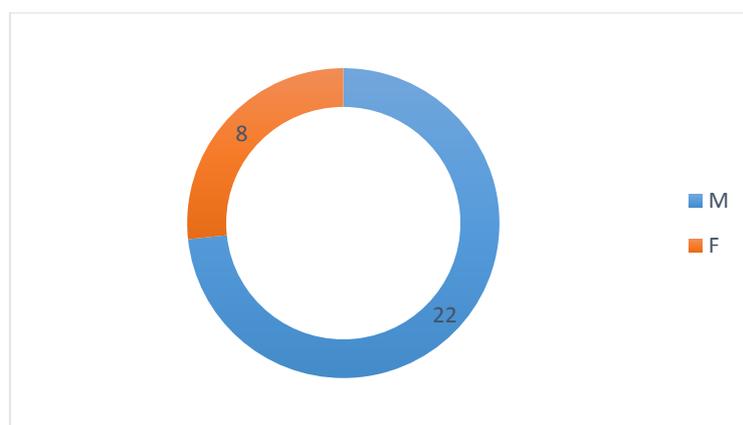


Figure 2, Table 2

Interviewee Sex

I am mindful of the assertion that Gregory was a 'ladies' man and have sought to denote his listening base as widely as possible. Similarly, every attempt is made to cover as wide a range as possible in terms of class and ethnicity. The latter is depicted in Table 3.

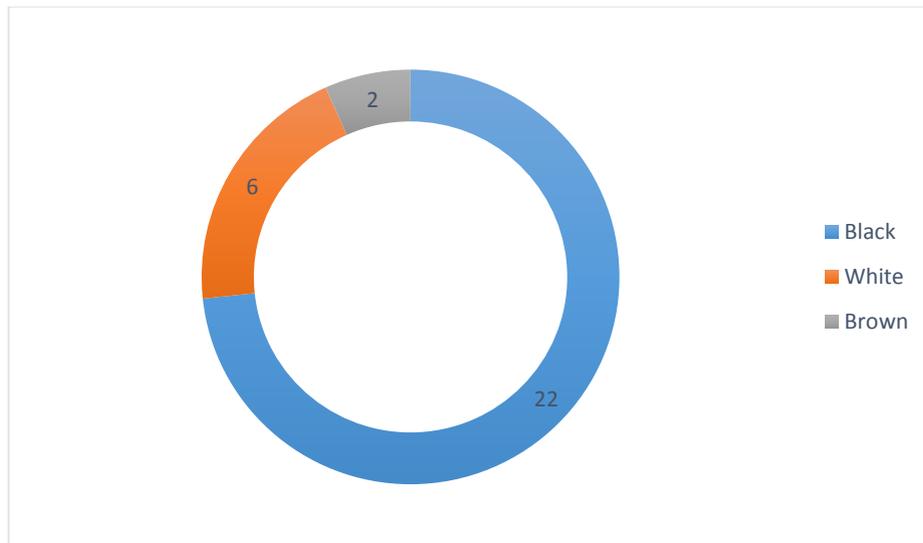


Figure 3, Table 3

Interviewee ethnicity

My use of the terms Black, White and Brown are taken from interviewee consent forms and interview scripts. Factors such as age and geographical location are more difficult to represent adequately. As expected, the majority of listeners are in the middle to old age range and my geographical base curtails the capacity to cover all of the known reggae scenes in the UK. The research is London focussed. The age bias facilitates the gathering of data from a little researched age range (Herbert 2011) in relation to popular music. Ultimately, no claims are made for representative sampling of Gregory's listening base, not least because little information exists outside of anecdote, from which to construct this. The same is true of music industry personnel.

Listening sessions

As it is now impossible to observe a live performance, the question of how best to organise capturing data from those listening to Gregory in a co-present form is undertaken

through constructed listening sessions. The technique is borrowed from the classic album format pioneered by Collen Murphy (DJ Cosmo). In its original format an album is selected and played in a venue equipped with a high-quality playback system and members of the public are invited to attend. Rather than one album, I compiled a playlist with participants invited and asked to join a focus group discussion as part of the session²⁰. Listening sessions were held in north and south London. The first was advertised locally by flyer and on radio and held at a local venue known for hosting Classic Album Sundays. The second was part of a Sound System Outernational conference held at Goldsmiths university. The sessions lasted between 90 – 120 minutes, are audio recorded and fully transcribed.

²⁰ See appendix 4 for listening session playlist and rationale for selection.

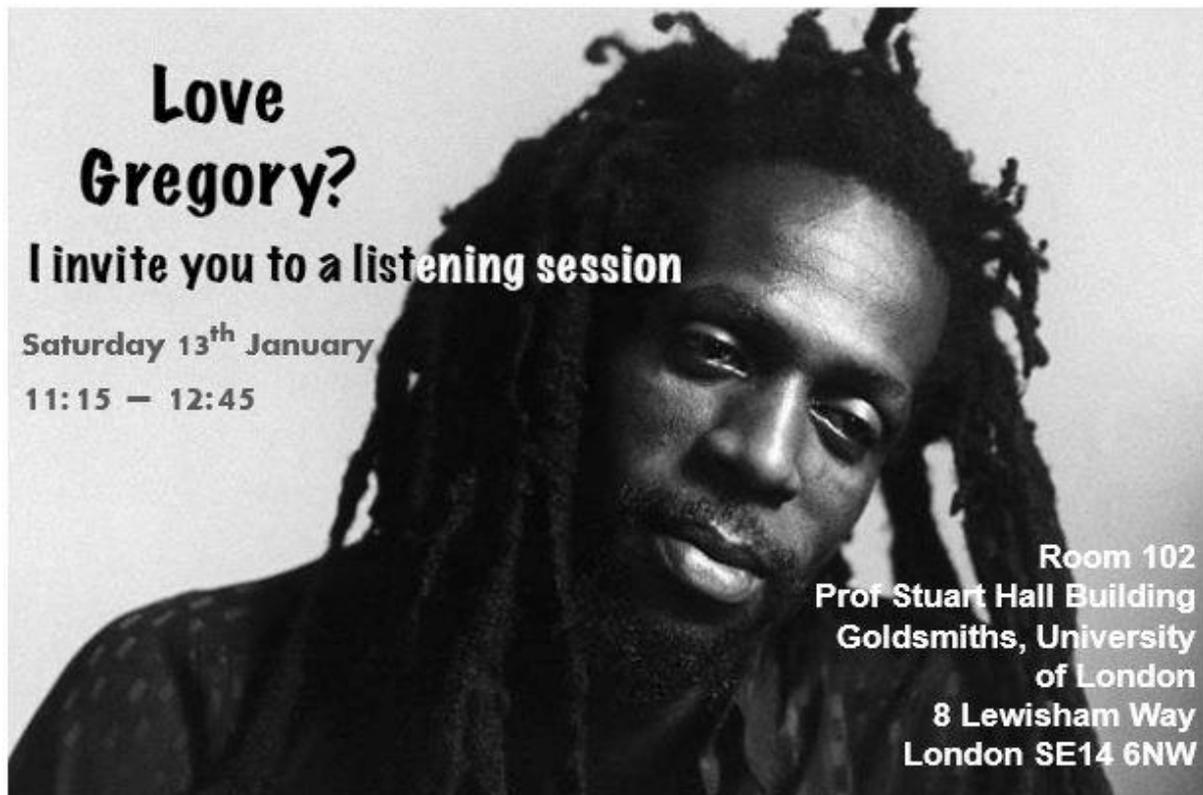
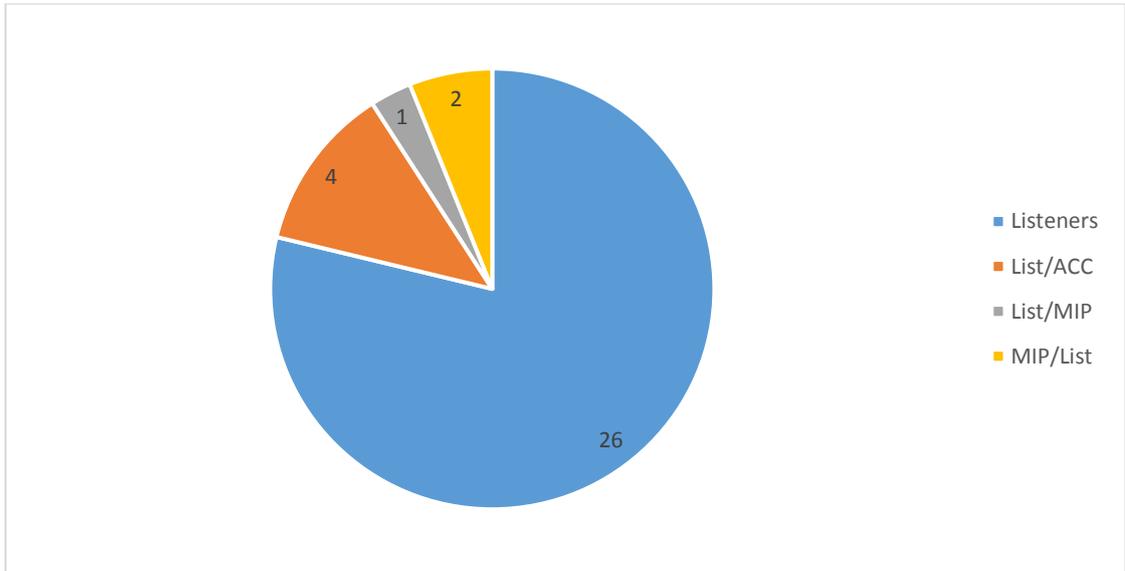


Figure 4

Flyers for listening sessions

The impetus for these sessions is two-fold. Firstly, to immerse respondents in the music they are discussing and to offer communal opportunities for discussion and sharing opinions. Secondly, to observe and participate in the bodily responses displayed and assess what differences and similarities exist in individual and collective discussions. Much greater claims are made for communal listening and by implication, its relationship to action and integration in life. The same interview schedule is used for the listening sessions playing tracks that resonate with question themes. In neither session were all the planned tracks played as discussion was rich and full. Sessions were held in November 2017 with 11 participants and January 2018 with 22 participants. 33 people participated in total. Completion of consent forms was less thorough than for individual interviews. However, all respondents participated.

Tables 4, 5 and 6 depict participants using the same categories as those used for individual interviews. It is interesting to note that listeners per se are the largest category present at the constructed listening sessions and that females, whilst still less than half, are better represented than in individual interviews.



21

Figure 5, Table 4

Listening Sessions 1 & 2 Interviewees

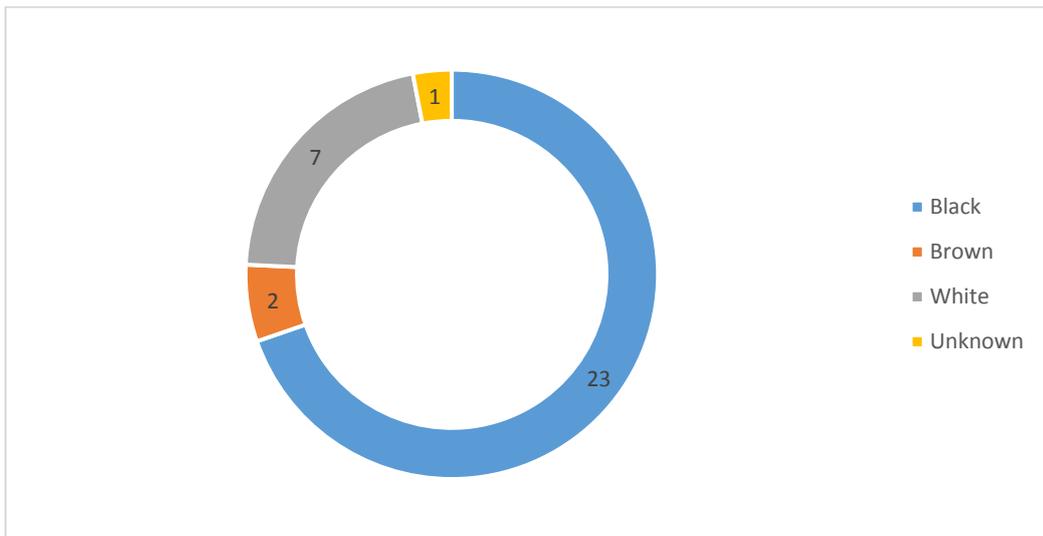


Figure 6, Table 5

Respondent Ethnicity

²¹ The categories are again abbreviated. Listeners = List, Music Industry Personnel = MIP, Academics, Cultural Commentators = ACC. Respondents were not directly asked if they had connections with the music industry or academia for example. However, overlapping categories are recorded where respondents spoke of this in the session. The two examples that record MIP/List are the DJs who operated the sound system for the second listening session who joined the discussion.

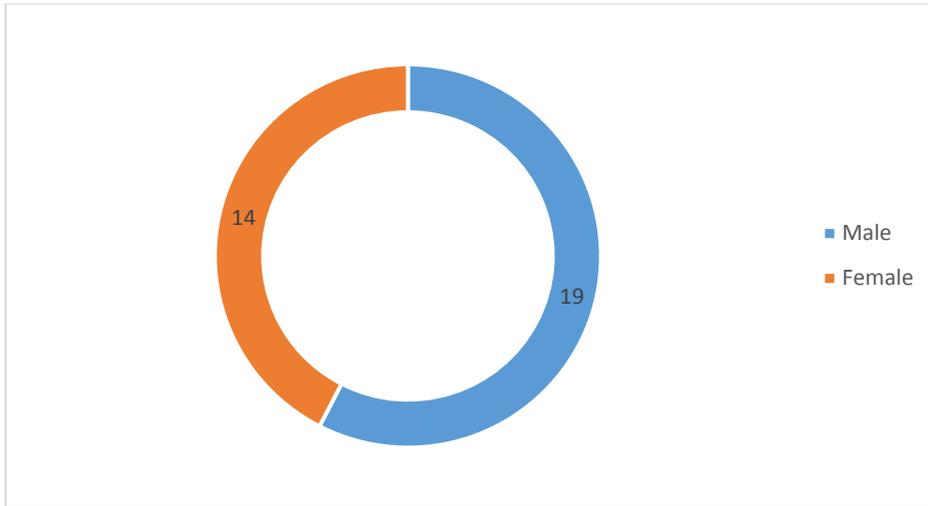


Figure 7, Table 6

Respondent Sex

Group listening is further explored through the medium of radio. Radio has and continues to play an important role in reggae's development and propagation and is a community cultural emblem in the UK. I participated in 2 live radio sessions. One of which asked listeners to request their Gregory favourites. The other, scheduled over a day, aired internationally on what would have been Gregory's seventieth birthday. Listening opportunities provide a means of capturing in time, space and place an experiential vibe. This is a uniquely appropriate methodology for the research project. Timely, it engages the current renaissance of high-quality listening in many cultural fields. It is moreover an acknowledgement of community forms of gathering and sharing that utilise well known media.

Secondary data

Despite the shortcomings and contradictions (Toynbee 2006) of traditional media coverage of reggae, a rich archive exists in disparate forms. Gregory's death in 2010 awakened an interest in his individual contribution and legacy located within what is now increasingly considered as an exemplary and pivotal era in the music. We have heard a resurgence of his material as versions, tributes and analysis of his generation's style. This is utilised in the compilation of a comprehensive discography.²² It establishes in conventional, popular music industry terms how prolific an artist he was and allows for some comparison with the work of others of his generation and stature. Indications of his tours and global fan base support a well-travelled, prolific artist of repute.

I have mined information from interviews long in the public domain that Gregory gave to the press, radio DJs and promoters and arising material which create a narrative of how he perceived and spoke of his music. His reticence in disclosing personal information is well known with many commentators arguing that he spoke through his music. This is supplemented by archival film footage of some of his concerts and his brief appearances in films and in documentaries on reggae. This is gathered and interrogated for common practices and personal themes in relation to his experience of the role and effects of his own music. This information is also compared and contrasted with industry perceptions of the man and his music. Comments on his personal motivations, opinions and thoughts on what he was seeking to convey and say are useful for corroborating and challenging what listeners hear. We will return to this in later chapters.

²² See appendix 1.

Sound clouds, podcasts, internet radio broadcasts have proven to be an increasingly large, lucid source featuring responses to Gregory as an individual artist and form an emerging and growing source of data²³. His death and state funeral in Jamaica, for example, have generated controversy and much public comment which I have also utilised. It enables insight into his professional and personal stance and provides a skeletal outline of topics, issues and perspectives that contribute to areas of questioning. It generates prompts for purposeful sampling, illustrating gaps in available information and contributes to the overall structure of the thesis.

In addition to this public comment there is a growing body of academic and culture industry output on reggae, Jamaica and Black people in Britain. Much of this discusses reggae in general, its local manifestations and global influence, but it also includes rich description and analysis of the music scene and the economic, political and social landscape within which it is located. Case studies of individual artists, studios, producers, sound systems and labels feature within this and are important for providing background detail of the emergence, developments and changes within the industry. It confirms the significance of the genre and its influence on popular music, as well as Jamaican, Caribbean, Black British and British culture more generally. It charts the existence, concerns and effects of reggae scenes across the globe depicting this as a reggae continuum.

²³ See appendix 5 for a YouTube video and podcast that speak to Gregory's continuing influence and provide examples of how he is memorialised within the reggae tradition.

Data Analysis

Primary data

All individual interviews are recorded, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis techniques. A multi-level approach is used embracing the phases of data collection (initial, main and verification), the loose groups of interviewees, individual interviews and listening sessions. In this way topics and strands from each category are elaborated, then integrated. Immersion in the data includes listening/watching the interviews in full at least twice, initially to verify quality and impressions formed and subsequently to identify meanings and patterns. Interviews are transcribed and transcripts read over several times. Only then are issues, topics, discussions grouped under research question themes such as value, voice, listening, then further refined through teasing apart categories within this. A rich archive of how value is ascribed, perceptions of the music and artist allegiance are compiled.

Through this approach consideration of cultural traditions and their transformation is facilitated. It also addresses the nature of musical sound. An example is the extent to which knowledge presented through Gregory's songs, and understood as such by his listeners, challenges representations that exist within the wider UK (Henry 2005). It also suggests ways in which the role of this particular music can be distinguished from other experiences (Hesmondhalgh 2002) in generating meaning. Interviews are additionally scrutinised concentrating on participants' experiences and interpretations and the meanings that arise from their engagement with the music. It is possible to speak of the general attitudes that are communicated through songs such as insistence or inspiration which can be considered in relation to broader social and political trends (Marshall 2011). Contemplated over a lifetime, listening lends itself to changing circumstances and developed understandings.

Music personnel and academic interview transcripts are compared specifically in terms of their “modes of describing” (Clayton, 2003: 51). This assessment notes the influence that musical discourse has on the music itself and recognises that familiarity affects the listening and the experience. Whilst this study ultimately unites these elements within the concept of musicking, it is interesting to engage with and test Martin Clayton’s (2003) assertion that the terms used in the discourse always link music to other domains of experience. It offers a partial explanation of the mechanics with which we learn to listen.

Discourse begets discourse, metaphorically creating a field within which consensus may be reached over the meaning and importance of the musical experience (2003:56).

The implication is that definition and interpretation of musical practice exert some influence or control over it. This suggests a new paradigm, recognises the contingency of musical structure and addresses the relationship between sound, experiential and academic description and imagined processes indicating structure and/or conveying meaning.

Secondary data

The different types of data collected are treated to distinct forms of analysis and use pertaining to their nature and the research priorities. Secondary source data of narrative form is used to initiate patterns, typologies and classifications. This is corroborated and cross checked against industry perspectives gleaned from interviews. The adequacy, convergence and tensions between these sources and academic explanations are also explored. Initial categories for thematic analysis included themes derived from this basic interrogation, an example of which is the general theme of love. Taken from existing literature in the field, this is refined through industry perspectives to include: estranged, alienated love; love of the

sufferer; self-love; love within economic restraints; love of a people, and love as a spiritual force. The theme is further developed through listener interviews which clarify how this is incorporated into, validated within a sense of self, what this means in terms of access to and enjoyment of loving spaces and touch, how this is experienced in dance, and how this music enables and provides structures for apprehending and expressing love.

As already alluded to in chapter two, the identification and analysis of lyrical themes forms a defining aspect of reggae scholarship. However, this has not taken the shape of grounding understanding in personal experience and everyday use. As argued by Negus (2012), popular song lyrics represent one of the most extensive forms of narrative and poetic encounter available on a daily basis yet their value in this shape has been neglected. This is so despite the fact that in other cultural practices and procedures, their role in fostering understanding of the world has been recognised and valued. Poetry and prose command greater value as cultural capital than song lyrics or spoken word performances. Led by listeners, the importance of lyrical analysis to meaning making fine tunes this thread.

Film and audio recordings are analysed as a way of exploring Gregory's live performances, which express communal music making and include listeners. This analysis focuses on his performative stance (Berger 2009) and includes voice, posture, demeanour, attire and movement. This distinctive, multi-modal, multi-sensory way of being in the world relates primarily to stage presence but is extended to include other visual representations such as record cover imagery, all of which are heavily mediated. The concept of music practica (Filmer 2003) is employed to examine the communicative partnership expressed as relations between voice and microphone, audience, instruments, the band and so forth. This form of knowledge is ever changing but always present and can be conceptualised as a

naturally occurring interaction that is a feature of the way in which music is communicated immediately and between generations. It is extremely useful to pull through a common strand, such as the song, *The Border*, which is analysed in communal listening, discussed in individual interviews, popular discourse in terms of reviews and interviews with Gregory as well as performances and audience interaction on film.

Musical analysis

Analysis of selected musical tracks and excerpts from performances are also interrogated through attention to musical sounds themselves which are central to the listening experience. Negligence in this area is noted (Negus 2007, Charles 2018) and with this omission in mind, a toolbox of relevant frames of analysis is collated and employed. Rhythm thus becomes repetition and anticipation that enhances coherence; it exists outside of its relationship to music as a basic structure of reality anchored in the bass line. It is implied in phrasing, through chords to breathing, and spans movement of limb to neural pulsations. The importance of this system lies in its expansive nature which includes connotations, bodies resonating and critically locates this in body, space and imagination (Middleton 1993) whereby participants feel they are a part of the musical mix.

A complimentary analytical method is offered by Alan Moore (2013) who focuses on music encompassing protest, both in terms of content and delivery, which together account for a confrontational position. The elements he includes are rhythm, pitch and a concept he develops of a persona/environmental relation in which lyrics are contextualised by performance. This is particularly applicable to the Caribbean and its cultural forms. Many commentaries have noted the hidden meanings contained in language use and identified this

with the need to disguise dissent cognisant of the power relations existing under slavery and colonialism. This is arguably also the case for the Black British population residing in a white majority culture and is therefore relevant for this study. An important caveat is that whilst the environment is analysable, part of it is contained in memory and experience, again bringing to bear the listeners' perspectives.

The intersection between speech and song offers an additional dimension for the analysis of sounds (Negus 2007). Songs are experienced as music, meaning that words operate as sounds. This analysis thus includes melody, chords, rhythm, texture and gesture and most importantly their interaction in a performance. A prominent feature is therefore whether a particular piece is singable; for reggae, one could also add danceable. Singing along is a way of embodying melody together with dancing. This is particularly pertinent in an analysis of Gregory as key to his stature is the prominence of these factors in his work. In a salutation to his practice, many commemorative radio programmes, podcasts and videos have included sections where listeners are invited to offer their renditions of his songs (including laments) and share stories of romantic dances.

A wonderful feature of many interviews I have conducted has been the willingness of respondents to sing me a particular chorus or phrase they love, rather than just refer to it. The approach to musical analysis provides a way of assessing and interrogating the music itself as heard and understood by listeners and practitioners. A composite approach is offered by Monique Charles (2018) who creates two research tools, musical discourse analysis and sonic footprint time-stamp to analyse grime. Using and combining musicological elements, contextual forces such as political, social and economic connections, as well as attachments

and sensibilities, practices and meanings are explored and the music conceptualised as a culture bearer as well as product.

Thus far gathering evidence from various sources: personal and professional narratives, popular music scholarship, the interrogation of lyrical themes, the use of vernacular speech patterns and their complementary world views, the embodied nature of communal and individual listening and the musical structure and importance of selected tracks facilitates validation in a manner that is both compelling and interesting. Reggae rose to prominence through many small outlets, word of mouth, sound systems, independent record labels, and producers and artists in the community. Prioritising the listening experience as a site where knowledge and meaning lie reclaims everyday cultural practices, with each strand of fieldwork adding another voice to the overall sound. Unearthing the relationships that exist within the reggae musical encounter between listener and performer, performer and performer (as revealed through the roles of DJ and selector as well as the versioning and rhythm-based tradition), listener and sound, listener and listener and between the sounds themselves necessitates a conceptual framework. One in which the separate elements that comprise the listening experience can be theorised and reassembled as a coherent whole. The following chapter provides this.

There are of course limitations and shortcomings already alluded to. There are in some instances, a shadow effect to positive methodological choices. My position as a listener and researcher, as a Black woman immersed in the music contains clear bias. It is likely that this restricts some comments. The geographical spread and male and female balance of respondents is not representative of reggae sites or known respectively. A definitive tour history, either within the UK or further afield could not be compiled (despite access to

managers) to quantify value in numerical and monetary forms. Overall shortcomings are raised in the final chapter.

The last cocoa: reflections on the research process

A final verse is needed to complete the methodology chapter. In addition to the process already outlined, is an experiential chorus led by me but sustained, changed and made more melodic by the timbre of respondents. Some of this has been alluded to in the main body of the chapter but it is worth making explicit the improvisations that shape and form the structure of the song.

Initial conceptualisation of the themes that might prove relevant to assessing value excluded lyrical analysis. The reasons are twofold. Firstly, this is one area in which scholarship already exists, albeit in relation to Bob Marley. Secondly, the reggae aesthetic (Dawes 1999) attends to this through its identification of lyricature (discussed fully in chapter 4). However, for most respondents the lyric is an integral part of the meaning making process, and in the case of Gregory, a celebrated aspect of his genius. Both his penning of the prose and his interpretation of the same. It cannot be removed from the mix or relegated to a lesser position. This is apparent in the number who sang particularly poignant lyrics to me in the interview space, explained how they used them in life, or detailed their appreciation of the fullest meaning gained over a lifetime of listening. This is accounted for in the ways that lyrical themes are woven into, expand and elucidate those gathered from the literature and interviews. It is captured in the co-creational concept of musicking.

Adaptations to the interview schedule are also led by respondents, inadvertently and explicitly. Early in the interviewee recruitment process it was obvious that the mere mention of Gregory's name functioned as an invitation to recount a personal story that encapsulated their relationship, or introduction to him. This became an initial exploratory question that literally asked, do you have, and will you share your Gregory story? At the other end of the conversation, my practice of asking what I might have missed out that respondents wanted to share often revealed a favourite track with justification for the choice. Again, this is incorporated into the schedule and used for chapter titles in the writing up process. Overriding my early place holder titles, and providing a background sound for writing, centred the voices and choices of respondents in analysis and drafting chapters. The titles include a named favourite by Gregory. These choices also frame the broad contours of the chapter as understood and related by listeners who appreciate and advocate for the track.

Beyond individual tracks, listener propensity to collate lyrical themes, performance practices and gather these under an archetypal banner reflecting an artist's niche is a shorthand indicator useful in assessing value. This process in the reggae tradition is often proclaimed with a title, Gregory's are, lover man and cool ruler. Respondents often refer to overarching themes in his body of work and practice as support for the nature of value they derive. Indeed, this classification and breakdown of aspects of value ultimately is integrated into the main research question. The interview phasing offered itself to scoping and defining the field, interrogating it, and verifying emerging findings. The final few interviews served to corroborate saturation, and with additional questions, test and validate my interpretations of the data gathered. The necessity of attending to Gregory within the genre, within the reggae experience is central to the approach. This account of his impact, influence and value

foregrounds the relationships and patterns co-constructed and celebrated by those concretely engaged in this musical activity.

Chapter Four

Theoretical Framework: Antiphony as Sonic Embrace

Introducing the framework

This chapter presents a theoretical framework for analysing the fullness of Gregory's contribution to reggae music. It is offered in the spirit of a bowl for directing, containing and amplifying the sound. As Sound System operators, and avid listeners know, the configuration and placing of speaker boxes is all important. It is built from the most useful ideas and motifs outlined and espoused implicitly or explicitly. In a break with tradition this material is presented after the methodology chapter. In so doing it utilises and integrates concepts and meanings gathered from the literature, the research process and respondents. Moving as a pendulum throughout the project from outset to completion, past to present. Additionally, to remain true to the central though under recognised, listener role in the evolution of reggae, and the corrective stance employed by this research study in prioritising these perspectives. The framework encompasses the breadth, depth and variety of sources used for data gathering and speaks to the synergy of sensory engagement that reggae demands. What is propounded is a structure that makes sense of the findings. One that is sufficiently flexible to cover the patterning and range of complexity the music can hold, nuance and fine grain. As well as formulations as to how this is cultivated through the listeners' investment in it and the value accorded it.

Apprehending the nature of musical communication as exemplified through Gregory's body of work, endow voice (voicing) and listening with central importance. As outlined by Eidsheim (2008, 2015), Barker (2015) and others engaged in critical reflection on voice, experiencing sound is inadequately captured and understood through use of a static referent. Deep analysis suggests the coagulation of several events in which vibrations meet "bodies encultured capacities" (Eidsheim 2015: 116) which are also subject to medium, time, context and personal negotiation. Voice is recognised for its unifying and balancing capacity in terms of combining sound and language (Barker 2015) and relating sounds to one another. In this encompassing stance a great deal of choice and points of auditory interest are available in transmission.

Listening is similarly defined widely and in dynamic individual and collective ways. The agency of the listener is acknowledged as a creative apprehending force which challenges what is deemed important. The physicality of the forms in which sound is absorbed as both vibration and touch, the connections to the limbic system and the arousal of emotions it can trigger are garnered to reshape and expand the components and parameters of a musical experience. An ear to the nature of musical communication facilitates identification and capture of assemblages, relationships and breaks (Moten 2003). In the context of reggae, the traditions of harmony and antiphony are fundamental and expressed within these wide themes.

The framework reshapes and amplifies old ideas of diaspora and dislocation, which are foundational to reggae discourse. Specific aspects that have been questioned, such as the validity of reggae's assertion of roots (Chude-Sokei 2011), are reworked. Within this synopsis elements for constructing experience and narratives of community and identity can

be established, chosen and shared. Diaspora as dialogue, identity as transitory and contingent consciousness, people as part of, rather than bearers of culture place experience and practice at the centre of meaning.

The teachings and impact of Marcus Garvey is reconsidered as an overlooked and underestimated linchpin of experiential resistance in international Black radicalism. The specific nature of the collective construction that Rastafari eschews (Barnett 2002) and its capacity to emphasise both social cohesion and individual development are incorporated. With the parameters of these reshaped, expanded concepts established, the reggae aesthetic (Dawes 1999) and its four levels of analysis are employed alongside the concept of musicking (Small 1998) to anchor these components of a reggae musical experience.

Voice

We begin with modern musical vocality, characterised as emerging from the encounter between the idealised, free expressive voice and the disembodied malleable recording (Connor 2001). In this sounding, the cultural, social and political aspects of voice are privileged. A bodily emission and aesthetic product, the voice can arise involuntarily but is also purposively released (Connor 2004). The purposes are wide ranging and changing, picked up and reinterpreted in listening by the vocaliser and listener alike. This effort of expression involves the whole vocal apparatus, air, and the muscular skeletal framework in support of posture. Hypothesized usually as a vehicle for words, pitches and ultimately meaning within communication systems, the physical and sensory properties of a voice, though alluded to are harder to capture and are therefore often neglected (Eidsheim 2015). However, it is these emotive and elusive elements that distinguish vocalists. In order to

examine Gregory's music and generalise from this to musical communication, all the facets of the voice are needed. Considered as a whole, the connections between sound, language, feeling, thinking and being promote synthesis, interdependence and understanding (Barker 2015).

To conceptualise voice as a point of juncture and balance is advocated as a method that facilitates the exposure of multiple perspectives on experience. Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson (2015) relaying a description of a mourning scene that incorporates voice recordings, one way conversation and silence, explain, "Voice as a powerful entity of connection, emotion and support – whether material, mediated or mute" (p 3). It performs these tasks through uniting aspects of the past, with the present and projected future, resonating within oneself and to others in communion. In this way it encompasses transitions, passages and transformations. The processual and relational quality is of particular relevance in the reggae offer, emphasising the oral and harmonic traditions from which it emerged and its bricolage character.

The body undergirding the voice (Di Matteo 2015), its timbre and texture reveal subjectivity through attitudes, personality, emotion and demographic details. Status and choice are enfolded and detectable, as are community and cultural imperatives to which speech is applied, for example, chanting, preaching, healing and singing (Macpherson 2015). Identified as a practice, the context of voice is important; its links to breath and the spirit relate to and expand the power it holds and wields. Socio-cultural ideals and practices cut across theoretical premises and suggest some general principles. Whilst this is uncharted, what clearly emerges is that voice is a site where numerous aspects of the individual and

collective, and sometimes the spiritual, interact. Its encompassing nature inhibits, inhabits and mediates what is heard and felt, what is deemed important and resounds.

A key theorist working within an expansion of and critical approach to voice is Nina Sun Eidsheim (2008, 2015, 2019). Acknowledging the intimate subjectivity, social texture and meaningfulness inherent in the voice she nonetheless places each aspect under scrutiny seeking to uncover how macro politics are materialised through sound. Focussing on Western operatic music she highlights the stress on those aspects of music that can be noted and captured and the consequent negation of visceral and sensual properties. Though these are much more difficult to encapsulate, they facilitate a multi-sensory perspective and depict the temporality of sound (2015). The prior selective conception reduces sound, renders it static and the choice between them frames how we relate to it imaginatively, in terms of the power it wields in our individual and collective lives. Her rejection of a simply aural mode of perception lead to an expanded acuity uniting tactile, spatial, physical, material and vibrational sensations (p 70).

Eidsheim's (2008, 2015) journey through voice in singing and listening (ultimately she unites them) is extremely informative. Several of the experiences and tools she uncovers are directly relevant to this work. Concurring with her basic premise that the "thick event" of voice is reduced through various conventions, her move to expand this details the many sensory domains involved. In applying a similar expansion, I consider what elements comprise the "thick event" of a reggae voice? These include the vocal apparatus, language system, timbre, the grain and cultural imperatives and influences (aforementioned in the development of the genre), preferred styles, intonations and vocal nuances.

Timbre and grain are both ephemeral categories liberally scattered throughout treatise on the singing voice. They are, however, problematic and are used here in specific ways. Roland Barthes (1977) seeks to capture a slippery element present in voice through his concept of the grain. This signifier as defined by him resides in the encounter between language, voice and the materiality of the body. The body singing is thus evaluated through the listeners' relation to it. This inclusion allows for the erotic speaking to a barely tangible, yet recognisable force present in voice and appreciated particularly in popular music. The stimulation of desire in its widest sense is undoubtedly an aspect of vocal prowess and pleasure. It is so for Gregory. Related to this is the tendency and capacity of the voice to express and induce emotion, again considered a cross cutting aspect.

Both timbre and vocal apparatus are scrutinised by Eidsheim (2008) in her thesis on the production of race through sound. Her discussion of the construction of the Black voice disputes the individual, unmediated notion of timbre arguing instead, "vocal timbre is the sound of a habitual performance that has shaped the physical body." (p 2) The key to the significance of these sonic nuances is their use in evidencing difference,

"Physiological differences between races – differences that do not exist in the material, measurable world. However, African-American vocal timbre and acousmatic blackness do exist due to the belief in racial difference and due to collectivised, subjective perceptions of difference through sound." (p 24)

This interesting proposition is supported by a history of selected African-American singers and productions as well as a brief foray into the physiological vocal apparatus. She notes that racial distinctions do not appear and the distinctions that do, have little bearing on sound possibilities. She concludes that timbral alignment, the practice of regulating both artists and

listeners, is exercised through work, music and body practice. All of this operates within a power structure in which imitation of the sonic ideal is taught.

Despite these investigations being firmly located within Western classical singing where the form of teaching employed and styles covered represent an extreme model, the implications for reggae music are stark. A similar imitation of the required sonic ideal can be taught, albeit in a loosely structured apprenticeship system. The route of the talent show, through which many artists, including Gregory emerged, can readily perform a timbral, stylistic gate-keeping function. The basic premise that the “natural voice” does not exist, instead of which specific qualities are selected, learned and performed validates the concepts of a reggae aesthetic and musicking. Of particular interest to this project is the agency employed in making and affirming a distinguishing sound. The choice to differentiate, to assert an acousmatic nature (Eidsheim 2019), to ask and answer the acousmatic question, “Who is this?” (p 2) is important. We will return to this theme and question.

Distilling Voice

The key points relating to voice that inform my theoretical framework are firstly, recognition of the limited nature of voice that can be captured in notation. This necessitates an expanded version that recognises sensory and physical properties and the possibility that meaning may reside across or in between these factors. That meaning is invested and interpreted by vocaliser and listener. Secondly, despite the voice being undergirded by the body, this does not necessarily imply innate, unique individual traits. It does, however, trace a body’s history. The immersion and participation of human beings in acculturated and acculturating roles and practices destabilises definitions and suggests voice as the performance of relationships. Thirdly, the notion that sound, specifically the categorisation

of voice, is implicated externally and internally in the construction of race and there is agency here.

Listening

The nature of listening; its components and perspectives, is as complex as that of the voice. Its heart is commonly conceptualised as a mode of comprehension that owing to its immersive qualities implies introspection and contemplation (Frith 1996, Carlyle 2013). In addition to this inward movement, there is an orientating aspect, both spatial and geographical related to balance and meaning. Much has been made of the fact that ears have no lids, and there is no point of audition²⁴. This does not mean that listening perspectives are not fluid, partial and partisan. “The radical sensorial openness through which our ears, body, auditory cortex and relevant parts of the mind-brain encounter the heard,” (Carlyle, 2013:15) does not translate into a concomitant openness in terms of what is being heard. Differences suggest that history and experiences are generative of particular sounds, speak to the differences heard and the effects and affects this has on the body.

What does it mean to listen? This question though deceptively simple raises issues that elucidate the research questions. It forces into consciousness consideration of the what and the role of listening. Understanding value and assessing it is premised upon perceptions of what is available and apprehensible. In unpicking the inward and outward movement of listening it is useful to conceptualise this as feeling or touch. Using vibration as an organising theme for understanding sound (Goodman 2010, Eidsheim 2015a) enables otherwise

²⁴ This may seem contradictory as I am using Gregory as a point of audition. I contend that the mix of components comprising the music facilitate the selection of favoured interest points and the unity of the whole, full sound.

contradictory practices and sensations to be united. Steve Goodman (2010) insightfully states that vibration is the connector of all living forms, organic or non-organic. Connection occurs on a molecular level and unites pathways of physiological and autonomic reactions with collective vibes, soundscapes and the notion of vibrational force (elaborated upon later in the chapter). To return to the question opening the paragraph, the answer if predicated on feelings, includes an awareness of the feeling one is feeling and the fact that one is feeling. As argued by Jean Luc Nancy (2007) and Peter Szendy (2008), sound through referring to itself privileges this return. Listening is thus an approach that strains towards apprehension of external stimuli at the same time as it is an approach to the self. The subject constituted in listening to music is therefore the music itself, which also refers to itself within its rhythmic, melodic (lyrical) and harmonious patterning and the individual self.

Relating this to popular music, technical transformations must be factored in. The practice of music making has changed in terms of procedures, the assemblages of sound, reproduction, amplification and propagation. The range and magnitude of music that is available electronically, alongside digital manipulation of sound fragments has altered the field completely. This raises the question of who has rights to and over music, from the perspectives of listeners and those creating and performing. This is important in considering both how and what listeners hear. Szendy (2008) in his analysis of the changes that have occurred in classical music listening argues that musical works contain and are configured with reception in mind. This is so for popular music also. Some of the questions posed concerning value, meaning, impact and listener perspectives are implicit in the musical offering, its context of creation and imagined performance. Still the act of listening confers its own agency and portion of meaning making labour on the individual. Though Szendy (2008) starts with the musical work, he acknowledges the competing listenings which are

brought into play and lays bare the history of the music and of listening which is conditioned by it.

In addition to the social and philosophical aspects of listening already outlined, a brief summary of the physical and neurological apparatus and processes involved is illuminating and feeds into later discussions of affect. The mechanics of hearing greatly simplified are based on vibrations.

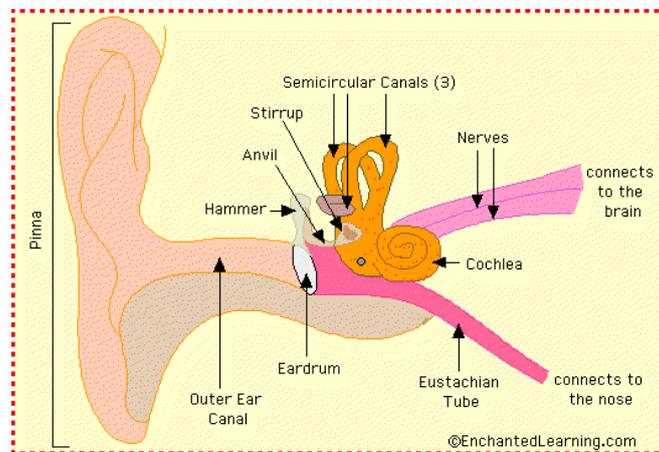


Figure 8. Anatomy of Hearing

Objects usually vibrate at multiple frequencies simultaneously, that are often mathematically related (Levitin 2006). As explained by Julian Henriques, (2011) “A vibration is no more or less than the propagation of a dynamic pattern through a medium” (p20). Patterns of vibrating air molecules (other molecules, such as water also vibrate) transmitted as sound waves to the eardrum cause it to vibrate at the same frequency. The oscillation of this fanlike structure in turn moves three bones, the hammer, anvil and stirrup which press fluid against the basilar membrane. This brushes cilia, which trigger nerve cells generating impulses in the

auditory nerve which transmits messages to the brain. The inner ear and brain then analyse this movement.

Amazingly, the hair cells that fire relate to the frequency of the sounds. This is relayed to the auditory cortex which directly matches this motion by firing neurons at the same frequency.

“Pitch is so important that the brain represents it directly; unlike almost any other musical attribute, we could place electrodes in the brain and be able to determine what pitches are being played to a person just by looking at the brain activity.” (Levitin 2006:29)

Timbral discrimination, though unmapped, is also very sophisticated in humans, enabling not just identification, but discernment of mood and physical state in those we know well from the sound of their voice. Contrary to commonly held beliefs about the differences between the hemispheres of the brain, modern imaging techniques and recent experiments show the distribution of musical capacity throughout the brain. “Music listening, performance and composition engage nearly every area of the brain that we have so far identified, and involve nearly every neural subsystem” (Levitin 2006:9).

This brief foray into the physical or material (Henriques 2011) aspects of listening affords connections to the plasticity as well as the rigidity of the brain. Its ways of remembering and processing are useful for theorising how individual and collective meaning might be forged and value assessed. Three further points are worth inserting here. The first relates to the evolutionary importance of sound. “The act of hearing bridges the ancient barrier between air and water, taking the sound waves, translating them into fluid waves, and then into electrical impulses” (Ackerman 1995:178). The second refers to the potential effect

of being immersed in sound. Though individuals are divided on whether loud music is pleasurable or painful (outside of damaging levels), saturation of the auditory system causes neurons to fire optimally. This may be related to the altered states of consciousness reported at such events (Levitin 2006). Thirdly, the preceding description of the hearing mechanism is only partial. Some sound (particularly low pitches) and particular mediums (such as water) lend themselves more easily to sound being felt throughout the body. This is also true of sounds we make ourselves, such as singing or humming.

Moving on from how we hear, to what we hear in a musical encounter brings us closer to thinking about its value and uses in everyday life. As already outlined, the reggae music offer consists of pitch, contour, rhythm, timbre and reverberation. Combined and in relationship to one another, they are organised by the brain into meter, harmony and melody (Levitin 2006). Lyrics can also be included here. History and experience are undoubtedly generative of particular sounds. This point and its connection to the listening experience is skilfully expressed through the sonic journalism of Peter Cusack (2013). Capturing Lebanon in a summer civil war with Israel he argues that, "Sound exhibits the same powers of illumination as light" (p25). I concur with Cusack in his assertion that the elemental, cultural and historical building blocks (of sound) bring together geography, political context and personal response in a juxtaposition that is powerful. This is not through representation in coded or symbolic ways, but is contained in the music as factual and emotional content, as well as spatiality, atmosphere and timing.

A difficult notion to express directly and with precision, it is partly contained in the importance attached to pitch and its probable evolutionary role in identification and in timbre, acknowledging the state of, as well as individual identity. It is also, as Cusack (2013)

claims, in the sense of spatiality that the ears provide. It facilitates judgement of distance/proximity and importantly affords flights of imagination in which we place ourselves in circumstances and trial how we might feel and behave. Ackerman (1995) notes the preponderance of auditory hallucinations and many writers on music speak to the space it creates for imagining and contemplation.

Returning to the most common conceptualisation of listening as a practice concerned with apprehending the transmission or communication of meaning, music is probably more ephemeral, and contradictorily, more concrete than this. It may essentially depend upon our ability to ascribe meaning to it. Accepting the linchpin status of vibration, listening is essentially about connection, with meaning and communication possibly following from this (Gallagher 2013) or being imposed (Nancy 2007). In this form pleasure can exist without meaning. Context becomes more important. This seems applicable to dance, an important element in reggae music. A song that invites dance can be forgiven for banal or antagonistic lyrics. Vibration encompasses myriad attitudes to listening (Szendy 2008) including whether these are individually or collectively based, how their impact and value can change over time, place and space and, importantly for me, what listeners bring to the encounter. The inference is that the connection will be different depending on the factors, including attitude that are being combined.

In establishing connection, it cannot be assumed that this is necessarily positive or desirable. In Steve Goodman's work (2010), vibration conceptualised as a force can be violent, seductive, abstract and physical simultaneously. The particular harmony within this concept is what it allows. Before understanding and meaning are sought, affect and autonomic responses encounter the vibrational force and connect. He identifies two basic

tendencies, centrifugal and centripetal (repulsing and attracting) in sound spirals. I consider these tendencies to exist within a continuum, not the usual line, but through the opening of a space into which sound spreads (Nancy 2007, Moten 2003). In so doing, sound penetrates obstacles. Nancy (2007) conceives of the space in both individual and collective ways. It is worth reiterating the attention he gives to the global sonorous space exemplified in the twentieth century.

“A musical-becoming of sensibility and a global-becoming of musicality have occurred, whose historicity remains to be thought about.” (p12)

Sound is represented as travelling on a wave, encompassing swells, rather than a point. It comes and goes, fluctuates and is flexible, existing both within and outside of the individual. This fluidity, encompasses and transcends many dualities, such as the individual and other, material and spiritual and is the reality of access to the self (Nancy 2007). It is predicated on the notion that listening implies a tension and stance that is seeking a relationship to itself. It is actualised by referrals; both meaning and sound operate in this way. It is a logic of evocation, a bringing of presence to itself. Combined with Goodman’s (2010) notion of a vibrational force, this extending and penetrating presence can impact upon collective feelings and moods of populations. It can do this alongside specific frequencies tapping into individual organ resonance, for example, the eye or nervous system.

Summarising Listening

Many relevant strands have been sounded in this reflection on listening. The key points that I want to acknowledge in constructing a theoretical model are as follows. Firstly,

listening encompasses physical, philosophical, sensory and perceptual elements. These are culturally, collectively and individually cultivated. How we conceptualise and the weight we grant to listening varies across time, space and place. It is an act that directs attention to varying degrees. Secondly, applied to reggae music, the urge to move the body and the lyrical resonance (more on this later) enhance the communicative force. Thirdly, vibration as a foundational concept that affords touch, connection, internal and external resonance whilst maintaining an ambivalence in terms of intent is critical. Fourthly, the essentially relational nature of sound is in its capacity to combine, organise and juxtapose all of the elements contained within it, as well as each element individually. An example of which is pitch as pure vibration and pitch as geographic and emotional imprint. Fifthly, recognition of the importance of the space carved between all of the elemental aspects of listening for imaginative experience.

Affect

Related to listening, but distinct from it, the concept of affect is an important component of my framework. It combines physiological and social (as in borders, boundaries and skin) sensations with perceptions. Both collectively and individually interpreted, it bridges the gaps between meanings, feelings and what listeners bring to and take from an encounter. Affect is centred in the body (Massumi 1995). It can be considered as a way of recognising and writing in a role for the body that does not reduce it to a sensory monitor, signal transducer and relay that ultimately works for the brain (and mind) in reacting to structures and stimuli that act upon it (Massumi 1995 & 2002). It is therefore conceived as an interface, that connects the object and subject, virtual and actual, implicate and explicate

order (Massumi 2002:99). Rejecting strict boundaries, dynamic thresholds are offered instead.

Brian Massumi (2002), a key exponent in this field, refutes the structuring capacity of culture which he regards as removing real agency from human bodies. Concerned with movement and change, he argues convincingly that nothing takes place in structure. Points and positions appear only retrospectively.²⁵ Movement as a qualitative transformation can best be conceptualised as a body in passage. This movement is abstract, it is becoming and cannot be linked deterministically to anything outside of itself. When movement ceases, points can then be mapped. This interest in process, applied to listening and engaging with reggae music suggests that its impingement upon the body, as a physiological, vibrational and social force is immediately experienced as a field of potential, it is becoming. Meaning, conscious reflection or emotion, is a position that is allocated after the event. It is the idea of the event meeting itself inwardly bound.²⁶

The usefulness of this concept is extended by incorporating a brief account of the limbic system, its connections to emotions, memories and motor capacities and the ear as an entry point to this. Joseph LeDoux (2003) examines the neural basis for fear conditioning drawing on the historical discovery of the hypothalamic link to emotions. Acknowledging the many questions that remain unanswered, he asserts the certainties. These include: the environmental evaluative role; the mediating role of discharging impulses; its interface with the motor systems. Sensory inputs, including auditory, terminate in this area. Learnt

²⁵ This is possibly an additional reason for placing this chapter here.

²⁶ I am aware of the criticism aimed at affect, particularly that by Ruth Leys (2011). Specifically, I agree that the distinction between affect and emotion cannot always be sustained. Similarly, I agree that the affective system cannot be separated from the cognitive processing system. Neither is my use of the term based on a "basic emotion paradigm." However, I maintain that the concept retains its relevance for this project as it is explained in the chapter.

contextual responses (such as fear conditioning) use the same pathways as natural learning. As one of the multiple memory sites within the brain, the amygdala engages with working memory and perceptual information whilst communicating with the arousal and bodily response systems (behavioural, autonomic and endocrine). The suggestion is that this nexus of inputs (external and internal) and multiple response pathways is what creates the affective charge in the mediation of conscious experience (LeDoux 2003).

A further layer is added by considering the work of Erin Manning (2009). Although this is concerned primarily with infant development, it has relevance to music. Questioning the basic idea that self-containment, particularly discriminating between inside and outside, is the key to infant development, Manning argues instead that relation be considered. Significantly, it is not one sense of self that is developed, but many, with direct experience being the key to awareness (p35) and this taking place in relation. Momentary cohesiveness replaces a stable self. Building on the work of Daniel Stern (1985), Manning concurs that it is events in early life which lead to modes of organisation.²⁷ As an integral part of experience, it is through the fielding of these relations that development occurs. Rather than through discrete stages, development can thus occur in quantum leaps.

Our senses of ourselves are built upon, discarded and rebuilt throughout life. Critically, this contains and is contained by, and cuts across all of the other strata. It does this through affect, in which cross modal transfer (amodality) is the key (p37).

“It is eventness in the making. It transcends the sense ‘channel’, causing a shift toward a supra-modal in-betweenness where sense-events take form that are neither directly

²⁷ I would question the emphasis placed solely on early life, however, the event organisation link is important.

associated to an organ nor to an object. Amodality foregrounds not the sense itself, but its relational potential” (Manning 2009:37).

Encoding across the senses facilitates recognition by all and any of them. Individuality and communality are co-constructed in the relation. This is the power of affect; its impact across registers. This experiential awareness is transformative. Relational potential is prioritised in a receptive state and engages both content and expression. The skin, rather than being a barrier that contains, becomes instead a carrier and field of relations formed through the experience of immanent events.

An appreciation of the skin only becoming a border when it is impinged upon and the importance of feelings in the construction of borders and surfaces is eloquently expressed in the work of Sara Ahmed (2014). The relevance of the skin’s mediating relation to the world is clear in terms of race and interpersonal potential, and is expressed differently under various conditions. She analyses “affective economies” (p8) showing how feelings are “produced as effects of circulation” and therefore conceptualising “the sociality of emotions” (p8). Destabilising debates positing hierarchies between emotion and thought, within emotions, tying emotion to sensation or cognition, questioning whether they are a part of our interior life, and ultimately the viability of the distinction between interior and exterior, she concludes that emotions are relational. They are social and cultural practices whose repetition and circulation are concealed. Working through various emotions, Ahmed (2014) shows that though sensations and emotions are different, they cannot be separated in lived experience. This is partly because they are mediated by memory, and as already argued, are just a part of an assemblage of inputs, pathways, arousal and response systems.

Concealed aspects of social and cultural practices have to be laid bare. Using the work of Small (1998) some of the forms of repetition and circulation will be revealed as built into and expressed through musical practices. For the current argument it is sufficient to note that emotions are investments in social norms, rather than purely individual dispositions. This can be likened to archetypal patterns that are imbued in structures and become meaningful. It requires identification and dis-identification that are attached to bodies as evidence of alignment. This movement towards some and away from others works to create boundaries and borders (Ahmed 2014:133). It is part of a power distribution mechanism that acknowledges or not, pain and histories. It shapes bodies and their potential and possibilities through unequal access to doing and being; public forms of culture and the ways in which they can be inhabited.

Having outlined some of the main aspects of affect, I offer a definition. It draws on the aforementioned work but is honed to fully engage with reggae music. Affect is a bodily impact experienced in a form that makes distinction between sensation and perception, instinct or intellect, emotion or thought impossible. It occurs in individual and collective bodies and events. It is relational, associative and as such, can be built into practices (e.g. musical), norms and values. It is circulated, repeated and can be concealed to varying degrees. Its meaning is often invested in issues of identification and belonging. I offer this as a way of theorising the value of music; one that forms the basis of how lovers of music engage with and speak about it. It is the linchpin of other explanations of sound, voice and diaspora as it links experience to theory.

Distilling Affect

Affect is centred in the body, though this can be an individual human body, collective social body and event. It affords connections and the blurring of distinction between subject and object. It also facilitates flow through attending to process rather than positioning. The multi-pathways that are engaged in experience are also how we develop, through fielding and organising relations. This amodal encoding is relational, constructing individuality and communality in content and expression in powerful ways. Emotions and feelings, as experienced by bodies, are not simply individual dispositions, or purely immediate. They are investments in and attachments to social norms and practices that are circulated and become ingrained. Working within unequal power dynamics and distribution networks, access to public forms of culture is thus shaped and curtailed accordingly.

The Reggae Aesthetic

Drawing on working class and peasant traditions of music, art, dance and religious and spiritual belief systems Kwame Dawes (1999) credits reggae with providing the distinctive post-colonial aesthetic which defined and shaped the world. Its arrival is located within a pivotal historical moment. The rise of the nationalist and labour movement in Jamaica, though concerned with issues of class, was elitist. Popular cultural expression was not seen as a suitable basis for a national identity. Yet, it is this communicative force, creating and using an indigenous language of emotion, challenging the intellect and incorporating the spirit that embraced and developed the paradigm shift that was taking place (p 24). The reggae aesthetic is a particular expression of socio-political hardship that also encompasses and expresses universal spiritual sentiments. This is constructed on four levels: ideology, which

includes mythology, cosmology and historiographical concerns; use of language; range, diversity and handling of themes; form, including musical structure and accompanying dance patterns. The construction of an encompassing aesthetic through which reggae can be theorised and explored is both interesting and useful.

Working through the levels identified by Dawes (1999), it is clear that ideologically reggae revives and builds upon a narrative of dignity of the African race. Its links to Rastafari provide a distinct route to the teachings of Garvey, but it is important to recognise that these ideas existed in the general population. Gregory's father was a Garveyite. This act of historical retrieval claims ownership of the slave past and relates it to the current situation. Rebellion, cultural and otherwise, is thus an appropriate response to present realities. Artists are drawn into the myth making process. Speaking for and to the community, the role of the artist in shaping and changing the society is important both symbolically and in real terms.

Reggae's use of language has already been addressed in chapter two, but it is worth expanding key points Dawes (2002) makes in relation to "lyricature" that are relevant here. Prior to reggae,

"The Jamaican dialect appeared in popular culture as a vehicle for humour. The omniscient and thinking narrator always spoke in standard English because that was the language of authority." (p82)

The assertion of a counter-voice is evident in the structure of language, and it also challenges the existing colonial narrative by empathising with everyday experiences and transforming them into political and social statements (p95). This is achieved through revealing them at a deeply emotional level that assumes identification. It feeds into a larger system of folk

intelligence (p282) that recognises and extends the sphere of influence of the ordinary person. As an art form reggae reinserted,

“An expression of the fact that Caribbean peoples possess a profoundly spiritualised sensibility that allows sexuality, political discourse, self-reflection and social commentary to be expressed in the context of an open cosmological structure.” (p242)

This is often explained as part of its African affiliation. Imagined or real, its existence rather than source is the point here. Positive interpretations of Africa and the assertion of links in self defining progressive form are a departure from the elite nationalist approach. A case is also made for the importance of romantic discourse in national identity and sexual energy as a spiritual force, rather than one opposed to it.

The range and diversity of themes handled within reggae are attributed by Dawes (1999) to various factors. One of these is the dialectic position of the artist as both a public and private figure. Supported by and reliant upon the audience, the artist “Is both inclined towards social activism and social commentary” (p100). This is alongside maintaining their relevance within a competitive market. Social commentary charts the stance of the particular artist and can be humorous, estranged and take the form of news. Importantly themes are localised and filtered through personal and community interpretations of truth and justice. Another influential factor is the openness of the genre. It articulates and is premised upon basic human conditions; philosophical weight with sexuality and desire, prophecy, faith and poverty, it provides a coherent and creative way of seeing and knowing the world.

Attending to form, Dawes (1999) points to the ensemble nature, version structure and performance base of reggae. All of which is underpinned by the role of dance. He names drum and bass as pivotal structural elements which are significant in instigating and

maintaining a circular pattern with no ultimate completion. He credits these elements as components that have fuelled developments in the music. This is a very specific take on the drivers of change within reggae, however, it is tempered by the overarching theme of dialogue between the instruments, artists and the community. The circularity is central to both dancing and the erotic. It provides a ring of comfort in which orgasmic moments occur that rejuvenate and offer space for thought.

“In reggae it is possible to dance and contemplate revolution, anger at oppression, the cruelties of life, the beauty of sexuality, the humour of human existence – all at the same time.” (p137)

This is a profound assertion which provide a framework from which Gregory as an artist can be examined. Using themes and ideas raised by participants, it lends itself to evaluation of the extent to which they pervade listening spaces and the importance attached to them in the listening experience.

Related to but separate from the reggae aesthetic is the concept of diaspora. It is worth while pausing here before completing this discussion. Also worthy of note is Dawes’ conviction that Caribbean literature has built upon and benefitted from reggae music.

Diaspora

Reggae has long been interpreted in diasporic terms within and outside of its home. This is despite the fact that its conceptualisation differs according to people, time and place. An interesting investigation of the ideological uses of reggae in Sierra Leone is instructive in its display of variation (Stasick 2013). It does not engage with meaning as understood by listeners and concentrates instead on social, political and military groups’ embrace of the

sound. What the variation suggests is the malleability in the embrace of the music. Leaving definitions aside momentarily, in this section attention is on the contribution that music has, and continues to make to diaspora as a theoretical construct and experiential reality, rather than the search for origins and histories in the cultural sounds. In line with the foregone considerations of relationality, diaspora is also examined within this theme. There are many strands that are brought together in the Caribbean experience and exploration of diaspora.

As already outlined in the history of reggae, the evidence suggests that slave song and dance were primarily a means of socialisation. Alongside recreation, they encompassed the planning and staging of resistance to slavery (Altink 2004, Cooper 1993), embodying and communicating community values. Artistic expression as collective activity thus has important historical significance. It was both highly regarded and marketable (Altink 2004, White 1998), albeit within local boundaries. In addition to the political and economic forces present, the development of reggae takes place within and alongside general regional currents which also impact. Consumption is one of these. Sandra Courtman (2004) makes the point that as researchers focussing on the Caribbean, “We must acknowledge that we too consume the region even if we are differently motivated to the tourist” (p xvi).

Consumption, economic exploitation and slavery conjure a potent mix that has a long history in representation. Catherine Hall (2017) speaking of Jamaica notes that the abolition of slavery saw the beginning of a particular representation stressing the lush landscape. This early imaginative experience has been constructed and developed in ways that link the tropical fecundity of nature with the nature of the inhabitants. However, both are cultivated and contrived (Sheller 2004). Importantly, they also come from outside of the region, or from metropolitan elites who are resident there.

Another clear current in the political, social and cultural field is the openness of the region to plunder and invasion. The historical results of this openness, both imaginative and real, have given rise to what Louis Chude-Sokei (2016) identifies as creolisation. A term initially Caribbean but now with global reach, it acknowledges the characteristic mixing, racial and otherwise of the region. It also links these encounters with identity and associated systems of thought and meaning making. It is generally rooted in slavery and its relations of subordination and domination, yet it should not be limited to this interpretation. It is also allied with notions of “synthesis and genesis” (p141) with which early reggae is often credited. As it has developed, an outernational perspective and presence has been created such that it is proposed as the aural, sonic representation and structure of diaspora (Gilroy 1993, Dawes 1999, Chude-Sokei 2016) with hip hop building on this receptivity.

It is from this region, and its majority transplanted populations that the term diaspora is reinterpreted and applied to Africans (Chivallon 2002, Gilroy 1993, Chude-Sokei 2016). Christine Chivallon (2002) states that the original concept speaks to the experience of the dispersion of Jewish populations and is based on bonds created through a common place of origin. The Africa model, she labels hybrid and identifies its base as movement and interconnection. I consider that this distinction is not so clear cut. Marcus Garvey (1986) subscribed to a place of origin bond, albeit a continental one. “Everybody knows that there is absolutely no difference between the native African and the American and West Indian Negroes, in that we are descendants from one common family stock” (p 71). Whilst promoting race purity, he also worked to draw together, “into one universal whole, all the Negro peoples of the world, with prejudice towards none. We desire to have every shade of colour, even those with one drop of African blood, in our fold” (p 55).

An Africentric focus as an element of diaspora can be distinguished from creolisation. It is identified by Chude-Sokei (2016) as encompassing all but centring this in the Caribbean itself. As such, it relinquishes the primacy of African identity, accepting ancestry and embracing both the imaginative and real openness of the area. Dub (a sub-genre of reggae) is labelled the sound of creolisation (Chude-Sokei 2016). As well as drawing out the merits of this mix: as evolution; a movement delinked from racial terror; and historically inevitable (Glissant 1997, Chude-Sokei 2016), limits are also identified. In Jamaica specifically, Chude-Sokei makes the point that creolisation has been used as a strategic method to disempower the Black majority and is the symbol of the elite. This is part of Garvey's critique of DuBois' organisation and leadership in America. It is also a part of the discourse within which legitimacy was sought. In this sense diaspora, rather than creolisation is more apt.

The application of diaspora from the Caribbean has primarily concerned relationships, forming and acknowledging these and providing examples of how they may be assembled. Essentially, this facilitates a way of constructing memory and looking back, as well as imagining alternatives and feeding forward. It provides a way of unifying the experiences of peoples with transnational connections and providing an "ideology of black mutual recognition" (Hintzen & Rahier, 2010: pxvii). Critiquing this application, Chude-Sokei (2016, 2011) argues that the past and future are imagined by particular groups within the Black diaspora which results in the privileging of an elite Black lens. Existing multiple Blacknesses are thus reduced for purposes of solidarity to the concerns of first world Blacks.

This is an interesting critique to consider. Certainly reggae, the issues it raises and its fashioning of diaspora cannot be reduced to first world concerns. However, academic discourse on and interpretations of the music can be guilty as charged. Returning to Garvey,

his movement and influence; as the largest card carrying, fee paying Black organisation to date, which underpins Rastafari philosophy and feeds into reggae, it is a disservice to write this up as part of a Euro-American elite. Chude-Sokei (2016) and Gilroy (1993) use literature extensively to explicate and support their particular cases and this medium may indeed be mediated through an elite, first world, Black perspective. I similarly lament the lack of research on reader perspectives that I identify for listeners. What is clear is that the concerns voiced in reggae music, the perspectives given space are those of the musicians, singers, listeners and larger population. They resonate further afield than their city and island of origin to centres of empire, colonies, wherever Black people have gathered and the African continent, resounding globally.

The issue is pinpointed by Chivallon (2002) whose examination of the concept raises the question of where meaning lies. Is it in lived experience or academic theories? Reliance on political and literary discourses is only one mode of (privileged) representation. She asks, “What is to be said of the more ordinary sphere, where the cultural is constructed day by day? Is it not there that the terms of social belonging are defined?” (p366). She argues that what distinguishes the Caribbean, particularly the Anglophone sphere, from the African continent is its manner of constructing social relations, labelled synchronic bonds. Distinct from linear models based on descent and territory, this collective act’s positionality is identifiable in reggae.

None of the strands explored render the term unproblematic. Alexander Weheliye (2014) notes the conflation of African descended populations with territories of Blackness and the absence of Africans in diaspora conversations. He identifies an emerging trend that locates Africa as a component. “Consequently, African cultures become players in the

construction of modern Blackness and Black cultures, ceasing to act as premodern fountains of authentic and anti-technological Black life” (p187). His analysis posits all Blackness as fragmentary and he identifies the ways in which diasporic populations are pitted against each other. Following his lead, a useful way to write Africa into diaspora would include listening to the ways in which the continent has embraced and interpreted Gregory’s reggae offering. As already alluded to, scholarship on this theme is emerging.

A central component of diaspora encompassing Africa, the Caribbean and Americas and expressed in reggae is that of trauma. As stated by Aisha Khan (2015),

“Culture and identity also find their place in diaspora through the experience of trauma, a theme that is rarely far from diaspora studies, whether as rupture and dislocation in the past or the present day experience of social inequality and its resistance” (p 39).

This issue of trauma as part of identity is accounted for historically in terms of the slave trade, plantation system and colonial exploitation. It is transformed through self-reflexivity into resilience and conviction for the future. The term diaspora encompasses many stories that relate to consciousness and cultural practices, both of which are processes (Khan 2015). Insightfully she questions the Black Atlantic asking why it should be isolated from the wider Atlantic world, the Indian Ocean and Far East regions with which continental Africa has long interacted. She advocates exploring diaspora as a dialogue. If this is conceptualised as communication then Chude-Sokei’s (2016) assertion that diaspora itself is structured largely by sound and Black populations’ engagement with sound technology, resounds with possibility.

Using Diaspora

The importance of diaspora to reggae cannot be understated. From its inception as a multi-source, yet unique sound, to its global reach and influence, its practices and traditions have found an anchor in diasporic connection. Part of its structure as a universal form is its capacity to frame myriad elements and tensions. The three strands I want to carry forward are firstly, the openness of the term that releases it from strict bonds of ethnicity, race and geography. This provides a space for inclusive self-definition which is sensitive to nostalgia, desire and flights of creative imagination. Secondly, the notion of sound playing a significant role in the construction and embrace of diaspora. Thirdly, the primacy of process and flow in the exploration of cultural practice and the implications of this for forming and revealing relationships.

An important thread running through the concepts outlined thus far is that of relationships. Within this, attention is directed to flow and process, rather than position or perspective. In itself, this is unremarkable as arguably relationships are present in all aspects of human society. Yet, the relationships advanced in these concepts, when applied to reggae begin to outline the parameters within which the listening experience can be apprehended. This emphasis is attuned to the ephemeral and bodily impact of music, to the immediate and influential affects, which through repetition, circulation and organisation, can stick and become a part of individual and communal lives. The reciprocal nature of these relationships, the agency of all concerned is the sonic embrace referred to in the chapter title. It can encompass projection, construction, collusion, resistance, and a future as well as roots.

Returning to the reggae aesthetic, we can recount what we have learnt. Its capacity to ground analysis of voice in its expanded version, drawing out examples of the sensory and

physical properties that are intrinsic to the music, practices and performance of artists is manifest. This illuminates the cultural imperatives that are implicated in the construction and categorisation of race and are correlated to artist and audience expectation and relationship. It speaks to listening, pinpointing examples of physical, sensory and perceptual elements to which attention is directed or drawn. It proposes a potential organising principle for this sound. The absolute inclusion of dance – the music is offered in this form – entrenches the embodied nature of the aesthetic. Encountered within the connective force of vibration, providing internal and external resonance as well as movement, carves a space for imaginative experience. Theoretical possibilities are also extended to include affect through recognition of the sociality and circulation of emotions and feelings and an appreciation that these energetic patterns palpably exist in individual and collective bodies blurring the distinctions between subject and object. In conceptualising reggae as the defining post-colonial aesthetic, its capacity to construct diaspora in radically open, creative terms that are inclusive and incorporate desire seems immanently possible.

Musicking

The final strand in this framework is found in the work of Christopher Small (1998, 1987) who produces a detailed analysis of the processes included in the activity of making music. His definition is broad, social and based in action: “To take part in any capacity, in a musical performance” (1998:8). It thus includes listening and dancing. He argues persuasively

that to conceive of music as a thing is an abstraction and reification, musical meaning can only be grasped in context, time and place. As already argued, I include the context of listening. Within this perspective, participation in a sound system, listening via the radio, as well as to a live performance are part of the creative process. He exposes and critiques prevalent underlying assumptions about music, which include treating performance as a medium rather than an event and communication as linear rather than multi-way. He devises the term musicking to encompass all of the participants in music making regardless of their various responsibilities, as well as the physical and social location of this action. Most importantly meaning, and for the purposes of this project, value is located. “The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in these relationships that the meaning of the act lies” (1998:13).

Once again relationships are accorded high value as elemental staples of life, particularly in development of self, community and learning. They are identified between sounds, people, models, imagined interconnections, the world and mystical realms. Relationships are conducted in the performance and listening spaces which is the focus of this examination. Crucially for Small, (1998) musicking is an activity that models as well as imagines our relationships within and with the world. This is potentially a much more generous explanation than Chude-Sokei’s (2011) version of Caribbean projections of Africa in which reggae is accused of inviting itself to Africa and behaving as its echo (p78). Rather, Small (1998) allows reggae to claim Africa, rejecting negative colonial stereotypes and performing union. This capacity for exploration and experience facilitates our celebration or rejection of the same and potentially encompasses the attachment and detachment theories in music scholarship (Negus, & Román Velázquez 2002, Palmer 2010). It negates the necessity for an either-or approach to the claims made for music generally. The focus on experiential

knowledge, through the body and senses is ultimately for Small (1998, 1987), the key to learning to live well.

There are several other components that speak to the approach being developed. Discarding notions of essential dualisms such as that between matter and mind, he argues instead for process as an active engagement with the environment, within which difference is experienced as perception, albeit a coded version. It is in this manner that meaning is made, through creating the context in which difference is heard and meaning ascribed. To rescue this from the purely individual, factors influencing processing, such as previous experience, social and political context are introduced. The crux is whether the information gathered is made useable or not. Use value is especially pertinent to this project. The beauty in directing this examination to a single artist, is to explore this fully. It adds a further dimension to affect. Experience that is useful can be linked to development in easily identifiable, productive ways.

Small (1998, 1987) dissects the concepts of ritual, myth, metaphor, art and emotion, which he argues are related and implicit in our communication, relationships to the world and embodied experience. He contends that it is through these concepts that categories of perception are organised, explored, celebrated, modelled and imagined. He makes the point that engaging, for example, in ritual, facilitates a sharper sense of time and enhanced awareness, this may be the contemplation principle identified by Frith (1996). Myth may provide the origins of connection for the bridges of sound noted by Cooper (1998), or drawbridge by Bradley (2000). He stresses that the power of these concepts reside in their immediate use value (long term use is not explored by Small, but is raised by respondents detailing their return and further exploration of key life concepts) in terms of explanation and guidance and that content is as important for this as form. His treatment of metaphor,

contained in both ritual and myth, is particularly interesting as behaviour and sensual perceptive patterns are abstracted and reworked with experiences and concepts supporting and validating them.

In this way participation in communal ritual generates meanings and is empowering. This goes some way to explaining the capacity of ritual to affect us and the power of group listening. It does not address individual listening to the same degree, though expansion is possible. In terms of emotion, this is harnessed as a formidable learning tool, relationships are felt, rather than explained.

“Who we are is how we relate and the relationships articulated by a musical performance are not so much those that actually exist as they are the relationships that those taking part desire to exist” (1998:134).

The process of bringing meaning into being is dialectical. Relations evoked or brought to light through musicking are also social forces which contain the possibility to in turn shape events. Many aspects of musicking are expressed in the literature but not expanded in the particular detailed way that Small (1998) layers his argument.

There are elements of an essentialist argument in Small’s (1998, 1987) depiction of African “gestural virtuosity” (1998:62). However, this is embedded in a detailed exposition of the traditions and practices underpinning this in America. His clearly stated aim of revealing and celebrating the philosophical contribution made by African people and their descendants to world-wide culture through their engagement in song and dance is irrefutable in the 20th and 21st Centuries and corroborated in works such as the black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). A more troublesome critique is that characteristics found in the music are mapped to the people expressing them. Factors such as adaptability, multiple rhythms, rhythm as the central

organising principle, well developed improvisation, unity of composition and performance, total integration of music and dance are asserted as defining. This is despite the fact, argued convincingly by Tagg (1989) that these factors exist in musical forms outside of the African continent and diaspora albeit in differing configurations.

The unification of Black people and their music is interesting as it demonstrates the cultural approach to music. Yet it is also problematic. Primarily because this is how music sounds to an outsider from a different tradition seeking distinguishing features, rather than how the music is understood and experienced by those engaging in it. These characteristics may be present, but to extract representative social, political and cultural sensibilities and apply them without investigation is crude. Despite these caveats, the fundamental assertion that musicking creates a public sound of inwardly desirable relationships, bringing them into existence temporarily is revelatory. It affords the question, what does the reggae tradition bring into being?

The framework

The expanded concepts of voice and listening, with affect as a breaking down of barriers of skin, emotions and actions are united in the reggae aesthetic. Gregory's body of work and the value attached to this by all who engage with it can be productively explored through these wide ranging themes. Applying the musicking model anchors the power of music in lives allowing for diaspora to be reciprocal, for performance to change the meanings that are experienced, for musical interactions to perform empathy. Taken together the potential for framing the language, concepts, sounds and stance which Gregory as a contemporary artist employed to theorise, understand and express the lived Black reality; and

are understood as such by his listeners is what is intended. The following chapters apply this to the data collected.

Chapter Five

Front Door

Mmmmm

Ahhhhhhhhh

I gave her back the key to her front door

'Cause it seemed she didn't care about me anymore

I gave her all the love I had and she spilled it

So I packed my things into a shopping bag and decided to quit

(G Isaacs 1981)

This chapter continues the theme of antiphony moving from a theoretical exposition to one that is experiential, and respondent led. Allowing their wisdom, depth and richness into the discussion. With the voice identified as the call, listening is then part of the response. Reacting to the needs and call of the listeners as well as providing a challenge and raising questions, the relationship is dynamic. The voice is not simply that of the artist, but of the community, the body of listeners, speaking to, from and for them. The data is introduced and

divided into three sections - the voice, listening and the man – which analyse the empirical conceptualisations offered and consider if and to what degree they are substantiated in the detail of theory and/or alternative claims asserted for the music by interviewees. The research questions addressing the significance of Gregory's voice and the role of listening in apprehending value are answered. The section entitled the man, presents listener accounts of the addiction, misdemeanours and frailty of Gregory which increasingly foreshadowed his public persona and career. How this is understood and incorporated into his legend status is discussed. His personal profile is not the focus of this study, but its impact on his body, life work, professional identity and global reach is important and thus cannot be ignored. It is also influential in documenting and giving credence to how the Black male is conceptualised by Black people. This theme is a stream of value that flows through each of the data chapters and informs the conclusions reached.

The thoughts, understandings and value attributed to this voice by listeners, expand philosophical treatise on the same. It is fitting that the voices of listeners clarify this. Confirming many of the ideas introduced in the literature review and framework, the transformation and transfiguration expressed and experienced surprise me. In attending to listeners, in centring antiphony my approach to the project is more than a methodological tool. Rather than simply and attentively listening for evidence, I value their interpretation. The qualities unearthed in their listening enriches my own. Thus, as the tympanic membrane oscillates backwards and forwards, inside and outside (see chapter four, section on voice) the authorial voice, that which holds authority on the experience of listening is framed collectively. It is multiple voices, liberating sensibilities, immersive and respectful of others. With this in mind, my own perspectives identified clearly, are interspersed throughout the narrative.

Methodological note

To protect the identity of participants in the study, they are granted full anonymity. All names have been changed and identifying factors deleted. This is partly to ensure confidentiality and honour the contexts of the constructed listening sessions and individual interviews. In these settings respondents are encouraged to freely share perspectives, intimate details and feelings secure in the knowledge that nothing disclosed can be traced back to them. This is of genuine concern and has been raised post discussion by interviewees. Of equal importance to this study is the need to place everyday listeners on an equal footing with reggae industry personnel and cultural theorists. The emphasis on listening and the listening experience in combination with the single artist focus, mean the considerations of a member of the public who identifies as a follower of Gregory is as relevant and worthy as that of an academic whose field is culture in more general terms. As raised in the introduction, the voices of listeners are scarce in the public narration of the reggae story. In Gregory's life work, their support is central. There are instances in analysis in which the opinions of specific groups are sought, for example, females, disc jockeys (DJ), Black British and so forth. These examples are clearly articulated in the text.

The voice

The primary and arguably most relevant aspect of the voice that is drawn out and commented on by all respondents is the aesthetic quality of Gregory's voice. The timbre (Eidsheim 2019) or grain (Barthes 1977) as identified by scholars. The invitation, the arresting

emotion as named by listeners. Even those that disclose a dislike for the man personally, are united in extolling the virtue and uniqueness of his voice. In a genre laden with artists who in appreciation of an individual's orality identify with it and model themselves accordingly, there are none (bar Glenny – a Surinamese artist²⁸) who capture Gregory. This is unsurprising. As an artist, his relationship to the world was built through his voice (Redmund 2018). As an art form, reggae music is essentially to be enjoyed. Its aural and bodily appeal are recognisably entertaining and inviting. Its success is premised upon drawing attention to itself, attracting and pulling others in. From his earliest incursions into the music scene, his voice has been the inspiration. Interviewed by the legendary Carl Gayle, in 1975, who writes. "He has no act as such, no airs, just a handful of songs and a golden voice" (p 6). It is acknowledged by his listeners.

Roger

"Just the sweetness of the voice, something about his voice... the overlay of the tradition of soul singing and the emergence of reggae. That's what I hear in him."

Calvin

"Just what we call talawa singers' man, wicked. And the vocals that this man have is something superior. Because when him sing is like all the women just start coo... when you listen to this man sing is just like you just stop and listen the words, the way him deliver the words and everything, so is something superlative."

The sense of being "captured, transfixed" by the music is a prevalent theme that flows from this. It attests to a related aspect of Gregory's voice, his ability to convey a range of emotions,

²⁸ See appendix 5, *Night Nurse* tribute video for an example of his oral alignment with Gregory.

seemingly effortlessly, that include ambiguity and do not rely upon lyrics. Returning to Gayle (1975), he notes the unusual element of “hard felt sorrow” in his sentimental rendering of love songs. And equally important, his adeptness in the apprehension and expression of feeling as in *Ba da*, that is elusive and open to interpretation. “A song with few lyrics and an unintelligible theme that nonetheless captures a real sense of frustration and yearning, a yearning born of hard times” (p 6). This unique interpretation of the male voice identified at the outset of his career would evolve into his trademark sounds. Exemplary identifiers that bear an imprint as significant as his name.

The thread of sorrow and hard times encapsulated in Gregory’s voice is discerned by his listeners and framed in myriad ways. These are always appealing and are an aspect of the call he extends. Giving voice to emotion, especially love, vulnerability and affection are currently restricted (at least in discourses) in African and Caribbean cultures – possibly for very different reasons – with men encouraged to suppress emotional displays. The reasons for this can include but are not restricted to, ideals of manhood prevalent in these communities.

Joe

“Vulnerability can only be shown in the private space, never the public.”

It is also the result of harsh racist structures that historically exploit expressions of openness punishing these severely. Exposure to and engagement with a chart-topping song scores a channel through which political commentary, alternative readings of history and analysis of power structures in society can be shared in subaltern or fugitive ways (Moten 2003).

As articulated by the following respondent the quality of the voice is equalled by the excellence of the message.

Mathew

“I feel like his voice was the voice of my era when I was struggling to make sense of a lot of things in my own life, my own development, my own activity as an intellectual.”

Combining a beautiful voice with a resonant thought, or the space in which to insert oneself and contemplate pertinent issues is a gift that respondents recognise and applaud. The addition of germane lyrics, most often penned by Gregory himself, elevate this offering encompassing dimensions not routinely included in the sphere of influence of popular culture.

As articulated by the following interviewee, the voice encapsulates and expresses a philosophical and introspective component that listeners hear and connect with.

Humphrey

“Identification with lyrics creates an awareness within myself which changes my perception and attitude.”²⁹

This palpable effect is further explained in terms that are acknowledged by virtually all of the respondents.

Humphrey

²⁹ Personal communication with a promoter who worked with Gregory in West Africa.

“African music talks to us.³⁰ It’s not frivolous like white music. It makes me think about our condition, check myself and my behaviour.”

This intimate relationship to Gregory’s voice is explained personally and politically.

Humphrey

“The way we relate to it is different. There are things in there that only we know. Exclusivity is in there for us.”

The characteristics labelled here exclusive, are in the voice and in the listening space. It is a vibrational and metaphorical connection. The educative and sensitisation role that the music plays relates to and can be applied to our way of living.

Mathew

“It’s a way of life. You see, it’s a livity... I consider myself to be someone who’s following a certain way of life in which music is absolutely fundamental to my way of life.”

It is clear in the relationship to Gregory’s music and music more generally and it is articulated repetitively.

Examination of the musical traditions of the African diaspora across time, space and place, and the role of voice within this, suggest a few unifying principles that are identified and included by listeners. These start with the central position accorded to music, and singers in life. It is an integral part of life, marking and celebrating the cycle, delineating a wide use of song, music and performance that encompass and accompany work, play and sorrow. The

³⁰ The use of African here is specifically directed at Gregory as a member of the diaspora.

expansive and integral use of voice carries traditions, reinterprets them whilst also creating new styles and versions. Thus, a voice can denote a specific moment in lyrics, timbre and grain and also encapsulate timelessness through the truth, pertinence and prophetic nature of the sound. Explained in the following statement.

Roger

“It’s of its time and at the same moment beyond its time. So it’s in its moment but it’s never sort of, never fixed to it....The music somehow refuses to stay in that moment. The best of it constantly speaks to our moment too.”

The longevity and continued relevance of singers such as Gregory is consistently raised. At the time of writing this chapter, June 2020, Father’s Day is filled with the sound of Gregory on Black radio airwaves. A nod of respect to the Black male in the UK that values their love for him and his alignment with them.

A further principle that is identified and embodied is the antiphonal tradition. Listeners are addressed through song and respond in kind. Spaces exist in the music for listeners to insert themselves metaphorically and physically. In performance Gregory frequently encouraged listeners’ participation, a practice that is theorised as part of the relations of diaspora by Jaji (2014) who names this echo location. In recognition and celebration of his artistry the crowd sing for him, welcoming him home with them, serenading him with their rendition of his song. We return to this in the section on listening, here it is sufficient to note that the combination of sound and language in song, compressed and released through the body of the artist, when skilfully expressed, is a potent force that touches listeners communally and individually.

The communal touch is expressed in the following excerpt recalling a concert at the Rainbow theatre.

Minerva

“It was a really fantastic concert. He overran there were no buses left, there was a whole tribe of us walking from Finsbury Park to get home but we did it because we were just on a high, cos it was such a fantastic concert.”

Part of the authenticity and community claimed in this recounting is that the “tribe” referred to is a London group of (largely but not exclusively) Black people. Boundaries of nationality and ethnicity give way to a public transnational allegiance conjured and substantiated by the voice and artistic performance of Gregory. The communal touch in concert with the individual is expressed in the following excerpt.

Chris

“It’s like a church, we all preach together. The voice is a chimed one. Dominant one here is agreeing with the masses....It’s a personal experience, the moment is the connectivity. I’m singing along with my voice, my emotions. The power is not just the artist’s, but mine.”

The sharing of power in the moment is an important testament of value. It is a form of encouragement and openness that exceeds philosophical treatment of the voice by restricting power to the body generative of the sound. The swell of power of listeners certifies and acclaims the vocal act.

Combining call and response speaks to how the music is enacted and experienced. The same is true of individual and communal affects. These are felt, embodied and

understood simultaneously. They are enjoyed as a direct reflection of and aid to processing individual issues, as well as a communal experience that connects individuals that are co-present, over radio waves, through listening and sharing love of an artist. This will be further explored in later sections of this chapter. At this point it is worthwhile analysing the manifestations of the voice as explained by respondents and captured in theory.

Archetypes of voice³¹

A common theme that many listeners note and that has already been alluded to is the range of styles that Gregory embodies. Roots, lovers and early dancehall are the most obvious but there are also forays into Jungle and DJ mixes. This is one aspect of locating the voice and it is premised on musical subgenres and performance idioms. It suggests differentiated listeners and to an extent, lyrical content. Another related aspect of this, and one that is recognised in African musical traditions is the archetypal role of the voice. Relating to reggae, this is gathered under four headings by Kwame Dawes (1999). These are: the pioneer of voice; the prophetic voice; the trickster – Davidian singer of psalms; the post-colonial, post-modern voice. These are not discreet categories, there is overlap. Artists can be placed in the camp in which most of their work sits, or as in the case of Gregory, their longevity and range can mean they straddle all. The case for this is made by listeners.

The pioneer of voice is evidently of great importance in the Caribbean region, a space often heralded as lacking in the roots and traditions that confer stability and historical status. It is also a foundational quest taken on by many diasporic populations and speaks to the need

³¹ Voice as an aspect of the reggae aesthetic is included in all of the seminal texts that speak of Black music traditions and roles. These include: *The Black Atlantic*, *What the Deejay Said*, *Sonic Bodies*. It is explicitly deconstructed in Dawes (1999) work. It is also applied to Marley, amongst other artists, which makes it especially relevant to this study.

for a voice (as in political, advocating for and distinct) expressed by descendants of these groups of people living in the UK. This is troubled by Christopher Small (1987) in his account of how philosophies are reworked and communicated through music and dance. The full rich tradition of African music was not transplanted wholesale into Jamaica, for example, as a colony. This is despite the continued arrival of newly enslaved people that could have sustained it. The reason Small advances, to which I concur, is that musicking (the act of music making) must be relevant to, make sense of and model idealised versions of the life that is being lived. This is accomplished through the relationships that are brought into being - within and with the world – through the act of musicking.

With this model in mind, the quest for voice is grounded in life and holds a restorative fervour. It speaks to the “energy and intellectual power of the music,” (Dawes 1999: 9) and extends far beyond the nationalist stirrings of an island. The archetype of the pioneer of voice in this context is rooted in working class and peasant perspectives on the world arising from conflicts in the social order. This is the reality of the region. Rather than “being built on an absence of ruins³²,” (Dawes 1999: 39) it is an amalgam that is coherent, adaptable, resistant and robust. Much like the people and context in which it emerged, this is certainly an aspect of its travelling capacity.

The trace of sorrow and hardship endured throughout these conflicts is indelible and audible in this archetype. As the following respondents express in their attempts to define reggae’s message.

Roger

³² An allusion to a novel of the same name written by Orlando Patterson which comments on the Caribbean identity.

“Why do people sing? Why do they sing? Well they sing to free themselves. At some fundamental level.”

Chris

“When we get rid of all the pain in the world then reggae will be no longer relevant. As long as there is suffering going on somewhere, we need it.”

The pioneer of voice, therefore, is bringing this message, embodying this sensibility, making known this perspective in the public and private spheres. Dawes (1999) identifies the trombonist, Don Drummond, as an exemplar of this type of voice. Melodically, Gregory is heard as following in this tradition.

Opata

“The early GI is clearly following horn lines. You hear him singing and you hear him essentially doing exactly what Drummond does in terms of following horn lines.”

The connection to the body in a wind instrument is through the breath as it is for a singer.

A comparison can also be made in terms of the emotional breadth, clarity and impact of his voice, which will be threaded through chapters six and seven. Drummond is highly regarded for his improvisations and compositions, their clear effect on audiences being a trademark (Barrow and Dalton 1997). He is also credited for his innovation within ska which provided a precursor to later developments in reggae. The notion of being ahead of one’s time and leading innovations in the music is discussed in the introduction and speaks to Gregory’s relationship with the dancehall space and ability to both read and initiate future potential directions. However, an additional aspect of this relates to an artist’s positioning

within their community. As a pioneer of voice, the suggestion is also that the community may not be ready to hear and accept their voice.

There is a trend in Jamaica of failing to recognise homegrown genius and innovation until it is lauded by outsiders (Gilroy 1993, Dawes 1999). This is commonly applied to Marcus Garvey, Rastafari, and Bob Marley. There is truth in this assertion, but it is a complex situation that benefits from a breakdown of the social groups that affirm their fellow compatriots and how and if this changes over time. For Gregory, his home support amongst reggae lovers was initially very strong and propelled his international success. This is within a general official, middle class and cultural policy disdain for the music as it strove to highlight existing and historical inequalities and to resist continued exclusion from the nationalist project and cultural sensibility being cultivated and heralded as a national identity (Dawes 1999). Support for Gregory waned in his homeland as his addiction took its toll on his voice and stature for a while. This was not uniformly expressed internationally. Core audiences remained faithful and new listening publics grew (see introduction for details of this). In the latter years and in death his legend status was renewed with industry and country accolades and a state funeral.

The presumption is that as an archetype of voice, his entire career as well as the meanings his work conveys and the purposes it serves as it travels, must be considered. It is my contention that an aspect of voice pioneered and embodied in his life and work is the acceptance of human frailty in the conception of genius and innovator. This is encapsulated in the following, quoted at length to reveal its comprehension.

Padma

“I think that the whole point is imperfection, is hurt, is flaw. That’s what makes it interesting. That’s what makes people people. And sharing that sometimes can be redemptive for the listener. It can be liberating.”

This is then expanded to include both the social context of voice and listening. She continues

Padma

“When you tell a history, why would you want to wipe out the ugly, naked brutality of it? Because that is part of the formation of the world as we know it. Of our identities. And you cannot move through things by pretending they’re not there. You have to see it, you have to heal it you have to find ways to understand it and it may take generations, it may take hundreds of songs... I think it makes sense that that would have happened to someone like Gregory. From the things that he thinks about. And the things that he sings about.”

This redemptive, restorative force of voice will be returned to in the final chapter.

The prophetic archetype of voice is signalled by historical concerns, Africa as an ancestral home and Africaness. The artist Burning Spear, is identified as a figurehead here. Again, we can clearly hear these themes in his body of work and name specific tracks such as *The Border*, or *Slave Market* that directly address history. Within this tradition is the proclamation tune, of which Gregory has several we return to continually. His pantheon uses voice as an entity that connects, providing emotion and support (Thomaidis & Macpherson 2015) and as such reaches into the past, drawing comparisons with the present and directing attention to what is needed for current and future sustenance. In this reading of the prophetic tradition tracks such as *Philistines*, *Black a Kill Black* and *Oh What a Feeling* form

part of this offering. Linked to the African griot tradition, this archetype sings a story that is part of the myth making process. Recognition of past and present pain are balanced with the invitation to dance this out. To give the body what it needs to survive and thrive. The following excerpts speak to his capacity to acknowledge the hardships of life, yet declare,

Chris

“There is all of this happening, but there is also love. Spend more time on this. I will be the conduit. I will move you to a better mood.”

Opata

“I come to give you a nice time.”

The combination of entertainment, education and play, particularly in the way in which language is used means,

Chris

“This is not discardable art. It has longevity and stays relevant.”

Humphrey

“Griots are still in existence in our artists. They give us messages all the time. This influences our behaviour, aspirations and language.”

Features of this archetype of voice align with that of troubadour and songster (Gilroy 2010). Its explicit radical interpretation of slavery and advocacy for justice, position it towards other expressions of inequality and cement its oppositional nature.

The trickster, Davidian singer of psalms archetype expresses the connections between the natural world, politics and the mystical (Dawes 1999). The form and role of the trickster

in uniting these elements is important in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean and has roots in the West African figure of Anansi.³³ It often takes the wider Caribbean personage of the shape shifter. Something of a hero, the figure exposes the power relationships between the official order and members of the community. It inverts and undermines them. As a rebel figure, Anansi succeeds through subterfuge and wit undertaking actions and postures that include the immoral, when deemed necessary. There is an interesting body of work that exists on this mythical creature, however three aspects are notably pertinent to listener reflections (DeSouza 2003, Marshall 2007).

The first of these relates to the nature of the creature. He is a spider and spins webs. This can be metaphorically read as creating a world from his own substance. In this instance, producing songs that lay bare the mechanisms of the social, political and spiritual worlds, making sense of them using personal experience. This aspect beautifully unites the trickster with the Davidian psalm singer, entities that at first may sound incongruous, incompatible but merge productively and are identified quintessentially with Bob Marley (Dawes 1999). As recognised by the following respondents

Opata

“What G has that connects him, I think really well to somebody like BM is a kind of lyrics sensibility that GI songs are about. You sense that he is creating metaphors that help to articulate how he feels. Like, he’s telling his story. So you can trace a personal narrative in his work.”

³³ A similar figure is present in Bantu speaking South, West and Central Africa, brer rabbit.

The personal narrative is not confined to the lyric. It is in the stance, the performance and the public persona rife with contradictory elements, demons and a sweet voice.

Joe

“The man was the artist. No veil.”

There is power and vulnerability in this projection and understanding.

The second aspect is the trickster’s relationship to the establishment and the community. Analysis of Anansi often places him in a liminal space. Just outside of the community, an area that is feared (De Souza 2003, Marshall 2007). It is productive in Jamaican terms to conceptualise this as the ghetto, where Gregory was born and raised and in which wits and often anti-social behaviour are drawn upon for survival. It marks the terrain of alienation from the larger society and can also be harnessed to witness the sites in which “others” exist in the UK. From this space, in which power relations are laid bare, the motivations, interests and machinations of the players are obvious. An understanding of the psyche of the powerful, of human nature is used to undermine and prevail against them. Again, the favoured weapon is ‘lyricature’ (Dawes 1999), this so for Anansi and for Gregory who is often identified as the alienated lover, citizen and man. As expressed by the following respondents

Peter

“When he does bad boy or one man against the world, when he does that, he does that really well.”

Ken

“Whatever it was, whatever he said it was like you imbibed it, you drank it in, because it’s true... And that proves he was also a metaphor master.”

Nevil

“Tunes about authority and struggle. Yeah, he’s a poor people person. His music is like he’s a spokesman. He speaks for the people that don’t have a voice.”

The liminal position exemplifies the development of personal power confronting and exceeding state sanctioned forms of power.

The third aspect of the Anansi character that I am drawing on is closely related to his intermediary status and is a Caribbean manifestation that is omitted from African interpretations (Marshall 2007). Rather than facilitating social change through acknowledging publicly in a controlled manner dissenting elements, in this evolution Anansi is more destructive.

Anansi was forced to metamorphose from a mythical Asante spider into a representation of the black slave trapped in a social system in which negotiation was an impossibility. In his Jamaican setting, Anansi was breaker rather than tester of the chains. He becomes a symbol of creative chaos and longed for freedom in a tyrannical and coercive order (Marshall 2007: 40).

The destruction is revolutionary, and this is widely recognised in the music.

Ken

“It was steeped in rebellion. What type of rebellion? That is the rebellion that enabled us to have this conversation today.”

Peter

“It’s a call for justice, a cry for peace, a call for some righteous arse kicking for the evil doers of this world, and even better you can dance to it.”

It is the destruction of malign, unjust forces.

Extrapolating aspects of the trickster and harnessing them to aid understanding of the nature and expression of Gregory’s voice is beneficial. It also resonates with his appetite for life, intelligence and lyrical artistry. From poverty and the margins of society, through song he came to occupy a central role in defining the Jamaican, Caribbean and Black diasporan situation and struggle. Charting the evil doers, pariahs and pitfalls in the journey to freedom -political, economic and spiritual – he embodies, as well as lyrically expresses a path.

The post-colonial, post-modern voice is personified by the producer Lee Scratch Perry (Dawes 1999). He worked with Gregory on his early *Extra Classic* album and his influence is identified in formal experimentation, humour and play permeating the lyric and performance. This strand is certainly present in the body of work, listener recollection and interpretation, and the man himself. Personal testimonies of friends and family, recorded interviews and performances indicate a playfulness and sense of humour that attest to his capacity to laugh at himself, celebrity and life in general.³⁴

Padma

“I have various stories about Gregory but invariably they always make me laugh... Very soothing at different points in my life, and quite difficult times of my life. I find him able to understand, somehow get in there and make it sweet, somehow.”

³⁴ See the final interview he gave on daddy Ernie’s YouTube channel as evidence of this.

Opata

“All his tunes that are funny, really playing around with this idea that, you come to my class, you’re the top, that way when he’s talking to women. It sounds like he’s just being macho man but the truth is that he’s begging.”

The plea is complex and encompasses pride and humour.

The lyric and rendition of song is anchored in the use of vernacular language. Whilst he is intelligible in English, the idioms, metaphors, rhythm and layered meanings are located in Jamaica, the Caribbean, Black Briton. To fully understand what is being expressed and explored, one has to be familiar with this sensibility, not least the communication that exists between music and the body (Dawes 1999).

Leonard

“I think people who haven’t listened to reggae from a young age struggle to really get in tune with the voice of reggae. They can get in tune with the music and that part of it they can find palatable and I think they can find the punchline or the chorus part of it palatable. They can grasp that. But not the nature of the voice. I think people really struggle with, if you haven’t grown up with it, with how reggae is vocalised.”

His voice has to be placed in context. As a part of an ensemble musical offering. One that leads and is also supported by a rich textured tradition of sound that signifies and offers much more than can be captured in musical notation or a simple reading of lyrics. Meaning and value are in the performance and as such, apprehended and incorporated through processes of acculturation and learning to listen which is often concealed in repetition and over time.

Listening

How is listening constructed empirically? The following excerpts suggest parameters.

Dermot

“Whenever I listen to Gregory Isaacs’ music, there is no way I can ever be sad or upset.

He always makes me feel mellow and chilled out.”

So, one such boundary comprises listener expectations. The promise of a relaxed state.

Gathering the contributions shared in a listening session, respondents build upon each other’s thoughts.

Ngor

“I agree with you in that Gregory was ours, and I agree with the brother there as well...there was that brotherhood and respect for the elders... And also, with your point as well, with the opposite sex, this was the music that also brought us together.”

Another boundary is therefore unity. It encloses age, sex and community differences.

Offering a non-native English speaker’s opinion

Bartek

“As you can hear, I’m not English, but I think what the reggae music communicate to me is the English word move in both side. Moving like the dancer moving or the movement, like the people’s movement.”

The boundary is not simply musically or lyrically based but suggest progress, unifying identification and action. Taken together, what listening encapsulates and affords is profound. Optimism and enhanced possibilities for the day; feelings of community and

brotherhood; a togetherness that engages sexuality, bodily movement and the movement of a people. This selection is extracted from the listening sessions and marks the beauty of respondents sharing a space in which they are locked into the music they are discussing.

From female perspectives, homing in on what they hear in Gregory, the boundary is expanded.

Ruth

“I would say there’s an honesty and authenticity to everything and when you feel that then everything gets stripped away and that’s what you are left with.”

May

“This is a man that has shown a vulnerability and I think I can relate to him like that.”

Jilly

“Nobody sounds like Gregory.”

The boundary now corrals emotional and moral alignment. What is immediately striking from the above accounts is that the score, levels and other measurable elements of music (Eidsheim 2015) are relegated to their affect and effect on the group or individual listening to them. The terms of listening that are engaged are not simply musical. The empirical construction of listening is much closer to that offered by Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015)

Indeed the experience of sound is a triangulation of events wherein physical impulses (sonic vibrations) our bodies encultured capacities to receive these vibrations and how we have been taught to understand them are at constant play and subject to negotiation (p116).

What we hear, what listening means is contingent upon perceptual systems which are attuned culturally and physically and are as emotional as any encounter with another person. Feeling is an integral component of thinking and being (Barker 2015). Listening as an act of understanding, of making sense of, requires combination and synthesis, coordination of all the senses to grasp and interpret reality.

As outlined in Jean Luc Nancy's (2007) classic text on listening, auditory attention provides depth and amplitude and thus approaches understanding in an experiential and intimate way. Many factors are brought into play such as accent, language, tone, timbre and vibration as aspects of sound that are in excess of simple explorations of meaning but speak to bodily and group ways of knowing and knowledge production. Through this manner of detailed analysis, the claim for this music as a restorative force emerges. It relates to weaponizing language and weaving it into a world of belonging where the type of language used embraces and celebrates those most often ignored in power displays.

Language

Related to listening; particularly to song is recognition of and familiarity with the practice and ideology of the lexicon it is framed by and delivered through. Language in this sense straddles both voice and listening, utterances and apprehension of the same. With English the official language of Jamaica, the vernacular, known as Patwa or Jamaican has long carried stigma through its association with the uneducated and its conceptualisation as a restricted code (Farquharson 2016). This disparaging evaluation has and is changing, and reggae music is credited with playing a role in this global shift (Gerfer 2018) through international music scenes and artists. In this community, adoption of Patwa for performance

and interview confers status and is respected as an expression of solidarity with the music and originating culture.

For listeners, the language of communication that Gregory embodies performs similar functions and is significant in several ways. For first generation British born Black people from Jamaican and wider diasporan origin, it provides a direct link to their parent's homeland, forms of expression, terrain, and offers a contemporary assessment of the social, political and economic landscape. This is invaluable in bridging the generation and location gaps. As eloquently described by the following respondents

Edwin

“At that time I hadn't visited Jamaica but I could hear it, smell it, see it, see the people walking, see the people singing you know, through the music of artists like Gregory.”

Jilly

“The Rasta guys they always have this sort of way of seeing the world in terms of what it really is. And I think that he was basically like a reporter from the ghetto telling what's going on and so on.”

The naming of the imaginative and philosophical realms incorporates individual, group and community prophecies and potential. The language used also provides a unifying and signifying link for the Caribbean and larger Black community in the UK. This is not because it is immediately identifiable as one's mother tongue, though structures and idioms may in fact be similar (Farquharson 2016) but relates to a political embrace in which it models belonging.

Emmanuel

“The music enables, the music reminds me that there are spaces and places where I am normal, and not absurd. De Bois talks about the existential absurdity of being Black in spaces crafted for white people and when I listen to reggae it takes me out of that absurdity into a normal space where everything is, ahm, like me, everything is Black, African. And therefore, I feel normal.”

It both models and affords a space that fits.

Alongside normalisation of descriptors, perspectives and experience, the language of reggae is also increasingly important as a communicative style for young, urban, trendy groups. Initially promoted through proximity with Black populations, it is now co-opted into the official language and used by members of the establishment (Cooper 2012, Gerfer 2018). Widespread exposure to this language and the intellectual alternatives it provides offer symbolic, ideological and practical spaces in which change can be creatively engaged. These sites are analysed in the following chapters, however, it is important to note the possibility that exists within the language itself to resist and abandon racist categories and the offer of legitimisation to emerging structures that contest knowledge as currently constructed and internalised (Henry 2006, Curry 2017).

This is most audible in the use of actively resistant, creative language attributed to Rastafarians and their influence on reggae. Such is the debt, that reggae is considered to be the main vehicle for disseminating Rastafarian ideology and theology (Murrell 1998). This exceptionally creative response gathered and extended folk knowledge, symbolically confronting and replacing the dominant narrative. The optimism of this movement is captured in the following.

Mathew

“I would say that at its best, his music is a music which makes the utopia of Rastafari livity, of Ethiopianist livity, makes that very vividly apparent. It’s powerful, it makes you feel it, it makes you feel like you know it. It reinforces things.”

Reinforcement, repetition and circulating emotions are age-old, cross-cultural learning tools.

The importance of Rasta speech patterns and parlance undergirding reggae music is in the philosophy it conveys and the breadth and distance it travels (Chevannes 1998). Two such routes are into the middle classes of Jamaica and the diaspora (Gilroy 2010, Cooper 2012). The resulting examples include the establishment of the International Reggae Studies Centre at the University of the West Indies and studies such as this assessing the value and influence of the music. The penetration of this language and its opposition to and distance from anti-Black systems of power (Curry 2017) presents an opportunity to suture intellectual and non-intellectual signifying systems so that life as it is lived can begin to be conceptualised and tools forged to work with this reality. This issue is returned to and elucidated in relation to love and identity in the following chapters.

Embodiment - dance

Returning to the musical mix in which language is one element, embodiment is similarly used to describe the types of listening; active, physical, a whole-body response that occur within reggae. It is a way to account for the immersive mode of comprehension and orientation, apprehending external stimuli at the same time as it is an approach to the self and it centres on the melodic, rhythmic and vocal practice. The following discussion taken from a listening session articulate the bodily impact and affect of these attributes.

Susan

“I think anyone could identify with that particular song. I mean for me, I didn’t know the song and I immediately felt enveloped by the rhythm, it just hit the body straight away. I think the dance rhythms are so compelling and so the message I think is relevant for anyone.”

Oliver

“I would say that I could identify with the sound of the music, even without the words. The rhythmic pattern of the bass line, or just you know, the analogue sound of the instruments and the voice is something I could identify with, even without knowing anything about the performer or words.”

Taken together, the inherent danceability is expressed.

Kevin

“I was compelled to dance. It was like the bass acting like a magnet on my feet.”

The compulsion of the sound and the fact that this is essentially a dance music mean physical engagement with it can be usefully conceptualised as a type of listening.

The holding and expression of the music declare culturally specific forms of knowledge, understanding and skill. This mode of apprehension and comprehension is part of the realisation of value and rejection of an external gaze steeped in Eurocentric colonial dynamics that objectify (Mann 2015). Meaning is made and manifest through dance.

Nathan

“It’s a call to action in a different way.”

Dawn

“It’s history as well as the dancing.”

The respondents above speak to the meaning they assert during physical immersion in the music. The former speaks to a primarily sensual reaction, the latter a political one. Both embrace emotion and implicate restorative agency. This is obvious in the sensual and sexual love experience carried in the music. It is worth noting how dance is engaged as bodily understanding.

The following respondent in confirming the link between the political and the erotic notes

Carmel

“He’s huge in Brazil, huge, huge, huge. In terms of how they dance to reggae music, all kinds of reggae music, it’s very erotic. I think it captures it very well in places like Brazil where a lot of the people probably don’t understand the lyrics because a lot of them don’t speak English, but they get something about the music and about the erotic nature of the music.”

Personifying and performing the meaning and nature of the music through dance is acknowledged as an essential aspect of the reggae offer and one that travels.

Fay

“You can be dancing and having fun, but also dealing with very serious issues in the music. So the music even as you’re engaged in the body, the pleasures of the body, physical dance; your mind is also engaged.”

It is an aspect that suggests active and embodied learning.

The unity of music and dance accessed across social groups and age ranges, is a Caribbean feature that respondents raise repeatedly and that is often traced to African ancestry where this is combined with religion (Savishinsky 1998, Brown 2010). This fusion demands co-creative participation and exemplifies musicking as a value realising a meaning making endeavour. Meaning is made in the decision to dance and the form the dance takes. Disc jockeys (DJs) in their interviews speak to recognising and appreciating the success or failure of their selection of tracks through the movement and stance of the bodies in the space they are curating. Interestingly they particularly note and explain cultural influences, maintaining that these set the broad parameters for just how immersed, bodily and intellectually, individuals become. They state unequivocally that Africans, Caribbeans, Black Britons and the Japanese, for example, are acculturated to profound listening and are trained and poised to seek meaning from this form of attention and give bodily expression to it. It is an interesting addition to the often stated ubiquity of music in Black culture. Speaking of Gregory, the following DJ says of the music.

Karen

“There’s a freedom in it where you can just kind of fill in the gaps yourself. Sometimes you can just let it wash over you before you latch onto it.”

Freedom, personal integrity and congruence confer the search and resolution of meaning most satisfactory.

The belief that a ritual cleansing is possible in listening, is a common refrain throughout this study. The importance of movement in transmuted pain is also recognised. Though the specific nature of the pain is omitted, in the following excerpt the communal embodiment is potent.

Chris

“We feel the pain, swaying with it. It’s a dance of connection. Energy piercing through every single person. Synergy. The same vibe.”

Naming the connectivity facilitated by the music is necessary and can be correlated with explanations offered by theories of listening that state the importance of pitch and the brains’ role in reproducing this (Levitin 2006). The notion of bodies gathered in a space (or individually tuned in over radio waves) with neurons firing in synchronicity is powerful. However, this is amplified if the entire body, cultures and experiences are factored in. As elegantly expressed by the following respondent.

Desmond

“Identifying with reggae was a badge of Blackness in London... There was Black performance, but you never saw a Black audience until reggae.”

This is a truth, if not the truth! Early predominantly Black audiences in London are associated with reggae and highlife and it difficult to time stamp the first. However as noted by a listener,

Humphrey

“There is cross fertilisation of music from peoples of African descent. Instruments, rhythms, use of horns, electric instruments came back from the Americas to West Africa. There is communality with mento, ska. Within this crossover highlife evolved.”

Communality and crossover in music and listeners can be assumed.

The importance of a gathering of this nature is implicitly and explicitly stated in many interviews. The point is made repeatedly in recollections of a Gregory concert held at The Venue in Victoria in 1982. Our respondent continues,

Desmond

“The one I remember most because of the crowd, no trouble just the crowd, was when Gregory was on there. It was a total roadblock. No trouble at all, one of the easiest crowds we’ve had to deal with but it was just so big it shut the road... I had seen Black Uhuru on there, Burning Spear, James Brown, all these acts and they’d been crowded but nothing like this.”

The affirmation explicit in being a member of this crowd is evidenced by the way it is recalled. Straying from bodily movement associated with dance we are led to a mobilisation of the people, a movement of the people into a central London, public space en masse. Drawn here by the sounds of affiliation, by desire, cultural politics made audible and material. Alignment and identification with Gregory through his sound and body, his embodied sound is an emotional work of labour as explored by Sara Ahmed (2014). It is a meaningful investment in social norms.

How we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective, which paradoxically takes shape only as an effect of such alignments. It is through and how others impress upon us that the skin of the collective begins to take shape (p45).

The shape is constructed in voice and listening, it collects the feelings and attitudes of many.

A physical rejection of the dominant narrative that would inscribe the Black body in negative, disparaging ways is undermined. It is decentred and overturned by and for the artist, by and for the crowd. Our respondent goes further,

Desmond

“When you went to the reggae dances there was the best-looking girls. These hippy girls just looked a mess you know.”

This humorous response can be understood in this vein, as a moving towards one another and striving for community (Shank 2011). It can also be linked to Gregory’s meticulous dress. It expresses a practical solidarity which is experiential with political agency enfolded in the listeners’ embrace.

Embodiment - singing

An additional form of embodiment is singing. It is the principal form in which antiphony is understood. Encouraging and enticing audience participation is a core aspect of Gregory’s performance style and is mentioned by listeners in two essential ways. The first of these is singing along during live performances and also to recorded tracks at events. As a respondent explains

Sonia

“We were doing Karaoke before that word. When it came to people like Gregory and Dennis and John Holt, we were singing the lyrics before Karaoke even had a term.... It just unites you, everybody knew the music, everybody knew the lyric.”

Though this response is difficult to separate from voice and can also be conceptualised in this way, it is included here as a means of recognising and encapsulating listener contributions to

an event. The capacity to sing the entire lyric of a song draws attention to the accessibility of the music and the emotional investment in it. It charts a familiarity that comes from hearing songs repeatedly, rather than having access to written form. This knowledge is firmly located within a wider societal and cultural context. Lyrics are remembered and used as anthems when the prose is poignant and the context in which they emerge or are heard, is relevant.

The following excerpt refers to the song *The Border*, and listeners singing it.

Mamako

“It exemplifies Gregory’s artistry. Very understated, his voice, the lyrics you know, it’s hopeful.... I don’t think we can underestimate the power of how that music helped us to survive. To move on.... The power of the music to convey what was needed, that hope about overcoming, yeah it was all in the music.”

As well as singing as a register of appreciation, listeners also demonstrate an understanding of the emotional dexterity of the lyric and rendition. In a listening session discussion, they note the longing carried in the voice, the relevance and applicability of the lyrical theme of home to those who feel displaced and unwelcome, the universality of the human need to belong and the transcendent and transporting capacity of the music. They therefore acknowledge how it can provide detachment for those who need to imagine the reality of those currently and historically in this situation and paradoxically, attachment and reflection for those intimately connected and able to embrace this reality. This interpretation is held in their singing along.

The second approach to singing that listeners raise, interestingly is aligned with both public and private spaces. It is premised upon the distinct vocality of Gregory and his capacity to draw individuals in.

Nevil

“If you know his music, that you’re listening to, you don’t get to listen to it. Cos you end up singing. Do you see what I’m saying? You can’t listen to it. You end up singing it. So you end up basically mimicking him. Because he’s got that unique style of singing, in order to sing it you have to sing it his way, or you can’t sing it.”

Listener participation can be juxtaposed with that of other artists who largely refrain from copying his vocal style (see the section on voice). I think it denotes the freedom and labour of listening. The imprint of the personal in the collective story. The respondent makes the further point that this immersion reflects the difference between simply listening and absorbing oneself in the music. It is a perspective echoed by many and it suggests a degree of self-abandon alongside the unity of subject and object (Zuckerandl 2008).

The final point that frames listening for my respondents comes from a specific sub-group; DJs who construct and curate listening sessions for others. Interviews with DJs from radio, sound systems and more occasional hosts provide a precise and stimulating assessment of what it is that they as a group seek to curate. It can be summed up as a listening experience that draws people in and welcomes them. That satisfies their need to dance, hearing and bearing the music bodily. That engages their audience intellectually and poetically through lyrics and specific arrangements that expand the experience in nuanced and educative ways. This is an integral part of nurturing the love they feel for the music and medium. However, using a variety of examples, they speak to listener agency, they attest to the fact of musicking.

The event, the value and meaning it holds belongs to all who participate and is influenced in this wide form.

An obvious but no less powerful aspect of this is that DJs are led by the mood and feel of the crowd as well as leading the crowd and taking them in new directions.

Mamako

“Always anchored within a community development, whatever the word is, concept. It’s about having good instincts. You know we would be in a typical blues party playing mostly reggae, dropping in some rare groove and some soul and then we would drop in an African track, which is like a love track. It would drop right! People would ask for the name of the track.”

The nuance, culture and feel of a group of listeners is a force that DJs respond to, investigate prior to playing a session and flow with. This is even so within a radio programme where there is more freedom as the audience is to some extent imagined, though ground in the known culture and ethos of the radio station, programme and DJ. Participants in a session also request tracks from wider genres and populations than imagined. In this way diaspora as a theoretical construct and lived reality becomes a linking concept for all, a dialogue providing a future rather than a search for roots.

Voice and listening enjoined

The reciprocal and shared nature of both voice and listening lay bare the co-construction of spaces of excellence, places of succour. Here aspiration, inspiration and education are enjoined within the guise and remit of enjoyment. The resulting exploration is

emotional and meaningful. It plays a role in forging community and nationhood, not least due in part to its imaginary and utopian capacity. This is held in the synchronicity of the voice, expressing beautifully pertinent, poetic lyrics in a language whose existence speaks resistance. What the voice can capture and convey, archetypically and emotionally is vast. When this is combined with music it expands. Many routes into the sound are articulated, whilst listeners acknowledge that the component parts cannot really be separated.

Desmond

“I think you can’t separate lyrics, language, and his voice because with all those great singers like that, I mean truly great singers, it was beyond lyrics... the best singers will just drift off into sort of noises... I think Gregory Isaacs made great noises, you know. His groans... Also, I think there was a point at which when Gregory was recording with Sly and Robbie, that they between them moved reggae on.”

Other listeners point to his work with the Roots Radics band and Steely and Cleve as evidence of his affiliations with the best rhythm sections.

If we take such statements at face value, then his voice is of significance as a foundational element and driver of the reggae offer. This is true musically and also in his encapsulation of, and journey through the archetypal voices outlined. His journey is long (continuing after his physical death), traversing subgenres and continents. For these reasons and in recognition of his personal lyricism, I consider that he dwells most comfortably in the trickster, Davidian psalmist mould. This accounts for his emphasis on justice and love as rebellious demands and acknowledges his mastery in creating metaphors to articulate his feelings and present a personal narrative that runs through his work. Despite being most fully located in this space, he expresses elements associated with each of the archetypes as the

possibilities contained in his music confirm. As well as framing analysis of the voice, the archetypal constructs are also relevant to listeners in that they provide an ease and familiarity in approaching the music. Their understanding of the cultural referents and their attunement to the deep, embodied listening in which they are embedded aid recognition and facilitate use.

The act of listening, including dancing and singing are critical to how value is apprehended. It is a creative and participatory form of engagement. Open and sufficiently flexible to include transformed and transcendent states, the possibilities range from grounding in present realities to utopian flight. The states are present in and accessible through metaphors and ritual and reliant upon co-creation in the spaces the music affords. Personal and political agency is realised, activated within this contemplative break (Moten 2003, Frith 1996). Why this is so concerns the unity of subject and object, the forms in which music resounds and reverberates within the human body and without. There is no other form of attributing value than listener endorsement and accolade. These are present in forms as nuanced and varied as the listeners themselves. The layers that are heard, alongside traditional musical components such as melody, lyric, rhythm, emotion and so forth, include a body and a character (Frith 2008).

The Man

It is productive to devote some attention to the broad parameters of musical communication through considering what the body of work we are analysing brings into being, what it enacts. This necessitates stepping back from the attributes of the sound and broadening this to include the man himself. Building on the profile offered in the

introduction, this interpretation is gathered from what listeners hear and feel they know about Gregory professionally and personally. In general terms it expresses a widespread acknowledgement of the artist as a memorialiser, historically, in our personal lives and as a community (of listeners') icon that stands for or expresses principles we concur with. In this dynamic, reciprocal relationship the listening public's holding of the artist and their response to the frailty and shortcomings that are exposed are an important aspect of what is categorised by many as the universal human experience.

Within this rubric, failure and how it is managed can become part of the narrative of physical and spiritual stamina and what one can expect walking through the world. In Gregory, his misdemeanours relate to crimes and periods of incarceration, his vulnerability to his drug addiction. The proximity of the Black population in the UK to criminalisation through racist policing and a racist criminal justice system (Lammy 2017, White 2020), historically means that this label can be read in alternative as well as neo-liberal establishment terms. For Jamaicans, those of lower socio-economic status, Rastafarian beliefs and popular music musicians (who often encompass the two former categories) incarceration and criminalisation has been a part of the subordination entrenched in state power through its various iterations (Mann 2015). The recognition that systems of power are also systems of representation and knowledge (Iton 2013) are carried in the sound. They are confronted, deconstructed and reconstructed (Murrell 1998). This excess, or extra information carried in the voice, experienced and realised in the act of listening is alluring and meaningful and frames experience. The following excerpt explores this.

Leonard

“It’s that lack of divorce, the lack of divorce between the artist and the audience that made reggae so special. Gangsters and artists, promoters, money men, whatever. There wasn’t this massive hierarchy and they were talking about their work and about issues, it just felt really real life and present. That’s prevalent in their music and that’s prevalent in their lifestyle.”

The closeness expressed in the above quote ultimately culminates in two main responses.

Hazel

“For me I blank that bit out. Bizarrely, because you know the music is still his strength, it’s the healing, it’s the vessel he’s using.”

Or a variation on this.

Jilly

“He wouldn’t have had the emotional pain without those experiences. So that maketh the man, that’s what we’re getting first hand experience of because we haven’t lived that life. For me it doesn’t take away anything.”

Empathy and understanding, stemming from ignoring that aspect of Gregory or embracing it represents a strong strand of listener reaction. Another is total forgiveness.

Padma

“It makes you feel for that person. But also it makes sense because that person isn’t taken out of social context. And the reality, the political reality, the economic harsh reality is of incarceration, drug addiction because of the harsh stark choices and

realities. So I think it doesn't take it away for me. I find it very very sad. I find it very very moving."

Gregory included his prison spells in his pantheon of songs. He sung about the perils of drug abuse and addiction and addressed these issues in interview.

Some listeners do not engage with the music he made in the later stages of his life considering it inferior and painful to listen to. The frailty and thinness of his voice carried on a digital rhythm compounds the distance from the quality associated with the prime sound.

Mark

"The voice was so amazing, that anything less than that voice was always going to be difficult for fans to come to terms with. And that was the problem I, as a die hard fan had."

Summarizing the overall feeling emanating from listeners towards Gregory, it is one of love, adoration and sorrow. A sorrow stemming from the proximity of death, addiction and disaster to Black lives, famous and ordinary. It is understood as a part of the story but not the definitive aspect. It is also experienced as part of his offer.

Ken

"He has actually left that record for us. Part of his legacy is this is me. This is what happened to me. Watch out! So there was always a message in it."

It is with this rich, nuanced legacy in mind that the following chapter analyses what his music brings into being under the headline of love.

Chapter Six

Better Plant Some Loving

Better plant some loving, let it grow and grow, tell you yeah,

Better plant some loving, let it grow and grow and grow.

Cos if you do wrong my friend, your harvest will be woe

Better plant some loving, let it grow and grow and grow (C. Hines 1985)³⁵.

Introducing Love

We have gathered and analysed respondent accounts of what comprises the voice and the role of listening in musical communication. We now turn our attention to other factors unearthed in this research project. This chapter identifies a key value in Gregory's music as the creation of a loving space. Drawing on the work of Lisa Palmer (2010), I use and extend her thesis of "loving Blackness" (p 1) to gather the types and aspects of love that are recounted by my respondents. Uniting the concepts of loving Blackness with that of a transnational space, the term loving space is used to delineate the area carved, the space sound assumes, and to authenticate what listeners find and contribute to the musical encounter in its various forms. It is a loving space that provides for solidarity across difference, minimising that which would divide. Attending instead to that which is possible,

³⁵ The song was written by C. Hines from the Gussie Clarke, Music Works Studio.

that which is enacted in the musical space. This includes unifying soul and reggae lovers, Caribbean and African immigrants to the UK alongside providing an entry point for the indigenous population; fostering listening across generations, discreet genres and styles within the reggae offer itself. It does this within the creation of a seductive (in the widest sense) mood. Love in this context embraces romance, gifting a space in which sexuality is released from the gaze and bonds of a racist society for whom notions of beauty, loving desire and pleasure as an aspect of spiritual and physical growth are routinely excluded from configuration in Black lives. It encompasses transformative socio-political understanding and activism towards community renewal and sustenance, an act of resistance.

To declare that a key value realised in Gregory's music is the co-creation of and immersion in a loving space may seem to be stating the obvious. Much of popular (and elite) music's appeal also draws on love in its many manifestations. However, the types and instances recounted by respondents, that I have grouped together here, are all encompassing. Love is underpinned by ideals of equality and spiritual sustenance and growth. It is expressed as an essential component of life itself, one that is often denied and restricted in the wider society. Described by many respondents as a palpable energy present in the listening space and running through the memories of the music, it is also manifest in the research space. I received many follow up emails after interview recounting how enjoyable the process had been and that it invariably led to a further session of rooting through personal music collections to satiate the need for Gregory. The sustenance and rejuvenating aspects of this space are both clearly articulated in interview (group and individual) as well as acted upon and embodied.

Solidarity across difference

A strong theme emerging from the data is that of promoting unity across difference. This may not immediately resound as an obvious aspect of love. However, the context in which it is raised by respondents and their perception of the value of forging and facilitating unity and solidarity, make it so. It is also in contradiction to popular music marketing strategies and aspects of identity relating to choice that would divide. It stands in stark contrast to narratives in the public domain that suggest and promote sex, race, ethnic and class divides in relation to the appeal of the music and its listening base. The data comprising this theme is often expressed as a response to an early exploratory question, “what is your Gregory story?”³⁶ It commonly describes the initial moment of being brought into the fold of appreciating and listening to Gregory’s music. This is not exclusively so as the theme is also present in questions on the value of this music. Its centrality and frequency speak to the range of possibilities identified and understood as integral to this experience.

The following respondent speaks to the moment of understanding and experiencing the allure, providing insight into how a night can be changed by the drop of a stylus on vinyl and the reaction of the crowd.

Ann

“I grew up in a house of reggae. So, I grew up with reggae, but I wasn’t a lover of reggae. I was a young soul rebel. I was the fluffy jumpers and the plastic sandals, type. Back in the day we used to go on these coach trips. So we went to Bristol and

³⁶ See appendix 2 for examples of questionnaires. This question grew out of the fact that when sharing information on the study, an overwhelming response from interviewees was to recount an incident which exemplified their individual relationship to Gregory, whether good or bad. This was incorporated into the questionnaire.

they were playing all kinds of music in this club and it really wasn't, it wasn't a good night. We'd gone all of that way, we'd payed our money, my hair which was pressed was sweating out and getting more and more full, and the music wasn't that great. And then the DJ played, *If You Want to be My Number 1*. And all of a sudden it became a good night and the mood completely changed."

This response is interesting in two important ways. It describes the feeling of one who is familiar with reggae but has chosen not to identify with it personally until this point. Recounted in a listening session, it sets the scene visually for the stylistic preferences affiliated with musical choice in order to cement the same. It is a look and choice that other respondents recognise. It also speaks to the role of the disc jockey (DJ) in curating a listening space and alludes to the influence of the crowd. Implicit in this story is the idea that the DJ can sense the crowd's disappointment and knows how to loosen the vibe.

The historic example is offered alongside a contemporary one.

Karim

"A quite recent story but I used to DJ at a club playing Bhangra, R&B, hip hop but we'd always use *Rumours* and the bass from *Rumours* to just add another dimension to the song and it would just unite the room."

The longevity of Gregory alongside the changing role of the DJ who now samples selections of soundtracks and merges them together, often with new sounds creating an original mix, is addressed within this response. It speaks to the continuing relevance of aspects of the musical offer such as the bass line. It is pertinent in a session that is not playing reggae. It is

significant to a crowd that may or may not be aware that reggae is included in the mix but respond bodily to it.

Continuing the theme of Gregory's relevance and ability to unite across genres such as rhythm and blues, bhangra and hip-hop, as well as across different generations, the following example relates to spaces created outside of a dance.

Stanley

"Gregory Isaacs was for me, one of those artists that could link my parents, or my parent's generation with my generation. So in the late 70's, mid 70s I was getting into reggae music and I could listen to Gregory and my parents would listen to Gregory as well, you know. It was one of those intergenerational artists that really my parents did like."

Intergenerational listening, the sharing of musical taste is an important aspect of this experience.

The three preceding examples offer some insight into the forms of difference that are addressed and minimised in the musical space I identify as loving. Little is said about the mechanisms, musical or otherwise that are responsible for, or influence this outcome. Interrogating the data and returning to it from a range of angles, three aspects of the theoretical framework resonate with listener experience. The first of these is listening as an attentive, active form, one in which respect is brought and understanding sought. This open and seeking mode is attuned to learning, as it anticipates it. As expressed by one respondent,

Rajesh

“You know, I think this is gonna sound odd, but respect is a big part. It’s an understanding that if you go down to the bare bones of it, the culture that the music’s coming from is a very profound, very defined Jamaican culture of many different parts. But I’m not an original part of that, I’ve come to it. So a large part is respect, a large part is a sense of trying to understand, even at the age of 43 and listening to it all my life, trying to understand just a part of the experience of these people.”

Explicit in this account is the openness to another, the willingness to enlarge one’s perspective.

The type of listening that is described here is not commonly associated with the excess of reggae music with its heavy bass lines and dance emphasis. Yet it clearly exists and is articulated in broad culturally representational terms that seek to understand the people in part through the music. He continues, expanding the personal appeal to a more general penetration and appreciation.

Rajesh

“Even though we are talking about it in that sense, it’s not a sociological experience, it’s not a scientific experience. It’s essentially the heartbeat of an island and a group of people that transcended their origins and it’s taken over pretty much the world to a point where the biggest growth market for reggae music being bought in the UK are Europe and Japan, the far east....And just understanding it, it’s a beat, it’s a voice, it’s the expression of a group of people who took oppression and poverty and this tiny little island created this industry against all the odds that’s totally shaped and changed half of the music we hear on the radio. So the understanding, the respect and more than anything just the fact that there’s a love there.”

The love that is identified is there for the people as well as the music. It is applied in recognition of the journey both have taken and what has been achieved. The listening space is manifestly loving.

The second aspect is affect. A slippery concept, it has attracted criticism from many fields³⁷ yet remains potent as it is often the form in which Gregory's impact is described by listeners. Introduced in chapter four, elaborated upon in chapter five, it is expanded here. This is exemplified by our respondent who explains how the initial rush is repeated and accommodated.

Rajesh

“I think you can't separate just the feel of the beat. And that it's like an addiction, people either get it or they don't. And if you get reggae, you get addicted to it. Because it's something that you never- that initial feeling of hearing that beat for the first time and loving it – you don't forget it. Cos, in my world there are two types of people, people that get reggae and everybody else.”

The bodily call to attention that is alluded to as an involuntary mode invokes power. A power evident in the initiated, which unites.

The third aspect is the reggae aesthetic (Dawes 1999), identified as the definitive post-colonial thrust shaping creativity. Fundamentally it is conceptualised as a way of perceiving the world that is premised upon and emerges from conflicts in the social order. This is a key element in its travelling principle. This is not confined solely to the domain of reggae music but extends to other cultural fields such as literature. Its influence and resonance are known.

³⁷ See chapter four for details of this.

It promotes a particular political, social and cultural consciousness, a connection both spiritual and philosophical. One that resists Eurocentric ideals and elitist constructions of knowledge and ways of knowing, life and ways of living.

Taken together, the direction outlined so far suggest an opening towards meaning. One that is apprehended intellectually, emotionally and bodily. Importantly, the body can be an individual human body, or a social body. A group, as outlined in the first two examples, become as an interface handling and organising relations between themselves, the sound and the environment. The aesthetic principles undergirding this experience provides a structure in ensemble form that sounds out belonging, even if only for the duration of the track. These “thick descriptions” (Eidsheim 2015) of the musical encounter are necessary to capture and include those features which are not present in musical notation, nor easily expressed in the language of culture. Yet they remain central to the event, its meaning and memory. There is a similar difficulty in accounting for the space that sound assumes both within and around the human body. I will return to this later in the chapter.

Remaining with the theme of building solidarity across difference as evidenced by listeners, the following extracts express further dimensions of this capacity.

Samuel

“I’m going back many years ago, I cannot really remember the year, but it was a very warm sunny day. My very young family, I had to think of somewhere to take them. And I heard of this open air concert at Clapham Common and I took them there. It was really to give them some open space. Really not to listen to reggae because I was brought up in the soul era. The calypso era coming from distant Caribbean. And we went right to the back of the crowd. It was a huge crowd and I went to the back

because I didn't want to disturb nobody and then that voice came on, Gregory Isaacs. And I really fall, I mean it changed, I wasn't there for a concert, I was there for open air and it really meant so much to me... I didn't even see who he was, I just heard the voice. And that was it."

Recounted by a Trinidadian respondent this entry adds further elements to the mixture. The divide here is twofold. Musical in terms of soul and calypso, a specific musical tradition most highly elaborated in Trinidad. It also speaks to the lure of the voice, the capacity of Gregory's voice to draw people in. This is developed further.

Ngor

"I'm from West Africa, so I was born there, came here when I was nine. In a strange, strange land. A strange land from whence I came. So I was mixing in different fields, my school was mainly white, but where I grew up in the estate it was mainly black people and mainly Jamaicans. So I'm from Africa, trying to find my way now within this white school and this society I've come in. The Jamaican community is where I got immersed into. So our identity and our belonging was there together, so it didn't matter where we're from, we were. This music, this reggae music gelled us together in that way. And Gregory was one of them. And just to take that point further, years and years later when I have gone back home and after a long time I met one of my class mates and, I left when I was nine as I say so, I haven't seen him since I've left. And when we're there talking about music, it's new years day we're playing music, they're playing Gregory too. I'm saying what!"

The beauty of these examples speaks to forging unity across African and Caribbean populations in the UK and on the continent of Africa. Gregory providing musical sustenance and points of reference and experience that open us to each other.

The influence of black Atlantic cultures (Gilroy 1993) not just seeding music production but sharing the experience of the full-grown product is evident. These examples also introduce an element of his unique practice, his voice. The availability of Gregory's music in West Africa can be correlated to the commercial activity of record companies such as Island, that had outlets there. However, the inclusion of the voice personalise the encounter and indicate choice. The aural hook as a way in. It is a way in that includes recognition of similarity. In addition to the aspects addressed in chapter five, the emotional capacity of his voice is a highly valued and much acknowledged aspect of his genius and performance which the following respondent attests to.

Susan

"I think Gregory's voice has a real yearning quality about it. That regardless actually of what he's maybe even singing about. That yearning is just great for reaching into all kinds of emotions, I think... I started listening to reggae in the freezing cold of Scotland in the 1970s and do you know it provided a space for me to become more informed and educated."

The yearning heard in the voice is often balanced with the detached performance stance and tempo. Its indication here is in its wide emotional recognition.

In further support of his vocal skill as a pull for white, UK populations, a respondent explains.

Nathan

“My way in was a much more predictable one for a white guy. It was when he signed on to Island and I still associate his voice with the cool ruler and the softer reggae stuff. So I’ve only become more aware of his conscious lyrics in more recent years.”

This respondent interestingly indexes the body of work produced for a large British record label as the platform through which he was introduced to Gregory, making the point that this showcases a particular strand of his repertoire. It is a part of a much larger debate within reggae about the demise of a more overtly politically conscious and Rastafarian inspired spiritual strand of the music (see chapter two). The ability to encompass the two is often cited as a key to Gregory’s success, unique contribution and capacity to appeal to both male and female audiences. It also brings the lyrical content of his musical tracks to the fore.

Leroy

“Listening to his music, realising how effortless it was for him to jump between genres. Because at first, that last record that you played, that was a social comment record. And it was like an anthem at the time. And then effortlessly he moved on to another say genre which was more the lovers genre and that was also effortless.”

The ease identified with moving between love and social comment suggest they may be closer in reality than currently conceptualised.

The preceding excerpts from the data highlight the role Gregory’s music has played in upholding community across island, ethnic divides and subgenres within reggae through minimizing difference. Whilst each example represents only a thought in the mind of a listener, taken together they begin to build a story of the value attributed to these musical

experiences. The voice as an aesthetic product as well as a vehicle for cultural and political conversations is recognised by listeners. Their relationship to the form and the message they hear suggests a complex and interactive scene. There is a sense of words, pitches, emotions and being connecting in the voice, and through the dynamic relationship between artist and listener challenging and constructing community.

The properties of voice alluded to by listeners are those that are often neglected, yet in the sound space, are inherently meaningful. Meaning shared amongst listeners, in general and specific ways. The listening sessions facilitate and record a joint construction of meaning and value around songs and how they are experienced. This is both initially on first hearing and subsequently through reflection and continued engagement. This is true of individual interviews as well but is recounted in a manner that often excludes the interaction that sharpens and develops such perceptions. This layered understanding combining memory, personal and group experience as well as the current discussion, sustains thoughtful and penetrating observations that build upon and extend the musings of each individual creating a group sense that encompasses but is more than its constituent parts.

The sense of solidarity being analysed here is also noteworthy in relation to the tribal affiliations commonly ascribed, though contested (Hope 2009), to popular music taste. Affiliations that reduce the music by attending to chosen aspects only. This is partially accounted for in assignation of sub genres and the breakdown of the constituent parts of the musical encounter. The music comprising bass line, guitar riffs, keyboard melody, drum beat and so forth. The voice personifying language choice, phrasing, grain and referencing the body through which the sound is processed and omitted. The stance, attitude, personality and emotions of Gregory as comprehended and complimented by the listeners and the

soundscape through which it is all experienced are also included. The depth and breadth of the offer in its expansion provides an entry point for many. It speaks to the longevity and influence of Gregory and reggae to the global popular music scene.

Loving

The traditional version of love associated with popular music is sexual love and desire. This forms a pivotal tenet of the value ascribed to Gregory and his music. It is most often articulated as a language for love, a space and the soundtrack to emerging and sustaining sexuality. It encompasses both the creation of a seductive mood that is experienced as tight and personal even in a crowd, and an approach or stance personified by Gregory as a role model that provides options for behaviour in love.

In her thesis, Lisa Palmer (2010) makes the critical observation that the public spaces that host reggae music are one of the first (and remain rare) in which the concept of love is harnessed to and integrated into the Black British experience. The public construction of Black sexuality and sensuality is riven through with racist tropes developed in the era of chattel slavery and refined through empire and colonialism. The denial of a wholesome sexuality is part of the dehumanisation and 'othering' that supports and justifies continuing discrimination. To centre Black people as obviously and inherently capable of giving and receiving love, expressing this poetically, musically and through dance in public and private spaces was, and to some extent remains revolutionary in the UK.

The following example is typical of an often-recited memory strand.

Mary

“I can remember being a young child, sneaking down the stairs at family get togethers and watching the adults doing slow dances together and thinking, oh my gosh this is what this music does for you and the joy in listening to that music.”

Experienced in childhood in the home environment, the scene is set.

It is this generation that is part of establishing and conducting these loving encounters in the public sphere. This is expressed by the following respondent.

Minerva

“I was thinking, actually he’s the soundtrack to the start of all of our interactions, when I was a teenager with the opposite sex. When you went to Cubies, and Norick and when you was rubbing off wallpaper, and a wind down, it was Gregory. That was where it started, and although I was a bit of a soul head, I was a big clubbie.”

The notion of a soundtrack for love, again may seem unremarkable and a familiar aspect of the drive and appeal of popular music. This offering is different, and the difference is ground in the reggae aesthetic it extolls and upon which it is built. As succinctly asserted,

Opata

“The concept of the reggae aesthetic is not something that exists outside and then is brought to impose on reggae. It is something that reggae tells you it is.... It’s supposed to be popular and engaged with all the trappings of popular music. But it is also at the same time deeply religious music. It has a core ethos and cosmology that shapes it and clearly GI belonged to that ethos. It is at the same time socially conscious, political and then ultimately it’s sensual. So if there is anybody who contains all of those elements in the most quintessential way it would be GI.”

The amalgamation of political, sexual and religious sensibility is how life is lived. That this is inadequately recognised in societal structures, is circumscribed in disciplinary cul-de-sacs in discussion make its unification all the more loving in the cultural spaces where agency is exercised.

In critical cultural practice, Jamaica specifically and the wider Caribbean region more extensively was no longer borrowing from Black America or the continent of Africa. It gathered the strands of its reality and asserted them in its own image, beat and voice. This in itself is seductive to a home grown and associated audience though further afield. In terms of romance, prior to reggae,

Opata

“There was a presumption that when you wanted to talk about love and wanted to talk about romantic things, you wanted to create an atmosphere of romance and so on, you turned to R & B (rhythm and blues), you turned to soul music. The presumption was that those are the artists, those are the songs that women would like, be drawn to. That was romance.”

A new valuing of the Caribbean carried on a steady and persistent beat offering romance in culturally recognisably form contains an urgency that conveys the timeliness of now. The present, life and love are there to be grasped.

Most respondents comment on the seductive nature, in a general sense, of the reggae music space. The prevalence of this theme facilitates a detailed analysis of its varied manifestations. On a broad level, the information shared by respondents affirms the claim that reggae music provides an essential release mechanism. The explanations provided by

listeners elevate this concept from a mere physical and psychological discharge valve to one that constructs an alternative reality (or genuine authenticity) that uplifts, supports and provides for a more enduring well-being than initially suggested. An essential element of the general seduction discussed is the recognition, visceral and tangible that we (Black people) are lovable and loving. That love is essential to human thriving and living well and that all that disputes, distracts and separates us from our loving nature is false. In listening to Gregory, we are restored.

Blossom

“That’s what I think Gregory filled us with, he filled us with history, legacy, all those things. And joy, utter, utter joy.”

Resisting Eurocentric ideals and elitist constructions of love are part of the reclamation of total human being status. It is described by one respondent as a dynamic relationship in which the artist raises questions and directs challenges which are embraced in the listening space, reciprocated and worked through in life.

Mixing weighty issues with dance, collective catharsis and joy is identified as a trope Gregory frequently employed. The following respondents speak to this. They address the adjunct between rhythm, mood and lyric.

Mary

“Well sometimes it’s like almost a conflict, like with the first song (*Love Overdue*) is like a really upbeat song but then the lyrics are about loneliness. Yes, so quite interesting.”

Kevin

“The song (*Slave Market*) is really deceptive because the feeling of the track, the music, it feels quite joyous and you could picture you could easily do an intimate dance with your partner in a sound system environment. But, the sting in the tail is when you listen to the lyrics.”

Seduction in direct form, is identified in Gregory’s voice. His distinct rendition of songs helps craft a loving mood. As explained,

Edwin

“Nothing like being in a blues dance, a drink in your hand, rocking away to, and he was the one to rock away to with... Gregory, he gives you time to relax, rock away, with those incredible vocals and just make you feel nice. And we needed to feel nice too, because we had to put up with a lot.”

The space for love that is conjured is not just an inviting intimate space. It is also one that speaks to and for the Black collective and individual experience. The opportunity to place oneself, find oneself and express oneself within contemporary culture in a fully rounded and non-racist way, is life affirming. As further explained by the respondent.

Edwin

“I guess you become more aware of what your struggles are, what your emotions are, if that makes any sense. Your emotions become heightened. Whatever you’re struggling against, you’re trying to get that girl you fancy, whether you’re trying to get along in your job, whether you’re facing racism. Listening to Gregory it just intensifies, well for me it does, listening to that voice, it intensifies that emotion.”

The intensification and amplification of emotion, of emotional states held on a rhythm, a note, a lyric is described by many. It is accounted for as both public and intimate.

The allure of intimacy with which the reggae listening space vibrates, is alive. It is recognised as such by those from white ethnicities as they learn to listen and engage with the form.

Roger

“There was a choreography, that’s the thing. A movement you know, a movement of bodies, sound, moving together. Not literally together but that sense, that sense of the rhythm, of the people together. That’s again, incredibly powerful to witness. Incredibly powerful to witness.”

This witness is not the external gaze Black people are often subjected to. Whilst it may come from the margins it is within the sound and the sphere of influence.

Musical structure and orality

The expression and practice of sexuality is identified equally by male and female respondents and often in the same ways. It is rooted in the structure of the music itself and Gregory’s individual orality. The intensity, rhythm and circularity of the beat is a defining aspect of the reggae aesthetic. As charted by Dawes (1999) the sexual energy of reggae is female. This is in recognition of its circular and comforting nature, in which heights are reached, rather than a linear climatic structure. Respondents relate to the organisation of the music primarily as a facilitator of dance, a compelling call to the body. Rhythm is associated with an impulse to move and perhaps to do so in an explicit way.

Minerva

“It’s easier to dance it, but I think that’s more about the beat. That’s more about that kind of, I don’t want to call it an erotic beat, but it’s a beat that pulses a particular way and sets you. Puts your body in a particular way and I think that works.”

The interplay between the body (individual physical bodies and the group), and the music is evident in the listening sessions. Participants rocked, swayed, kept time with their hands and feet and some literally stood up to dance on the spot. It is visibly difficult for respondents to remain still. Salutes and calls to rewind form a part of the sessions. The chemistry is sensual and explores pleasure in an open way and in a form in which the prophetic and erotic are closely connected. The circularity grounded in the rhythm is experienced as compulsive. Within this compulsion are layered expositions on reality.

In reggae it is possible to dance and contemplate revolution, anger at oppression, the cruelties of life, the beauty of sexuality, the humour of human existence – all at the same time. (Dawes 1999:137)

The wholesomeness of Gregory’s offer, in terms of how and what themes are addressed, the depth of listener engagement and meanings brought to bear explores all aspects of the Black human condition. And from this standpoint, as outlined by Stuart Hall,³⁸ rather than narrowing the field encompasses humanity in its rejection of “other”.

Much of the meaning and value elucidated by listeners can be categorised as extra musical significance as it does not reside in measurable (Eidsheim 2019) score, or lyrical properties. However, it is present. It is identified by Barry Shank (2011), in the concept of

³⁸ Chapter two is organised on this basis and explains it.

musical beauty, as the point where the search for more is initiated. It is an aspect of the sounds' fullness. It is activated through longing and the pursuit of shared meaning. As noted by many respondents, "The power of the voice to compel an inclination to listen," (p 844) is recognised in Gregory. Having thus been drawn in, integration of what is known and felt makes for a meaningful experience.

An often reported aspect of his orality that provides additional meaning, are his groans and sighs.

Leonard

"Gregory would bring tunes to life with the voice and the atmosphere that he would create from the groans, you know. It was like some of his tunes were almost like one big groan. One big moan and groan but it, at the same time it was so unique, so atmospheric. You know his voice."

Another comments

Ken

"When Gregory groans you're in agony."

Offered by way of explanation

Ken

"The enjoyment comes from the way that his voice elevates the great rhythm tracks onto something that was very different. That's unique, that's God given. You know all of his work ethic, his writing, his ability to do it both live and in the studio, you know that's hard work. But the instrument that he had and the way that he used it and

exploited it and the way that he elevated music as a result of it, was for me, the foremost thing that I always remember about him.”

The use of moaning is a familiar arrangement in the Black gospel tradition across the Americas and Caribbean. It is a way of the voice relinquishing the need for words and moving instead to the qualities of music. Inarticulacy becomes a way of describing that which defies description (Edwards 2002). It is this to which the listener contributes a response that is also a call. The call to insert oneself, one’s subjectivity and life situation into the music of which one is a part. It is recognised by many respondents as a freedom embedded in the music.

Within the continuum of his practice is also the ability to precisely enunciate a love situation that speaks expressly to the individual.

Edwin

“I remember hearing the track *John Public* for the first time, one of his best ever tracks and it reflected what you was going through at the time, you know. Because West Indian families could be very very conservative shall we say. And if you dated and you say, decided to start growing your locks and you’d turn up at the door with your weatherman cap and the father look pon you and kiss him teeth and say a few words under him breath. *John Public* addresses all of that.”

The space for reflecting upon and theorising love is imbued with collective and individual agency.

The Lover

Alongside the recognition and celebration of love, expertly capturing life situations as listeners are experiencing them, Gregory is also credited with and valued for providing advice.

This is through his lyricature, performance and personal stance. It is also a function of the breadth of his work. As noted,

Edwin

“Because he could be the lover, he could be the scorned lover, he could be the wishful lover. Even in his lover’s oeuvre he could be different characters. Which was great, he could be a guy or a girl or whatever. You could interpret your own kind of meanings.”

The range suggests there is a Gregory track that is relevant for every situation. He can be drawn on to help create a tender moment in the privacy of the home. This also works in public spaces by carving intimate and personal focus within a crowd. It is attributed directly to his rapport with his listeners and his ability, already mentioned, to infer he is speaking directly to the individual and their specific situation. This is comprehended as a human propensity to,

Ken

“Gravitate towards what makes sense to you....It creates a mind space for actionality.”

In this affirming, relevant relationship to track and artist, male respondents especially, share how this influences their own practice.

Caleb

“For me Gregory’s love song gives me, and I still maintain that although you don’t see it so much in the young people now – an approach. He has this thing about an approach, so even though he may not be favoured by the female’s parents, he still has a certain dignity about him, a certain way of presenting himself. And I think that kind

of like comes through on the music and comes through to a guy who basically wants to ask a girl to dance as well.... The way you dress, the way the songs are delivered gives you a feeling of you just can't approach a woman any and any how. You have to come a certain way, that's for me, yeah."

Combined with an approach, is what I am calling a stance. I use this term to highlight stage presence, outlook and opinions as can be gleaned from his body of work.

Edwin

"It gave us guys the license to be romantic...Definitely Gregory out of any reggae artist that there is. He was the man to follow, he was the man to try and mimic. You had to copy his swagger, he was the bar....We knew his effect on women."

This is not random advice or mere suggestions for behaviour but comes from the visible, emotional and physical force of his performance. He continues,

Edwin

"For some reason, when I used to play sound systems, it always seemed a lot easier to ask a girl to dance if there was a Gregory track. They always seemed to be more willing to enter your clinch...I thank him for that"

This is confirmed by female respondents.

Millie

"I think er, his music, you're talking about approach, I think it makes it easier. I remember back in the day it made it easier, if a guy came and asked you, you wouldn't say no."

The construction and comprehension of a sexual space in which willing participants engage in play is undoubtedly a well known aspect of Gregory's trademark dexterity. Several respondents cited Gregory's appearance in the film *Rockers* as evidence of his personal sexual aura.

Edwin

"Just the image, what's that movie, *Rockers*. You know I still have that distinct memory of him walking down the street and bopping down the street and that's just what you emulated."

Maud

"For me the scene that captures that very well is in *Rockers* where the musicians are walking and Gregory's walk is just so erotic I think."

The combination of Gregory's vocal, lyrical and physical prowess place him in a position that very few reggae artists enjoy. He is able to speak to and for men and women across the diaspora and be relevant to both, as well as reaching out to other cultural and ethnic groups of majority and minority populations.

Part of this appeal is encapsulated in his real life, expressed lyrically through his understanding of the rude bwoy³⁹ sensibility. His spells in prison, articulation of the trials of life associated with urban poverty and the way in which this is held and linked to the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism are entrenched themes that are interwoven throughout his music. This campaigning and truth barring aspect of his offer, alongside a deep vulnerability that is

³⁹ The term recognises the young Jamaican criminal who refuses to adhere to social rules that restrict personal expression.

audible in his voice and lyrics, legitimise male emotional expression and the human need for love in community and sexual relationships.

Maud

“This was a music of love, this was a great poet and there is nothing threatening about that sensuality there.”

“Otherwise possibilities” of love

It is worth pausing here to ground and expand what is being apprehended and conveyed on the subject of sensual love. This includes sexual energy and expression but is not restricted to this. An expansive idea is expounded. It is one that relates to the excess discerned in music (Crawley 2017), the extra capacity for bodies to enact sound, for emotions to be gifted free reign and expressed wholesomely. These accounts speak to catharsis and transformation and unite idealised, imagined relations with current lived reality. How is this possible? Ashon Crawley (2017), starts from the premise that the Black experience does not fit into current theories. “How to detect, how to produce and inhabit otherwise epistemological fields, is the question of Black study” (p3). A focus on the listening experience in reggae, analysing the associated practices of paying attention to the thick event of the voice (Eidsheim 2019), acknowledging aspects that cannot be captured in musical notation but reference groans and the use of breath in specialised ways, affirms the existence of what Crawley (2017) aptly names, “otherwise possibilities”.

This concept is useful in gathering dance as a way of listening to music (introduced in chapter five), of utilising music to theorise and practically engage in life. Reggae performs resistance through meaningfully expressing the Black community individually, collectively,

locally and internationally. Speaking of the Pentecostal way which facilitates able comparisons, Crawley (2017) states, “These sensual experiences were not merely performed through duress but were the instantiation and signs of life and love” (p7). Reggae as embodied and experienced by the listeners I interviewed, unequivocally testifies to this. Stepping outside of the need for external approval and worth permits “other” thoughts and practices to be endorsed. Interviews with reggae music practitioners confirm this and provide examples of sessions restricted to Black only participants in order to preserve and amplify this perspective.

Mamako

“It was our thing, it was ours. It really kind of reinforced the thing about belonging. This is ours and no one can touch it....Remember those dances where there was on the flyers, strictly an African event, and they meant it. Strictly an African event, this was just for the sisters and brothers.”

Inverting popular music value indicators, which relate primarily to sales and money, enable precedence to be granted to social practice, the utility of reggae. Gregory’s work is his sound. As such Blackness is understood, experienced as a force in the world, sonic and otherwise. The loving space is thus a space of opportunity.

The atmosphere, the feeling, the sociality and bond coalesce in the listening space. This can straddle detachment or attachment; to the music, to the society, to the individual and or collective dream that is being pursued. Sensual love is anchored in love as solidarity. This is so for those who define themselves as members of the Black community and is recognised by those outside of it. It is named by Crawley (2017), a performative intervention.

Jilly

“I think it shows, in the music it shows love and passion in everything and you can relate to it. The world goes round with love, I think and that’s what comes over to me.”

This intervention is not a subsidiary to theorizing and expressing love. It is an integral attribute of it.

Gender differences in perception of love⁴⁰

Honing in on male and female roles and stereotypes within love relations and how they are represented in Gregory’s music produces nuanced interpretations. Acknowledging the advice and stance men identify and the eroticism and sensuality named by both, not all aspects of this experience are applauded by listeners. The centrality of heterosexual love, the perceived submission of the female, the polygamous nature of relationships are all mentioned and critiqued by participants. The fact that love is rooted in Caribbean culture affords it a practical nature that many respondents comment favourably upon. It embraces being in and out of love, loss and frustration, battles of control and depicts versions of love ranging from the conventional idealised, to strategic performance (sexual and economic) based forms. This is always within an overall capacity for love, an invitation to be open and attentive to another. There is recognition among listeners that Jamaican culture specifically and Black diasporic more generally are often held as examples of backward patriarchal enclaves. Reggae is charged with being a site of misogynist, homophobic views that prevent progress. The

⁴⁰ The term gender is used rather than sex in recognition of the emerging fluidity of sexuality and identification of sex that is relevant in society at large and present in the interview space.

slackness and violence in dancehall are a current iteration of this tradition. This is not how it is experienced by listeners.

Overarching themes noted by most respondents relate to Gregory's persistence in love. This is in terms of the absolute need for it and the necessity to continuously search for it. It is accompanied by his dignity in the face of parental and authority's censure. These characteristics are lyrically and physically ascribed to him and as such acquire the mantle of a male ideal. It is an ideal that does not command strict compliance but instead suggests parameters, with limitations unveiled to which one can attach oneself and assess how well it fits. The following typical male response includes factors identified by many.

Percy

"In terms of what I appreciate, he unashamedly loves women, right. And he makes no excuses for that. And I just think that's true. It's like whatever you love, if you love that person, or you're attracted to that person sexually, I like owning it and saying this is me. This is what I like. I don't think he makes himself out to be perfect at all. But what I like about him is that he's honest about it. So I feel like he's honest about his flaws so that's what I kind of listen to and appreciate."

A careful reading of the above displays an openness to whatever personal preference is held. The emphasis is on the ownership and honest expression of this.

Another nuanced lyrical assessment proffers that polygamous unions are suggested, and as such, are not criticised. They are constructed in forms that encompass female agency in both asserting their sexual needs and desires and holding a plan for the relationship. However, portraits of women that imply deference to men are not deemed acceptable.

Familial relationships mean that misogyny cannot be tolerated. Critically, this is set within a personal analysis and historical context.

Ken

“As a slave your only purpose is to procreate. So if through our process of redefining that maybe we have this, we have that, we’re redefining. The reason why that is crucial is if you go to anthropology, anthropology 101, they will tell you the most complex kinship systems on this planet are found across that continent of Africa..... So if we are recreating that from the fragments we had left, who on the outside should determine what we see as sexually appealing or sexually appropriate? That’s what they do in reggae. Look at the way we dance!”

Interpreting Gregory’s perceived stance in terms of one’s own situation and beliefs is a common thread running through much listener commentary. Experience is a key filter through which the music is assessed and embraced, or not accordingly. Male respondents, with great frequency speak of the direct applicability of the situations conjured in the music.

In comparison to male direct identification with the love configurations assembled, female respondents articulate a more general attitude to love itself. Interestingly, one that is relevant to all sexes and sexualities. This encompassing interpretation is often prefaced by a setting aside of white feminist politics.

Padma

“I think this is a very difficult area because obviously feminists will scream about Gregory. But I think there definitely is a connection between the erotic, in personal freedom and personal permission to access feelings and taboos and to talk about

pleasure, sexual gratification, sharing that isn't proscribed by religion or familial authority. So in that sense I think it's incredibly political and incredibly threatening. To family structures, to religious authorities, to political structures. Because it defies control...I think that Gregory is always talking about love. I think he's saying love is abundant and to get as much love as you can into everyday existence."

The incompatibility of mainstream, white feminist thought is not a rejection of feminism per se. An experience based, specific analysis is contemplated.

Minerva

"He did his work at a time when women weren't particularly empowered, and even though in terms of the Black woman we very much led in terms of the home and we led in other ways."

The proposition that race problematises a simple gender analysis is clear.

The analysis offered by listeners often resists reaching fixed conclusions. This is expressed beautifully within many discussions. Pondering the meaning behind the track *Night Nurse*.

Opata

"*Night Nurse*, only makes sense, really really really in the context of Jamaica. Right. It's a very Jamaican song. So "I don't wanna see no doctor," right, I mean that sort of anti homo erotic articulation, but its clear that it's coming out of the context of a Jamaican sense and their idea of the night nurse, only you alone can quench this thirst. That language is part of the culture and that was a great love song. And it's a love

song that doesn't pretend that sex is not involved. It's a love song that positions, that sort of says I am vulnerable to you, the woman."

The track engages Caribbean forms of entreaty and plays lyrically with love affecting health. There is also the question of whether the title refers to cocaine or a woman. Interpretation is left ultimately to the listener and the understanding they bring to bear on the situation. The ambiguity is noted within the reggae music business also.

Roland

"Producers that have worked with him, they still don't know if it's about a woman, love or drugs sometimes. Sometimes he has a great way of intertwining some other issues in his life. Can be looked at as romance, is he talking about a female, is he talking about another subject? He has a great gift of being able to convey that in his music... But a lot of heartbreak in there and a lot of love and you can go from there really, yeah."

The capacity of the music to carry life enhancing, economic and destructive aspects of love and need within the same tune, is a clearly identified Gregory convention. We will return to this as part of his appeal in the conclusion to this chapter

The broad articulation of love is captured through multifarious means. The effect and affect of the music are explored by listeners. This is most often articulated in relation to his effect on women. It is recognised by respondents of both sexes.

Blossom

"I remember seeing Gregory in concert at Dougies.... And there was this super fan, I would call her and she was just on him constantly, rubbing her arm, her hand along

his leg for the whole concert. And he was, it was like she wasn't there. He carried on regardless. And, if that wasn't the height of professionalism, I don't know what was. But she was, she was so happy and he indulged her, he just continued singing and it was great."

In response to this example, shared in a listening session, there were many affirmations of similarly observed lovestruck behaviour of females recounted by listeners. An official version is offered by Mandy Samara uncovered in her research on sound system culture.⁴¹ In this instance, Gregory's performance in Huddersfield requires additional ambulances to be placed on standby in order to meet the demands of female fans fainting. Whether the extra ambulances were needed is not documented. What I consider the request references is his legendary appeal to women.

What might this be saying in relation to Black women expressing their affiliation to an artist, in relation to the differences and similarities with which women express themselves? It is difficult to pinpoint. Does it suggest the repression of culturally inexpressible thoughts? Its significance may be associated with public displays of adoration and hysteria being attributed to Black women who are usually conceptualised more stoically, more aggressively. There are respondent testimonies that males find Gregory an aid to seduction. This is true for females also. We will return to this in the final chapter.

Gregory's effect on men is also acknowledged by women.

Jilly

⁴¹ Disclosed in private communication with the author.

“The guys on one side the women on one side. And then when Gregory comes on, probably late at night when the girls are tired out, that’s when the guys move in. So, I think the men love that just as much as the women. Love that sort of mood, just as much as the women.”

The mood that is conjured is located in both imagined and known acts.

Jilly

“I don’t know, he’s just got a way with words. And the music, it’s like I can just imagine the scene. You know, lots of Rasta’s call their women queen, and he made, from that song that woman feels so good and it’s kind of seductive and then you’ve got the rub a dub with it. I just think, I just think he’s number one when it comes to seduction.”

Borrowing from both reality and fantasy permits idealisation of what one has, of current existence. Its transformation into what one could have, aspirational existence; is actualised in a heartbeat, a drum beat that captures.

The fluidity between reality and fantasy is discerningly expressed by the following respondent.

Padma

“I think that imagination is real. And I think emotional and spiritual resonances are real and that’s what it conjures up. So I don’t think it’s not real. I think it alters your felt, lived reality day to day. Therefore, it’s real. If it shifts your consciousness, it’s real. If it makes you happy it’s real. It’s the sort of reality that matters because it makes people happy. It makes people feel understood. It makes people feel like they have belonging. So I think the beautiful imagery or the sun shining, or raining in a very

beautiful environment is something that you are transported to. And it shapes you, the environment you're in into something that isn't cold. So you recreate it. You look for it. You find it."

The potency of this form of communication is attributable to many strands of influence which are interwoven and intricate.

Listeners clearly identify an alternative, an otherwise history as one consequential aspect.

Dawn

"It's history as well as the dancing. There's history in it as well because you kind of listen to the words after and then you kind of look at the way your life has gone. I mean it's like a plan ahead, sort of feeling you get. That's what happens. I mean the records over but then you think about the song, you hear it time and time again and then you kind of analyse it differently. So it's got a big impact that record has."

Understood personally, archetypically, or simply as an aspect of the human condition, it holds and educates. For those for whom it fulfils a need for explanation and understanding of the brutal history from which they have emerged and continue to live within the ramifications of, it is a welcome home. It is a place at the table. The music transports. It takes us to a place of belonging, a space filled with love. A part of Gregory's genius lies in his ability to help us feel that we are where the music is playing. Anchored in emotion, which is expressed in every breath and note, it is a loving embrace.

Mapping the Loving Space

The data presented and analysed in this chapter substantiate the existence of a loving space. It is a sonic space, that creates, expresses and promotes love in various distinct but integrated forms. How might this be mapped? It starts with the bringing together of a listening community straddling Caribbean ethnicities, music genres, class, generational and racial divides, in the Caribbean and UK where historically these differences have acquired and marked structural and powerful positions. That this is so further afield attests to its huge influence. This can be usefully mapped to its place and circumstances of origin and international (Henry 2006) posts. As argued by Dawes (1999) and corroborated by listeners,

Reggae is the product of artists working consciously within the historical, social and cultural forces which have shaped Jamaican society. It is the aesthetic form which has brought Jamaicans to see those forces mostly clearly and which has best expressed their desire to variously change or celebrate aspects of their society (Dawes 1999:30).

In the exploration and naming of these forces, it is clear they are not confined to the Caribbean, or to the exploited sites of empire and colonialism. They are the forces of modernity (Gilroy 1993) and as such are integral to global centres of power. This music is able to speak beyond national boundaries and address human concerns of individual and collective freedom, love, justice and the meaning and purpose of life. This is not a vanguard positioning (Dawes 1999). Reggae's peasant and working-class origins, artists and listeners facilitate a political and philosophical dialogue based in common existence, able to encompass contemplative discourse. Gregory and other artists like him are celebrated by listeners for speaking principally to their own community, encouraging and fostering solidarity from a

perspective that centres the concerns of Black communities.⁴² This is a loving space gifted to all who engage with the music from whatever social, economic and political perspective they assume. The specificity of a racialised position enabling and articulating a global understanding.

Concentrating on love, its articulation and expression is a profoundly encompassing way of promoting unity. The language, depiction and sound of love sutures divides whilst enabling recognition of and enactment, development and the becoming of a love ethic. A sensual and sexual ethic that is inclusive, emotive and recognisable. One that provides an outlet for and reworking of symbols and oeuvres of love that meet contemporary demands and embody acts of humanity. An unexpected and very present strand of the data collection process is the delight respondents express in formally recognising Gregory within the reggae tradition and their lives through the research project.

The strength of erotic and political forces as drivers of human behaviour and Gregory's attention to the same is advanced as an explanation of his popularity and stature. His voice, the rhythmic tempo and the intensity of the music provide a call to listen and to dance, a way in. The significance of the encounter between, "The materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue," (Barthes, 1977:182) is evoked frequently. The inclusion of the whole body in the act of singing is particularly relevant to Gregory as it encompasses the listener's relationship to his body. Essentially erotic, Gregory appeals across the sexes in different ways. It is a complex mix of the macho and vulnerable which through immediate identification and representation are accessed, and intimacy fostered.

⁴² Gregory is most often compared by listeners to artists Dennis Brown, Sugar Minott and Alton Ellis.

Voice as the naming of an entity, individual, country or political grouping which grants entry; symbolic, material and cultural to relationships that develop an expressive self is similarly important. In this sense voice is a connector. This is through the physicality of vibration and capacity to share the construction of meanings and values attached to life issues. A further aspect intrinsic to listener experience and which gathers the components of the voice is its capaciousness, its excess. Afforded by the microphone (Connor 2001), the fullness and power of the voice are in many senses the making of the solo artist, and extend its reach in the musical mix and space that sound assumes in the body and beyond.

As expressed in chapters four and five, the link between voice and meaning is listening. There are many ways to listen. With Gregory this almost always includes a bodily attention and intention to understand (Nancy 2007). In this auditory state, the sounds (voice and music) affect us holistically. Spreading throughout the body, sound opens spaces as it travels intermingling with other sense registers engendering responses commonly apprehended in affectual terms. Terms that conflate interior and exterior life, states of being, and anchor emotions in the relational sphere where learning takes place. A sphere in which feelings circulate and are social (Ahmed 2014). In their sociality they are powerful, for how pain and stories are held or distributed uncovers hierarchical mechanisms. The power to share Black stories through the medium of music tells of a wound and a healing possibility.

Sexuality as a healing force, as well as spirituality and revolutionary ideas are celebrated and expressed in dance. Respondents raise the compulsion to dance and the fulfilment this brings, repeatedly. It is raised within the context of its equally powerful effect on the psyche. Influences that are sustained, revisited and mined for ongoing insights and

understanding. The importance of this is eloquently expressed in Symeon Brown's (2019) essay lamenting the contemporary lack of space available to Black men in the UK to dance.

The disappearance of public spaces to dance, or even just to sit without the pressure of buying a coffee is often offset by the abundance of digital space...The internet can occupy my mind, but it does nothing for my body. Nothing can replace the importance of dance. It is my body that lets me know that I'm alive, which is why what I'm able to do with mine on weekends matters more to me than my smartphone (p155).

The avowals of the critical importance of this music, that wraps poetry articulating truth, love in an inclusive, seductive and danceable form cannot be overstated. The curtailment and closure of public spaces, loving spaces featuring artists like Gregory, is felt and lamented.

The connections between the music, dancing and sexuality engage all the senses. The lyricature - content and form, provide a means of retrieving the past, using it to understand the present, whilst fashioning new ways of being. For love, this comprises acknowledging our painful history and treatment by Europeans and their state and civil society structures. Naming this reveals the conscious choice that exists to reject this pernicious narrative, to enact and explore tender complex perspectives of our own. An aspect of this that emerges from accounts given by respondents centre on how male and female perceive themselves as constructed within Gregory's body of work, and whether and to what degree they are comfortable with this depiction.

Complex and interesting characterisations arise from this analysis, especially in relation to conceptualisation of sexuality. There is little evidence of male patriarchal dominance as advocated in public discourse. Conversely a greater emphasis on male sexual vulnerability is indicated than a cursory glance at reggae macho might suggest. Women

express and are granted more agency, sexual, economic and intellectual than is acknowledged in the public sphere, though the industry as an entity is noted as a male stronghold. Thus, the interface between the public and private implications of what is constructed in the loving space in which reggae is performed is powerful. This theme will be returned to in the conclusion. Refining and constructing a love ethic is a recognised and fundamental component of the value intrinsic to the music of Gregory. An emphasis he championed and spoke of regularly in interview.

The diasporic commitment is apparent and sophisticated. Of particular interest is the love that is extended to the continent of Africa and its peoples, and the reciprocal space this crafts. Though outside the scope of this study, Gregory is a much loved and widely travelled artist on the continent. His work has been adapted to local styles and incorporated into the performance spaces of cities such as Accra, Freetown and Nairobi (Stasick 2013). The transatlantic conversations that the music hosts performs a welcome embrace that diplomatic structures often neglect. This movement across the diaspora enriches the spaces in the UK where connections coalesce.

Co-creating and experiencing a loving space as detailed in this chapter is evidence of Small's (1998) concept of musicking, an experiential form of knowledge production and sharing sounds. Experience and its bodily impact are exactly how we all learn. In this learning field, emotional response, content and stimuli is both social and individual. Listeners express a diversity of opinions on the love characters alluded to in the music. This is filtered through their experiences and political inclinations. It is not a simple acceptance or rejection process. But one in which personal traits are measured against desired outcomes and written into the

meaning making process. The redefining along an intimate axis is a strong feature relating to the theme of love.

The absolute location of Gregory's music in a love ethic, albeit one steeped in rebellion is a central trope. The penetration of sound, and by inference its capacity to hurt or heal are considered. Ascribing meaning is where creativity and freedom to choose exist and are worked with. Small (1998) places great emphasis on group behaviour and the listening sessions as data gathering exercises attest to this. Strands of thought are picked up and extended in myriad directions and a sense of the group emerges from lines of response. It is interesting to contrast this with individual interviews and the manner in which community is recalled and enacted in both. This will be considered more fully in the final chapter.

Accepting that learning is premised on emotional response, how listeners are introduced to Gregory and reggae music generally suggests a path to learning. Learning to listen and learning to be. One in which abstract contemplation, immersive participation and everything in between comprises the ritual of introduction. This has repercussions for further engagement and how relationships are conceptualised and enacted. For some the pull of a crowd in a situation such as a concert is the bastion of community. Whilst for others empowerment is in the contemplation of being placed within the space the music conjures, for example Jamaica, and the warmth of belonging this provides. Yet more participate in the unity in action which the music as a social force touching people and therefore shaping events performs. As stated in various ways by many respondents, histories are brought to listening with the expectation of being understood and changed. Chapter seven analyses this in relation to identity.

Chapter Seven

Slave Master

“Every time I hear the music and I make a dip,

Slave master comes around and spansks I with his whip, a whip,

But if I don’t get my desire, then I’ll set the plantations on fire,

My temperature is getting much higher, got to give what I require. (Isaacs, 1977).

Introducing love of self

This chapter analyses the central theme arising from the data, love of self. In many ways this is both a prerequisite to and the bastion of loving others. Undoubtedly a major value attached to the music of Gregory, is the inclusion and foregrounding of self love in the pantheon of love expressed through his life work. The significance of this command as a strategy for life cannot be overestimated. Expressed through the title track as a reclamation of Jamaican, Caribbean and Black diasporan history, it is premised upon justice. Anchoring self love in this way is revelatory and revolutionary. It makes audible the root and routes through which self loathing and deficit social positioning have arisen and places the responsibility for, and tools of redress in our hands. Approaching this through an acceptance and analysis of Atlantic slavery and our existence in its wake,⁴³ is an example of the genius of

⁴³ For a full explanation of this term see Christina Sharpe 2016. Its use here refers to the physical wake of the slave ship – the drag effect it has on the body of water it travels through; the ritual held to comfort the bereaved and ensure the safe passage of the dead; the condition of being aware of the structural forces that impede the progress of Black people.

Gregory. It is through this echolocation that identity is advanced. The beauty and clarity of this movement facilitates the initiation of a conversation on this brutal historical epoch. One that acknowledges the pain endured, the strength gained and the healing balm of the music. Through this format identity becomes an anchor. An elemental, social, spiritual and physical force to be built upon and embraced.

The theme of identity is complex. As espoused by respondents it incorporates many elements and performs several tasks. These include building solidarity, identified in the previous chapter and amplified here. It is analysed and accounted for as a means of forging bonds between Black people, linking Black people to Africa, accommodating politically Black⁴⁴ populations within the UK and exposing those that identify as white to the alternative public spaces hosted by them. This invitation to respect those constructed as other by the state and its institutions is a respectful and uncomfortable initiation, made palatable by the lure of the music. It can be through identification with the music, its listeners and narratives. Or, through detachment and questioning of current alignment and conscious repositioning. Encouraging the notion of likeness and kinship within Black populations across the diaspora through identifying similarities in experience and understanding is built in. As is developing a consciousness of self that includes a historical sense of being, with ideas of subjectivity encased in a musical quest to understand. A quest that advances the historical reality of a Black sound. A sound that reverberates through the individual, the collective and assumes space as a right, not a privilege. A human right that exposes and seeks to redress inequality.

⁴⁴ This term encapsulates a movement prevalent in the UK in the 1980s and early 1990s that combined minority ethnic populations under the umbrella term Black. It indicates a colonial, exploitative historical and contemporaneous relationship with the British state through its empire.

Analysis of the data endorses most clearly two elements of the framework outlined in chapter four, the reggae aesthetic and musicking. The former attends to archetypes within the reggae offer and facilitates the location of Gregory as an artist. It identifies the themes the music addresses and the practices through which this is accomplished. The latter provides a conceptual container for the form of interaction with the music that listeners detail. Interaction that affords passage across space, time and place and through which the subject and object are united. A result of which is the bringing into being, the materialisation of ideal relationships.

As already stated, the data though broken down into constituent parts for clarity, operates as a whole. Akin to the recording of reggae music, specific instruments and sounds are laid on individual tracks (in a multitrack studio). They are heard through playback as a cohesive full sound. This is so for male and female respondents and a gendered examination of identity is offered. It is critical as much scholarship and industry commentary identifies reggae as a source of identity construction, though this has prioritised the Black male without expressly stating this. The fact that Gregory's listeners are predominantly female is noted but not addressed. This omission is rectified through the inclusion and acknowledgement of the female experiences of tuning into the sound, the space and themselves.

Caribbean and Black British solidarity

Moving from tangible aspects of identity and belonging based on place, family ties and group customs such as ethnicity and tribal affiliations, is critical to the Caribbean experience.

Building a sense of self under the conditions of “other” in the majority space of the Caribbean and the minority space of the UK is premised upon an alternative understanding of the Atlantic slave trade. An understanding that is not tied to the European need to dehumanise the population groups they enslaved and continue to exploit. Reggae is highly valued here. For listeners, this begins with the identification of Gregory’s music as “Black and ours.” Defining Black music as argued in chapter four, is problematic, however, for the majority of British Black, African and Caribbean (as acknowledged on the consent forms – see appendix 3) respondents, this is unquestioned. It is not based solely on skin colour or racial distinction, but more aptly describes ethnic and cultural traditions identified in Caribbean, African and African American majority populations. In order to contextualise listener ownership and personal identification with the music more broadly it is necessary to briefly clarify the various ways in which the term Black is used.

A definition of Blackness is offered by the Black study group (2015)

We understand blackness historically as the external imposition of a racial ontology which is particular to populations racialised as black. At the same time, the internal production of racial ontologies of blackness by black diasporans have destabilised the claim that any racial category is given or natural (p1).

This complex intellectual definition is useful in that it references internal and external understandings, rigid and fluid boundaries which encompass the lived experience expressed by respondents. Importantly, Blackness is referenced in relation to the music. From a Jamaican brought to the UK as a child.

Calvin

“Well, being in England, reggae wasn’t really played a lot... And dem time deh when it was small me identify with it because dat a fi mi music. You understand, fi mi music. And then wherever me go, I wanted to portray my blackness, identified through Gregory and the music, you understand?”

This response states explicitly that the restricted public domain available for the music has no bearing on developing affinity for it. On the contrary, the implication is that Calvin takes it upon himself to further propagate the music through his external portrayal of the blackness encapsulated within it.

Remaining with the construction and embrace of a Caribbean and Black British identity, Gregory is valued highly here. The essence of his potency lies in listener affinity with his music. Within this, respect for the Black experience can flourish. A common introduction emerges from the ubiquity of music within the community. Occupying the position it does within the Black community often means that it is hard to specify an introduction to reggae music

Ken

“I think reggae music got into me. I just grew up with music. People have asked me to pin it down and I can’t.”

The centrality of music in life is extended to others.

Dwight

“I would imagine music is a part of everybody’s life. I can’t imagine any human being not liking music. It is part of our nature. It’s part of what makes us human.

These responses to the question of how listeners first engaged with the music demonstrate its prevalence and pervasiveness in their early lives.

A more detailed entry is offered in relation to Gregory.

Minerva

“I remember most of Gregory’s music was like the soundtrack to my teenage years. So we had a sound system in the basement in our house, just because the boys were sound people. And Gregory was played constantly throughout my teenage years.”

Doug

“So when you hear certain ahm, tune from Gregory it bring you to certain times of you life whether as a young youth a grow up or when you reach ina the teenage part as me say and you a go a dance.”

The fact that tracks are used to catalogue and symbolise stages of life, emotions, places, people and events is important in representational terms. To simply label this as a soundtrack of life does not adequately convey the levels of attachment. It is meaningful in terms of learning and becoming too.

The listening sessions provide material evidence of the capacity of the music to transport respondents to the original time, space and place of hearing the track with the additional reflection facilitated by discussion with others. The impact is powerful. As well as indexing life, Gregory’s music engages with it in individual and communal capacities. This is expressed by the following respondent.

Doug

“Him leave a impact. If you ask everybody ina di room something bout Gregory dem have something fi say so, I’d say him did leave a impact on everybody who did have the opportunity to hear about him and fi hear him songs dem.”

Another, recounting the tension of growing up Black and British states that the need to carve a sense of self congruent with personal ambitions whilst recognising historical inequalities is essential.

Minerva

“Gregory for me was key to that because part of him, part of what he was saying is stand up, be proud... And so that gave you a certain strength to deal with anything that anybody put inside of you so that nobody couldn’t take, your kind of identity away from you. And I think that he was part of that movement that kind of empowered us to go out and say don’t mess with me. Yeah, don’t mess with me.”

Personal pride and political understanding of the Black experience across the Caribbean and the UK is clearly identified. Resources and strategies to defend it are also indicated.

The significance of ethnicity, ancestry, race and culture as components of Blackness heard and available for negotiation in the music and its listening spaces is clear. From a British Black,

Leroy

“Gregory Isaacs was, I would say one of the main figureheads for youth growing up in the area where I was born. In the 60s, as a teenager in the 70s, ehm, where in this country it was a case of Black and white. You know. You were with us or against us. Gregory’s music was always a strong focal point of our lives as Black people.”

George

“At the time I was a teenager and the words, we were singing along with the words definitely. And although we knew that it was a Jamaican artist, we could actually identify with the words in terms of how we as teenagers were dealing with each other.”

Overtly, whiteness in opposition to Blackness is present, but interestingly it is a category that contains elements of positionality wherein a choice exists for alignment. Both categories include modes of conceptualising and behaving within the world (Crawley 2017), and as such the decision can be made to step outside of this way of being. The learning encased in the music is relevant.

The following respondent speaks from a non-British, white perspective.

Kevin

“The music teaches me things, proverbs. I write about it.”

The political sensibility of the music affords a particularly embodied and lived political education. This is a less tangible, but no less real, intimate experience of solidarity and can become an aspect of identity not usually attributed to non-Black groups. This theme will be returned to later in the chapter.

The Black voice that is identified is not restricted to speaking only to the Black community however internationally constructed. The universal themes that are addressed are relevant to a wider audience. The following excerpts express this and reference a thread of communication that is developed through the listening session. The discussion is on *The Border*.

Jilly

“It was just so beautiful because as that guy was saying...anybody in exile, that song you can relate to it. Because it’s a yearning. Yearning to return home.”

The point is further elaborated.

Ngor

“So it’s not just that it’s a return for Black people in the diaspora to Africa. But it’s going way back it’s the beginning of where everything started from anyway. So it’s home for everybody, whether it’s your spiritual home, or whether you want to live there or whether it’s in your mind, your conscience to realise that we are all from one. This is, this song can be as deep as that.”

Respect for, rather than shame over the Black experience is extended to a wider community. It is relevant to a wider community, and this derives from its capacity to speak to the human condition. Albeit through the historical and contemporary experiences of Black people.

A trope that is identified by many listeners as part of Gregory’s lyrical practice is to speak in the conversational present, even when narrating stories about slavery.⁴⁵ This works on various levels. The listener is intimately drawn in with time and space compressed to facilitate a personal connection with the situation being described. It also allows the story to move from slavery to wage exploitation, intrinsically and implicitly linking the two systems. This movement in time is sophisticated and interwoven lyrically. It extends to potential solutions. Rebellion becomes the only honourable response to oppressive situations and here

⁴⁵ Henry, (1997) provides a lyrical analysis of *Slave master* identifying this practice amongst others and its effects.

we are comforted by the assertion that we have developed strategies to deal with this. To retell the Atlantic slave story and exploitative neo-colonial practices in this form, set to an insistent rhythm and voiced in a compelling manner renders time a pendulum (Snead 1981:72) and Blackness a force in the world (Crawley 2017).

African solidarity

Reggae is routinely perceived as an aesthetic practice that is primarily directed towards and relevant to population groups racialised as Black. Especially those who are the descendants of, or share similar experiences with its country, region and context of origin. This is part of its story, expressed commonly through theories of subculture. There is much more however, to be said in analysing solidarity. A specific and much celebrated aspect of solidarity that is depicted in reggae is the provision of a positive version of Africa and a reorientation of Caribbean and other Black populations towards this link. This is habitually accredited to Rastafarian philosophy and musical practices permeating the sound and its links to Garveyite teachings and prophecy. As shown in the literature review and encompassed in the theoretical framework (chapters two and four), the reggae link to Africa is undisputed.

The very affirmative African inclination has been charged with having an imaginative root (Chude-Sokei 2011). What is critiqued and often undermined is the validity of this attachment and its usefulness as an orienting principle. For participants, this criticism is wholly disputed. The following extract names this.

Opata

“The idea that the Africa that reggae produces is invented is not true. This is not true, not at all. This Africa that is presented is an Africa that comes from Rasta, which comes from an, a real engagement with Africa, not a fantasy engagement with Africa. That is a joke that people put on Rastafarians.”

Naming this disingenuous practice as unfair, the respondent goes on to share their informed perspective.

Oyata

“When I moved from Africa and I sat down with Rastas as a child, Rastas were interested in the real Africa, not the invented Africa. They’ve always been. Rasta’s connection with Africa from Garvey, the engagement with Garvey and the idea of what Africa means and so on.

The connection is strengthened through seeking out and compiling information. He continues

Oyata

“All the way through the study of the Ethiopian history, which is not invented, that existed... to Pan-Africanism, that is not invented. That existed. I mean Haile Selassie was the head of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah, they were interested in Nkrumah. Many of the Jamaican Rastas when they moved to Africa didn’t move straight to Ethiopia. Many of them moved to Ghana, to West Africa where they saw that there is an interest in Pan-Africanism and so on.”

Verifying the authenticity of the Rasta interest in and knowledge of Africa, this is brought to bear on reggae music. Mortimo Planno, a key figure in the cultivation and dissemination of Rastafarian philosophy, is credited with harnessing the emerging sound of

reggae through its artists. Critiquing the world view prevalent in Jamaica, he offered an alternative cosmological outlook (Niah 2010). An important tenet of the emerging doctrine is the necessity and ability of each person to discern for themselves the truth contained in state and religious edicts and concomitantly the relevance and applicability to their lives. His open-door policy in Trench Town supporting reasoning, facilitated deep critical thought (Duncanson-Hales 2015) and was frequented by radical intellectuals, emerging reggae artists and other cultural practitioners. His greatest disciple is Bob Marley, and much has been written about this relationship, however artists such as Gregory also participated in this progressive milieu taking the results into their art. This is highlighted by an interviewee as he ponders the position of spirituality in Gregory's life.

Mark

"I think it was very important to him in his early years. There was a transitional period, I'm certain. From his work with the concords and then the solo recordings. And then you could see particularly in, uhm, there's an album for GG's records and the back of the album is him with a bible, bandana and the beginnings of dreadlocks, smoking weed... That photograph really epitomises what he, Dennis, Bob and the others were going through."

This point is corroborated by those who knew Gregory well. They relay his spiritual conviction and the necessity of this affiliation for entry to the reggae music business. Our respondent continues.

Mark

“Mortimo Planno was the elder Rasta who inspired so many of the singers to discover the significance of Black origins, of Black history from an African origin and of course the religious concept of the divinity of Selassie as defined by the lineage back to David. So clearly these were deep and moving teachings.”

The use of imagery to bolster the argument speaks to full spectrum engagement with Gregory the artist. This is also reinforced by accounts of crossing paths with him in London.

Returning to the validity of this view, it is further elaborated on with thinkers distinguished.

Opata

“We have to be clear that there is a way in which the Rasta man just walking on the street saying, “mi wan go back to Africa,” and so on looks funny and so we make a joke of it. But true Rasta thinking, these guys that were the thinkers and influenced people like Bob Marley and Peter Tosh and so on, they were not living in a mythical world. They knew what they were talking about.”

Of interest here is the way in which experience is interwoven with visionary appeal. The role of organic intellectuals in expanding and influencing community consciousness is revealed. Our respondent continues.

Opata

“They were constructing a myth of Africa, but the idea of creating a myth doesn’t mean that you are inventing something that doesn’t exist. What you’re doing is creating a narrative of understanding that makes sense to you in this cultural space.”

The attunement of cultural space with narrative, stated with varying degrees of eloquence and elegance, is prevalent amongst listeners. It is linked in the following example with both the minutiae and the generalities of belonging as an aspect of identity.

Ken

“So to me if you listen to those tracks that speak to belonging. Belonging in a, let’s say in a micro sense you belong to Jamaica. That’s your micro. You belong to Jamaica, whatever. But the macro is, you’re an African and where are we? We’re dispersed.”

This is relevant to both the Caribbean and the UK. He continues

Ken

“Again if we even say we go back to the *Slave Master* tune. Slave master noh come from Africa! Slave master come from Europe. So just the fact that you are using that to make your argument. You are saying to people, we are here, in this position because cultures have clashed.”

This sophisticated weaving together of a narrative that sings of our condition, uses imagination but is not imagined speaks to an understanding of the cultural space.

Imagination is explored further in the following quote which combines a political yearning with the basic need to belong and shares how this is achieved within Gregory’s music. Recounted by a Black British male, it discusses national and ancestral identity.

Leonard

“The best records are the ones that take you into that place and make you want to be in the place where you hope that artist is being performed. And then on a political

level it is that dream, that dream of going to this place that's going to embrace you.
Going to Africa, across the border."

Escape to a place of belonging is detailed in relation to Jamaica.

Leonard

"The interesting thing for me was going to Jamaica the first time in '91 as an 18-year-old and feeling, I remember coming back and thinking if I died now I would be happy because – and it took me time to come down from this whole notion that I want to move to Jamaica, cos that's what I wanted to do straight away."

Belonging is tempered by time and experience. He continues

Leonard

"And then, by the time I went the second time, I realised oh OK, I'm not Jamaican however much I might try to fake it and do it I'm an outsider there as much as I'm an outsider here, in the UK I should say or in England."

The relationship between reality and fantasy, as enabled by the music, is laid bare by the respondent continuing the line of thought.

Leonard

"So I don't have a home as such. But then there was something that was unbelievably reassuring that gave me a level of contentment when I was in Jamaica that I had never felt at any point being here. And that's what reggae brings me to. That's what it brings me back to. It brings me back to that feeling of a home, even if it's not real. Even if it's not a reality for me."

The nature of reality, how far its boundaries can be stretched, what grounding in its embrace can facilitate is a recurring theme. Its importance here is restorative and speaks to possibilities experienced even if fleetingly within the musical space.

The embrace of Africa as an ancestral home and the Caribbean as a familial homeland is incredibly important as building blocks of identity. Reclamation of and retelling the slave narrative with its ramifications for the current economic and social situation, rooted in justice, is breathtakingly bold. The links asserted between Africans, Caribbeans (African Americans) and Europeans redefine state sanctioned, education system espoused and commonly held understandings. Most importantly, it comes from the people themselves.

Dwight

“Reggae is evocative of history. It oozes history...It reflected an African consciousness of Jamaican people. It resonates with history in so far as one of its defining characteristics that sets it apart from other music is its social focus. No other music has that special quality of social commentary.”

This sense of location that is underpinned with an uplifting alternative is described.

Edwin

“Listening to reggae music gave me an incredible identity. You know at last I was proud to be in my skin. In my Black skin.”

So far, we have discussed the philosophical outlook and lyrical themes heard in the music. Africa is also present in the importance attached to this form of communication and in the construction of the musical sound itself, the source of its rhythms. The emphasis on the off beat, the prominence of Kumina and Burru drumming, the use of music to achieve altered

states of consciousness are understood as ancient practices melded with modern ones. It is heard by listeners in,

Kevin

“Prominent Nyabinghi percussion.”

And recognised as

Chris

“Melody your body is attuned to that connects to soul consciousness.”

It is heard and embodied in the unity of the social, religious and political. It is encapsulated as enlivening an African mode of being.

Darren

“So my African mode it just enables me to just feel like whatever the world throws at me, or whatever people think of me, that I am great and I do deserve to be here.”

The African link explored in this section will be further developed under diaspora in the final chapter. Its importance here is as a legitimate alternative that affirms a positive sense of self-worth. This comes from respect for and an understanding of ancestral legacy, as well as providing a narrative in support of Caribbean and Black British solidarity. An aspect of Gregory’s music that is repeatedly raised in the listening and interview space is the embrace and projection of identity discourses into the communal public imagination and the public spaces previously defined as loving. Multiple signifiers that relate to a sense of self and a link to others are created and shared in these spaces and further afield.

Use value of the music

Alongside the representational, educational, celebratory and cathartic elements of the musical offering, many listeners detail the ways in which they use Gregory's music in daily life. It is important to state these as it offers an alternative to record sales, the net worth of an artist, royalty payments and other monetary indicators of value. The many aspects of life that are informed by music are difficult to grasp and quantify but are important in terms of personal relationship and are a part of the listener perspective that is being unearthed. Interestingly, much of this information is drawn from the individual interviews, with only brief sentiments expressed in the communal setting of the listening session. However, these sessions accommodate a specific sharing and building of an idea that is especially compelling. Extrapolating use value in this form is complex as it is expressed as part of the identification experienced and understanding of the perspective and concepts encoded in the tracks. This is akin to the Rastafarian concept of livity which denotes a way of life that is uplifting and just. The relevance of the music is also captured by this aspect of value. One strand of this can be summarised as using the music to speak for you.

Ken

"I used to be in discussion with people and they would say some folly and mi used to just say to dem, listen dat tune yah."

This example addresses the depth of engagement with tracks, and level of affiliation felt for this form of expression. The fact that it is considered appropriate for discussion in higher education circles also suggests the ideas expressed are sufficiently rigorous and intelligent to warrant exposure and sharing. A further strand speaks to ways in which Gregory's music feeds into their formal career.

Edwin

“Through reggae music I gained the confidence to write.”

This is confirmed by another respondent who states that reggae music,

Emmanuel

“Informed my work as a theologian and academic.”

Yet another affirms a wide application.

Padma

“I definitely carry that understanding into everything that I do. Into the way I raise my son. Into the arguments that I have with my family. Into the way I see organisations, relationships. The way I conceptualise travel, culture, appropriation, erm housing. It definitely has affected my understanding of history.”

The understanding that is carried through into everyday life forms part of an intricate blend of influences from which respondents select as appropriate, detachment or attachment.

Often the interpretation suggested by the music is woven into a personal story which enables a conscious rejection of accepted narratives. This is captured in the following excerpts detailing the process of making a career decision, recounted in a listening session.

Caleb

“I’d say one of the first tunes that’s in my mind, it’s when I was going through like a career decision and going to the careers officers which is not a very good experience.”

The poverty and racism in the experience of dealing with the careers office is taken up by the other listeners in the group who offer additional examples of how Black people are restricted to certain low skilled paths. The respondent continues

Caleb

“I actually did consider uhm, going in the army. Yeah because there is different skills you could learn from that. I didn’t want to be a soldier, but I wanted to have some sort of a skill. I chose electronics in the end which was actually done at my school, but the point I’m trying to make is that one of the things that actually put me off going in the army was actually a Gregory song, called *Lonely Soldier*.”

Again, the group concur, offering recognition of the track, supporting the respondent in his story. He explains

Caleb

“When I listen to that tune, there’s something about it that actually came into my heart that was saying to me, I am not a soldier as such, but he is actually speaking the experience of a soldier and the experiences that one would go through if you were a soldier... So it’s not just a skill I could get, I would probably end up going to war and maybe I’d lose my life and all that kind of stuff and that actually changed my decision point, for good or for bad I don’t know.”

Quoted at length, the above example makes audible the process through which identification with Gregory and the story he constructs lyrically and musically, has an impact. This is conceptualised in various ways. Initially as an affect, one that strikes at the heart. The capacity of the music to resonate across sensory registers is described in chapter four as

amodal encoding. The sensory rush experienced is visceral and powerful. It is associated with learning. Impact is also described in forms that are allied with musicking. The sentiments facilitate the listener empathetically and remotely being drawn into the experience, with a heightened state of awareness that allows an imaginative response. From this place a decision is reached. A decision that incorporates real and projected scenarios, feelings and bodily effect. The relationships that are brought into being are those of Black people and the state, the value of Black life to the individual and the state, the dislocation between the objectives of the war machine and everyday people and their priorities and practices of maintaining love and family. The ability to trial relationships through musicking and judge their efficacy and applicability to one's sense of individual and collective identity is also open to other ethnicities that engage with the music.

White solidarity

The majority of interviewees for this study identify as Black (British/Caribbean/African), followed by Asian and other minority ethnic groups with a small number of white British and white North American, respondents. The following section examines some of the material provided by white interviewees on the ways in which aspects of their personal and collective identity is changed and developed by engagement with the music. Much is made of attachment and identification with the aesthetic, the alternative narratives, engagement with the Black community through an affinity for and learning to listen to reggae. In response to the question, "is Gregory's music your music?"⁴⁶ the material points to varying degrees of detachment from mainstream conceptualisations that previously

⁴⁶ See appendix 2 for full question used.

provided unexamined and accepted bastions of identification. It depicts movement to a more tenuous and uncertain space in which experience and the development of a more critical understanding is an intimate and life changing process.

In answer to the above question the following respondent's answer, quoted at length, is unequivocal.

Peter

"Yes, absolutely and I know that it's an interesting topic due to my skin colour."

This absolute clarity is unusual in white respondents, who along with academics often dispute and critique the nature of ownership, preferring to declare their love for the music. The respondent's positioning is further explained through his introduction to reggae and explanation of learning to listen.

Peter

"My first introduction to reggae was the two-tone bands. Specials, Selector and Madness. To be honest when I first heard reggae I didn't like it. I thought it was weird. I didn't really dig it. But the Specials were – I guess I make the analogy it's like they translated it into a language I could understand."

The need for translation and being open to learning is elaborated.

Peter

"The Specials they were really singing about things that mattered. That was interesting to me as a teenager... It took me quite a long time to get into reggae. I became a fan of original Ska and still thought reggae was kind of weird. You know,

not really getting into it. Then slowly but surely something clicked. I began to get it. Can't really describe it any better than that. It's like a huge jigsaw and then you kinda just think, oh okay, yeah....For me, the more I heard, the more I wanted to learn. And then the more I learned, the more I wanted to hear."

This cultivated appreciation leads him to conclude

Peter

"You think about the message that Gregory gives the world. It's the voice of Jamaica, but it's also the voice of people everywhere. Whatever skin colour, whatever nationality. I don't know if there is a more universal music than reggae when it comes to that."

The universality that is identified broadens the music's appeal.

Embracing and embodying the "nourishment" that the music and its world perspective provides, our respondent notes that there is a contrast between the acceptance and welcome offered by the reggae community.

Peter

"Over the years I've been fortunate enough to meet and interview and even make friends with a lot of key singers, players of reggae, Alton Ellis, Mikey Dread, Desmond Decker, and not one of them has ever brought up the colour of my skin."

It is members of his white ethnic group that exhibit surprise at his identification and allegiance.

Peter

“Now people say things to me like how come you like reggae so much you’re like the whitest white guy. Oh you’re so white. I’ll challenge them, what would make me kind of Black? If I wore a track suit, or wore my hair in dreads? You know these kind of stereotypical things that people think about. So yeah, I would call reggae my music. Not because I can lay any cultural claim to it, simply because it’s something that’s spoken to me, its musical message.”

In conflict with the view expressed here, over the course of this study there have been public accusations of white music professionals being remunerated at a higher rate and their contribution attracting greater rewards in terms of industry accolades. This is alongside a long expressed claim that Jamaicans (artists, producers and DJs) have not enjoyed the returns the music generates for those outside of the country.

A sympathetic, overtly political identification with the music is offered by the following respondent. Again, quoted at length, it explores the learning that takes place and cultural shift that occurs. The excerpt begins with an answer to the question, “reggae is often linked to identity formation, is this so for you?” This respondent initially rejects this proposition.

Roger

“Hmm, well, probably more identification than identity formation. If that makes sense so, erm, I think it is impossible to think about the experience of what it meant to come of age in London in the 1970s and 80s without that thread and that sort of register if you like, touching your life somehow.”

Further into the conversation, having thought through the gifts the music bestows, the respondent returns to the question and changes his mind.

Roger

“I suppose in a way, I suppose in a way. That version of what culture could be.”

The cultural possibilities that exist generate political understanding and movement. Identity is transformed through an experiential political education. This is elucidated.

Roger

“Regardless of your background, if you were in those sorts of milieu, if you were in those worlds, those contact zones of which there were, you know, the school was a place, the dance was a place, the street was a place. There were fraught places, there were places where there was bridging and division, where there was extraordinary opening out across lines and divisions, as well as barbaric hatreds and racisms. They were tangled up it felt like to me at that time.”

This tangle of experiences and the search to assign meaning, to often conflicting interpretations, is clear. The framing that the music provides is introduced.

Roger

“I suddenly was in a situation where I was mindful of being a minority in a way. Yeah, that’s right. In a world where you are a majority, you were suddenly in a world where you were a minority. And acutely aware of the things you’d assumed all your life. I learnt so much about that.”

Personal experience is then expanded to encompass wider societal relations and forces.

Roger

“It wasn’t until I really put myself in an environment which was hosted by Black Londoners largely, young Black Londoners where suddenly I thought OK, this is an alternative public world where questions around my whiteness and so on, needed to be checked, needed to be confronted.”

The weight of this realisation is acknowledged. He continues.

Roger

“That was an incredible thing for a teenage person to realise. Yeah, the world isn’t quite as I thought it was. Or, it seemed different and accessing that through the music, was accessing a different sense of the world. A different sense of the world, of the people who were making the music and of their place within the world too.”

A thoughtful reflection, it is powerful in its harnessing of representation, experience and a political framework for uncovering who you think you are, who you might become and what choices you can exercise in the moment. Often the choices relate to the forces you choose to align with and correspondingly those you reject or distance yourself from. These associations form intimate aspects of identity relating to beliefs and world view. The fact that they are accessed through cultural appreciation, specifically music with its immersive, transcendent, embodied practice, makes it an especially powerful source. One that is returned to and reworked in different ways at various points in life.

UK minority ethnic solidarity

Within the UK, much of its industrial and economic development has been dependent upon the extraction of physical and human resources from across the globe. This history of

empire and exploitation has facilitated the growth of multicultural communities, particularly in large urban conurbations. It is to these spaces that many former colonised people came in response to the state's request for labour. These disparate national and ethnic groups share similar experiences of colonisation in their home territories and racism in the UK. Particularly for the second generation of these marginalised groups, those born in the UK, the ideology espoused by reggae artists like Gregory, though speaking of a Black Caribbean encounter elicits similarities with their own. This is especially true of their social positioning and treatment within the UK. The labels ascribed to this group as an umbrella term have undergone several iterations with each providing more specificity. However, there was a period beginning in the late 1970s and continuing for some time when Black was an acceptable rallying term around which many African, Caribbean, Asian and mixed groups clustered. The following excerpts speak to this acquaintance and its impact on identity formation both at the time and currently.

Continuing the theme of acquiring a political education, Gregory's role is acknowledged. It is ascribed not just a political slant, but a more overtly political articulation that makes sense of life as it is being lived. This includes identifying and challenging racist family tropes, the state's discriminatory practices and a desire for accurate historical awareness.

Rajesh

"I think it certainly, it woke me up a great deal to the world around me. But I think it did with most of us. But I honestly believe that my generation, that early '70s mid '70s born generation, we were politicised anyway. I think we were more political than people are now. And I think the music, reggae music had a massive impact on that."

The contesting and learning garnered from the music is one aspect of its appeal.

Rajesh

“So reggae was our, it was the street music, it was the cool music. You know, me and my friends weren’t listening to Abba or the Bee Gees. You know, Saturday Night Fever meant nothing to us. Or Grease. You know!... You’d walk down the street and the music is blasting out of windows. You’ve got a couple of rude boys walking down and they’re a bit older than you and you know they’re rude boys but you kind of admire them at a distance.”

This response names the dislocation from the larger cultural icons and the admiration fostered for those in the local community who embody cool. He continues

Rajesh

“And they’re all dreadlocked and they’re all going to sound system dances. And that used to be, by the time I was ten, eleven it was like a, our kind of Shangri la. It was the kind of thing we used to aspire to, to be in a reggae dance with big speakers, which we only got now and then.”

Proximity makes learning from this source and identifying closely with it an easy move to make. Describing the appearance of Gregory on The Tube, performing *Soon Forward*, he states

Rajesh

“We’d heard that he was gonna be on there and every single one of my friends we sat and we waited, and only one of my friends had a video recorder, so we made him record it. And there was all these smelly rockers on and whatever. Isaacs comes on

with Roots Radics backing him and he's got the white suit on and the white trilby hat and he's just, you know. It was like a, it was like one of us."

The direct acceptance of Gregory as "one of ours" expands the earlier depiction of local cool representation. Gregory's relevance is not simply geographic. Our respondent explains further.

Rajesh

"You know. Even though he's racially completely different to me, he was one of us. It's like one of ours is on the telly. He's on a music show that's usually, not mainstream but it's generally middle-class white kids who went to art school and are in bands. Here's Gregory Isaacs and it kind of finally felt like The Tube was my show."

Tuning in to the music's impact on identity construction, on political aspects of this, the experience of living in the UK as an outsider, despite it being your country of birth are raised. The divide between the host culture, parental culture, personal experience and association is significant.

Rajesh

"It was hard to know where you belonged... So we ended up, I think reggae is a big part of it, creating our own culture. And that expression of British ethnicity, so British Jamaicaness, British Indianess was brand new. And I think the reggae, the Jamaican stuff was brilliant but Gregory Isaacs, Dennis Brown particularly those two, and Sugar Minott actually, spent a lot of time in the UK and they influenced all the UK bands as well."

The pathways and results of this creativity and learning are not relegated to youth but are carried into adulthood and continue to exert influence and impact on identity, on personal positioning.

A similar experience is espoused by the following respondent who details her route into Gregory's music. Again, entry is initiated by an affiliation with political music.

Padma

"I liked music throughout my life. I grew up in a very white and Asian culture. And then in my later teenage years I began listening to quite political music, white, punk and rock and subversive folk."

Having named the lure, a step change is identified in the politics associated with reggae.

Padma

"When I went to university I started to listen to more reggae. And partly that was influenced by my friends there. And I really loved it. It was softer than some of the other political music that I listened to. It was softer, but it was no less political. But it was coming from a place where you go through a journey to resolve or to heal something, with a recognition of injustice."

The naming of justice as a strand that appeals is profound. It is elaborated upon.

Padma

"Whereas a lot of the music I used to listen to was angry about an injustice. And when I reflect on it now, I think the starting point was obviously different, because the heritage of reggae came from a known understanding and a shared experience of

terrible human suffering and injustice. Whereas a lot of the white music I'd listened to was reaction to an immediate economic or political cause or incident. So they were immediately angry in a very different way. But they were much more privileged in many ways."

The authenticity identified within and connected with the music comes from its Jamaican origins, the social and economic conditions of its emergence in the global economy and the social commentary and positioning of its artists and listeners. Using these indicators, Gregory's stature is unquestioned. The relevance of his island identity to the racism and structural inequality suffered in the UK is understood and accepted more readily by other immigrant populations.

Padma

"It's contributed to my cultural identity and growth, to my intellectual, emotional resonances and helped me to understand the bigger context of being an immigrant in the UK. The comparisons, the comparisons with other kinds of people migrating here and their cultures helps me to see mine more clearly."

In part, this comparison is more likely because of the outsider status ascribed to immigrant populations, particularly those who are visibly different. It is also due to the spatial proximity of these groups. As explained in relation to his home.

Rajesh

"It's like somebody picked up a bit of London and they just threw it into the East Midlands. Because we were so multicultural then, all of us, the Asian kids, all the south

Asian kids, the white kids, the Black kids, the mixed-race kids we were all sharing cultural experiences. So, we were going to each other's houses.”

The familiarity and shared outsider status are not simply predicated on race or ethnicity. It also references socio-economic class. These factors in combination impinge on identity, its representation and construction. They speak to the appeal of the medium. Its accessibility is also relevant. Essentially, it is shared cultural experiences that enable understanding to develop. The warmth of loving spaces that embrace and include, that make room for difference to be less significant are valued. This is explored in terms of gender in the following section.

Male and female identifiers

The reggae scene is often depicted as male dominated. This is definitely so in terms of artists and industry personnel. It is not true of the listener base. Though the voices of both sexes have been quoted throughout the chapter, this section acknowledges the appeal Gregory had amongst females, breaking this down and examining the similarities and differences outlined by male and female respondents in relation to identity construction. He is recognised as a sexual icon with an abundance of female appreciators as well as a rude bwoy with an image and reputation that resonates with males. This wide appeal is not unusual within the genre, however, it is linked to Gregory in forms that are not afforded to other artists. In part it captures his ability to straddle both lovers and roots reggae and to do this in a manner in which each unsettles the other. This is captured in the following comment.

Rajesh

“For me, one of the top ten albums ever made, *Night Nurse*, just because it’s so simple and effective and does what it is supposed to do. But even on there you’ve got ehm, *Stranger In Your Town*, which sounds like a lovers tune and it is, but in part there is an undercurrent. Can I come to your town? Well why can’t you come to my town, kind a thing? So that all makes you think about the world around you.”

This practice is identified by many listeners and documented in chapter six through the track *Slave Market* which is set to a lovers beat belying its piercing contemporary message. It is also attributed to his emotional vocality endearing women to his vulnerability, facilitating a tender outpouring for men, whilst maintaining a proud, confident expression of Black manhood. This construction and portrayal on a world stage, in a local dance, is a gift for Black people.

A common theme recounted by male respondents is that they seek to emulate Gregory in style and appearance.

Edwin

“It was Gregory, especially for the girls, I think he was the one. As for the guys, because the girls liked him we tried to copy his walk. We tried to mimic it... with the swinging arm, so on and that look he had. I even know guys who tried to grow their locks like Gregory. He was such a visual icon.”

Respondents relate to his live performances, album art, appearances on television and in films and encounters with him in the community.

Doug

“Me look pon Gregory as one of the artist dem weh, not only vocally and song writing him good, but him also was a artist wa present himself looking good which in me, myself love music and is a singer meself, me follow dem pattern de as well. Cause me tink seh is a good way fi come as a artist, yeah.”

“Good” thus encompasses an overall standard of personal and professional traits.

Females also comment on Gregory’s image in an appreciative but less directly appropriative way. There is recognition of the benchmark set by him for other reggae artists and that this filters through to listeners and those attending clubs and dances. Both the visual look that is emulated and as noted in chapter six, the music entwine to create the mood.

Veronica

“When you are in a nightclub and you hear that sound and you’ve got your eyes on someone across the room (laughter) then you just walk and say right this is the one I want to dance with and feel the beat.”

The mood then paves the way for an approach. This is an important part of fashioning and reclaiming a Black identity. The sensual and sexual are political. Who is perceived as desirable is a pertinent choice. Both sexes agree that the ambiance, the musical vibe created by Gregory is unique. This is not determined by lyrics, or musical arrangement specifically but encompasses his sound and specific orality.

Maud

“When you hear his trademark sigh, uh I can’t do it...He made that beautiful sound, it was so sweet.”

This is corroborated.

Calvin

“Now coming to Gregory, Gregory just tek it a little further now and you could feel it when you go to party. You might feel a little chemistry from a daughter and even if you have to walk cross the room to hold a daughter hand. You want to dance with her, through the Gregory. Alright.”

Agreement that Gregory performs a special sensuality is not a theoretical or imagined situation. This response is one of many that directly state that the mere opening bars to one of his tracks function as a call to find a dance partner. This observation is also shared by DJs and sound system operators hosting and orchestrating a dance. In the listening space it is realised, enacted, and absorbed. The desirability and beauty that fill the space is not simply attributable to the effect that Gregory has on women, though this is acknowledged by all. Commenting on a concert given in the later years of his life, a DJ states

Mark

“He was a giant artist...The sense of adoration was palpable.”

Though beyond the focus of this study, this is replicated across countries and continents in similarly empowering ways. Countries that are identified as having a national reggae scene often have an integral sensuality performed and expressed through the music. Brazil is an exemplar of this and Gregory is highly regarded here. Love and sexuality are recognizably fundamental aspects of identity that confined within the racist structures of the UK, are asserted through the music in reclamation of total being status.

Equally important to this investigation is the encompassing political learning that is central to constructing a conscious Black identity. There are some suggestions in the wider

literature on reggae that imply roots reggae is more important to male listeners with females prioritising the tracks that speak of love. Though this is critiqued (Palmer 2010), it proves tenacious and lingers, for example as a justification for the popularity of British lovers rock (especially with British Black females) and Gregory's female listeners. Across the instruments of data collection and the men and women interviewed, the impact and contribution of the music to the development of a historical and politically conscious Black identity is paramount. The scene is set. The issues are clearly articulated.

Minerva

“In terms of identity I think that, certainly for me, growing up born Black and British, ehm we grew up at a time when the tensions between us as the first generation coming through, there were tensions with the home groups....he was part of that genre of music that helped people as they were going through that piece of trying to identify who you were, what you were about, what you stood for, what you didn't stand for, what you would take and what you wouldn't take as a Black woman.”

The establishment and refinement of personal boundaries are critical. This is confirmed by another female respondent recounting university and the grounding and respite gained from hosting a radio programme.

Blossom

“We were very much in the minority and this Sunday evening when we were, you know they gave over the radio station and we had our little 2 hour programme, the boys always played *Soon Forward*, it became our anthem. It just embraced us and

filled us with a sense of being and being black. In a sea of total whiteness and alienation. And yes I can, and yes we will and we did! We certainly did.”

The opinions expressed by male respondents are essentially the same.

Calvin

“Reggae music teach me a whole lot because to me is like a open book. Sometimes it’s even better than go school. Because what them man they preach in their songs you can’t get from no books...So when you listen those guys, you know is like you transfix. Because the singing, the words that them instil inside you, the feeling that them give you.”

The individual impact is combined with the communality of the listening space more generally and the learning that is shared amongst participants.

Calvin

“When you go out and you meet you own kind, you exchange views and sometimes a not you a talk, you know. It’s the words that you listen from them man de come out. That express the feeling that you couldn’t really describe yourself. So I think say, listening to Gregory and certain other man, them give you a serious form of identity. And I can’t give no higher praise than that man, you know.”

The overall impact is summarised eloquently by the following respondent and appreciation of the focus of the study is expressed.

Ngor

“Reggae music spoke for us. It was our education for a lot of people who needed education from wherever your belonging, from where you’re from. Whatever you needed to know, didn’t know. Educated you and brought us together.... So I’m so glad that his name is being highlighted more now. He’s not Bob Marley, he’s Gregory Isaacs. So, thanks.”

In concluding this section, it is important to stress that the emotional literacy and range expressed in Gregory’s body of work is appreciated by male and female respondents. As analysed in chapter six, the following quotes confirm this.

May

“This is a man that has shown a vulnerability and I think I can relate to him like that... So many people can’t do that, so I’m really glad that he’s been able to.”

It is equally applauded by male respondents who more often than females acknowledge the direct applicability of the emotions he is expressing emanating from the situations he is engaged in and which they are also experiencing in their lives.

Edwin

“He recorded some songs that touched me immensely. I mean, *Poor And Clean*, and *The Border*, especially when I was thinking about locking up my hair and had enough of this life, Babylon or whatever and just wanted to step across the border if I could. I had a personal kind a crisis and that song crystallised that if you like.”

A subtle difference expressed by male and female respondents in relation to his vulnerability and overall stance, is that men more readily acknowledge Gregory’s mastery of the medium.

Ken

“He knew he had it.”

The implication is that women are more inclined to accept Gregory’s emotional vulnerability as him laying himself bare before his public. Interviews with those that were close to him and family members suggest to me that both assertions are true.

Conclusion

An important point reiterated by many respondents is the continuing relevance of Gregory’s music.

Roger

“It was of its time and beyond it.”

It is within this frame that it is analysed. It is also as a cultural output. One that is conceived to entertain and in so doing represent, educate, support, communicate in ways that enliven and offer succour. It is an ensemble offer and Gregory’s stage presence drew upon and revelled in this. It is present in the importance attached to his look as well as his sound, both of which distinguish him from his contemporaries. So what tools, what building blocks, what truths are conveyed and embodied in the music? How are they accessed, moulded and utilised in the lives of listeners? The data reveals that the revolutionary take on the African ancestry of Caribbean people (the Americans also) is central to reclaiming a full humanity and forging total being status.

The tools used to do this are not the masters (Lorde 2018). They derive from the peasantry and working-class cultural traditions of those who were the enslaved people. Those who survived the middle passage, transatlantic chattel slavery and continue to exist

within the gendered racial violence unleashed on Black populations across the globe (Weheliye 2014). The fact that Gregory addresses the life experiences, history and social positioning of the Black male whilst appealing to the female is important. It enables a hearing of the disadvantages experienced because of maleness. The data alludes to a specific violence which renders Black men victims of patriarchy rather than as commonly conceptualised, benefactors of it. This can be traced to Rastafarian cosmology which highlights the ravaged remnants of male identity available under empire, colonialism and neo-liberalism. This music thus offers language, space and ideology to theorise Black male life. The reggae aesthetic (Dawes 1999) breaks down this pivotal cultural offering and frames its impact in its island home and further afield.

Building on the archetypal voice traditions explored in chapter five, here the concern is with the message and its implications. Analysis is levelled at the mythology, world view and historiographical concerns raised in Gregory's music. In many ways it inserts a male Black voice, one that is largely omitted from dialogue on diversity and representation. Or is inserted in such a way that their historical sexual vulnerability is erased, their capacity for reflection excised and a full adherence to patriarchy, as theorised by white feminists, is advanced (Curry 2017).

Of great importance and recognised as such by listeners is the retelling of Caribbean history. This is encased in the dignity of Africans and Black people. It posits a review of the relationship that refuses to privilege, or pit one against the other. That offers recognition of their joint suffering, resistance, struggles and strategies. Linking the past to present realities in this way has provided for a progressive relationship to be forged between groups of Black people that language, geography, ethnicity and other tribal affiliations would otherwise

undermine. Initiating and encapsulating a process of renewal and change is part of the vitality and promise of this sound. For UK listeners needing to align with their parents, their emerging communities, their ancestors and further afield, this is invaluable. Not just in the sense of what it offers but the spaces it carves for further reasoning.

The interplay and dialogue between the music, the body and the artist are central to building and shaping identity. Respondents repeatedly speak of Gregory as “one of us/ours.” This defies simple racial and ethnic boundaries. It relates to positionality, not just external representation, though this plays its part in identity, but internal alignment. It encompasses visionary progression. Values, political positioning, spiritual and religious beliefs and affiliations are important here. A respondent spoke eloquently of the similarities between Sikhism and Rastafarianism and though not a practising member of either religious group, expresses appreciation for the openness of the aesthetic and its premise in basic human conditions. The freedom identified in the music enables each listener to bring their own experiences and understanding to bear. It is within this analysis of the listening space that musicking is most apparent.

The aspirational, inspirational, educational and emotional impact of the music is harnessed directly to meet individual and collective needs. Respondents relay moments of returning to the tracks that are associated with political growth and learning in order to reaffirm continued allegiance and verify that there are still valued principles at play in their current life situations.

Leonard

“I listen to it, it’s kind of talking to my principles and to whether I am still upholding my principles. And again that’s very much as a Black male, that’s very much my political ideologies it absolutely speaks back to me in that way.”

Gregory’s longevity and prolific production have enabled him to exemplify the role of touchstone for many of his listener’s lives.

Darren

“Every so often he would just make something that I really liked from I was younger right up until he passed. I class them as my sort of struggle along life.”

His humanity, frailty and public mistakes are included in this journey and offer opportunities for forgiveness and empathy, a greater emphasis on understanding than condemnation. Listeners report separating the body of work from the imperfections of the man and use this gentle approach towards themselves, correctly interpreting it as an act of love.

This is the expansive, inclusive version of love that is brought into existence in the listening space and anchored in everyday life in myriad ways. It exists in the communities that are formed through the sharing of sound. It exists across the sexes. Both males and females gravitate towards Gregory’s political sensibilities and emotional dexterity in characterising love relationships. Ambivalence and mistrust are recognised, verified and accepted as an element in sexual identity. This disturbance of the prevalent male and female stereotypes of love is liberating in that it proposes greater similarity than difference in attitudes, reflective capacity and emotional range. This is not to deny sexism, it exists in the reggae music industry and many female performers and personnel experience obstacles. They also draw attention to the support they receive balancing this. Noting similarities does

not erase differences either. Gregory's pursuit by the police, incarceration and links to criminals are topics raised frequently. Rather than placing him on the edge of the community, this resonates particularly with male respondents who express affinity and liken this to the state sponsored violence they experience at the hands of the British police. This will be examined further in the final chapter.

These identity discourses are enacted and constructed in local, national and international arenas and correspondingly, imaginations (Hope 2013). Cultural signifiers of identity are created and disseminated, tried and assessed for their usefulness and efficacy. From the data gathered in this study, identity is not solely constructed within representation, as important as this is. It is constructed of intimacy and subjectivity through the spaces, public and private in which listening takes place and which encompass many meanings and understandings. Such that it is malleable to experience and self-inscription.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion: Send Me Back My Heart

How can two hearts beat as one?

And you've got both and I've got none

I crave for happiness in the midst of loneliness

But the grief and pain become numberless, So

(G Isaacs 2008)

Introducing the Answers

The work of this chapter is to gather and bring to the fore the information, including feelings, ideas, associations, memories, understandings, philosophies and wisdom collected, and all that has been learnt during the research process. As the best tracks in the reggae tradition do, we return to the beginning. These are the questions that guided the investigation.

1. What value (cultural, political social and spiritual) is realised through the music of Gregory Isaacs?
2. In what ways is his voice of significance?
3. How does listening play a role in apprehending value?
4. What is revealed about the nature of musical communication?

Armed with, and restored by the perspectives of listeners, a wealth of material has been provided to help answer these questions.

The value of Gregory's music is appreciated by listeners. It is experienced as a loving space. A practice in the facilitation of full human status and personhood. It offers the co-creation of fundamental, life enhancing communication and strategies often denied and distorted within racist structures. The understanding and proclamation of a loving nature is a truth that is restorative. In this space, through this experience, solidarity, similarity and identifications are forged. Internal and external perspectives are aired, reasoned over, reconciled or rejected, and a positive, historically congruent self is seeded, planted, nurtured. This encompasses gender attributes and relations, ethnic, race, class and political affiliations. The possibilities are remade and remembered. It is heard and distilled through the instruments of grounding, of experience.⁴⁷

As we have heard, the voice is significant as the expression of the soul through the body. But neither concept is meaningful in the singular. It carries agency, the traces of the flesh and life as it is lived. Not just individual life, it is expanded to signify the community, nation, region, transnational and diasporic communities as the Black voice. It generates and expresses tones, sounds and linguistic markers that speak to and denote the boundaries of belonging, of community, of choice. The ease of travel across geographical, gender, ethnic, national and language divides is enhanced within a musical swell.

In similar fashion the role of listening in apprehending, constructing and apportioning value is theoretically, and then experientially accounted for. Its complex internal and external movement through individual and communal bodies is where meaning is made. It is remade,

⁴⁷ The term grounding refers to Rastafarian communication processes in which new knowledge, born of experience is unearthed, shared and overstood.

returned to and adjusted as circumstances and perspectives demand. Its bodily forms, including dancing and singing as cultural traditions implicate, is experienced as techniques of attentiveness. Bodily attention that interprets and expresses musical communication, adding value through commanding the release and rejuvenation these forms enfold. The building of Black audiences in spaces in which we are “othered” is equally decisive. It forms the skin of the community/individual body.

In acknowledging the excess of the voice and listening practices the following concepts form a refrain; the erotic as the basis of all love; selfhood and personhood; liminality and movement. These are the approaches to Gregory and themselves, as individuals and a community, that listeners reveal. This vitality is fleshed out within the current context of the COVID 19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter campaign, initiated in the US and expanding globally with the murder of George Floyd. The current international attention on racial and structural inequality provides an additional layer of meaning. The implications of this for musical communication specifically and cultural expression more generally are confronted.

The methodological parameters are reassessed as tools and spaces capable of discerning and amplifying voice, of extending the boundaries of sound so that all that is produced can be heard and meaning acknowledged, constructed and agreed (at least in principle). Possibilities for how the work might be taken forward, its shortcomings and questions raised along the way are highlighted. Thus, a version of the original with the dub plates – stripped back sound featuring one or two instruments providing a bass line or solo - that foreground concepts and directions in the original mix is offered. My role as researcher/listener is similarly probed. In recognition of what has been learnt on this journey, the presence and voices of listeners is maintained in this chapter. In this final chapter, my

authorial voice is aligned with the voices of listeners sounding my position as a researcher steeped in the music, and in acknowledgement of the research process itself. In answering my questions respondents have expanded my understanding and knowledge and shifted the project accordingly. The final voice is an ensemble one. The conclusions and implications pursued are my own.

Surprises in the data

The research project has unearthed rich detail supporting the intrinsic, constructed and shared value of Gregory's music. It is worth pausing here to examine the word intrinsic. What do I mean by this? Little exists in sounds themselves that are already known (Eidsheim 2019) or can be known conclusively. Knowing is always held alongside, in relation to something else. Yet, a collection of practices, enculturated, recognisable, largely agreed upon in listening, vocal and musical spheres, in cultural spheres that comprise the reggae aesthetic exist and are reinforced. In its travels it retains, remakes a signalling quality. These include the circularity of the rhythm, emphasis on the off-beat, centrality of bass, of drums, association with a polyphonic tradition, antiphony. Factors which enable ready identification of liminal, on the edge of, between societies in the West. And African societies in the South.

Affiliation and re-creation through music and language choice, metaphor use, performance practice and audience connection enable claims of "ours, this is us." This sound speaks to aspects of our condition. Overlaid and entwined with experience over time, its initial and early approach, the process through which we learnt to listen, is difficult to discern. Much like group emotions (Ahmed 2014) its stickiness can be felt, its circulation

acknowledged, its power appraised and its allure recognised. But what makes it so is complex and shifting. We will return to this. For now, let's remain with the value listeners identify.

Two broad findings stand out. The first of these is the absolute assertion of Black male sensitivity and vulnerability in love and life. It is wrapped in defiance, agency and calls for justice. Frames which are often posited as patriarchal and political, rather than loving, creative expressions of full personhood. The second is the importance of this popular music form as an expressive and contemplative force that articulates and constructs from lived experience, hopes and vision, a congruent way of walking through the world. A livity that is not counter-cultural but is ours, pertaining to and tracking our understanding of life as it is lived. Who is the us to which "ours" refers? It is listeners, largely Black audiences that have built, supported and imbued this sound with meaning. What is the significance of these findings?

Loving spaces

An overall and key value is the creation of a loving space. A space that harnesses love, ushering it into the cultural, political and social fields in diverse ways that are linked in their relation to reality. This is experiential knowing in which love is felt, it is absorbed as it circulates. Gregory is known for his emphatic attention to love in all its manifestations. In numerous interviews he asserts his belief that there is no stronger force in the universe and that this was the pull that drew him into the music business.⁴⁸ It is fitting that the warmth of this love is palpable and appreciated by listeners who work with and contribute to the love

⁴⁸ An interview with Daddy Ernie a radio DJ. <https://youtu.be/Qk475SrdPQM>

available in this space. A loving, sonorous space imbued with allure, belonging and acceptance is rich in markers, traditions, practices and philosophies that are the raw materials from which identities, coherencies and thoughts about self emerge and are refashioned as appropriate. They arise in memories of parents and extended family groups and gatherings. The charisma and attractive nature of bodies in these spaces enacting love are retained as achievable exemplars long after the music has ceased.

The importance of this space is also to be found in its position. Occupying a liminal place between the private domain and the public sphere it acts upon and colours both. It draws upon and is influenced by them also. It is thus a cocoon in which to feast and grow and ultimately emerge sufficiently formed, as well as a landing site to which one returns to replenish. The multidimensionality of the space is alive in the forms of love it fosters and supports. These are detailed in chapter six but can be categorised as: romantic and sexual love which centres on attraction and attachment; community love which expands familial bonds by capturing strands of identification and awareness including history; love of life which gathers the more esoteric spiritual essences, the beauty and inherent meaningfulness of life in all its forms.

The construction and maintenance of this loving sonic space enlists a community effort and rewards the same. Claiming and marking space, the occupation of territory, coheres and unifies individuals and groups previously separated and isolated. It strengthens those already affiliated. The population and strategy of the opening of such spaces express and refine our ways of walking through the world and as such is value laden. Embracing the raw components of our lives and stories, reconfigured and propagated through the music of Gregory, is an energetic and spiritual endeavour, a political force. Political in the sense that

its occupation of and incursions within the public sphere renders it more than a simple concern with individual life, but with community, society as a whole. The allusion is that the space being held exists historically and will continue to into the future imbuing it with a worldly concern. Where actions spark reactions and give rise to endless possibilities through networks of relationships, comprised of but unbounded by individuals.

Excess, a concept detailed in relation to voice and listening, is documented here, seeping into liminality, marking borderlands of intermixing. Spaces and places in which home and belonging can be felt, detachment and new personas developed. Outsiders become insiders and host those that dominate the already certified public spaces that exist. The loving space includes sound system dances, concerts, parties, public functions, communal listening over the airwaves in the individual space of the home, the car and increasingly the computer. It covers personal selections heard in isolation. Whatever the context, the sonic content envelopes, penetrates and transforms.

Love of Self

Many of the ways in which the value of this music is recounted by listeners speak to gathering or getting one's bearings. This is an orientation that love anchors, that it magnetises. It is a love that reaches out and within, expanding to embrace life. Its power is found in epiphanies and less dramatic tones that build into lifelong perspectives born of experience. Experiences of sociality, community and solidarity across ethnicities, musical genres, age and sex. Included are values that listener's articulate under the themes of identity/ies/fiers. The research process exudes a strong sense that despite the complexity and misuse of this term, in essence this is where the crux of Gregory's music lies. It is the

capacity to state with love, with clarity, with pride, this is us. This is who we are. This is what we mean to each other. This is how we perceive and experience ourselves. The we, is expansive accommodating differences that can and do divide but are surmountable in community, national and international alliances. Identified by Gilroy (1993) as the black Atlantic it is more extensive than this body of water suggests. The how is centred in full human status, in the rejection of all that would limit this. It is in the naming and healing of old and continuous wounds and the commitment to self-care and agency as recovery.

Forged and expressed under a cultural banner it realises and marks a profound encounter. As expressed by listeners it represents an invitation to join in. An invitation to experience this music, this community, these perspectives and allow them to affect and impress upon you in unpredictable ways. Ways that last beyond the initial encounter and initiate complex chains of reaction that influence relations thereafter. This is expressed in the following excerpts. Mamako pays homage to the importance of Gregory and Sonia to his continuing impact.

Mamako

“So Gregory he was the cool ruler, the ultimate lovers man. I think he was credited with having one of the first lovers rock tracks. But yet still, seminal tracks like *The Border* and *Slave Master* show how much of a musical genius he was. So, for me it was very much part of me, part of my journey.”

Sonia

“The fact that you can still play this music, forty years on and generations of people who are our generation and even younger, it resonates and they relate to it. It shows the power of those songs, you know.”

We can take from these statements assurance that the power still circulates.

A related aspect of self love that features prominently in respondents’ accounts of value, is that relating to romantic, sensual love. It unites would be lovers and more generally integrates the power of the erotic into life. The sexual drive is explored as an essential element of human nature and fully located in ordinary Black lives. It is given expression in culturally recognised and specific forms that employ the beauty of the Black experience. Much is made of this quality of the music. Sweet vocals, set to seductive tones and bass lines, with poetry and emotional language make loving a more probable outcome. Male and female speak of the increasing love vibe palpable in the environment as sound systems sessions and parties are being set up. They recount the instant transcendence a track can provide and the sensory overload, akin to being plucked out of the current environment and deposited in another, enveloped in love and desire. This is not just recounted or remembered by respondents. It is corroborated through bodily responses to the music in the listening sessions and animation of the interview process.

The value of this music in orchestrating, depicting and accompanying love and sexual expression is manifest and multifaceted. It is a culturally and contextually relevant love ethic that expresses and speaks to our situations. Replete with our pain and joy, our hurdles and rites of passage. The power of contributing to and loving the depiction presented of oneself is impossible to overstate. A sensitive and wide understanding of romantic love with its humour and encompassing humanity is personified. From this, listeners take counsel and

succour. They relay both observing and feeling able to relinquish the protective methods usually employed in everyday life.

This sentiment is especially noted by male respondents who cherish the value of role models expressing the vulnerability they feel. It legitimises and makes possible their articulation of the same. It confronts societal portrayals of Black life and catapults into the public sphere what we know to be true of the private sphere. Females similarly applaud the love ethic personified in the music and speak of its role in swelling the ranks of listeners and propelling Gregory's fame. My question probing ambivalence in his portrayal of women bore no fruit. Rather the emotional clarity and range, the appeal to and recognition of the power of the female and reciprocal response required for love to flourish are highlighted. Both male and female agree that the prospect of romance, of intimacy is enhanced. The willingness to enter the dance space, the embrace of another, all contribute to the embodiment and performance of sexual love. This is powerful perception, expression and medicine. A healing balm, it is known by all, as is Gregory's part in evoking and stoking this fire.

An important and frequent corollary to self love is the shared insight that societal depictions and expectations placed upon male and female cannot contain the variety within and are insufficient for Black people. Speaking of Gregory's encapsulation of the warrior and lover archetypes, this is identified and claimed in individual lives.

Maureen

"I believe I am the mix of the two."

It is claimed by male and female. The inadequacy of current and historical gender categorisations to explain and map behaviour are held as examples of racist ideologies which mean the cultivation and protection of inner spaces, internal resources are ever more vital.

The concept of liminality applied to the boundary of the inner and exterior self, the skin of the individual and the community is productive. A semi-permeable membrane that holds one together, gives form and shape providing a shielding barrier. Protection engages physical control (O'Hall 2006) a comrade to political resistance. For many listeners the two cannot be separated as they nurture and constitute the other. In our listening, experiential, musical spaces, constricting gender stereotypes are rejected. Black males are recognised as subjected to patriarchal systems of domination that both demand and undermine their manifestations of maleness, which are maligned, misrepresented and misunderstood. Gregory is not identified as misogynistic or over macho. His warrior, resister mode becomes protective of the Black community. His badman status an appropriate response to the harms that would assail him from his community's and personal positioning.

A similar acceptance and understanding are extended to what can be perceived as an ambivalence towards women who are simultaneously revered and mistrusted. It is explained in terms of experience, and this means the female capacity for sexual exploitation and a will to dominate are also acknowledged. These capacities, personalised and localised in Gregory, the scenes he along with listeners conjure and enact in musicking, are recognised and embedded in us all. Females embrace their power, its shadow and celebrated aspects. Its similarity and fluidity with male ascriptions are noted and circumstantial, historical and psycho-social factors are apportioned appropriate influence. These findings are unexpected and relay a complementarity between male and female within the Black community and

maybe people more generally. Needs and drives are understood as universals rather than competitive battles that render some or classes of victors.

It is easy to read this as a golden age, a blessed community engaging in politically relevant and spiritually nurturing activities. This is not so. What is revealed by listeners is creativity and possibility. New, modern myths enacted and embodied that re-version old ones and reinterpret established ones. A more equal form of sexual play is promoted, a wider bandwidth of gender is brought forward in which all can find encouragement, and in which negative hyperbole is discarded. The lies powering the irrational fear of Black men, that have become the accepted truth, are intimately and collectively understood to be wrong. Our understanding of ourselves rings true. Its validity resounds in the music, is performed in the dance and comprises new and different rights and responsibilities that implicate unity and collaboration. Black females are restored to beauty, tenderness with strength factored in. Anger is righteous. Identity as practical activity, as common sensibility, as similar experience is authenticated and intensified. It is beautiful to behold and partake of. Ultimately, the extent to which this account is understood as fantasy is in direct oppositional and equal force to prevailing hegemonic narratives.

Reprise

Thus far we have traversed the loving space absorbing its self love, constitutive and restorative elements. These abound in relation to formation and maintenance of a Black community, culturally and politically, locally and globally. They emerge in sensual and sexual relationships straddling the private and public domain carving room for loving one another and oneself. We cannot calculate accurately the value that is apportioned to such

foundational and yet ephemeral influences. For listeners, this is summed up as priceless in its power to meet needs, to publicly declare and substantiate humanity and its travelling capacity, all of which confront oppressive distortions that leach the energy for change (Lorde 2018). Accepting that meeting human need is infinitely valuable, the development of an internal measure of empowerment, of love in varying aspects is comprehensive. This is what is brought into being with this musical life work. Of paramount importance is the fact that we are saving ourselves.

Voice(s)

The unique and individual, generic and universal voice of Gregory has proven an appropriate and exemplary instrument with which to address its significance in the reggae offer. Documented from listener perspectives, theoretical conceptions are exceeded. Emerging from the liminal space of the Caribbean, it is significant in its capacity to amplify and communicate ordinary working class and peasant musical and cultural traditions, sensibilities that are otherwise omitted from the nationalist project (Dawes 1999) and devalued in the global.

Aaron

“You had these people coming up, this new music that they could express themselves through and everybody had a story to tell. And it was a very powerful story on occasions. You know what I mean? You had people coming out of the ghetto, singing about the ghetto. And out of the ghetto came the best voices.”

The best being the most compelling stories carried in the most evocative tones.

How significant this actually became and continues to evolve into is in part due to its ease of travel and relevance in the belonging and racial awareness missions in the UK. Often this geographical place is identified correctly as a pivotal point, a portal to wider sonorous spaces (Gilroy 2010, Palmer 2010). The political, economic and social struggles voiced here in song, nurtured and attended to in cultural forms are at least as important as the travel ways carved by empire and domination. These are foregrounded in the listener story. It has global resonance too that links and addresses the African diaspora across the world and communities and individuals for whom justice and equality are important ideals deemed relevant in musical culture.

What is heard, held and conveyed in the voice is racial signifying, emotional literacy and intelligence, states of being and understanding that are used for succour, healing and sustenance, as well as pleasure, joy and release⁴⁹. These are present and reworked in the music that cradles the voice, that provides accompaniment for its idioms, cadences and inflections. The rhythmic patterning, basslines varying interpretations of the melody, ensemble nature of the whole sound purvey enclosure and tight parameters with spaces for self, dreams, contemplation, group understanding and expression.

How is this range embraced, these possibilities supported? The answer resounds in the excess of the voice. The theoretical framework identifies the expansive nature of the voice starting with the traces of the body that are audible, the experiences, history, emotional state, geographical location, travel, gender, habits, lifestyle and education. This is more than the bodily emission of sound. It encompasses the voice in song and includes choices exercised

⁴⁹ I am speaking here of how listeners relate to and use the music as well as what they hear in it. Attributes include, self-control, persistence, self-motivation, compassion and understanding.

by the vocaliser and their presumed listeners. It is a product. As such, a sound moulded and directed, comprising agency, intention and purpose. It cannot but include traces and indications of the bodies (including the musicians, engineers, producers) through whom sound emerges. It is interpreted and understood by listeners as of them, speaking and singing to them, touching and fathoming them. The bonds of this intimacy are identified by Paul Gilroy (2010), as forged in a time when “music did occupy the epicentre of black culture in a new and distinctly modern way: as both custom and commodity.” (p 145) Though he speaks of African American music, the same is true of reggae.

Reggae follows a long tradition across the African diaspora of music marking and facilitating life. Of the voice in song, wielding a powerful force. This force is in excess of what can be measured, or scientifically explained, but is experienced as worthwhile and beneficial. Returning to our listener,

Aaron

“I just get that same buzz as from many many years ago... There is no other music like it on the planet.”

It is within this deceptively simple explanation, variously offered by respondents, that I consider the kernel of the allure lies. It is in the erotic quality of the voice.

Eroticism is named by Roland Barthes (2008) in his sharing of vocal preference. However, the application of the concept delivered by Audre Lorde (2012) is much more akin to that described by listeners. “The erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge” (p 10). For Lorde, this is identified as one of many kinds of power that lie deep and often unacknowledged in females. I contend this is so for males as well, is present in

Gregory's body of work, and is what his listeners hear. It is a force that encourages movement, precipitates and accompanies change, prioritises internal understanding over external judgement. As such it is a process, a realisation, a coming to be that accommodates lifelong engagement.

Aaron

“Reggae, that is mine. And that's what I identify with. That's what I know. That's what I grew up on. That's what my teenage years, you know it was part of my teenage years. My twenties, my thirties, my forties, right the way through. Hopefully till I'm put in the ground.”

The importance of this testimony is its commitment across the life span, by implication this cannot be static. Allegiance, though often initiated in youth, extends far beyond this impressionistic and identity forming period.

The embodied nature of this affiliation and its expression determine that it cannot be comprehensively observed or heard from a distance (Baldwin 1979), sufficiently mapped within existing musical scales, or thought through without cultural sensitivity and experience. The considerations of voice incorporate atmosphere, sociality and connection. In this way, sense perception, motor response cannot be wholly located in individual human bodies (Crawley 2017, Ahmed 2014). We are not just influenced, but are made of environmental factors, physically and metaphorically (Crawley 2017). We emerge, exist and develop in a social arena. Thus personhood, smadification,⁵⁰ can only be nurtured, achieved in an environment in which the elements that abound acknowledge our humanness, are loving

⁵⁰ This term popularised by Prof Rex Nettleford speaks to the Rastafarian philosophy of self-definition which facilitates achieving and claiming accomplishment.

towards us, support and aid images, sounds, perceptions of ourselves that resonate with our experiences and understandings. Anything less, curtails and destroys. It does this through seeking alignment with forces that are averse to our allure and intrinsic worth, ambivalent to our humanity.

The value and applicability of the erotic as understood by Lorde (2012) is wholly appropriate here. Characterised as an internal resource it is deeply embedded in both the physical and spiritual planes, it is thus a liminal power capable of arousing and providing the charge for change. The dominion of the erotic is distorted and abused in current depictions and discussions of Black sexuality, femininity and masculinity (Lorde 2012, Curry 2017). It is relegated solely to the sexual, misnamed and policed, and cut off from the life force that it is. In Gregory it is affirmed. Identified in the voice, it is a drawing towards, a leaning in, and as such becomes a form which unites, which gathers. It resounds in the longing, the emotion, the sexual, political and economic vulnerability embodied in the voice. Woven throughout the chapter, it is sufficient here to note the need, name the feeling and strength of this magnetic pull towards another from our deepest selves. It is felt by male and female and whilst it acknowledges the racialisation of voice, it goes beyond symbols to substance (Younge 2019) encapsulating experiences, practices, lives, embodying layered meanings.

Listening

The role of listening in apprehending value is clear; it is here that meaning is sought and made. This is so for the vocalist listening to their own voice in the performance of song. The mechanism is bodily listening, including dance and song. It is worth reemphasising two points made in earlier chapters. Firstly, deep or concentrated listening of the type

respondents routinely describe in relation to Gregory, is experiencing a resurgence. It is one that is uniquely packaged and commoditised yet is sold as a necessary rebalancing of current listening habits. These are conceptualised as individual, on the move, entirely self-selected and relegated to peripheral or background soundscapes. In addition to the rise of festivals as spaces for communal, immersive music, listening sessions are also being offered (Barnes 2019). Here vinyl, high specification playback systems, community and darkness are enlisted as aids to meditative listening, relaxation and ways to live well. Darkness, immersive sound vibrating in and around the body are trademarks of the reggae scene with the addition of dancing. Secondly, and related to the first, is a return to the conception of listening to music as participatory, active engagement. A ritual, fundamental act of life that models and reworks cultural forms of concentrated attentiveness and one that is marked by differences across and within cultures.

In essence, listening to Gregory is listening to ourselves. And by this, I mean as a racialised community and as individuals who deserve and demand to be heard in our innermost selves. This is a practice of redeeming one's own humanity (Shilliam 2013) and it speaks to overdetermination, layers of meaning contained in the song which comes from the struggle. This is all referred to by listeners and conceptualised here as a component of the excess of listening. Why is listening to ourselves an act that is meaningful and value laden? The findings establish that it brings us home to ourselves. It resources and replenishes us. It is eloquently expressed by the following respondent who shares what he gets from musical encounters with Gregory.

Darren

“It’s a feeling of being a non-conformist. You’re not gonna turn me to what you want.
Meaning the system or life.”

This is contextualised as part of the groundwork of building a stable sense of self.

Darren

“Things change, your attitudes change. But there is a certain foundation that will
always stay.”

The foundation is cultural.

Foundation is usefully addressed through the specific development of the language that emerges from the philosophy offered by Rastafari (Alleyne 1996). It is linked to biblical expression (Palmer 2007), to experience and perception (Pollard 1980), and to the natural world through its critique and rejection of capitalism, colonialism and its political and doctrinal defiance and subversion. It is an extension of Jamaican popular language. A unique feature is the creative use of the I, and I and I. It is recognised as having special importance in the lexicon and performing many tasks in different speech contexts. It accounts for the plural, whilst acknowledging the individuality of each and the freedom of expression and perspective that this endows. It holds and expresses the combination of divine indwelling spirit and human presence that is realised within Rastafari (Barnett 2002). This assertion is enabling and transformative for the psyche (Barnett 2002). It is so because the changes correct the inferior position imposed by the colonial experience and reject its distortions. It is thus a “heart language,” incorporating God consciousness and community solidarity (Palmer 2007:30).

It is important to note that the elements collected and refashioned by Rastafari, embedded and communicated through reggae are not new. The unification of music, dance and religion are routine cultural expressions on the African continent (Savishinsky 1998). Notions of the god-man concept exist within Jamaican folk culture (Chevannes 1998), continuous themes across Marcus Garvey and Rastafari are identifiable. The central concerns of human development (Nettleford 1998) encompassing art forms, spiritual beliefs, language, economic and political strategies are rethought and enacted in community. In this way the individual's role in the collective is not proscribed, there are many forms of orientation.

Self love rooted in context and experience provides a particular authenticity both spiritually and individually. The role of community is decisively locked in through the tradition of reasoning. This vital group communication strategy is a practice of reaching consensus (Barnett 2002), of ascertaining the sense of the group. It is a method that brings forth the higher truth that resides in the soul through collective reflection. A process that at the very least, provides learning opportunities.

We return to our listeners. It is difficult to document through excerpts the distillation of thought and agreement reached during the listening sessions. Respondents often relay their individual experience and thinking by weaving it into the larger communal narrative under construction. This special form of data gathering facilitates reflection that generates new understanding which accommodate the feeling of the group. Value is part of the process as well as its product.

The final note in the chord that embraces is the chime of our own song. Voiced and heard, it is the sound of us singing to ourselves, for ourselves and of ourselves. Its fullness breaks open the heart, its nuance sutures us back together and one to another. Recognition

arrests and cradles us in the listening space long enough to hear and experience something new. Something for this moment, situation, reality. This is the sound of our song in a strange land. In chapter two, the first written recollection of Jamaican music is analysed by Rath (1993) who documents the cessation of song and change of tune when observers from the slave owner class are spotted. This protection is afforded in new forms in Gregory's reggae. It is hidden in plain sound in the orality, the themes, the layered meaning in each crafted word. It is in the emotion belying the cool stance, the pain and joy in existence, the survival and creativity of life lived on the margins, regardless of the continent. And in the same way that we recognise that the oceans lapping the continents are one body of water; the sounds, bodies and sensibilities of performers and listeners form the skin of the community.

Methodological Appraisal

The decision to attend to a single artist, somewhat unfashionable (Gilroy 2021), has proved effective. Initially driven by the need to expand the field and communicate the community nature of the aesthetic, it has delivered riches by accommodating the range of propagation methods utilised within the genre. Sound systems, cassette tapes (Monrose 2021), radio, live performance, communal and individual listening and everything in between are all included. The listening experience defined in this broad way similarly does not constrain or stereotype an audience. It facilitates listening over time, reflection and return, and grounded affinity with an artist. It privileges the listener and their experience as remembered, recounted and applies their frames of reference to the literature, industry commentary and scholarship on the genre. An emphasis that gathers influences and relationship to the artist, music and cultural expression as a grounding in belonging.

The shape that emerges is fed by the facilitation of “thick description,” (Eidsheim 2015).⁵¹ It flows from the semi-structured interviews, with questions uncovering themes that probe relationships. It comes from the listening sessions which enfold participants in the music they are discussing and reveals the perceptions and articulations of all sharing the space. It is an output of the joy expressed at the opportunity to speak about Gregory, the ubiquity and centrality of music in life, and the depths to which this affinity reaches. It also touches on the layers of meaning and benefit that can be excavated, mined from an encounter, a track, the lyric, the musical arrangement, the environment and the learning.

The shape is also influenced by my place and presence in the research process. As both researcher and listener my positioning is part of the methodology employed. The framing of the project, its morals and ethics combine my motivations and those of my participants. This is encoded in the track titles that head chapters, the significance attributed to culture, the purpose and judgement accorded to data gathered and the uses to which it is put. Accountability to fellow listeners, my participants, the wider reggae, and academic communities all play a role in how the narrative is constructed. It provides borders, parameters that challenge my interpretations and prompt me to check and recheck their validity. I have used my final semi-structured interviews with a radio disc jockey, a promoter of live music, three listeners and two academics, to in part scrutinise the efficacy of the findings as they emerge. I do this to guard against amplification of an issue that speaks only to me in my multiple situated position. As subject and audience, the described and addressed, the opportunity to disrupt my perceptions is welcome.

⁵¹ I came to this term from Eidsheim. However, it was made famous by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. It originated from Gilbert Ryle, a British philosopher, travelled to America and has acquired cross disciplinary usage. As an investigative tool I have found it beneficial.

Ultimately, I am accountable to my community which I embrace as a commitment to contribute to knowledge production in ways that enhance our lives. As expressed by Arun Kundnani (2020), there are questions to ask.

We need to ask if the knowledge we produce effectively analyzes structures of power as they exist in the world today. Are we doing so in a way that has an organic connection to liberation movements seeking to overturn those structures of power?

In short, what use can the knowledge produced be put to? The answers to these questions are to be found in the priority given to the listener experience. It is in the equal status afforded to the voices that are heard. It is in the imperative to delve into the cultures of listening that give meaning to and reveal the worth of this music.

Dissonance in the chord

There are questions that remain unanswered. What impact did listeners have on Gregory's practice? How did his reception across continents feed into his development as an artist? Anecdotal evidence and insights from those who knew him personally and those who worked with him suggest the relationship was indeed reciprocal. He is known for his closeness to the dancehall space and audience rapport. His immersion in his community (culturally, musically and socially) is true of his life in Jamaica and his sojourns in England. Whether this was an expansive or restricting factor would be an interesting route for further exploration.

There are shortcomings in the project. It is very London biased. Initial plans to hold listening sessions in Birmingham and Wolverhampton could not be fulfilled. Interviews were

conducted with individuals either based in, or who have lived in regions outside of London, but this is not a question I asked and whether it was revealed was left to participant's discretion. It would be interesting to engage with listeners on a regional basis to explore what differences, if any exist. Related to this is international listeners. It would be enriching and informative to hold a listening session in Jamaica and one other country, possibly Brazil or Italy. Language differences were present in the sessions held but could be more fruitfully engaged as a means of examining voice and listening practices cross culturally. Jamaica as the home of reggae would be a useful reference point for the changes travel, and the specificity national scenes has wrought. Again, this was touched upon in semi-structured interviews conducted in Jamaica. However, a systematic exploration of value and meaning could not be attempted with the material gathered.

An overall shortcoming is that participants are self-selecting.⁵² There is no attempt to claim representation in terms of sex, ethnicity, age or socio-economic class. There is an overall aim to have listeners as the largest group in order to rectify what can be heard as scholarly and industry domination of the reggae narrative. Most information in the public domain is from this source. This situation is changing rapidly with the mushrooming of virtual platforms and channels. It would be an interesting proposition to focus on information entirely from this source. It would also be enriching to engage in greater performance and musical analysis which have played a minor role in this project.

As reggae artists of Gregory's generation (the pioneers and originators) pass away and much oral testimony and memory of its triumphant past are fading, it is necessary to record

⁵² See chapter 3 for a breakdown of participants. This is offered in terms of female/male, industry personnel (radio and sound system personnel, promoters, etc) cultural commentators (academics, journalists) and listeners.

similar profiles of artists and their contributions. Attention on the voicing and listening practices associated with other artists would construct a more detailed version of the unique relationship of each to the whole reggae offer.

Revealing Musical Communication

We move to the final research question. What is revealed about musical communication? An important revelation is the importance and accessibility of this mode of relating to oneself, others and wider society. The aspects of value detailed in this project attest to this and anchor it in both substance and symbol (Younge 2019). This is very important. Cultural activity, formation and expression is often relegated to symbolic importance. Representational significance is separated from material, real and practical consequence. This is refuted by listeners who speak to and of the difference this music makes to their lives. This is calculated individually and collectively, nationally and globally, internally and externally. It is a powerful assertion to make. What changes can we claim for the music? Who and what interests does it serve? Listeners declare reorientation born of understanding (Shilliam 2013). They discover new perspectives and possibilities of being. They claim new knowledge wrought from experience and participation, rather than abstractions that do not fit.

This is musicking, making music and making meaning. Refusing to stand outside of the circle of humanity as dictated by the violent domination of slavery, of empire, of colonialism. Directing instead, cosmologies and myths that construct archives.

These alter-archives are a testimony to thoughtful, reasoned, inspired, grounded, creative liberation struggles against injustice; and what is more, they are principally accountable to their own subject matter. (Shilliam 2013:22)

It is acknowledged by the generation(s) that follow, expressed in their assertion of the dancehall space as educative and political. Alignment with it is evidence of vision and self-respect (Heron 2005). Accountability is vital and radical. It exposes the dissonance of historic and current structures of domination and power organised along and exploiting race, class and gender tectonic fault lines.

The dissonance is confronted and a new melody borrowing from ancient and myriad sources offers a creative, harmonic arrangement that responds to the current situation. Understood in this way, culture is integral to political, economic and social life. An important revelation that listeners unearth is the change in thought patterns and behaviour, challenges to accepted wisdom, educational content and practice that comprise the sound. The longevity, reworking and sampling of this music speak to the flexibility of musical communication and its capacity to mine essences from the past, to generate possibilities that address the present time. The continuities, possibilities, changes and hopes for the future make it a note that accompanies and expresses reflection and action. Reflecting upon action and action upon reflection are expressed as characteristics that listening propagates. We are accustomed to conceptualising music as a soundtrack to life with songs indexing moments and memories of importance. What listeners also divulge is music referencing learning, understanding, perceptual shifts. Referencing, as well as initiating and developing the same. This is evident in the tropes garnered from popular song that are drawn into contemporary analysis.

In a time of covid 19 and its disproportionate effects on Black and Brown Britons (African Americans and Black people across the globe), our position in the labour market, the status and value attached to our efforts are already fully articulated and overstood. Structural disregard extends to our lives. In this era of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the wanton murder of Black people by those whose role it is to serve and protect, we have alternate archives (as well as official records) that document and lay bare the state's, and its machinery's disregard. This is so whether we are a significant proportion of its workforce as in the health service, or not as in the police force.

A return to the original questions of the project, that provide the key through which the melody is heard reveal that more can be said regarding the spiritual. For listeners, the erotic as a life force is integrated with the spiritual and human need to express creative power. This infusion is crystallised in Rastafari spirituality. A metaphysical vision (Dawes 1999) as in *The Border* and *Slave Master*, is expounded that is accessible.

Opata

“Reggae music is spiritually present and spiritually rooted. Reggae music is sensual and beautiful.”

The synthesis that is suggested between these elements, often regarded as antithetical to each other, is special. It is taken to heart and mind by listeners.

In this way it provides a model, of which few exist, to articulate a world view, a political sensibility that is rooted in faith and spirituality. Gregory's musical offering whilst permeated with conscious, righteous philosophy is grounded in the flesh, its weaknesses and possibilities. That fact that messages and treatise of spiritual depth and weight are carried in and explored

through musical encounters speaks to the sophistication, ubiquity and importance of this form of cultural expression in Black life. It also reinforces and extols a principle of unity of existence. A principle of balance. A principle that emerges from plenty, from excess, enfolded in overload and saturation. As recognised by Henriques (2011) reggae music with its deep resonating basslines, grounds listeners in their bodies. There is no bodily abnegation or abstinence. Enjoyment, freedom is not greed or overindulgence. It is not sinful (Lorde 2018). It is a route to responsibility, to acknowledging personal and people power.

Reprise

It is worthwhile gathering all that we have considered and learnt concerning construction of the Black male. A body in which class, race and gender coalesce. Where systems of subordination and domination merge. What nuance does Gregory's music provide? For me, its lived essence better accounts for vulnerability than patriarchy would suggest. The murder of George Floyd, and countless others, is better understood and fought against when Black males are not identified as simply male, with the racialised element serving only to delineate their position in relation to white men. But where instead their structural and symbolic positioning is referenced in relation to external and internal divisions in race and gender categorisations. In which enslavement is clearly seen as resting on violent domination, the white supremacist ethic (Shilliam 2013) in action. Context is all important and makes sense of structures. How powerful is the normative category of male when it is Black, poor and disenfranchised?

Similarly, internal divisions and contextual practices, social and cultural understandings of gender difference challenge female structural subordination as a given.

Again, unless this is contrasted solely with white, female categorisations, shifting internal rankings and flexibility are overlooked (Mutua 2013). Age, sexuality, class are meaningful realities that co-constitute and affect the distribution of power. This can thus facilitate the inclusion of females in the roll call of death sanctioned by the state and its emissaries. Just as it can highlight the excruciating vulnerabilities of Black males in the criminal justice system. What does this mean for charting a liberating and protective course for Black populations? It has to start with a depiction that is recognisable, that rings true in terms of experience, emotional resonance and outlook. This is true of Gregory's music, of reggae music. It also contains possibilities for expansion and improvement. Utopian impulses are enacted, built upon, embodied. A world in which the self can creatively and lovingly reside, leave and return.

We confirm that starting from the particular, the specific of race, does encompass universals. It is fugitivity (Moten 2003) and excellence in harmony. It is the beautiful exposition of captivity (Baldwin 1979), external and internal that archetypically, all of humanity can relate to, have experience of, and consequently aspire to freedom. It is the particular experience of vulnerability, of alienation that hold the promise of love's security and belonging. It is the unity that comes from knowing each individual's configuration of social and personal identifiers – both chosen and ascribed by others – makes them at once unique and absolutely ordinary. Thus, detail enriches perspectives in terms that abstractions and theories cannot.

An aspect of this is the synthesis of difference (Shank 2011). It is easy to hear this in a musical chord, in the vocal harmonies that dominate, in the organising bond of the rhythm that encourages deviation, in the synchronicity of bodies in the dance space. It is as Crawley (2017) argues, a performative intervention. It speaks to and of vital human concerns. It

performs adaptability, reflection, improvisation, integration and political transfiguration (Gilroy 1993). “The bounds of politics are extended precisely because this tradition of expression refuses to accept that the political is a readily separable domain” (Gilroy 1993:38). The music offers more than an analysis of the situation. It also reminds us that we possess the tools required for our protection, and ultimately psychological and physical liberation. This is in part the overdetermination, the excess in the music. The deep understanding and meaning that listeners pinpoint that also reside in action.

We pause to consider the track *Slave Master*, its performance, music and lyric. A complex and beautiful treatise heading chapter seven and referenced throughout. Live performances and recordings vary.⁵³ It is always contextualised within a narrative that identifies the plantation as the seat of Caribbean oppression, that discloses continuities between slave and wage labour, that documents anger amongst Black people, and identifies our self-sufficiency in recognising and providing for our own needs. The song is a powerful call to arms that is noted as such. An archive where we are reminded that we have the skills, we know what tactics are needed. We can give ourselves what we require.

In 2020 and 2021, with race, inequality and structural racism exploding (once again) into the public domain and its discourse, reggae music provides a soundtrack to demonstrations, news items and media programmes. At the time of writing this section, late March 2021, a programme entitled, *Black Power a British Story of Resistance*, screened on BBC2 features a Gregory track, *Black liberation Struggle*. It is acknowledged as a chronicle of

⁵³ The following videos attest to the different performances given by Gregory.

<https://youtu.be/upC9W4vp4MU>

https://youtu.be/uMvLf5J_aZU

Whether sung sweetly in princely fashion or intensively, core sensibilities remain. The difference is in how this is communicated.

the Black experience relevant to the British empire and Black people residing in the UK. This is a commanding position to occupy.

Let us return for the last time to the first recorded musical scene in Jamaica as documented by Rath (1993). We know that plantation owners required enslaved Africans to provide musical entertainment for them. Performing to their desired standards, tones, traditions. Enslaved Africans did this. They could copy sounds as required. But left to themselves, out of earshot and view these were not the sounds they pursued. The assumption is they returned to the music they were acculturated to hear, practiced in performing, that held meaning for them. This may be so. It may also be the music that best expressed their sorrow, dreams, that sang and sounded their current lives. We know that this was different to the white community's music. We know it was only shared under duress.

There is something of this in Gregory. Heard and expressed by him and heard and expressed by his listeners. Who is within the circle musicking? Commitment and contribution to the sound has and is changing. Who is on the edge? Straining towards meaning or rejecting? This is also shifting. But the initiated and uninitiated remain as categories. Agency exists in the choice to mimic the master's song or sing one's own. Agency runs through the construction of a different voice. This may be popular music in its fullness. A turn away from art imbued with hierarchical, dominant status through its audiences and sponsorship. In reggae there is a trace of its cultural significance through its fidelity to the practices of ordinary people. It celebrates the perspectives of many as it remains true to its traditional roots (Bilby 2021).

What of this can be generalised to musical communication per se, across genres? Listening as a methodology, as a way of attending to how music communicates is sensitive

and promising. What might we learn from different geographical contexts, such as Canada, Brazil and sub genres such as grime and trap? What might new forms of music production suggest? Listeners have expanded the parameters of musicking. Meaning and value are not restricted to the sites and spaces in which music is shared or heard in community. It is relevant to listening in solitude too. This is also participation. Such practices are often conceptualised as totally modern and lacking in public spirit, marking the demise of communality and sociality. Yet a preference that realises individuality does not necessarily exclude community. In truth it is mood dependent. It is need dependent and different modes of listening reinforce each other, not least through memory. It raises and resolves what is often projected as a tension between the individual and group, the I and we. It is beautifully held in the philosophy of Rastafari. It is heard in the music. It is brought to the music in frames for contemplation, relationships, perspectives, it is in loosely agreed conventions, practices for living well. These likely exist across genres and await unearthing.

Appendix 1

Discography

There is no definitive list of albums released by Gregory Isaacs. Many are compilations of previously released material, albums released on more than one label (often his own African Museum, or to enable release in various countries), or issued with a track or two that are different, and albums released with different names. The following list includes studio albums of original material, live albums with some original material and highly valued compilations that feature key collaborations with other artists. I have used dates that can be corroborated or appear regularly in the public sphere as the most accurate.

In the words of Marlon James (2014), “If it no go so, it go near so.”

- 1975: *In Person* (GG Records)
- 1976: *All I Have Is Love* (Trojan)
- 1977: *Extra Classic* (African Museum)
- 1978: *Mr Isaacs* (DEB Music)
- 1978: *Cool Ruler* (Front Line)
- 1978: *Slum (Gregory Isaacs in Dub)* (Burning Sounds)
- 1979: *Soon Forward* (Front Line)

- 1979: *Gregory Isaacs Meets Ronnie Davis* (Plant)
- 1980: *Showcase* (Taxi)
- 1980: *Lonely Lover* (African Museum)
- 1981: *More Gregory* (Island/Mango)
- 1982: *Night Nurse* (Island/Mango)
- 1983: *Out Deh!* (Island/Mango)
- 1984: *Let's Go Dancing*
- 1985: *Judge Not* (Greensleeves), with Dennis Brown
- 1985: *Private Beach Party* (Greensleeves & RAS)
- 1985: *Easy* (Tad's)
- 1986: *Double Dose* (Blue Trac) with Sugar Minott
- 1987: *Victim* (VP)
- 1987: *Watchman of the City* (Rohit)
- 1988: *New Dance* (Bun Gem Records)
- 1988: *Come Along* (Live & Love)
- 1988: *Red Rose for Gregory* (Greensleeves & RAS)
- 1989: *Warning* (Serious Business)
- 1989: *Feature Attraction* (VP for Mixing Lab Records)
- 1989: *No Contest* (Greensleeves & VP), with Dennis Brown

- 1989: *I.O.U.* (Greensleeves & RAS)
- 1990: *Dancing Floor* (Heartbeat)
- 1990: *Call Me Collect* (RAS)
- 1991: *Set Me Free* (VP)
- 1991: *No Intention* (VP)
- 1991: *Boom Shot* (Shanachie)
- 1991: *State of Shock* (RAS)
- 1991: *Past and Future* (VP)
- 1992: *Cooyah!* (New Name Music)
- 1992: *Pardon Me!* (RAS)
- 1992: *Can't Stay Away* (VP)
- 1992: *Rudie Boo* (Star Trail)
- 1993: *Unattended // Absent* (Pow Wow & Greensleeves)
- 1993: *Unlocked* (RAS)
- 1994: *Work up a Sweat* (African Museum)
- 1995: *Not a One Man Thing* (RAS)
- 1996: *Private Lesson* (Heartbeat)
- 1996: *Come Closer*
- 1996: *Mr. Cool* (VP)

- 1996: *Maximum Respect* (House of Reggae)
- 1997: *Hold Tight* (Heartbeat)
- 1997: *Hardcore Hits* (Ikus)
- 1997: *Dance Curfew* (Acid Jazz), with Dread Flimstone
- 1998: *Kingston 14 Denham Town* (Jamaican Vibes)
- 1998: *Do Lord* (Xterminator)
- 1997: *Happy As A King* (Raven)
- 1999: *New Dance* (Prestige)
- 1999: *Turn Down The Lights* (Artists Only)
- 2000: *So Much Love* (Joe Gibbs Music)
- 2000: *Future Attraction* (VP)
- 2000: *Father & Son* (2B1 – Gregory Isaacs & Son)
- 2002: *It Go Now* (2B1)
- 2004: *Life's Lonely Road*
- 2004: *Give It All Up* (Heartbeat)
- 2004: *One 2 One Volume 2* (High Power Music, VP Records), with (George Nooks)
- 2004: *Rat Patrol* (African Museum)
- 2004: *Masterclass* (Greensleeves for Blacker Dread Records)
- 2005: *Revenge* (P.O.T.)

- 2005: *Substance Free* (Vizion Sounds)
- 2006: *Come Take My Hand* (Mun Mun)
- 2008: *Hold Tight* (Mafia & Fluxy)
- 2008: *Brand New Me* (African Museum)
- 2009: *My Kind of Lady* (Rude Productions)
- 2010: *Isaacs Meets Isaac*, with King Isaac (King Isaac Music)

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule

The following is a compilation of all the questions asked across the individual interviews and listening session focus group discussions.

The questions are organised into areas and are formally constructed but this is not necessarily how they are phrased. They act as prompts in the conversation. No one was asked all the questions as answers covered many questions and crossed topics.

For some interviewees, detailed, specific questions were asked relating to their individual professional or personal role in Gregory's life. These are not included here.

Personal

1. Do you have a Gregory moment/story? Please describe it.
2. How did you get into reggae music, describe your introduction and growth in it.
3. Is reggae indexed to a mode of signification (events, times, periods) or sensibility (emotions, feelings, belonging/detachment) for you? Is it a combination? Is one attachment stronger?
4. Do you identify Gregory's music as your music? In what ways? If not, why not? What rights do you have to it and over it?
5. Has reggae contributed to your sense of identity? If so, in what ways? If not, why? Does this include fixed, unchanging aspects, what are these? Does it include fleeting/passing aspects, what are these?

Musical

6. Describe for me what you consider are Gregory's specific musical practices? In terms of voice, rhythm, lyrics performances.
7. Are specific feelings/emotions communicated through Gregory's music to you? What are these?
8. What feelings/emotions are stirred/raised in you when you listen to his music?
9. Explain Gregory's/reggae's role in your everyday life
10. Is a part of Gregory's role as a conduit or relay of feeling from the raw, personal or informal to the endowed with meaning and public; i.e. a language of love, a way of expressing the pain of Black experience, formation of new community?

Social/political

11. Is there a Black voice, a voice of reggae, a voice of Jamaica as expressed through Gregory? Please describe this.
12. Many claims are made for reggae, what would you say is its main role, e.g. if music is a form of communication what is reggae saying?
13. What is the relationship between the scenes and spaces conjured through Gregory's music and reality? i.e., Jamaica, Africa, love, freedom, alienation.
14. Gregory is renowned for his love songs. Is there a connection between the erotic and political in Gregory's work? What is this? What is he saying about love?
15. What kind of characters (male/female) does Gregory construct through his body of work? Describe them. What do you appreciate/applaud in this, what do you have to ignore?
16. What are the gender roles being laid bare in their interaction?

Listening

17. Do you recall when you first listened to music? When (if ever) have you become aware of music as something to be understood?
18. How do you listen to music? What is your primary mode? Have your listening habits changed with technology or other prompts?
19. Why do you listen to Gregory? Are you able to articulate that?
20. What is your approach to listening? What do you bring to and get from the act of listening? Is this possible collectively? Is it possible when listening individually? Does it change in these different environments? Does this differ in live music listening and recorded?
21. Does listening to Gregory's music facilitate/allow transcendence? If so, from what to what, where to where? Is this an affect, feeling state?
22. The physical impulse to dance and an understanding of what the track is about are both present in the music. Is there a special/particular state that this integration engenders?
23. What do you do with what you take from Gregory's music? How do you use whatever it is you have gained in your everyday life, in your collective life, in global and national understanding and relating?

Music professionals

24. How important is listener feedback, are they agents in developing musical composition?
25. What was Gregory's studio ability? His microphone practice? Did he stamp his mark on productions or leave it to engineers to do their thing?

26. What is the role and what weight would you give to the following elements that combine into Gregory's reggae offering; lyrics; the language they are expressed in; musical arrangement; voice as instrument and communicative tool?
27. My particular interest is in listening. As a DJ you facilitate this for others. What kind of experience are you trying to construct?
28. Are there culturally specific ways of listening? Do we learn to listen?

Scholars/cultural commentators

29. What do you consider is the nature of the voice as expressed in popular music?
30. When writing about a session, what do you want to create for your readers? Are you sharing your experience?
31. My particular interest is in listening. As a ... you write about the genre, musicians, their music, events and performances. How and where do the audience and listeners feature in this? What is their role?

Closing questions

32. Gregory's addiction, spells of incarceration are widely known – other side of his persona, very open about these. What does this contribute or take away from how we view his work, his story, his contribution?
33. Do you have a favourite Gregory track? Why?
34. Is there anything you would like to add? Is there anything I haven't asked about that you think I should have?

Appendix 3

Information Sheet and Consent form

Edwina Peart Research Student, Goldsmiths University. cop02ep@gold.ac.uk
07949641027



I am carrying out academic research for PhD examination on the late, great reggae artist Gregory Isaacs and invite you to take part in an interview or focus group discussion as part of this. The purpose of the study is to find out what is communicated through music, what effects this has on us as individuals and groups, what knowledge (if any) is imparted and how music is used in daily life. The focus is on the opinions of listeners.

This approach means I am interested in your account of your experiences and perceptions. The questions I will ask are to help you recollect, evaluate and frame your thoughts. Your participation should take between 1 & 3 hours and you are free to withdraw at any time.

Any material cited from the interview transcripts will be treated with confidentiality and references that may identify participants will be edited out. Recordings and transcripts will be kept securely and destroyed in accordance with relevant guidelines.

The material gathered from this study will be used in my completed thesis, copied and published for cataloguing and public access. It may also be used in subsequent publications.

If you require any further information or know of others who would be happy to contribute please contact me.

Thank you for contributing to my research.

CONSENT FORM

Full title of Project: Listening to Gregory Isaacs.

Name and contact details of Researcher:

Edwina Peart, cop02ep@gold.ac.uk 07949641027

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reasons.
3. I agree to take part in the above study.
4. I agree to the interview / focus group discussion being audio recorded
5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in the thesis and any subsequent publications

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Age	Ethnicity
_____	_____	
Signature	Date	
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix 4

Listening Session playlist

Rationale

Several factors influence track selection. These include at least one from each of the four decades of his work span, a representative sample of the leading producers he worked with that symbolise particular phases within the genre and which exemplify his individual offer, and labels that he recorded under including his own. Within this process, attention is also paid to the significance of specific versions of songs and the fact that some of the volume of his work can be accounted for in repetition and compilations. This selection is also refined in relation to expert opinion and statistical information convergence.

In neither session was the full track list played.

Love overdue

Black a kill black

Universal tribulation

John public

Top ten

Oh what a feeling

The border

Slave market

Give it with caution

Poor man

Rough neck

Intimate potential

Betrayers downfall

Mind you dis

Appendix 5

Night Nurse tribute and Gregory Isaacs Tribute Hour

<https://youtu.be/HHtTQZ83Ke8>

<https://www.mixcloud.com/Biggamonro/gregory-issacs-tribute-power-hour/>

Appendix 6

Glossary/use of terms

Archetypes – energetic and cultural patterns of behaviour and understanding that over time have become ingrained such that their history and action is concealed. This term has been explored and popularised through the work of Carl Jung. Its application here is not psychoanalytical but speaks to patterns of behaviour and thought that exist within and across communities. They are contained in stories, myths and strategies for survival and living well. Their evocation is akin to a magnetic field.

Audience – listeners, spectators and participants who engage with and or encounter works of art, in this case music.

Black – the term is used to denote people of African, Caribbean, African American (including South American) ancestry, and mixed ethnicities of the above. It is capitalised with reference to identification that is not ethnically, nationally or geographically based but is a wider association. It distinguishes colour from the notion of ancestry and culture. It is consistent with other group labels such as Asian. It is my default position unless specific reasons for lower case usage are advocated or used by individuals being quoted. I recognise the blanket nature of this term, its implicit approval of the outdated concept of race and its obfuscation of diversity. However, at this historical moment it encapsulates a reality yet to be erased.

Black music – the music of the people identified above.

Dancehall - The term dancehall is used in two ways. 1. To refer to the physical space in which a dance is held. 2. To refer to a particular type of reggae that followed the roots reggae phase and remains current today.

Diaspora – A scattered population who are separate from or identify with a homeland. It can reference ethnicity, religion, race. It can include forced or willing removal.

Fandom – exhibiting a positive personal connection to a body of music. This can relate to an artist, genre, era, geographical locale, curation method or dissemination form.

Flat second – a chord that is not built from any of the notes of a major or minor scale.

Listening – Paying attention to, seeking to understand, engaging with, auditory witnessing of sound. This includes bodily attention in the form of dance and singing along. It describes varying degrees of intensity.

Listeners are those who engage in the practice of listening.

Livity – This Rastafarian spiritual and philosophical concept recognises that life is ground in experiences, and it is from this root that one authentically acts and speaks. It references a way of life. Its core is the acknowledgement of the life force that exists and flows within and between all people and living things. It is an expression and call for congruence and harmony.

Lyricature – A term coined by Kwame Dawes (1999) to speak to the connection reggae song lyrics have to literature and to working class and peasant language formation. He also notes the emotional sensitivity and multi-sensory nature of the language structure and practice.

Musicking – A term coined by Christopher Small (1998) to conceptualise music as an activity rather than object. “The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies.” (p13) This

includes the relationships between sounds, people, imagined ideal relationships modelled, the world and the supernatural.

Reggae aesthetic – Dawes (1999) uses this term to account for “the energy and intellectual power of the music,” (p 9) and its impact on the shape of Jamaica’s and the wider Caribbean’s creative context. I would argue it has had a broader appeal, certainly it has influence in the UK. The term references, “A cultural, ideological and formal framework” (p63), which as an element of popular culture is very accessible. It arises from a perspective on the world ground in social conflicts.

Planter – A term used to describe colonist settlers who supported and benefitted from Atlantic slavery as the cheapest source of labour on their farms. As a group they wielded great influence socially, politically and economically.

Pirate radio – radio stations that broadcast without a valid licence. This relates to legality of transmission and reception. Reggae radio stations in UK cities in the 1990s were very important spaces for countercultural music.

Smadification – Self acceptance and realisation of one’s intrinsic worth. A term popularised by Prof Rex Nettleford to express the process of countering alienation. It speaks to the Rastafarian philosophy of self-definition which facilitates achieving and claiming accomplishment.

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