



Jamming in Japan

A History Of Bob Marley And Reggae

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WWW.ONEPLANETONEWORLD.INFO
AUGUST 2010

"Nowadays the cycle of life is so fast, it's like a shinkansen.

Reggae is a slow train that stops at every station so you can see the beauty surrounding you"

– Haruki Okada –

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www.oneplanetoneworld.info

Cover design by Tim Huisman (www.worksoftime.nl)

Revised Edition (August 2011)



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Preface

“To millions the world over, reggae is more than a music. It gives voice to their cultural aspirations, and is a lifestyle, a mindset, even a philosophy”¹

On a late afternoon just before Christmas 2009, I was walking through the bustling streets of Shibuya – a major nightlife area of Tokyo and one of the major fashion centers of Japan where the young and hip gather – when I suddenly noticed familiar colors on a billboard on top of a nearby building. Red, gold, green and black. Squashed in between two tall buildings and surrounded by flickering neon lights, the billboard announced the upcoming release of a new album containing music called ‘regga-enka’, a combination of reggae and Japanese music called enka. At that moment I instantly realized how far reggae had travelled through time and space from its birthplace Jamaica in the 1970s to Japan anno 2009, and how it had thus overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. Moreover, I realized it was time to continue and expand my study about reggae in Japan, a project which had already started several months earlier after vaguely remembering that Marley had visited Japan in 1979.

This document, then, presents the results of my research about Bob Marley and reggae in Japan. It is the culmination of months of research and many years of interest in – and love for – Japan and reggae music, and a humble attempt at providing an account of the history of reggae in Japan and the role of Marley therein. I hope readers of this work will find something back of my enthusiasm, and will find it as interesting and entertaining to read as it was for me to do research and put my findings into writing.

Lastly, I would like to thank a few people who helped me with this project. First and foremost, I thank Saori-san for among others translating the questionnaire into Japanese and distributing it amongst her friends and fellow students. Thanks also go out to Suzuki-sensei who allowed me to attend his classes about reggae music – although I couldn’t understand much of what was said – and offered his help in creating and copying the questionnaire. I also would like to thank the people at the Ōya Sōichi Bunko for their patience in helping a foreigner with a limited mastery of Japanese. Especially thanks to the only employee who spoke English and helped me find articles about Bob Marley. *Domo arigato!*

One Love!

Martijn Huisman

19-08-2010 / 19-08-2011

¹ Chang & Chen, 1998; 4.

I. Introduction

“Reggae music is the root of all music. The only music with life, the only music that wake up the slumbering mentality and bring people in reality. The only music that flashes lighting and rolling thunder and make the earth quack. The only music that speak of Jah Rastafari”²

Although Peter Tosh, one of the founders of the original Wailers together with Bob Marley and Bunny Livingston, may have been somewhat exaggerating, the fact remains that reggae is one of the world’s few surviving folk music’s. Importantly, its popular sound, which originally developed out of the experiences, emotions and traditions of the Jamaican people, has evolved from folk music to a style of music listened to and celebrated around the world. Originating from the small Caribbean island nation of Jamaica, reggae music has spread across the globe and has had a large influence on popular music and culture. From Africa to Europe, the America’s and Asia, reggae is nowadays to be found around the globe. This document traces the winds that brought reggae across the ocean from Jamaica to another island nation, Japan, and the role of Bob Marley and his band the Wailers therein, by constructing a history of reggae in Japan.³

To understand the introduction and development of reggae in Japan, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the general history of reggae music. The history of Jamaican popular music since 1960 can be roughly divided into four periods which all featured a distinctive beat. From 1960 to about 1966 ska was the most popular music, followed by rocksteady from 1966 to 1968. Out of ska and rocksteady developed reggae, which became the most popular beat in 1969. Reggae made in this early period between 1969 and 1974 is now commonly called ‘early reggae’. Between 1975 to about 1983, ‘roots reggae’ became the most popular type of Jamaican music. It was this second type of reggae that would become popular around the world through the music of artists such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Burning Spear, to mention only a few of the numerous Jamaican artists performing roots reggae. In tune with the apparent speeding up of life, Jamaican’s popular music turned to a faster beat as dancehall became the most prevalent sound from 1983 onwards. Dancehall has since then continued to be the most popular Jamaican sound.⁴

History is often said to consist of, and be made by, the stories and lives of great men. This project largely focuses on one of the great men in the history of (reggae) music. A man who during his lifetime served as a world ambassador for reggae and promoted messages of love, freedom and Rastafarianism around the globe. A man who sold more than twenty million records, making him the first international superstar to emerge from the so-called Third World. His name: Robert Nesta Marley, better known as Bob Marley. An international superstar in life and a legend in death, Marley is and has been a symbol of

² Peter Tosh in the song Burial, live at My Father’s Place in Old Roslyn, New York on 15-03-1979.

³ Chang & Chen, 1998; ix.

⁴ Chang & Chen, 1998; x.

freedom for many. In 1989, Chinese students demonstrating at Tiananmen Square in Beijing reportedly used Marley's *Get Up Stand Up* as their marching song. During the civil war in Nicaragua between 1981 and 1989, Marley's music was immensely popular as both sides saw themselves as fighting against oppression. When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, people reportedly sang Marley's *Three Little Birds* for hours.⁵

Today, more than thirty years after his untimely death at the age of 36, Marley as well as his musical legacy continue to provide inspiration to millions of people around the world. Although his music was too broad and varied to define him as a true protest singer, Marley always tends to show up whenever there is a protest or a demonstration and his spirit seems to be present.⁶ Not surprisingly, every year the memory of Marley is honored by numerous tribute-concerts worldwide. And what to think of the amount of followers or friends on the official Bob Marley Facebook-page, somewhat of an important indicator in our modern times, which as of August 2011 lies around 30.2 million people? Although the reggae scene is nowadays dominated by dancehall – the pulsing, bass-heavy sweaty variant of reggae that centers on D.J. clusters known as sound systems – Marley and roots reggae remain popular as ever.⁷ In Japan, Marley also continues to inspire many as his words and music have been embraced by Japanese with different predicaments but similar feelings. Although the painful restructuring of corporate Japan in the 1990s was no source of inspiration for Marley, his passion to be free against the establishment has proven to be inspirational for the children of Japan's new economy.⁸

Marley's life, rise to fame, and international stardom have been extensively covered throughout the years in numerous books and articles, especially after his death in 1981. This document will not go into detail about the life and musical career of Bob Marley however, nor will it recycle definitions or backgrounds of roots reggae, Rastafarianism, dancehall, and so on. A lot has already been written on these subjects in academic and non-academic articles and books alike and information on these matters can easily be found online and offline. Good books about reggae music are *Reggae Routes: The Story of Jamaican Music* (1998) by Kevin O'Brien Chang and Wayne Chen and *Caribbean Popular Music. An Encyclopedia of Reggae, Mento, Ska, Rock Steady, and Dancehall* (2006) by David V. Moskowitz. An extensive and detailed book about Rastafarianism is Ennis Barrington Edmonds's *Rastafari. From Outcasts to Culture Bearers* (2003). For books about Marley and the Wailers, see Timothy White's *Catch a Fire. The Life of Bob Marley* (2006), Christopher Farley's *Before the Legend. The Rise of Bob Marley* (2007), John Masouri's *Wailing Blues. The Story of Bob Marley's Wailers* (2008), and *Bob Marley. The Untold Story* (2009) by Chris Salewicz. The community at Bob Marley Magazine (www.bobmarleymagazine.com), a website dedicated to spread news about Bob Marley's life and music, moreover offers a huge amount of information gathered by fans and enthusiasts.

⁵ Chang & Chen, 1998; 3.

⁶ Farley, 2007.

⁷ Fischer, 2010.

⁸ Joe, 2005.

Recent years have also witnessed an increased academic interest in reggae and dancehall – not only in Jamaica and the Western world, but also in Japan. Noriko Manabe, assistant professor of musicology at Princeton University, presented her paper *Locating the Japanese and the Jamaican in Japanese Reggae/Dancehall* about the indigenization of Jamaican music in Japan in July 2010.⁹ Marvin D. Sterling, an anthropologist and assistant professor at Indiana University, saw his book *Babylon East: Performing Dancehall, Roots Reggae, and Rastafari in Japan* released in 2010. In *Babylon East*, Sterling explores the history of the Japanese embrace of dancehall reggae and other elements of Jamaican culture, including Rastafarianism, from an anthropological perspective. Sterling’s work is recommended for anyone interested in (dancehall) reggae in Japan. This document in part builds upon the studies of Manabe and Sterling, especially because the latter had the opportunity of doing field work (interviews) in Japan.

This study, however, does not approach reggae in Japan from an anthropological or strictly musical point of view. Instead, it provides an historical account of reggae in Japan and the role of Bob Marley and his band the Wailers therein. In addition, one chapter is devoted to (possible) explanations for the popularity and appeal of reggae in Japan. The first part of this document will explore the history of reggae in Japan, looking at how and when reggae was first introduced in Japan and how the music and the reggae scene developed from there. The second chapter, *‘The Harder They Come: Japan meets reggae’*, therefore focuses on the introduction and reception of reggae in Japan. The third chapter, *‘Babylon By Shinkansen’*, provides a detailed account of Bob Marley’s visit to Japan in 1979. The fourth chapter, *‘My music will go on forever’*, deals with the development of reggae in Japan from 1980 onward. The fifth and last chapter, entitled *‘The Japanese reggae experience’*, explores reggae’s appeal and popularity in Japan. A conclusion and bibliography can be found at the end of this document.

Lastly, the use of words like dancehall and reggae is somewhat tricky, as they are sometimes used to describe the same thing while at other times they are used to describe different styles of music. In this paper, ‘reggae’ mostly refers to the politically and socially conscious music also known as roots reggae. ‘Dancehall’ refers to dancehall reggae, a branch of reggae described by Sterling as “patois-based toasting to digitized beats, and the subcultures associated with it”, which became popular after 1983 and is the dominant style in the reggae scene today.¹⁰ Terms like ‘reggae music’, ‘reggae culture’, and ‘reggae scene’ encompass all styles of reggae including roots reggae and dancehall. On a final note: in this paper I mostly only mention Bob Marley. However, Marley never performed on stage alone and was always supported by his band the Wailers and by the I-Threes, the three female backing vocals that included Marley’s wife Rita. Although they are not (often) mentioned here, they certainly deserve credit and recognition for their work.

⁹ Cooke, 2010.

¹⁰ Sterling, 2010; 8.

II. *The Harder They Come*: Japan meets reggae

In the late 1960s reggae developed out of ska and rocksteady in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica and at the same time the capital of musical development. It was not until several years later at the beginning of the 1970s, however, that reggae began to travel abroad. Interest in the new style of music was outside of Jamaica largely sparked by the crime film *The Harder They Come*. The film, released in 1973 and starring renown reggae-artist Jimmy Cliff, tells the story of Ivanhoe Martin, a young Jamaican aspiring to become a singer. After the death of his grandmother, Martin leaves the countryside and moves to the big city. After settling in Kingston he develops a career as a singer as he is allowed to record a song (*The Harder They Come*, also the soundtrack of the film) which quickly becomes a hit. At the same time, Martin also develops a career as a criminal, trafficking marijuana and eventually shooting whoever stands in his way. At the end of the film, after an unsuccessful attempt to escape the police and flee to Cuba, Martin is gunned down by the police.

Although Jimmy Cliff plays the role of Ivanhoe Martin very convincingly, the real star of *The Harder They Come* is the soundtrack, which consists of eleven early reggae songs picked personally by director Perry Henzel and features artists such as Toots and the Maytals, Desmond Dekker and Jimmy Cliff himself. Besides the impressive soundtrack, the portrayal of the reggae scene as well as the lifestyle of (some) Jamaicans (including dreadlocks and the consumption of marijuana) and the life in the slums of Kingston all helped to generate foreign interest in reggae and Jamaica. However, the film initially met with little success. It was only later that the film as well as its soundtrack garnered interest and managed to put reggae on the international radar while becoming an international cult classic. Today it is easy to see how the film appealed to foreign audiences and how it could become an international cult hit. For viewers not familiar with Jamaica and reggae, *The Harder They Come* provided and provides a window on Jamaica and the fascinating music scene of Kingston in the early 70s. As such, similar to many other countries, the film provided future Japanese reggae fans with the possibility of discovering reggae and Rasta.¹¹ Thus, according to Noriko Manabe, Japanese interest in reggae was initially largely sparked by *The Harder They Come*.¹²

Around the same time *The Harder They Come* was released, reggae-inspired hits such as Paul Simon's 'Mother and Child Reunion', Eric Clapton's cover of Bob Marley's 'I Shot the Sheriff', and the classic album *Catch A Fire* (1973) by Bob Marley & The Wailers reinforced foreign interest in reggae. In Japan, punk music imported from England also stimulated interest in reggae from Jamaica, as punk itself had been heavily influenced by reggae through Jamaican immigrants. The 70s also saw the opening of a small number of record shops specializing in directly importing reggae music from Jamaica into Japan. These record shops were followed by small reggae clubs, bars, and live houses throughout

¹¹ Sterling, 2010.

¹² Manabe, 2010.

the country.¹³ One of the first of these reggae clubs was Club 69 in Shinjuku, Tokyo, which only played roots reggae. The import record shops, together with several early reggae clubs in urban areas, would become the leading promoters of reggae in Japan, as underground interest in reggae slowly intensified.¹⁴

The first Jamaican reggae artists to come to Japan and perform live were not the already popular and well-known Jimmy Cliff or Bob Marley however, but three singers fittingly called the Pioneers. As part of a promotion tour for Trojan Records, the Pioneers visited Japan in 1975. During the trip they were accompanied by the Cimarons, the first self-contained indigenous British reggae-band which had been formed in 1967. The Pioneers, consisting of Winston Hewitt and the brothers Sydney and Derrick Crooks, had already been performing since 1962. Although their line-up changed regularly with original members leaving and new members being recruited, the Pioneers remained quite successful, especially with a song called 'Long Shot (Kick De Bucket)', which became a huge hit in England in 1969. From 1970 onwards, however, the group gradually moved away from reggae and began to make music with a more direct pop approach. In 1971 they had their last real big hit with a cover of Jimmy Cliff's 'Let Your Yeah Be Yeah'.¹⁵ At the height of their musical career in the 60s, the Pioneers had been considered one of Jamaica's finest harmony groups and one of the most successful vocal groups in the history of Jamaican music. Although they had already passed their prime as a reggae act, the Pioneers made several albums during the 1970's and regularly performed abroad. In 1975, the Jamaicans proved to be true pioneers when they visited the land of the rising sun, thus becoming the first Jamaican live reggae-act to visit Japan. Later, they would also brake new ground by performing in Thailand and Jordan.¹⁶



Promotional image depicting the arrival of the first reggae bands in Japan. On top it reads: 'First time reggae comes to Japan'.

The sign held up in the middle reads 'Welcome to Japan. Trojan. Pioneers'. In smaller katakana (Japanese writing) is written on the left 'Paioniaazu' (Pioneers) and on the right 'Shimaronzu' (Cimarons)

Source: Facebook

¹³ Sterling, 2010.

¹⁴ Sterling, 2006; 8.

¹⁵ Leggett, 2010.

¹⁶ Cane-Honeysett, 2010.

The introduction and reception of reggae in Japan in the early 1970s bears great similarities to that of hip-hop ten years later. Both reggae and hip-hop were imported to Japan from abroad and, more importantly, have their origins in black culture. Whereas reggae developed out of ska and rocksteady and expressed the experiences and emotions of black Jamaicans, the roots of hip-hop lie in black, urban America, being born from the challenges faced by blacks in the ghetto's of the United States.¹⁷ The notion of reggae having its roots in black culture is especially significant for understanding its reception and popularity in Japan. After all, Japan is an isolated island nation with a society often considered to be homogeneous. Of the about 127 million inhabitants, only 1.6 million or so are not native Japanese. Of those, only about fifty thousand are actually black. Yet, despite the virtual absence of blacks in Japan, even more so perhaps in the 1970s, black culture and music became very popular.

Ian Condry, a cultural anthropologist and associate professor of comparative media studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has done extensive fieldwork and research into the hip-hop scene in Japan. Some of the explanations and ideas coined by Condry about hip-hop in Japan can also be applied to reggae. Like *The Harder They Come* did for reggae, it was also a film that helped accelerate the global flow and popularity of hip-hop.¹⁸ In 1983, *Wild Style* introduced the four elements of hip-hop (rapping, deejaying, break-dancing, and graffiti-art) to Japanese audiences. Although the ghetto origins of hip-hop were not understood, partly because there are no such ghetto's in Japan, the toughness and originality of the style made a lasting impression on the Japanese audiences.¹⁹ In *The Harder They Come*, the story largely takes place in the poorer parts of Kingston, showing that the local reggae scene and criminality originated in the same places and were often in one way or another connected. Considering the fact that *The Harder They Come* was released ten years before *Wild Style*, it is safe to assume that reggae's origins in the ghetto's of Kingston must have been equally poorly understood as the origins of hip-hop in the American ghetto's.²⁰ At the same time, the new style of music, life in the ghetto's of Kingston, and the toughness of marijuana smoking, dreadlocked Jamaicans was most likely fascinating, leaving a lasting impression on Japanese audiences in the same way as *Wild Style*.

Japanese writer Atsushi Inami argues that instead of 'black street level music', as it developed in the United States, hip-hop in Japan was received and consumed as the 'most up-to-date' trend. Hip-hop was seen by the Japanese as a new style of rock, providing an alternative to already existing music genres. Therefore, hip-hop in Japan was never established as music rooted in street culture, but as a new music style to distinguish oneself with from other Japanese.²¹ Like hip-hop, reggae was initially also considered a new style of rock and an alternative to existing music styles. In the absence of ghetto's and other elements which formed the social background of reggae, reggae was received as a

¹⁷ Condry, 2000; 167-168.

¹⁸ Condry, 2001a; 229.

¹⁹ Condry, 2000; 170.

²⁰ Condry, 2001b; 373.

²¹ Condry, 2000; 170.

new fashion and a style of music to identify and distinguish oneself with. Moreover, it was only in later years that Rastafarianism, the religious movement strongly interwoven with roots reggae, gained prominence through the music of artists like Bob Marley and Burning Spear. It is highly likely therefore that reggae, like hip-hop, was initially received in Japan as 'just' another music style, which subsequently became a fashion because of its newness and a way of distinguishing oneself with from other Japanese.

This chapter has explored the first encounters of Japan with reggae through among others *The Harder They Come* and punk music imported from England. The early 70s saw the opening of several reggae bars and clubs and the first Jamaican reggae artists touring through Japan. However, the popularity of reggae in Japan would truly reach higher levels when Bob Marley and the Wailers visited Japan in 1979 as part of a tour through Asia and Oceania to promote their new live-album *Babylon By Bus*. According to Marvin D. Sterling, "Bob Marley, reggae's main international messenger, performed in Japan in 1979, and it is Marley to whom most early Japanese reggae fans trace their first exposure to the music. Marley's only concert tour of the country brought reggae at the time most fully to the attention of mainstream Japanese audiences".²² The next chapter focuses on this significant event in the history of reggae in Japan.

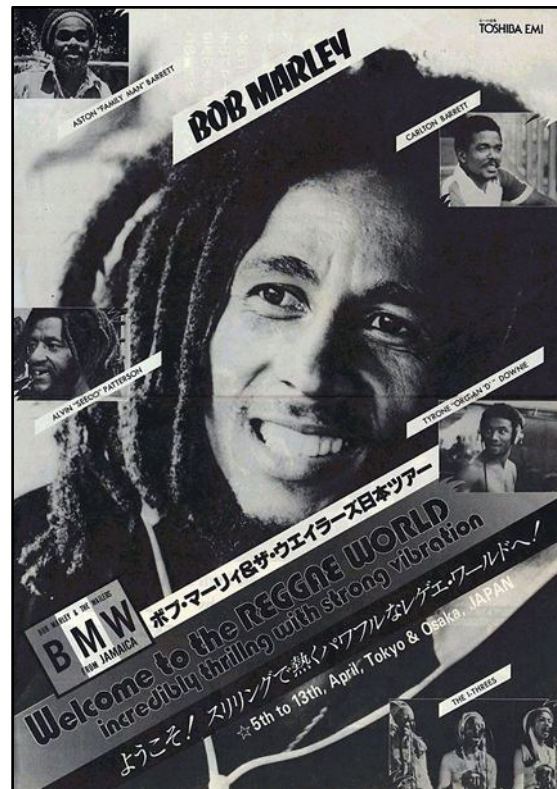
²² Sterling, 2010; 10.

III. Babylon By Shinkansen

In April 1979, Bob Marley and the Wailers visited Japan for the first (and only) time as part of their Babylon By Bus-tour. Marley's visit was a significant and special moment for the Japanese, as Marley had firmly established himself as an international superstar and was already the most famous and influential reggae artist in the world. In the previous year, Marley had toured through Europe and the United States. Recordings of the European tour had led to a new live-album, which was released in 1978 under the name *Babylon By Bus*. To promote the new live-album and to popularize Marley and reggae in markets where the Jamaican singer was still a (relatively) new name, a tour through Africa, Asia, and Oceania in the spring of 1979 was planned. According to John Masouri, "it was virtually unheard of for reggae bands to tour so far afield, but this band was intent on making converts wherever they went, and Marley saw such pioneering exploits as further opportunities to spread the Rasta gospel".²³

As Marley was indeed still a 'new name' in the Far East, with a "potential largely untapped", the Japanese leg of the Babylon By Bus-tour was provided with "mammoth promotional back-up" from Toshiba-EMI (now EMI Music Japan Inc., one of Japan's leading music companies).²⁴ Although the original plan had been to kick off the tour with two concerts in the Ivory Coast, Africa, on March 16 and 17, Japan was the first country to host Marley and his Wailers for their Babylon By Bus-tour. Billboard, a weekly American magazine devoted to the music industry, wrote in March 1979 that the details regarding the venues and dates in the Ivory Coast were still 'fluid'. Eventually, both concerts were cancelled due to unknown reasons. The tour thus consisted of only nineteen concerts, of which eight took place in Japan. Lasting for a total of one month, from April 5th to May 6th, the tour took Marley besides Japan to New Zealand, Australia and Hawaii.²⁵

Only seventeen months before his last concert ever in Pittsburgh and almost two years before passing away in the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in Miami, Marley arrived in



Poster issued by Toshiba-EMI announcing the visit of Bob Marley and the Wailers to Japan Source: Bob Marley Magazine

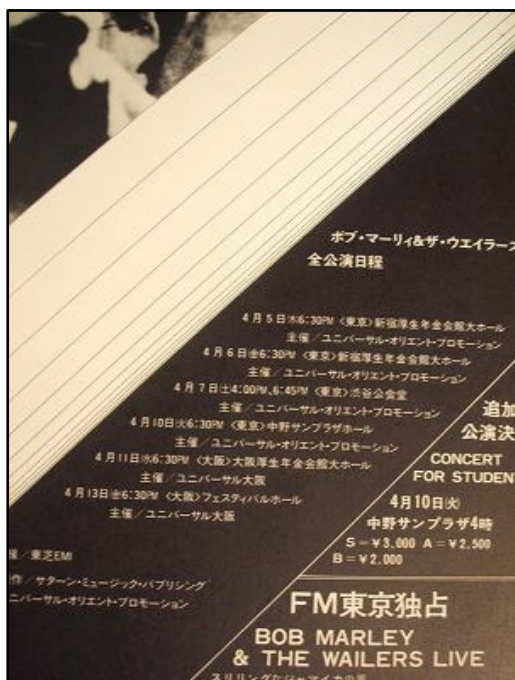
²³ Masouri, 2009; 469.

²⁴ Billboard, 1979.

²⁵ For tour dates see: http://www.bobmarleymagazine.com/forum_bmw/showthread.php?t=63455

Japan in early April, where he and his entourage received an extraordinary reception.²⁶ Upon landing, apparently without giving Marley and his fellow Wailers a chance to freshen up after a long flight, a press conference was immediately held with more than one hundred Japanese journalists and photographers present, all eager to take photo's of Marley and get him in front of their microphones. Remarkably, and in sharp contrast to most of their colleagues in Europe, Japanese journalists asked serious questions about Marley's (religious) beliefs and Rastafarianism.²⁷

Prior to their first concert in Japan, Marley and his band visited the Yamaha factory in Hamamatsu, an industrial city located in Shizuoka Prefecture famous for its musical instruments, where they were given new music instruments and Yamaha sponsored clothing. Marley received a brand new Yamaha rhythm guitar, which he even took on stage while performing the encore at the Shinjuku Kosei Nenkin Kaikan in Tokyo on April



A list of the Marley concerts with dates and times. On the right, the ticket prices for students for the concert on April 10 at the Nakano Sun Plaza
Source: Google Images

5th. This gig in Shinjuku was the first concert of the tour, as well as Marley's first live performance in 1979.²⁸ The next day, Marley and the Wailers again played at the Shinjuku Kosei Nenkin Kaikan. Kweku Ampiah, now head of the Japanese section at the University of Leeds, studied in Tokyo around the time Marley came to Japan and was present at one of the concerts in Shinjuku. Ampiah recalls that "the experience was electric in part because the venue was so small".²⁹ On the 7th, two concerts followed in the Shibuya Public Hall (also in Tokyo, nowadays known as the Shibuya C.C. Lemon Hall) almost back to back with the concerts starting at 4 PM and 6:45 PM.

After taking a two day break, two more concerts were given in Tokyo on the 10th at the Nakano Sun Plaza. Several songs recorded at these concerts have been used for various

bootlegs such as *Tokio Rasta*, *A Man In Tokyo* and *Sunplaza Show*. In 2001, an official live-CD simply called *Japan* was released on the Japanese market, containing twelve songs recorded at the Sun Plaza and an interview with Marley that took place during his stay in Japan. On April 11th, Marley and his entourage took the famous shinkansen (bullettrain) from Tokyo to Osaka, the third biggest city in Japan some four hundred kilometers west of Tokyo. On the same day the Osaka Kosei Nenkin Kaikan hosted Marley for his seventh concert in Japan. After two days of rest, the tour through Japan ended with a concert at

²⁶ Salewicz, 2009; 349.

²⁷ El Fers, 1991; 66.

²⁸ Wailers.co.uk, 2002. Other sources however mention that Marley also played his new Yamaha guitar at both the concerts on April 10 at the Nakano Sun Plaza Hall and the two concerts in Osaka.

²⁹ From personal correspondence.

the Festival Hall in Osaka. After this last performance, Marley soon left Japan as a concert in Auckland, New-Zealand was scheduled three days later. Over the course of little over one week, Marley thus performed at five different venues, playing a total of eight concerts in Tokyo and Osaka.



Ticket for the show at the Shinjuku Kosei
Nenkin Kaikan on April 6th 1979 Source:
Collection Mike van der Linde

The set list for all Japan concerts was about the same, containing older songs like 'Concrete Jungle' and 'Burnin' and Lootin' and more recent ones like 'Running Away', 'Exodus', 'Lively Up Yourself', 'Is This Love?', 'War', 'The Heathen', 'Crazy Baldhead', and 'Positive Vibration'. Reggae classics such as 'No Woman No Cry', 'Jammin' ', 'Get Up Stand

Up', and 'I Shot The Sheriff' were also played. Although the set list was very similar to that of the previous Kaya-tour in 1978, the Japan-tour regularly featured extended versions and songs were played in a different order. Sometimes, 'Stir It Up', 'Punky Reggae Party', and 'Natty Dread' were also played, although this happened very rarely. More importantly, the Japan-tour sounded different than other tours due to the Wailers and Marley playing on the new Yamaha instruments they had picked out at the Yamaha factory.³⁰ Thanks to YouTube it is possible to get an impression of the Marley concerts in Japan, as recording of one of the Japanese concerts have been put online.³¹

During their visit to Japan, Marley and his entourage encountered a 'problem' that is still very actual today: marijuana is strictly forbidden in Japan. For rasta's like Marley and most of the Jamaicans travelling with him, the herb was not a drug or an illegal substance. Instead, it was an integral part of a natural lifestyle and used for spiritual and social communication.³² Because of the fierce Japanese anti-marijuana policy, Marley's 1978 album *Kaya* (meaning marijuana) had for example already seen a special release in Japan with a different back cover, as the original back cover had showed a picture of a burning joint.



Marley with fans
Source: Bob Marley Magazine

³⁰ Low, 2011.

³¹ Although the concert is posted under the name 'Bob Marley Live In Osaka '79', it is probably a compilation of the two concerts at the Nakano Sun Plaza on April 10 in Tokyo. Not only does the set list on YouTube not match the set lists of the concerts in Osaka, but the songs themselves are also described as originating from a concert on April 10. To listen to these recordings, visit: http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=392FBD19A69323C6&search_query=marley%2BJapan

³² More, 1994.

Normally, local promoters had the responsibility to provide the necessary herbs for Marley and the Wailers, but this proved difficult or impossible for the Japanese promoters of the tour. To tackle this problem, a member of Marley's touring party travelled ahead to Japan to make certain arrangements. Upon arrival in Tokyo, the Jamaican musicians and their party were given no less than fifty Thai sticks, a form of cannabis from Thailand that was mostly popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a precaution, the entire floor of the

hotel in Tokyo where Marley and his entourage were staying as well as the floors directly above and below had been completely booked by the Jamaicans. The Japanese promoters of the tour had believed that the fifty Thai sticks would be enough for the

“Our message to the people is that Rastafari is the Almighty. And this time the minds come together and defend one thing, so we can have a whole world unity instead of many divisions all over”

- from an interview with Marley in Osaka, Japan, April 1979 -

entire tour. They were greatly surprised and even shocked, however, when they found out that almost all of the sticks had already been consumed before Marley and the Wailers had even set one foot onstage.³³



Marley and bandmember Alvin "Seeco" Patterson in Tokyo Source: Collection Mike van der Linde

But how were Marley and the Wailers received in the land of the rising sun? Marley's wife Rita would later say that "Japan was memorable. We had a lot of press there saying how well they thought it would be doing there in ten years time: how it would be taking over Japan. And we said that it never would! They loved Bob, and Bob played a big part in them absorbing reggae as they have done".³⁴ Mitsuhiro Sugawara was an official photographer for the Tokyo concerts and released a book with his photo's called *Bob Marley Live!* several years ago. Sugawara remembers the performances of Marley as so powerful that they appeared spiritual even to Asian eyes. "You could tell the man was sent by God to deliver God's message", Sugawara said. "Bob Marley represented a new way of

³³ Salewicz, 2009; 349-350.

³⁴ Salewicz, 2009; 349.

life – to be with nature, to be loving, to be yourself. I think Bob Marley's message is universal. I think in all corners of the world, people can relate to his portrayal of oppression by a big government or big companies against the masses”, said Sugawara. “Powerful messages of resistance are still understood”.³⁵ Haruki Okada, a longtime fan of Marley and reggae music, contents he met Marley and the Wailers in 1979 during their Japan-tour. “Over four days, only 6,000 people came to see him, so the security was very loose. At the end of the show, Bunny Wailer took my hand and brought me up on stage and invited me backstage. Somehow I got to meet Bob. When I took his hand, Bob said, 'This isn't the first time we've met' and, immediately, we became good friends”.³⁶ Although Okada’s claim of meeting Marley and becoming friends should be taken with more than a grain of salt, as Bunny Wailer had not been part of the Wailers since 1974 and was not present during the Japan-tour, it is telling that apparently only six thousand people came to see Marley in Tokyo.



Marley surrounded by the Wailers after just having arrived at the train station in Osaka with the Kodama shinkansen (bullettrain) from Tokyo Source: Bob Marley Magazine

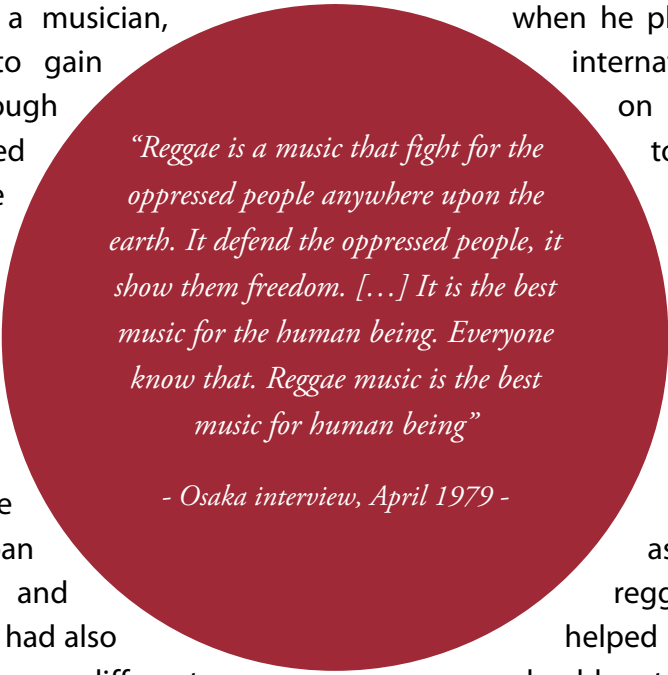
The venues Marley played at in Japan were very small compared to the ones he had been playing for years around the world, predominantly in Europe and the United States. The Shinjuku Kosei Nenkin Kaikan for example could accommodate a maximum of 2062 visitors, the Shibuya Public Hall 2084 concertgoers and the Nakano Sun Plaza, a hotel in Nakano with a concert hall attached, could hold a maximum of 2222 spectators. If the estimate of the total amount of visitors by Okada was correct and only about six thousand people showed up for the six Tokyo concerts, it means that these concerts were not sold out. In Osaka, Marley played in slightly bigger venues, although it is not known if these concerts were sold out or not. The Kosei Nenkin Kaikan offered seats for about 2400 patrons, while the Festival Hall, home to the Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra, could

³⁵ Joe, 2005.

³⁶ More, 1994.

accommodate 2709 concertgoers. If all eight concerts had been sold out, the total amount of visitors to Marley's shows in Japan would have amounted to about 17 500. Considering the fact that Marley had already become an international superstar since the release of his album *Exodus* in 1977 and in the West played for tens of thousands of people in large venues, the attendance in Japan was perhaps a bit disappointing.

Visiting Japan for the first time, it must have been a rather strange experience for Marley and his band to suddenly perform for such small audiences, despite the enthusiastic reception by the Japanese fans and press. Perhaps it reminded Marley about his earlier days as a musician, when he played in small bars and clubs trying to gain international recognition and stardom. Although on a small scale, especially compared to the tours directly before and after the promotional tour visit to Japan, the great success as reggae proved to be a definitive and steady foothold in Japan. While Marley had only been there for little over a week and had only performed in two different cities, reggae definitely gained momentum in Japan as Marley had made name for himself and reggae. Importantly, Marley and his band had also helped to distinguishing reggae from calypso, a different and older type of Caribbean music which had been popular in Japan several years earlier.³⁷ Despite the strict anti-drugs laws, visiting Japan also proved to be a rewarding personal experience for Marley and the Wailers. Besides receiving brand new Yamaha instruments, Marley ate sushi for the first time for example, which he liked so much that he would continue to eat it the rest of his life.³⁸



“Reggae is a music that fight for the oppressed people anywhere upon the earth. It defend the oppressed people, it show them freedom. [...] It is the best music for the human being. Everyone know that. Reggae music is the best music for human being”

- Osaka interview, April 1979 -

Despite Marley's impressive performances in Tokyo and Osaka, reggae did not immediately become a mainstream popular cultural fad, or *būmu* (boom) as it is called in Japan. However, “even today, fans and practitioners who attended talk and write about the '79 tour with something close to reverence, as a 'legendary', once-in-a-lifetime event”.³⁹ Indeed, even long after his untimely death in 1981, Marley has remained the foremost icon of reggae music worldwide. This is the same in Japan, where “Japanese interest in reggae music has remained intensively centered on his iconic figure”.⁴⁰ In the years after Marley's visit, an underground reggae scene developed and reggae started to enjoy an immense popularity in Japan. This popularity, as well as the current flourishing

³⁷ Sterling, 2010; 10.

³⁸ Low, 2011.

³⁹ Tagawa, 1985; as cited in Sterling, 2010; 10.

⁴⁰ Sterling, 2010; 10.

dancehall scene, can according to Noriko Manabe be traced back directly to Marley's only visit in April 1979. Thus, she writes, Japan, like many other regions in the world, is in fact now reaping the seeds that were sown by some of the best-known reggae artists, beginning with Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley in the early 1970s.⁴¹

This chapter has explored the visit of Marley and the Wailers to Japan, an important event in the history of reggae music in Japan. The next chapter will further explore the history of reggae in Japan by looking at how the music and a reggae scene developed from 1980 onwards.

⁴¹ Manabe, 2010.

IV. 'My music will go on forever'

Although the Japanese embraced Jamaican reggae stars like Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley in the 1970s, Japan's love affair with reggae really took off in the 1980s. A number of small enterprises developed around a slowly but steadily growing underground reggae scene, which included publishing (*Riddim* by Overheat Music and *Sound System*, which would later evolve into *Reggae Magazine*, by Tachyon), event promotion and record companies. Eventually, Overheat Music and Tachyon would become "major managers of reggae's later popularity in Japan" through their respective magazines and sponsorships of reggae events and concerts.⁴² These record companies also signed several Jamaican artists to record deals. At the same time, an increasing number of Jamaican artists started to come to Japan for promotional tours in search of new audiences. During the late 1970s and early 1980s reggae festivals started to appear in and around Tokyo with predominantly Jamaican artists performing. These festivals greatly added to the popularity of reggae, as they provided a major route for reggae music to enter Japan. To this day, festivals are an important part of Japan's reggae scene. One example is the One Love Jamaica Festival, which started in 2004 with 30 000 visitors and is since then organized every summer in Tokyo's Yoyogi Park with increasing numbers of visitors, activities and performances.⁴³

The first major reggae festivals in Japan were Reggae Sunsplash, a worldwide tour of Jamaican artists which started to include Japan in the early 1980s, and an annual reggae festival called Reggae JapanSplash, a nationwide concert tour of Jamaican and Japanese artists that developed into a big summertime event. Reggae JapanSplash was organized by Tachyon, began in 1985 and hosted Jamaican artists such as Gregory Isaacs and Marcia Griffiths, who had been the leader of Bob Marley's backing singers the I-Threes. The festival grew into a major summer festival, as nationwide attendance peaked in 1994 with more than hundred thousand fans.⁴⁴ The Reggae JapanSplash festival peaked in 1997, however, with an attendance of about fifty thousand fans.⁴⁵ The number of Jamaican acts playing at such festivals gradually decreased in favor of Japanese artists, apparently in attempts to cut costs and because a number of Jamaica's bigger artists were notoriously difficult to work with. Eventually the festivals almost exclusively featured Japanese reggae acts.⁴⁶ This was possible because the 1980s saw the development of homegrown Japanese reggae, which had quickly taken root and flourished as several Japanese reggae artists became quite popular.

Two of the first artists to create Japanese reggae were Rankin' Taxi and Nahki, who both started singing in Japanese with Jamaican accents and performed in a 'dancehall vocal style' which strongly resembled rapping. Being attracted to reggae through the music and conscious lyrics of Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley, Nahki began playing reggae in

⁴² Sterling, 2010; 10.

⁴³ Sterling, 2006.

⁴⁴ Sterling, 2010.

⁴⁵ Cooke, 2010.

⁴⁶ Cahoon, 2005.

Tokyo after he moved there for college in the 1980s. After having visited Kingston in 1984, he eventually moved to New York and started to regularly perform with Jamaican artists in New York and Jamaica. Nahki has often been praised by Japanese fans for his authentic renderings of Jamaican reggae as he always sings in patois, Jamaica's difficult-to-comprehend dialect. Rankin' Taxi became attracted to reggae through the music of Bob Marley and Yellowman in the 1980s, and soon thereafter began frequenting reggae bars around Tokyo. In 1983, he went to Jamaica for the first time, where he became greatly impressed with the excitement and powerful sound of dancehall. Upon his return to Japan, Rankin' Taxi started the first popular sound system in Japan called Taxi Hi-Fi. Subsequently he also launched his own record label, giving many young Japanese artists the chance to release their work.⁴⁷ Other local artists who emerged during this early period of Japanese reggae were PJ with his band Cool Runnings, Chieko Beauty, and Sister Sayoko.⁴⁸

By the early 1990s, reggae had become a major popular cultural phenomenon in Japan as a vibrant reggae scene had emerged. Reggae bars and clubs and Jamaican styled craft shops and restaurants serving natural food seemingly appeared everywhere, especially in Tokyo. *Reggae Magazine*, which was connected to Reggae JapanSplash, "helped galvanize interest in reggae music with its record reviews, profiles of Jamaican musicians, information on upcoming club events, and advertisements for local reggae bars, craft shops, clothing stores, and record stores".⁴⁹ In combination with the popular summer festivals, reggae, Rasta and other things Jamaican became widely popular. Newspapers, magazines, travelogues, novels and television documentaries started to spend considerable time and paper on Jamaica and Jamaican culture, resulting among others in an increase of Japanese travelling to Jamaica from 29 in 1980 to 11534 in 1995.⁵⁰ Attracted by the prospect of new markets, major Jamaican reggae artists increasingly started to visit Japan, where their concerts sold out quickly. Around this time, English reggae artists like Maxi Priest and Shinehead sold more than 500 000 copies of their albums *Bonafide* (1990) and *Sidewalk University* (1992) in Japan.⁵¹

However, at the end of the 1990s interest in reggae had declined significantly. Tachyon and *Reggae Magazine* ceased to exist in 1997 and many of the small businesses that had flourished in the early 1990s also closed. Especially the folding of Tachyon had big consequences for the reggae scene in Japan, as "a major route through which Jamaican artists had reached the country, as well as a major conduit of information about the reggae scene in Japan, closed". As interest in roots reggae waned, it had to compete once more with other types of music and cultural imports such as tango, salsa, and the so-called *esunikku*, "a hybrid stew of global ethnic culture".⁵² Record sales stagnated for almost the entire 1990s and only went up dramatically after 1999 with the popularization

⁴⁷ Manabe, 2010.

⁴⁸ More, 1994.

⁴⁹ Sterling, 2010; 12.

⁵⁰ Sterling, 2006; 9.

⁵¹ Dreisinger, 2002.

⁵² Sterling, 2010; 13.

of dancehall reggae.⁵³ While Jamaica by then had already been “in transition close to fifteen years [...] from the dominance of roots and early dancehall [...] to the prevalence of the digital riddims of contemporary dancehall reggae, [...] Japanese popular awareness of reggae music in the late 1990s [...] continued to be dominated by roots and early dancehall”.⁵⁴

However, this would dramatically change in the late 1990s as dancehall also ‘took over’ the Japanese reggae scene. While older Japanese reggae fans had become interested in the music in the 1970s through roots reggae, many young Japanese listeners had already become acquainted with dancehall, so that by the late 1990s dancehall had already become a subcultural movement in the reggae scene before it really became popular.⁵⁵ Nowadays, dancehall is the most popular style of reggae in Japan, while roots reggae has become a subculture. Dancehall basically consists of two ‘largely gendered’ scenes, the sound systems and the so-called ‘donnettes’. The sound systems are dominated by men and involves an MC selecting and introducing tracks and exciting the audience, while DJs are vocal artists performing over these musical tracks. The second scene is dominated by the scantily and extravagantly dressed female dancers known as ‘donnettes’. Marvin D. Sterling remarks that “many Jamaican social commentators see dancehall, with its materialist, erotic aesthetic, as lacking the dignity and spiritual uplift of roots reggae, its predecessor. But as was the case with roots reggae at one time, dancehall’s status as ‘vulgar’ black ghetto music has not stopped it from becoming a commercial force within, nor hindered its expansion well beyond, the island”.⁵⁶

Dancehall in Japan from 1990 to today

As the 1990s progressed and interest in roots reggae ebbed away, dancehall steadily became more popular until it exploded into the Japanese mainstream music scene around 2000. The sudden dancehall boom was in large part caused by the unexpected successes of Japanese performers abroad. In 1999, two Japanese sound systems, Mighty Crown and Judgement, won international sound system contests that had always been dominated by Jamaican sound systems. Especially the victory of Mighty Crown at the World Clash in New York, the most high profile and prestigious ‘sound clash’ in the world, in 1999 proved to be an enormous boost for dancehall in Japan. However, even before their international success, Mighty Crown had already been performing in front of large crowds across Japan. In 2002, Japanese dancer Junko Kudo unexpectedly won Jamaica’s National Dancehall Queen competition in Montego Bay, while in 2004 another Japanese dancer finished third. These successes led to increased interest by the media and the public in dancehall and

⁵³ Dreisinger, 2002.

⁵⁴ Sterling, 2010; 12.

⁵⁵ Sterling, 2006; 9.

⁵⁶ Sterling, 2010; 8.

reggae, with Mighty Crown and Junko Kudo quickly becoming celebrities in Japan.⁵⁷ Mighty Crown continued their success, as they would again win the World Clash in 2007, while Kudo became somewhat of a Jamaican celebrity after her surprising win in 2002.⁵⁸

During the dancehall boom, artists from all over Japan rapidly gained recognition and started performing in Tokyo in big clubs like Club Asia and Amate-Raxi. Various artists also signed deals with major record labels such as Sony or Avex. This subsequently saw the Tokyo reggae scene skyrocket as tickets for reggae club nights, which were held almost every day, repeatedly sold out. Dancehall parties and festivals with tens of thousands of visitors started to appear, like the Yokohama Reggae Sai, which was founded by Mighty Crown in 1995 at a club with a capacity of hundred fifty visitors. Over the years the event quickly expanded and the amount of visitors grew to thirtyfive thousand in 2006 when tickets were sold out in less than an hour. In 2009, the Yokohama Reggae Sai, which was then held for the fifteenth time, attracted about fourty thousand fans, making it the biggest reggae event in Japan.⁵⁹ After several years of absence, Reggae JapanSplash also returned in answer to the renewed popularity of Jamaican music and culture. Interestingly, according to Sterling, “dancehall reggae in Japan has not only achieved a boomlike glory equaling that of its roots predecessor in the 1990s: in many ways, remarkably, it has exceeded this popularity, as measured by record sales and concert attendance”. Sterling writes that one of the reasons for this renewed and increased popularity is that Japanese have become enthusiastic and interested in reggae because of the successes of Mighty Crown and Junko Kudo. Their victories in international competitions have helped ‘legitimize’ Japanese reggae internationally as well as in Japan itself. Thus, the “upsurge of interest in reggae following these victories is not just about love for reggae, but also about the possibilities of Japanese accomplishment on the international stage”. After other cultural exports such as *anime* (Japanese animated cartoons) and *manga* (Japanese comics), Japanese (dancehall) reggae proves itself as another successful export to the global market.⁶⁰

Nowadays, the reggae scene has expanded so much that Japan, after Jamaica, has the second biggest reggae scene in the world. Pushed by the Japanese media, especially magazines and on the Internet, who portray Jamaican dancehall culture as ‘cool’, reggae has become a multi-billion yen industry. During the 1990s, it became increasingly possible for reggae to be quicker and more widely diffused, as Japanese reggae fans got more timely access to Jamaican music and could stay up-to-date with the newest trends, artists and songs. New communication technology like the Internet and mobile phones moreover made it possible for the entertainment industry to reach wider markets and larger audiences. These developments (or even revolutions) led to what David Harvey has

⁵⁷ Sterling, 2006; 1.

⁵⁸ Sterling, 2010.

⁵⁹ Wilson [translator], 2010.

⁶⁰ Sterling, 2010; 15.

called a 'time-space compression' between the Japanese and Jamaican reggae scene, thus contributing to the popularity of dancehall and the growth of the reggae scene in Japan.⁶¹

Reggae has not only become one of Japan's most lucrative musical genres, however, but it has also matured to the point where Japanese artists receive much, if not more, respect than their Jamaican colleagues. The Japanese music market, the second biggest in the world, is dominated by Japanese artists with a ratio of about three albums to one 'foreign' album being sold. Japanese artists freely borrow Jamaican riddims and, like fans and entrepreneurs, visit the island in the Caribbean to get inspiration, buy records, and to experience Jamaica and the reggae scene in person – including late-night visits to dancehalls, the lyrical poetry of Jamaican DJs, eccentrically dressed artists sporting dreadlocks, and the mixtures of Bob Marley-styled reggae with hardcore dancehall rhythms.⁶² Yet, Jamaican musicians are also still popular and in demand.

Although Japanese artists freely borrow riddims from Jamaican dancehall, the message in Japanese dancehall doesn't merely mimic its Jamaican counterpart. Japanese artists put their lyrics in a Japanese context, and refrain from singing and protesting about life in the (in Japan virtually non-existent) ghetto. More importantly, most Japanese artists sing in Japanese, although some use patois in their music.⁶³ This development has greatly contributed to the popularity of reggae in Japan, as the language barrier has largely disappeared (more about this later). Most Japanese, even while associating themselves with global black culture or the Jamaican reggae culture, ultimately maintain social relations that take place on a local, Japanese level in the Japanese language. Moreover, "Japan remains powerfully home, the seat of a Japaneseness intimately experienced in familiar landscapes, among family and friends, in the familiarity of faces (even those of strangers), in food, in religion, and in the ease of one's own language".⁶⁴ So even when Japanese associate themselves with foreign cultures, they still live in a day-to-day world that is distinctly Japanese.⁶⁵ Therefore, reggae's popularity naturally increased as artists started to sing in Japanese about themes relevant in Japan, although the importance of (understanding the) lyrics should not be overestimated as demonstrated in the next chapter.

Innovation and development

The history of reggae music in Japan can be roughly divided into three different, yet overlapping, periods or developments. In the first period, which lasted from the early 1970s to the early/mid 1980s, reggae was introduced in Japan through the import of Jamaican music and the worldwide appeal of artists like Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley. During the subsequent second period which started in the early 1980s, Japanese reggae

⁶¹ Condry, 2001a; 225, 230.

⁶² Tomlinson, 2006.

⁶³ Chamberlain, 2009.

⁶⁴ Sterling, 2010; 6.

⁶⁵ Condry, 2001b; 374.

artists like Nahki and Rankin' Taxi started to appear, who mostly tried to emulate Jamaican reggae by singing in a mixture of Japanese, English and patois. The third development can be described as a period of innovation in which Japanese reggae developed with artists singing in Japanese about themes relevant in a Japanese context. This type of reggae is now commonly described as 'J-reggae', in an attempt to differentiate it from Jamaican reggae.⁶⁶ Throughout these periods, innovation has led to new styles of reggae music such as dancehall. Dancehall in Japan is strongly influenced by hip-hop, so much so that in fact this influence can be seen as a crossover from the domestic Japanese hip-hop scene.⁶⁷ Moreover, in an attempt by the Japanese music industry to capitalize on the popularity of reggae, the seemingly unlikely combination of reggae and enka gave birth to a new musical hybrid called 'regga-enka'. Enka is a popular Japanese music genre which stylistically resembles traditional Japanese music and can perhaps best be described as a form of sentimental ballad music. At a promotional event in early December 2009, the famous Japanese enka artist Takashi Hosokawa presented a new CD called *Regga-enka Allstars*, containing eleven famous enka songs that have been largely translated into English and sung under a reggae beat by reggae musicians.⁶⁸

The development of Japanese reggae has also led to a very diverse reggae scene. Sterling distinguishes four styles of reggae in Japan which are all part of a "continuum of Jamaican identified subcultures". Besides roots reggae and dancehall, these are dub, which consists of mostly instrumental remixes of existing recordings, and 'neo-reggae', which is an approach to roots reggae and ska involving creative instrumentation, thus linking it to other forms of music such as pop, rock and jazz. Interestingly, each of these four styles tends to represent itself as distinctly different from the others, although they are all essentially branches of the same root. Dancehall musicians and fans for example tend to condemn roots reggae and to a lesser extent dub people for wearing dreadlocks and consuming marijuana, which is seen by dancehall people as the sole prerogative of Jamaican rasta's. Roots reggae and dub practitioners on the other hand often condemn the dancehall crowd for the violence, materialism and homophobia that forms an important part of dancehall.⁶⁹ Indeed, "the majority of young, urban dancehall fans from such cities as Yokohama, Tokyo, and Osaka, though able to appreciate the kinship between roots and dancehall, have comparative difficulty connecting with the former; while in rural areas, where much of the postboom roots scene is now to be found, roots' naturalistic vibe has followers, young and old, who see dancehall as nothing but grating noise and chatter".⁷⁰ Although dancehall is now the dominant subgenre within reggae in Japan, roots reggae remains popular, especially in the summertime, as "urban reggae bands – also somewhat removed from the Rastafarian element – keep the tradition of live instrumental reggae alive as inflected in their own original styles".⁷¹

⁶⁶ Sterling, 2010.

⁶⁷ Sterling, 2006; 13.

⁶⁸ Williams, 2009.

⁶⁹ Sterling, 2006, 10-11.

⁷⁰ Sterling, 2010; 13.

⁷¹ Sterling, 2010; 18.

Big in Japan

So who are the most popular and famous Japanese reggae artists? Undoubtedly, the most influential artists in the reggae scene at the moment are the two brothers forming Mighty Crown. Mighty Crown hails from Yokohama, where most of the reggae scene of Japan is situated, and has been popularizing dancehall both in Japan and abroad by performing in the Caribbean, the United States and Europe. Being the first and only Japanese act ever to win the World Clash, Mighty Crown quickly gained popularity since 1999 and has been predominantly responsible for the major breakthrough of dancehall in Japan as their victory fueled interest in reggae music and black culture. For many young Japanese fans Mighty Crown is more than just a reggae act: Mighty Crown *is* reggae. It makes one wonder if these young Japanese fans know about the roots of dancehall and the history of reggae, or if they are even interested in the artists that brought reggae to all corners of the globe. Baz Dreisinger writes in her 2002 article for Vibe magazine that many fans in Japan are actually not interested in reggae's heritage. Although dancehall is quite different from roots reggae, Sami T of Mighty Crown says that without Bob Marley there would have been no Mighty Crown. "He really inspired us - it's big music with a big message". Despite the apparent general disinterest in reggae's heritage amongst Japanese dancehall aficionados, Mighty Crown pays homage – and tries to let fans pay homage – to Jamaican reggae and culture through their music, and by 'schooling' their listeners about reggae history and culture.⁷² Other popular sound systems in Japan are Blast Star, Red Spider, Mighty Jam Rock, Jam Tek, Sunset, Infinity 16, and King Ryūkyū.⁷³

Japan also offers more traditional reggae styles however. Bands like Dub Sensemania, the Bandories, and Zion High Players represent the 'naturalist vibe of roots reggae', which is especially appreciated in the Japanese countryside.⁷⁴ The duo forming Dry & Heavy are considered the *crème de la crème* of Japanese dub reggae. Despite the fact that dub is often seen as no more than a stylistic influence and an almost abandoned studio technique, Dry & Heavy still occasionally perform live although they haven't released new material since 2002. Lovers rock or lovers reggae has its most famous artist in Japan in the person of Moomin. While most reggae artists, especially in dancehall, rap or utilize a more aggressive style of singing, Moomin sings in a very sweet and melodious voice. Another popular artist is Pushim, who has been dubbed 'The Queen of Japanese reggae', although her repertoire includes other music styles in addition to reggae. Lastly, there is Metis, one of the few Japanese artists who uses Rastafarian references in her songs. She has even mastered patois which she includes in her lyrics from time to time.⁷⁵

⁷² Dreisinger, 2002; 134, 136.

⁷³ Sterling, 2010.

⁷⁴ Sterling, 2010.

⁷⁵ Kay, 2008.

More than thirty years after Marley's untimely demise and his only visit to Japan, his music is still listened to and celebrated around the world, including Japan. At the same time, reggae has developed into all sorts of new styles and has gained a wider audience than ever. It would be interesting to know what Marley would think of the current reggae scene and its domination by dancehall. Perhaps Marley would be proud to see that reggae in all its various forms has spread around the world, even in the land of the rising sun which he visited for only one week in April 1979. Marley's popularity and marketability

have led to a huge amount and variety of merchandise, which can also be found among youthful Japanese as fashion or as a tribute to Marley and reggae music. Despite the current

*"My music will go on forever. Maybe it's a fool say that,
but when me know facts me can say facts.
My music will go on forever"
- Marley, June 1975 -*

dominancy of dancehall, there are also young Japanese who idolize Marley and try to emulate his music. One example is a reggae band from Kyoto who post video's of their cover songs on YouTube.⁷⁶ Although the video's are of a rather bad quality and the singer is not quite the new Bob Marley, the sound produced by the band is surprisingly enjoyable. On their YouTube channel twelve Marley songs can be found, which include classics like 'War', 'Redemption Song', 'Burnin' and Lootin', and 'Concrete Jungle'. Although just one example, it shows that Japan like the rest of the world has not forgotten Bob Marley and that reggae in Japan in all its various forms is very much alive today.

Having explored the history of reggae in Japan from its introduction in the early 1970s to today, the next chapter zooms in on the Japanese reggae experience in an attempt to explain the popularity and the appeal of reggae in Japan.

⁷⁶ See: <http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=kpop55#p/u>

V. The Japanese reggae experience

The combination of Japan and reggae may seem surprising, especially given the differences between Jamaica and Japan and their respective histories and cultures. Japan and Jamaica lie on different sides of the planet, separated by many miles of sea. Besides being island nations, the two countries share few historical and cultural links, although it can be said that both peoples were forced to abandon their natural ways of living and accept an alien (Western) culture. Jamaica was occupied and colonized by the Spanish and later by the British, while Japan quickly modernized (that is, Westernized) after it was forced to open up the country to the rest of the world in 1854. Moreover, the Rastafarian religious beliefs which form an important part of roots reggae seem to fall on deaf ears in Japan as most Japanese are not religious. Alongside Rastafari, the love for marijuana, often sung about and praised in reggae music, is not shared by most people in Japan where the herb is strictly forbidden. However, Eiko Furuya, leader of a group of Japanese DJs and a sound crew specializing in traditional roots reggae, argues however that even though Rastafarianism has no significant presence in Japan, “we can relate to many aspects of it. Rasta tells us to respect our own culture and roots. As a Japanese citizen, I would like to keep my culture and roots alive through the style of reggae”.⁷⁷ Thus, Japan and Jamaica do have something in common when viewed vis-à-vis ‘Babylon’, which is the name that Rasta’s give to “the imperialist-capitalist society and its culture, which they reject and in which they refuse to participate”.⁷⁸

There is also the issue of language. Keith Cahoon, former CEO of Tower Records Japan, thinks the Japanese are actually put off by Jamaican reggae because it is mostly sung in patois, Jamaica's dialect.⁷⁹ Even during the days of Bob Marley, many native English speakers had difficulties understanding Marley when he spoke in patois during interviews. Professor Manabe from the Princeton University argues, however, that there are actually certain similarities between Jamaican patois and the Japanese language. Both are for example melodious languages, while the grammar of patois is more reminiscent of Japanese than English.⁸⁰ Regardless of whether patois is understandable or not for Japanese, what about the lyrics in Jamaican reggae? These often deal, at least the more traditional styles of reggae like roots reggae, with themes uncommon in Japanese popular music such as inequality, racism, poverty, Rastafarian beliefs, and marijuana. With a language barrier and few cultural and historical links between Japan and Jamaica, how and why did (Jamaican) reggae appeal to the Japanese? This chapter attempts to answer this question by exploring similarities between reggae and traditional Japanese culture and music, reggae as anti-establishment music, black culture as fashion, and the role of language and lyrics in the Japanese experience of reggae music.

⁷⁷ Joe, 2005.

⁷⁸ Dorff, 1977; 43.

⁷⁹ Cahoon, 2005.

⁸⁰ Manabe, 2010.

Similarities with traditional Japanese culture and music

One of the possible explanations for the popularity of reggae in Japan may lie in the similarities between reggae and traditional Japanese culture and music. The festive vibes of reggae, particularly its historical roots in mobile DJ-units, seem to resemble the atmosphere found at Japanese local Shinto (the indigenous spirituality of Japan) festival's known as 'matsuri', where elaborate public processions consisting of music and dance are common.⁸¹ According to Nori, who works at a dub plates store in Yokohama, the appeal of reggae for the Japanese lies precisely in this similarity with Japan's Shinto festivals. "In Japan we have matsuri festival, with big drums going boom boom. The sound of that drum is connected to this Jamaican reggae music".⁸² Sachiyo Morimoto, the Japanese author of the book *Gender and Sexuality in Jamaica*, agrees and thinks that some of Japan's traditional music with its emphasis on drums is echoed by the heavy baseline and bass drum patterns of Jamaican dancehall sound.⁸³ Moreover, the so-called nyabinghi drums used at groundation ceremonies in Rasta culture resemble the sound of Japan's traditional taiko drums.

Further similarities with reggae are found at 'Obon', a festival where according to Japanese Buddhist customs the deceased spirits of ancestors are honored. This festival traditionally includes a dance called 'Bon-Odori', which bears some resemblance to skanking, the highly stylized dance style associated with reggae and particularly ska music.⁸⁴ Morimoto thinks that the bon dances also bear great similarity to the Jamaican outdoor dancehall culture. "Even though the bon dances are only held during the summer time as a special event and there are fewer occasions than dancehall in Jamaica, both are free outdoor community events where everybody from the young to the old can participate in", says Morimoto. "And anybody can sing at a microphone, if he/she wants to. Traditional songs, original songs or anything. It is basically a site we socialize with neighbours from the same community, but visitors are also welcome. We just go and dance and drink! We relieve our everyday stress and enjoy. So I assume that the concept of Jamaican dancehall has never been so foreign to Japanese, because we have had 'bon dance' culture for a long long time".⁸⁵

Lastly, reggae's rhythms also seem to echo those of (traditional) Okinawan music, so much so that Okinawan music has often been called Japanese reggae.⁸⁶ Indeed, there seems to be an uncanny resemblance between Okinawa and Jamaica as both islands enjoy warm weather throughout the year and attract many tourists. Both islands however are also largely ridden by poverty, with Okinawa in fact being the poorest prefecture in all Japan.⁸⁷ Similarities between reggae music and traditional Japanese culture and music

⁸¹ Cahoon, 2005.

⁸² Seani, 2006.

⁸³ Murphy, 2009.

⁸⁴ Cahoon, 2005.

⁸⁵ Murphy, 2009.

⁸⁶ Okinawa is one of Japan's southern prefectures and consists of many small islands.

⁸⁷ Cahoon, 2005.

however can only partially explain the appeal of reggae in Japan. After all, how could reggae become popular if it just resembled culture and music already familiar to the Japanese?

Get Up, Stand Up

Reggae has long been considered and identified as rebellious, anti-establishment music. Not without reason, as reggae proved to be very influential and politically aware in Jamaica in the 1970s. Roots reggae for example emerged in the late 1960s as a musical outlet to express the disillusionment that had followed the jubilation of the immediate post-independence period (Jamaica officially became an independent country in 1962).⁸⁸ The adoption of Rastafarianism by many Jamaican artists, which included wearing dreadlocks to show a rejection of mainstream society and an identification with Rastafari, further added to the perceived rebellious nature of reggae. Artists who were not rasta's moreover often still identified with its stance against oppression and imperialism and its calls for justice and equality.⁸⁹ Some reggae artists experienced the wrath of the police and the state in response to their politically and socially conscience songs. Peter Tosh, for example, was arrested and beaten up several times by Jamaican police for his songs that called for the legalization of marijuana. When Bob Marley rose to become a powerful force and symbol of freedom and hope for the lower classes, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) closely monitored Marley's actions and even told him to water down his lyrics.⁹⁰

Its rebellious history and image as anti-establishment music is certainly also what makes reggae interesting and appealing to some Japanese. Nobutoshi Nakagawa, a music critic and sociology professor at Osaka Prefecture University, explains that "Japanese people cannot relate to nor advocate Pan-Africanism and Rastafarianism, as Marley did. Marley becomes most persuasive for us Japanese when he sings songs like 'Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)'. People who feel rejected by the big system are turning to Marley. His message may make even an bigger impact in Japan if the Japanese society continues to create a class of poor young people who feel neglected. Young Japanese people are put in situations where their future economic security is no longer guaranteed, unlike their parents who enjoyed relative social and economic stability as the Japanese economy grew".⁹¹ The worldwide economic situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century has certainly also left its traces in Japan, where many young people these days have troubles finding a (decent) job. In fact, nearly one in six Japanese apparently officially live below the poverty line.⁹² Could it be that (young) Japanese are attracted to reggae, with its

⁸⁸ Sterling, 2006; 2.

⁸⁹ Socialist Worker Online, 2005.

⁹⁰ White, 2006; 427-432; Masouri, 2008.

⁹¹ Joe, 2005.

⁹² Search on 'Millions of Japanese trapped in 'hidden poverty' to find dozens of websites with the same article about the economic situation and poverty in Japan.

reputation of being rebellious, anti-establishment music, because of the economic situation, as they have become disillusioned with, and feel rejected by, 'the system'? Perhaps. Although reggae indeed covers themes such as poverty and discrimination, there is also the positive vibe of reggae and its message of hope and a better future. In times like these, with economic and environmental problems, reggae might for this reason naturally appeal to (young) people.

Feelings of dissatisfaction with the establishment and life in Japan in general do seem to be important reasons which lead Japanese to listen to reggae. Dissatisfaction and even disgust with Japanese society and especially the educational system put Yumi and Kohei Sakazaki on the trail of reggae. They became attracted to reggae and Rastafari after listening to Marley's redemption songs. Yumi says that Marley "made me think about suffering and racism for the first time. I'd never even considered equal rights. Japanese don't think they are Asian, but instead consider themselves white Japanese. It came as a shock to learn that I was brainwashed by my education. We in Japan are slaves too. We have economical slavery. By travelling to Jamaica and learning from the Rastas we discovered what was real – not the covered story in Japan where everybody is so rich they waste things". Hiroyasu Tanigawa, a former student at Tokyo University, sees reggae and Rasta as a search for order in an artificial world. "Many Japanese city kids don't have much spirit because they have less chance to experience nature. They walk on concrete and forget that a drive to the countryside wasn't necessary in past times. Even if a person doesn't understand the exact spirituality of Rasta, they feel it in the rhythm". His girlfriend Sumi adds that Japanese youth "are always told to be a good child, a good student, but still we don't know how to be ourselves. Reggae is helping us do that".⁹³

Not only students and (jobless) young Japanese are attracted to reggae, for even for younger Japanese who have not yet entered the labor market – or have been rejected by it – reggae provides an "attractive, asymmetric alternative to the normal, strict script of everyday life".⁹⁴ Explaining his own likening of reggae, Wataru Iwata relates: "When I was 15 years old, I was really bored in school. Then I learned from Bob Marley and saw that my school was part of the Babylon system – always the same thinking, the uniform, the haircut – set up to keep us down. I faced a similar repression and was looking for a way out. He touched my soul".⁹⁵ Indeed, as Marvin D. Sterling writes, Japan like Jamaica is essentially part of 'Babylon', a "world dominated by the West" which includes the adoption of "Western ways of thinking". Thus, "when the Japanese reggae musician Sawa lyrically describes himself as a 'raggamuffin inna Tokyo City / ragamuffin inna Babylon City', [...], he invokes a sense of himself as a rebel, rejecting life in an exploitative, soul-crushing, Japanese city that is as Babylonian as anywhere else".⁹⁶ Thus, it would seem that reggae can be rebellious or anti-establishment in different ways, as for some it is a way of protesting against the economical situation, while for others it provides an alternative to

⁹³ More, 1994.

⁹⁴ Chamberlain, 2009.

⁹⁵ More, 1994.

⁹⁶ Sterling, 2010; 6.

the strict and intense years at school or an attempt at returning to or conserving a less Western and more Japanese lifestyle.

There is another way in which reggae appeals as anti-establishment music, as it seems to have a special connection with minorities in Japanese society. Sterling writes that Japanese practitioners of reggae often identify with reggae out of a shared sense of 'blackness' (or 'otherness'). Some channel their anxieties over Western monoculturalism through reggae, while others are of Korean descent and identify with the nationalistic, anti-colonial messages of reggae.⁹⁷ Noriko Manabe from Princeton University adds that many of the famous Japanese (dancehall) reggae artists in Japan actually have a non-Japanese background. The two brothers forming Mighty Crown have Chinese heritage for example, while female reggae singer Pushim is of Korean decent. Asked about minorities in Japan, Mighty Crown's Master Simon answered that he saw it as a sign that race and ethnicity do not really matter in reggae. This would indicate that reggae in Japan is open for all, in contrast to other music styles and genres. Manabe thinks that the experience of being a minority in Japan perhaps leads performers to gravitate more towards reggae with its reputation of being anti-establishment, instead of opting for a hegemonic culture. Interestingly, the story of Ivanhoe Martin in *The Harder They Come* is thus to some extent familiar to many Japanese reggae artists. Most of the Japanese reggae and dancehall performers are actually not from big cities like Tokyo or Yokohama, but from the country side, exactly like Martin in *The Harder They Come*. Moreover, there are certain aspects of Jamaican culture which resemble regional and/or rural Japanese culture, most prominently the humor and warmth, directness and unpretentiousness that are often lost in big cities like Tokyo.⁹⁸

Emancipating oneself from mental or economic slavery through reggae music seems a credible alternative to bowing to 'the system'. But the question whether reggae's moment in the rising sun is of a true spiritual and rebellious nature or just a big business commodity and a fleeting illusion seems justifiable.⁹⁹ Are the Japanese really drawn towards reggae's unrestrainable freedom, or is reggae just another fashion to pass the time before becoming a salaryman or office lady? Kei Kitanaka, owner of a reggae store in Tokyo, thinks that because the world continues to be marred by poverty, war and violence, the ears of young people are opened to Marley and reggae music. At the same time, Kitanaka also recognizes that many Japanese wear reggae t-shirts as a fashion and only listen to reggae as a summertime groove. Indeed, Japanese wearing dreadlocks more often than not do not actually know or care about Rastafarianism. Kitanaka believes, however, that there are also committed fans who do appreciate and support the deeper meanings in reggae and in particular the songs of Marley.¹⁰⁰

Like Kitanaka, most people concerned with reggae in Japan see two currents of youth. For some, reggae is just a new freedom and an excuse to do anything they want,

⁹⁷ Fischer, 2010.

⁹⁸ Manabe, 2010.

⁹⁹ More, 1994.

¹⁰⁰ Joe, 2005.

while other more serious fans use reggae to try and escape from the frantic pace of today's life and society. Izaba Rogers, a self-professed reggae almanac who left his native Jamaica many years ago to live in Japan, is critical of the Japanese reggae scene. "The movement is hollow. It's 'katachi' - or form - someone who dreads their hair overnight just to become a 'Rasta'. The dance hall beat is fast, and people are living fast, so kids are into it", says Izaba. Tomakazu Kaneko, who 'found' Bob Marley during a vacation in Florida and, inspired by the Jamaican king of reggae, made the pilgrimage to Jamaica, also has his doubts about the reggae scene and thinks that young Japanese are mostly attracted to reggae music because dancehall artists often sing about sexual things.¹⁰¹ This idea seems to be supported by Manabe, who asserts that the lyrics in Japanese reggae are largely characterized by humor, partying, dancing, and romance, with only occasionally political or social critiques.¹⁰² Sachiyo Morimoto thinks it might be the hype that attracts young Japanese people to Jamaican dancehall. "I think Japanese basically love to dance, though we are more shy than Jamaican people. There is also a commercial factor, too. Japanese media, especially magazines and internet are reflecting Jamaican dancehall culture as 'cool'. Young people are naturally attracted to the things which are considered 'cool'. So Jamaican dancehall might be popular in Japan. It's a fashion".¹⁰³

Black culture as fashion and symbol of defiance

The second chapter shortly explained the roots of reggae as lying in Jamaica and in black culture. Could the contemporary perceived 'coolness' of black culture be a driving force behind the popularity of reggae in Japan? It certainly seems so. In recent years black culture and especially musical expressions such as hip-hop have become popular and fashionable in Japan. At the same time, however, being into black culture is still regarded in Japan as a form of rebellion. In his article *Burakku: Black Culture In Japan*, Ricardo Arthur describes his experiences with black culture and reggae music while living in Japan. "Over time, I realized for Japanese youth, being into black culture is a form of rebellion, and therein lay the attraction. Young people like to be different in one way or another and stand out as individuals. Hard to do in a country where conformity is encouraged. Live the same, think the same, look the same, be the same".¹⁰⁴ This view is supported by John G. Russell, professor at the Faculty of Regional Studies at Gifu University, who has done research on the contemporary representations of blacks and blackness in Japan. Russell writes that "with the Vietnam War, the rise of counterculture and the influx of black music and culture, disaffected Japanese youth came to see the African American as a counter to the values of the Japanese establishment, and the black Other was adopted as a symbol of

¹⁰¹ More, 1994.

¹⁰² Manabe, 2010.

¹⁰³ Murphy, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur, 2010.

defiance, forbidden fruit, and their own alienation from the Japanese mainstream".¹⁰⁵ It was exactly near the end of the Vietnam War, which ended in 1975, that reggae came to Japan as part of this influx of black music, thus providing disaffected Japanese youth with a music style to support their defiance to and alienation from the Japanese mainstream. From this perspective it is quite understandable that reggae became popular in Japan, as part of a general interest in, or even fascination with, black culture and music. Japan has known a long history of adopting (black) music from abroad, especially in the postwar period, from jazz in the 1950s to folk in the 1960s, rock in the 1970s and hip-hop and reggae in more recent times. It can be said that nowadays Japanese reggae artists, like hip-hop acts and jazz players before them, express "native pride through appropriated and transformed non-native music that originated in black culture".¹⁰⁶ While being into (Jamaican) reggae may be perceived as a sign of defiance because it is intertwined with black culture, it has also become a fashion in Japan and especially in Tokyo where Bob Marley t-shirts, youth sporting dreadlocks, and the colors associated with reggae, can be seen regularly in places like Shibuya, Harajuku, and Shimo-Kitazawa where the young and hip gather.

The language barrier and lyrics

Language forms an important part of our identity and is a key variable for understanding Japanese reggae and how Japanese experience reggae music. After all, it is through language we convey and express ideas, emotions and experiences, whether it be on paper or in films and music. Ian Condry has done research about the role of language in hip-hop in Japan. He writes that Japanese rappers have created new dialects by rapping in Japanese with a punctuated rhythm, while at the same time adding English words to create more compelling rhymes. These linguistic features not only add to the music, but at the same time produce social difference as rap musicians and their fans set themselves apart from mainstream Japanese through the use of this 'rap dialect'.¹⁰⁷ In the Japanese reggae scene, social difference is also created as reggae artists and fans make use of their own 'reggae dialect', consisting of a mix of Japanese, English and Jamaican patois. Popular artists like Mighty Crown for example use English and patois in addition to Japanese in their performances and during interviews, thus popularizing the use of this 'reggae dialect' among their fans. Japanese reggae artists and fans create and use this reggae dialect to not only identify and define themselves, but also to set themselves apart from other Japanese.

While language is a very important part of our identity and life, not everyone speaks the same language. Although the world is often considered to have become a 'big village', its inhabitants speak many different languages and dialects. While boundaries

¹⁰⁵ Russell, 1991; 20-21.

¹⁰⁶ Dreisinger, 2002; 138.

¹⁰⁷ Condry, 2000; 172.

between countries may slowly disappear, like within the European Union, language barriers persist. This is especially the case in Japan, where most Japanese, despite having learned English for several years at school, generally have a limited mastery of English. This is in part due to the fact that English is almost never used in everyday life. But if most Japanese do not understand English very well or at all, what does this say about (Jamaican) reggae in Japan? An obvious answer to this question is that, as described in the previous chapter, the language barrier has led to the development of Japanese reggae with artists singing in Japanese. But if the language barrier prevents Japanese from understanding Jamaican reggae, what does this say about the authenticity of reggae as anti-establishment music and a form of resistance? After all, politically and conscious lyrics have helped give reggae its reputation of being anti-establishment. How can reggae be perceived as anti-establishment music in Japan when the lyrical content is not or hardly understood?

Those involved in the creation of dancehall in Japan believe that it is not the lyrical content that excites the Japanese, as most listeners do not understand the lyrics. Sammy T, one of the Mighty Crown DJs, says that “the music is very straight, positive... half the people just vibing out to the rhythm”. Shandy Eye, one of the few Jamaicans in the Japanese reggae scene, agrees. “Japanese don’t know roots rock reggae message yet, just vibration now”, he says.¹⁰⁸ This notion is supported by Jamaicans living in Japan. A person under the pseudonym ‘Mung_k’ writes, for example, that he is “embarrassed by the lewd, garbage coming out my island home when I hear them playing in the stores and malls here in Tokyo. It’s a good thing there is a obvious language barrier, and even the Japanese who speak English don’t really understand the heck we are saying. It’s the infectious rhythm that keeps the music popular, ‘cause the day they understand the content it won’t be played here.” [punctuation added].¹⁰⁹

In his articles about hip-hop in Japan, Ian Condry argues that the various meanings of rap lyrics are mostly lost on Japanese listeners, although Japanese releases of albums usually contain translations of the songs and music magazines reviews often describe the themes of albums. According to Condry, the attraction for Japanese listeners lies more in the voice of the singer(s) than in the meaning of the words, of which even the main idea is often not understood. A Japanese DJ wondering about the lyrics of one of his favorite songs was for example shocked to learn that ‘We love smokin that chronic’ actually referred to smoking marijuana.¹¹⁰ During hip-hop concerts, the angry attitudes, the swear words and the recorded sirens and gunshots instead of the lyrical content promote images of what it means to be from the ghetto.¹¹¹ The lyrics in reggae music often also seem to be of secondary interest to (Japanese) listeners. Instead of lyrical wordplay or political or social messages, the sound or the good groove and the energy of the singer is

¹⁰⁸ Seani, 2006.

¹⁰⁹ Reaction in the comments on the article: Cooke, ‘Reggae/dancehall popularity in Japan rooted in similarity’, *Jamaica Gleaner*.

¹¹⁰ Condry, 2001a; 232.

¹¹¹ Condry, 2000; 171, 174.

what makes Japanese enjoy reggae music.¹¹² This does not necessarily only apply to people listening to reggae in Japan, for what is the charm of reggae music if it has intelligent, wonderful lyrics but boring melodies and rhythms? It can be argued that in fact very little reggae or pop music for that matter can stand up to textual analysis, or as Kevin Chang and Wayne Chen write in the preface of their book about reggae: “Music is music and poetry is poetry, and rarely do the twain meet”.¹¹³

Being interested in the role of language in the Japanese experience of reggae, I conducted my own research during my stay in Tokyo by distributing questionnaires amongst Japanese university students. The results support the idea that lyrics are not very important when listening to reggae music, because most Japanese listeners understand the lyrics only partly or not at all. Out of the 49 people who said they listened to reggae music, 33 said they primarily listened to the music and paid little attention to the lyrical content. Upon the question if they could understand the (English) lyrics in foreign reggae music, almost 65% answered ‘a little bit’. Thus, one of the effects of language differences is to make the importance of Jamaican reggae depend largely on the music rather than the lyrics.

Returning to the popularity of Bob Marley in Japan, Chris Salewicz mentions in his book *Bob Marley. The Untold Story* that “in Japan [...] Bob Marley met an extraordinary reception. At the concerts, the audience would show they knew every song, and would sing every word of the lyrics”.¹¹⁴ The website of the Wailers furthermore mentions that “promotional duties taken care of, the band put in some amazing performances in Japan. The crowds proved how the music crossed the cultural barrier by singing along in perfect English”.¹¹⁵ With the previous paragraphs in mind, the suggestion that the Japanese audiences at Marley’s shows knew all the lyrics and were able to sing along in perfect English seems questionable. However, there is an explanation for the fact that the Japanese could sing along with Marley during the Japan-concerts. Neville Garrick worked with Bob Marley, as well as other reggae artists such as Burning Spear and Steel Pulse, as a graphic designer, creating the artwork for several Marley albums. In the introduction to a book by Chris Morrow about reggae album cover art, Garrick explains: “The inclusion of Bob Marley’s powerful lyrics on nearly all his album sleeves had a tremendous impact on his international audience, we later found out. While on tour in Tokyo in 1979, we were surprised to see that the Japanese audiences sang along all the words with Bob. We learned that the only English they knew was the words printed on the records sleeves”.¹¹⁶

Throughout this chapter several possible reasons for the popularity and appeal of reggae in Japan have been explored and discussed. All these possible reasons seem to be pieces of a larger puzzle, as they can only partially explain the popularity of reggae. Regarding the language barrier and lyrical content there seems to be a paradox. On the

¹¹² Condry, 2000; 181.

¹¹³ Chang & Chen, 1998; x.

¹¹⁴ Salewicz, 2009; 349.

¹¹⁵ Wailers.co.uk, 2002.

¹¹⁶ Morrow, 1999; 7.

one hand, reggae is regarded and often experienced as rebellious, anti-establishment music. On the other hand, however, the lyrical content of reggae is only of secondary interest. Japanese listeners moreover mostly do not understand the lyrics of foreign reggae. What does this say about the role of Jamaican reggae music as rebellious and anti-establishment in Japan? Perhaps it is not the music itself that is seen in Japan as rebellious, but rather its connection with and roots in black culture, as Ricardo and Russell note that being into black culture in Japan is often still seen as an act of defiance and rebellion. Although several pieces of the puzzle have been identified, it remains difficult to determine which elements contribute most to the appeal of reggae in Japan. What is not difficult to determine, however, is the fact that reggae music is positive, uplifting and relaxing. For an overstressed society like Japan, reggae seems to be the ideal music to unwind with. Indeed, some people argue that the reggae phenomenon in Japan is strongly related to the Slow Life movement, a cultural shift aimed at slowing down life's pace and experiencing life in a fundamentally different way. The peaceful feel of reggae and its natural vibe moreover certainly seem to be compatible with Shinto, the indigenous spirituality of Japan and the Japanese people, as described at the beginning of this chapter.¹¹⁷

For some Japanese, reggae music also provides a way of escaping a perceived boring life in Japan. According to Ian Condry, Japanese hip-hop fans see their country as boring and too peaceful in comparison to images of the United States based on American hip-hop. Moreover, these hip-hop fans see Japan as saturated with meaningless pop music and pop icons and lacking the excitement and 'reality' of dangerous, city streets as represented in hip-hop.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, reggae seems to have a similar effect on some people, who, perhaps drawing upon images of (life in) Jamaica as presented in reggae music, also find Japan boring. Kazuki Osaka, a 23-year-old DJ from Kagoshima, came to Jamaica because he wanted to visit Tivoli Gardens, a neighbourhood in Kingston which has been home to several violent confrontations between gunmen and police. "No gun in Japan, no thief in Japan", Osaka explains, "I want to go downtown to Tivoli. Tivoli scary, but maybe I want scary. Get a vibes like old-time Japan, when people have no money but many friend". And then there is Yumiko Gabe, who has been living in Kingston for over sixteen years. A few years ago, her husband, a native Jamaican, was shot dead in Kingston. Asked if she would trade the relative danger of Kingston for the familiarity and safety of her native Japan she answered: "No, Japan is just for visiting. Boring. No excitement. Too safe to live".¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Seani, 2006.

¹¹⁸ Condry, 2000; 181.

¹¹⁹ Chamberlain, 2009.

VI. Conclusion

The history of reggae in Japan provides evidence for Ian Condry's notion that "although popular music travels on the winds of global capitalism, it ultimately burns or dies out if it is not supplied by local fuel".¹²⁰ Reggae was introduced in Japan in the 1970s mainly through *The Harder They Come*, English punk music and artists like Jimmy Cliff and Bob Marley. Although not the first Jamaican reggae artists to come to Japan, Marley and the Wailers' visit in 1979 was a significant and instrumental event in popularizing reggae in Japan. From 1980 onwards, an (underground) reggae scene developed and flourished, especially after homegrown Japanese artists and reggae festivals around Tokyo started to appear. Initially, the Japanese were fond of more soothing reggae styles such as roots reggae and lover's rock. A vibrant roots reggae scene existed in the mid 1980s, but ebbed away about a decade later, although there is still a roots reggae scene in Japan and a small population of spiritual, marijuana-smoking disciples of the Rastafari religion who mostly live in Japan's rural communities. The late 1990s saw the rise of dancehall – a branch of reggae far removed from roots reggae as propagated by the likes of Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff, and Burning Spear – to dominance within the Japanese reggae scene. The (Japanese) youth of today now discovers reggae music mostly through dancehall. Similar to Jamaica, reggae in Japan has not been standing still over the years and neither has the technology. Reggae knows many sub-genres, including dancehall, dub, lovers rock, and 'neo-reggae'. In Japan, reggae has moreover been influenced and changed by Japanese artists, who sing in Japanese and give reggae a 'Japanese flavor' by singing about themes relevant to the Japanese. At the same time, new hybrids such as 'regga-enka' are created, which combine reggae with more traditional Japanese music.

The second part of this document tried to explain the popularity and appeal of reggae in Japan, by exploring similarities between reggae and traditional Japanese culture and music, reggae as anti-establishment music, and the role of black culture and language and lyrics in the Japanese experience of reggae. All these elements partly explain the popularity of reggae. Clearly, the current dancehall boom and domination of the reggae scene in Japan have been sparked by the unexpected successes abroad of Japanese artists and dancers in the early 2000s. These successes helped 'legitimize' Japanese dancehall reggae internationally as well as in Japan. They moreover generated pride in the Japanese accomplishments abroad, which in turn resulted in more (media) interest in Japanese dancehall reggae. Reggae is thus a shining example of what Ian Condry calls "a transnational style pushed by Japanese entertainment and fashion industries and pulled by Japanese youth eager for the latest trends while circulated by a wide range of Japanese media".¹²¹ The question whether reggae in Japan is just a fleeting illusion, a trend or fashion, or there to stay permanently remains to be answered however.

¹²⁰ Condry, 2001a; 222.

¹²¹ Condry, 2001b; 372-373.

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