'The same bucky-massa business': Peter Tosh and I-an-I at the one love peace concert

Rachel Mordecai

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapi

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation
Mordecai, Rachel, 'The same bucky-massa business': Peter Tosh and I-an-I at the one love peace concert, Kunapi, 30(2), 2008.
Available at:https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapi/vol30/iss2/5
'The same bucky-massa business': Peter Tosh and I-an-I at the one love peace concert

Abstract
Peter Tosh's performance at the One Love Peace Concert in Kingston, on 22nd April 1978, is (in)famous for its militancy and strident rejection of the very premise of the occasion:

Dis concert here whey dem say is a PEACE concert, I man nevva did a go come in. Yu know why? Cause wha, was a PEACE concert. An ah wonder if many people realise what de word PEACE mean. Eeh? Yu see most intallectual peeple in sociaty tink de word PEACE means coming togeda. PEACE is de dipluma yu get in de cemetery. Seen! On top a yu grave dat is mark ‘Here Lies De Bady of John Strokes, Rest in PEACE.’ Seen! An I know many of you lickle brothers woodn like to hear yu dawter say she’s gon to give away a little PIECE, a bongo clippins, yu no seen. So yu can imagine how defective Peace is. Seen!1
RACHEL MORDECAI

‘The same bucky-massa business’: Peter Tosh and I-an-I at the One Love Peace Concert

Peter Tosh’s performance at the One Love Peace Concert in Kingston, on 22nd April 1978, is (in)famous for its militancy and strident rejection of the very premise of the occasion:

Dis concert here whey dem say is a PEACE concert, I man nevva did a go come inno. Yu know why? Cause wha, was a PEACE concert. An ah wonder if many people realise what de word PEACE mean. Eeh? Yu see most intellectual peeple in sociaty tink de word PEACE means coming togeda. PEACE is de diploma yu get in de cemetery. Seen! On top a yu grave dat is mark ‘Here Lies De Bady of John Strokes, Rest in PEACE.’ Seen!

An I know many of you lickle brothers woodn like to hear yu dawter say she’s gon to give away a little PIECE, a bongo clippins, yu no seen. So yu can imagine how defective Peace is. Seen!

The concert had been arranged to celebrate a truce in the savage political wars between armed gangs of PNP and JLP ‘enforcers’ in the streets of Kingston. The event had practical aims: some of the proceeds were earmarked to fund various initiatives in the affected communities. But the symbolism was paramount: a massive concert to bring together members of formerly warring factions with the benediction of reggae music, it was also the occasion of Bob Marley’s first performance in Jamaica since having been shot in his Kingston home in December 1976. The most famous image from the concert is of Marley on stage, flanked by Prime Minister Michael Manley and opposition leader Edward Seaga, holding their clasped hands together over his head. The moment was seen as heralding a new day of popular unity and political co-operation; as it turned out, the truce did not survive much past its celebration. Yet what matters for my purpose here is the strong contrast between Tosh’s militant stance on that night and the generally conciliatory tone of the event, including the other musical performances.2

The subversive tenor of Tosh’s performance has been widely remarked: Stephen King notes that Tosh ‘attacked Jamaica’s corrupt social and political system’ (11); Brian Meeks (1997) comments, ‘[Tosh] clearly questions the aim of facile political unity which was fostered by some people in that peace concert’ (np); and Roger Steffens calls the performance ‘incendiary…. Calling down fire and brimstone on the rulers of Jamaica, seated uncomfortably before him in the
second row of the National Stadium.… Tosh became the living embodiment of the conscience of his nation’ (np).

Erin Mackie and Carolyn Cooper offer the most extensive analyses of Tosh’s performance. Mackie focuses on the figure of the outlaw, and the explicit link that Tosh makes between famous pirates from Jamaica’s colonial past and the ‘rude boys of West Kingston’ who, Tosh alleges, have taken ‘the glorified marauders celebrated in Caribbean history’ (26) as role models. Cooper points to Tosh’s subversive word play — the neologism ‘shitstem’ for system, and particularly the dual-pronged pun on peace (quoted above). Through such linguistic play, Cooper suggests, ‘Tosh totally reconfigured the politics of the peace concert, defining an alternative discourse of black integration that included even Lucifer — the police — however temporarily’ (np). I generally agree with Mackie’s and Cooper’s arguments, and I have taken Cooper’s formulation of Tosh’s ‘alternative discourse of black integration’ as instructive. However, this discussion will take a more detailed look at the movement and scope of Tosh’s performance than is attempted by either, and will focus particularly on Tosh’s elaboration of the black collective subject of Jamaican-ness, and its ultimately revolutionary implications.

There are several accounts of how the truce that gave rise to the concert came about; two, at least, describe it as a direct result of the Green Bay massacre of 5th January 1978, in which ten young men — JLP loyalists — were lured to an army firing range outside of Kingston with the promise of guns. There they were fired upon by soldiers; five were killed, and the others escaped. Speculation about the agents and motives behind the massacre was rife; nothing was ever definitively proved. In any case, when the story of Green Bay spread (the army’s cover story having crumbled rapidly), the effect on Kingston’s urban poor transcended party lines: ‘now they saw how expendable their lives really were. Slowly a gang truce began to take shape in the tribalized ghettos of Kingston’ (Gunst 103–104).

From all accounts, the truce was negotiated among those most immediately affected; the involvement of the party leadership came later, in organising the public celebration. The concert took place at the National Stadium in Kingston; ticket prices were kept low to encourage attendance by all citizens. A line-up of popular Jamaican performers was assembled, with Bob Marley as the star attraction. Tosh agreed (reluctantly, by some accounts) to appear, but then delivered a performance that radically subverted the event’s celebratory spirit and the assumptions of its organisers.

I am contending here that the significance of Tosh’s performance extends far beyond a gesture of opposition to the Jamaican political establishment. An examination of the themes and recurrent figures of Tosh’s performance reveals a complex conceptualisation of Jamaican identity, at a time when that category was being intensely contested. Despite the common perception that the turbulent decade of the 1970s in Jamaica was about the contest between democratic socialism (championed by the People’s National Party [PNP] which formed the
government after 1972) and free-market capitalism (advocated by the opposition Jamaica Labour Party [JLP]), the period was also the occasion of a struggle over membership in the Jamaican nation.

As Obika Gray (1991) and Rex Nettleford (1998) have observed, Jamaica exited its colonial period in the midst of a struggle over identity. This battle was engaged primarily along racial-cultural lines over the extent to which Jamaican identity should be predicated on blackness and the African ancestry of the majority. Gray frames this struggle as a contest between two ‘incompatible rival models of “Jamaicanness”’: a black nationalism that developed among the worker-peasantry in the early twentieth century, and what Gray calls ‘Jamaican Exceptionalism’ (13), a norm of Jamaican identity, advanced by the socioeconomic elites, that focused on multiracial harmony. Such a norm rejected any one ethnic group’s claim to comprising the (racial) essence of Jamaicanness; it was a direct challenge to surging black or Afro-centric consciousness among Jamaicans. This conflict did not erupt suddenly in the 1970s; Gray calls the 1960s ‘a period in which class conflicts were played out on the terrain of culture … [and] Individual identity and nationality became objects of political struggle’ (13). To this extent the contestation of the 1970s was a continuation of the preceding decade, with the significant difference that upon Michael Manley’s election in 1972, the government had begun to weigh in publicly upon the side of black nationalism (a significant departure from the stance taken by the JLP government of the 1960s).

Into this contentious discursive field, Tosh inserts a construction of Jamaican-ness predicated upon three inter-related components: the centrality of a racially based collective subject, with blackness as the foundation of belonging, awareness and action; the potent combination of righteousness and defiance; and a long historical view of the experience of diasporic black people, in which the 1970s were merely a continuation of centuries of colonialist, racist oppression. In Tosh’s view, not only do black people have a claim to citizenship in the Jamaican nation, theirs is the pre-eminent claim. On his understanding, a historically constructed blackness is the core of Jamaican identity; everything else is ancillary. It is worth noting that the major elements of Tosh’s position can be traced to his grounding in Rastafarianism, and as such can also be identified in the music of other reggae artists of the time, not least Bob Marley. It also bears pointing out that, on this particular occasion, only Tosh was articulating this Rasta perspective from a radically oppositional stance.

Tosh’s set opens with the Rastafarian piety of ‘Ighziabeher (Let Jah Be Praised)’. Here Tosh not only establishes an unambiguous moral position — expressing devotion to the deity and drawing a distinction between the faithful and the ‘workers of iniquity’ — but also signals the creation of a Rasta-centric (and therefore Afro-centric) cultural space. Moreover, Tosh’s posture is not that of the meek, but of the righteous, who fully expect to be exalted by the workings of
The same bucky-massa business

divine justice. Thus, the song issues both a promise to the faithful and a warning to the wicked:

Fret not thyself
Because of evildoers
Neither be thou envious
Against the workers of iniquity
For they shall soon be cut down
Cut down like grass
And they shall wither like corn.
[Spoken:] Let Jah arise
And let all His enemies scatta

Indeed, as I will show, the collective subject created by Tosh in this performance — which is in some aspects, though not all, coterminous with the community of the righteous evoked in ‘Ighziabeher’ — may expect to be the active instrument, and not merely the beneficiary, of the divine will as it manifests in history.

Tosh transitions seamlessly from ‘Ighziabeher’ to ‘Four Hundred Years’, implying that a righteous stance necessarily creates awareness of and protest against the long trajectory of the oppression of black people, beginning with the Middle Passage and slavery. ‘Four Hundred Years’ is in many ways the linchpin of his performance. Here, Tosh’s creation of the black collective subject informs and is informed by his long historical vision:

Just look how long: it’s four hundred years (four hundred years, four hundred years)
And it’s the same old-time colonial imperialistic philosophy
Said, it’s four hundred long gone years (four hundred years, four hundred years)
And my people, my people just begin to see
But if you come on with me
There is a land, a land of liberty
Where we can live, we gonna live a good life
And you know we got to be free, we got to be free

This is not the observation of a bystander, but of an engaged subject: it is ‘my people’ to whom the persona of the song addresses himself, and he includes himself among the ‘we’ who are moving towards freedom.

Significantly, Tosh emphasises not only the historically delimited experience of slavery, but the continuity of oppression through the decades since emancipation in 1838. This continuity fuels the urgency of Tosh’s message: it is this sameness of which, he insists, his people (soon to be figured as ‘I-an-I’) are just becoming aware. The trauma of the present draws its symbolic and emotional resonances from the trauma of the past; contemporary experiences of deprivation and despair continue to re-vivify the collective memory of slavery, lending it ever-renewed potency. Also, the slavery metaphor has particular vibrancy for Tosh as a Rasta. Rastafarian symbology refers to Rastas in particular, and New World black people in general, as latter-day Israelites in bondage, exiled in Babylon and groaning towards liberation. Here is an instance of the memory of slavery functioning, in
Gilroy’s words, as ‘a living intellectual resource in [black people’s] expressive political culture’ (39). This is slavery as a productive figure, and Tosh uses it to full effect as ‘Four Hundred Years’ moves to its climax.

‘Look how long!’ Tosh wails, the force of his voice highlighting the duration of the black experience of oppression. This leads into a dramatic moment: most of the instruments drop away, leaving only the song’s rhythmic skeleton. Tosh’s voice is thrown into sharp relief as he sings, ‘Four hundred years / And it’s the same old-time bucky-massa philosophy’. His emphasis on ‘bucky-massa’ is pronounced, a pointed reminder of Jamaica’s status as a neo-plantation society. The bucky-massa (or backra-massa) is the white slave owner, a figure of domination and the incarnation of power wedded to injustice. In a just society there may be leaders, but there are no bucky-massas; Tosh’s message is that Jamaica in 1978 is still closer to the plantation than to the just society.

Later, in the short speech that precedes ‘Burial’, Tosh elaborates on what he means by ‘the same bucky-massa philosophy’: ‘Well right now yu ave a system or a shitstem whey gwaan inna dis country ya fe a long ages a imes. Four hundred years, and de same bucky massa bizniz. An black inferiority, and brown superiority and white superiority rule dis lickle black country here fe a long imes’. Tosh points to the racial oppression, the cultural denigration of black people that has warped Jamaican society; more significantly, he identifies Jamaica as a black country that has been under the misrule of a racist ideology. This is Tosh’s claim for the fundamental blackness of the category ‘Jamaican’. In the early twenty-first century, it may seem unremarkable to refer to Jamaica as a black country. In 1978 it was perhaps becoming unremarkable, but, as Stuart Hall contends, ‘Black is an identity which had to be learned and could only be learned in a certain moment. In Jamaica that moment is the 1970s’ (116). Tosh’s statement occurs in a time when calling Jamaica a black country was still polemical and when the question of a national racial identity was still a contested one, despite the multiracialist national motto, ‘Out of Many, One People’. The ideology of multiracialism has had equivocal success in Jamaica, some argue, because it has masked the bucky-massa bizniz that Tosh decries: a hierarchical multiracialism, in contrast to racial equality.

Offering an antidote to the racist distortion of Jamaican society, Tosh closes his brief speech with a marvellous assertion, both warning and promise: ‘Well, I-an-I come wid earthquake, lightnin and tunda to break down dese barriers of oppression, drive away transgression and rule equality between humble black people’. This is clearly a riff on the lyrics of Marley’s song ‘Exodus’ — ‘Jah come to break downpression / Rule equality / Wipe away transgression / Set the captives free’ — a reference the audience would undoubtedly recognise. In Tosh’s version here, Jah as the agent of justice is replaced by ‘I-an-I’ — a complex, and central, Rasta expression. Used as the first-person pronoun, it can be variously singular and plural, and recognises the existence of the divine within each
individual (Murrell et al 1998 447). Moreover, as Nathaniel Murrell and Burchell Taylor point out, ‘The expression ‘I-an-I’ … links a vibrant hope to a clearly perceived destiny of freedom, justice, righteousness, and peace’ (1998 392). Thus, here Tosh’s community of the righteous from ‘Ighziabeher’ and his historically constructed black collective subject from ‘Four Hundred Years’ merge by way of Rasta ontology, and are named ‘I-an-I’. Arguably, Tosh is also exploiting the flexibility of the pronoun, and using it here to mean both the singular Tosh (as prophet and avenging angel) and the aroused, black Jamaican collective subject whom he is rhetorically evoking. Further, note his insistence on racial identity (‘humble black people’), and the suggestive tension between lowliness (‘humble black people’) and power (‘earthquake, lightnin and tunda’).

I should point out one more instantiation of the Jamaican collective subject which is also subsumed under Tosh’s I-an-I: the persona of ‘Stepping Razor’ (which precedes, in the order of Tosh’s performance, the speech just discussed). Meeks and Omar Davies agree that ‘Stepping Razor,’ with its truculent self-assertion and overt threats (‘If you wanna live, treat me good … I’m a stepping razor, don’t you watch my size / I’m dangerous’), is emblematic of the style and stance Tosh sought consistently to project as his public persona. But, as Meeks points out, it is important to note the collective and political resonances in this act of individual self-fashioning: “‘Razor’ is Tosh”, Meeks says, “but [it] is also virtually a leitmotif for the poor in class-divided Jamaica” (n.p.). ‘Razor’ is also an evocation of the rude bwoy, a figure dating back to the 1960s that — surfing the intersections of politics, protest, and popular culture — comes to have considerable currency in the 1970s.

Garth White defines the rude bwoy as ‘that person, native, who is totally disenchanted with the ruling system; who generally is descended from the “African” elements in the lower class and who is now armed with ratchets (German made knives), other cutting instruments and … guns and explosives’ (39). In ‘Stepping Razor’ the rude bwoy, small but deadly, warns any would-be ‘bully’ or ‘chucky’ not to be deceived by his size:

I’m like a cutting razor
Don’t watch my size
I’m dangerous (dangerous)
(I’m like a stepping razor, don’t you watch my size) I’m so dangerous

My use of ‘small’ here should be taken in a social, not physical, sense: social hierarchy in Jamaica is commonly expressed in terms of ‘big men’ and ‘small men’. The threat is both explicit and dire: ‘If you wanna live / Treat me good’. Don’t mess with me/us, is the message, and coming after ‘Four Hundred Years’, it advances an alternative to the passivity bemoaned in that song, of ‘sit[ting] down on your pride’. Here the posture is defiant, not quite on the offensive but stridently on the defensive.
As with ‘Four Hundred Years’, the song comes to the fullness of its dramatic impact at the end, where Tosh chants a litany of violent possibilities:

I’m like a cutting, flickin, lootin, shootin, stabbin, steppin, […]
I’m dangerous
I’m like a stepping, walkin, flickin, bumpin, shootin, stabbin…
I’m so dangerous.

Tosh may be signifying the society’s growing anxieties about violent crime, an increasingly urgent concern. It is hard not to read this as an incantatory celebration of violence, but it would be wrong not to read it also within the context of Tosh’s broader social critique. This is not motiveless malignancy, but backlash from a collective subject too long exploited, denigrated and marginalised. Moreover, Tosh may want to remind his audience that the representatives of ‘decent society’ there present — particularly the politicians — are not above deploying, for their own purposes, the rude-bwoy posturing (and violence) of the urban poor.

Like ‘Stepping Razor’, ‘Burial’ expresses a strident posture and contains the (somewhat more oblique) threat of violence. However, it is lyrically more complex, and draws together many of the themes and motifs that are at play throughout the performance. There is the theme of revelation, a people becoming undeceived (‘Now we know the truth / We find you wearin the boot’), that has already been raised in ‘Four Hundred Years’, and will be brought to fruition in ‘Get Up Stand Up’, which closes the performance. As in ‘Ighziabeher’, there is the voice of righteousness inveighing against the evildoer:

What a big disgrace
Di way how di pirate dem rob up di place
Dem grab everything they can find
And I said, dey even rob the blind.

The dichotomy established here between the righteous and the wicked is further elaborated by a parallel distinction between the living and the dead:

Let the dead bury the dead
And who is to be fed, be fed
I ain’t got no time, no time to waste on you
Cause I’m a livin man, got lots a work to do.

A living (righteous) man has no time for the dead (the spiritually bankrupt), because he has ‘lots a work to do’, the work of feeding those who need it. And why? Because ‘the rich man’s heaven [Jamaica] is the poor man’s hell’. The living/dead distinction is one Tosh will pick up again in the speech immediately following the song; ‘living’ suggests also ‘livity’, which is righteous living, in accordance with the natural order and the injunctions of Jah.7

In the speech that follows ‘Burial’, Tosh mounts his deconstructive attack on the ideal of peace, as quoted at the beginning of this article: ‘PEACE is de diploma yu get in de cemetery’. More than this, Tosh seems to announce the
'The same bucky-massa business'

advent of a new era, one initiated by the increasing enlightenment and sense of agency among black people to which he is contributing. Thus, having rejected ‘peace’ as the central premise of the evening, he says ‘When black people come togeda and feget say well, someting — dere is a destructive element between I an I what segregate I an I, which was a force laid dung by Lucifa, seen. But now dat I know dat Lucifa hands and foot will soon be bound, seen. An I shall cast him into outta daakness, an bring love an justice to black people once more’. This is the ‘alternative discourse of black integration’ to which Cooper refers: the redemption of I-an-I from the internecine conflict instigated by an external force, Lucifa, which Cooper glosses as the police, but which may more broadly signal both metaphysical malevolence and physical agents of the competing political camps. Interestingly, Tosh uses the specifically singular ‘I’ here, rather than the collective (or ambiguous) ‘I-an-I’. I-an-I will be saved, but (it seems) Tosh will do the saving, by awakening the collective to its true nature and purpose.

The extent to which Tosh’s language and imagery draw from the Judeo-Christian bible will already have become apparent. This is entirely consistent with his location within Rastafari; Murrell and Lewin Williams observe that ‘the Bible has a preeminent place in Rastafarian life and thought because, for them, it is a book written by and about Blacks. As a result, the biblical materials pervade almost every form of Rastafarian discourse’ (1998 326). But Rastas are also deeply conscious of the central role played by Christian churches in justifying the enslavement of Africans with recourse to scripture. Thus, ‘With their “hermeneutics of suspicion”, [Rastafarians] are selective in their use of biblical materials, so as not to propagate “white distortions” of the Bible and continue the ideology of Babylon’ (1998 327).

This Rastafarian ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ provides a context for understanding Tosh’s rhetoric, which roundly criticises Christianity and Christians while drawing deeply from the same sources and elaborating many of the same themes. Thus, even while he signifies on Matthew 22:13, Tosh goes on to excoriate those who have used religion to exploit the oppressed:

learn dis man, white man teach I an I say I an I ha fe dead go a heaven. Why? Dat dem can come a Jamaica come take whey de whole a de sun. Yu no seen, an inherit de blood baat Eart. An we gaan a whey? Heaven, gaan drink milk and honey. Cause we a wha? Fool. Dem tell we say cow jump ova moon and dish run way wid bongo clippins spoon. Me a tell yu! Yu ever check dem ting deh?

Here Tosh elaborates the distinction between the dead and the living from the song ‘Burial’: the dead are the befuddled, who have been blinded by religion and have abandoned their birthright to swindlers. Tosh reduces religion to absurdity, implying its equivalency with nursery rhymes, and heaping scorn on the credulous. Again, he grounds his argument in a long historical vision:

Yu see dem lickle game here, is juss some games whey Columbus an Henry Maagan an Francis Drake, Bartolomew Dilas Cassus, who was de fuss guy come roun wid dem
cross roun him neck fe come trick black people and say rite now black people is Israel so if we waan hole dem de ongle ting we can hole dem wid is tell dem say see de cross dere, an fe falla Jesus him soon come back.

Look how blood baat lang we deh ya a wait pan Jesus. Eeh! All now, to blood baat. All de war in de Eart, Jesus cyaan do a ting bout it a graass cyaat. Yu no seen! A who ha fe go do dat? Is I an I ave to come togeda wid is seen? Heartical love and respec fe each adda.

Here Tosh comes to the crux of his ‘dread sermon’ (to use Cooper’s phrase): delusion must be replaced by enlightenment, passivity by agency. And here the agency is unequivocally collective: Tosh performs as the prophet, but the action must come from all the people. Moreover, Tosh clarifies the necessary alternative to the deadening ‘peace’ of the concert’s title: enlightened, collective action pursued ‘wid heartical love an respec fe each adda’. While this may appear at first glance as a rather tepid injunction, Tosh’s demand is grounded in the ethos of Rastafari: heartical signals ‘emotions, feelings, and spiritual upliftment (not necessarily religious) as an attachment to the Rasta culture’ (Murrell et al 1998 446). Respect, moreover, is an attitude so prized in Jamaican interpersonal relations that it has been ritualised into a greeting.

Beyond reconfiguring the politics of the peace concert and rendering it an occasion of black togetherness, Tosh makes it a consciousness-raising event, an occasion for truth-telling and what Bob Marley famously called emancipation from mental slavery. Tosh’s message is that, when Jamaicans become aware of their true nature (African, free, inter-connected, powerful) and infuse their actions and relations with that awareness, there will be no need for specious declarations of peace. When he turns, in the next breath, to enjoining his listeners to put Jamaica’s resources to work for the benefit of all its people, rather than allowing their exploitation by external actors, his direct address to Manley and Seaga seems almost a formality. Tosh has made it plain that his real audience is I-an-I, the Rasta-imbued Jamaican collective. It is I-an-I to whom he appeals, and in whom his hope resides.

The last three songs of Tosh’s set (‘Equal Rights,’ ‘Legalize It,’ and ‘Get Up Stand Up’) all address, in various ways, the themes already discussed here. But it is Tosh’s rendition of ‘Get Up Stand Up’ that draws the elements of his performance together into a brilliant piece of musical incitement. Each of the three original Wailers — Tosh, Marley and Bunny Wailer — performed solo versions of this song at various points, in addition to the versions the group performed together. Of these, Meeks says Tosh’s version is ‘a far more essentially militant and aggressive one’ than the versions performed by the group — and this performance certainly supports that assessment. Simple changes such as ‘Don’t give up this fight’ rather than the more common ‘Don’t give up the fight’ lend urgency and specificity to the message. Tosh’s insertions of — variously — ‘my brothers’, ‘sisters’, and ‘black people’ after the line ‘Stand up for your rights’ repeatedly evoke the collective of I-an-I, and underline its grounding in a
common racial identity. The long historical view is here in ‘Half my history was never told’ (the more widely familiar version is ‘Half the story has never been told’), which reappears later as ‘Half black people history was never told’. There is an echo of ‘Four Hundred Years’ in the line ‘You’ve been down too long’, which is interposed in the third chorus between the normally sequential lines ‘Get up stand up’ and ‘Don’t give up this fight’.

As the song progresses, its anger and militancy seem to increase, as if Tosh, at the end of the long jeremiad of his performance, is ascending towards frenzy. ‘Bullshit’ appears twice in the song’s second half — both times in relation to the critique of Christianity as a misleading and pacifying doctrine: ‘Sick and tired of this bullshit game / Die and go to heaven in Lord Jesus name’ and ‘Preacher man don’t tell me bullshit / Heaven is under earth’. Finally, the song climaxes in a defiant, almost inflammatory chant of resistance that seems directed towards both the incitement of I-an-I, and the provocation of those defenders of the status quo who, Tosh acknowledges, will be offended and alarmed by his message:

\begin{verbatim}
Git up, stand up
Stand up for your rights, you going to war
Git up, stand up
I say, don’t give up the fight
Dem don’t like this, but
Git up, stand up
I said, stand up, stand up for your rights
Git up, stand up
We ain’t goin bow to no bucky-massa
We ain’t goin bow to no colonialism
We ain’t goin bow to no, no ism
We ain’t goin bow to no imperialism
Cause dem pack up a whole bag a schism
\end{verbatim}

This is chanting down Babylon at its most potent. At the end of his performance Tosh sums up the array of forces conspiring against the liberation of I-an-I, simultaneously declaring and demanding I-an-I’s rebellion against them. The interplay between ‘I’, ‘we’, and ‘you’ here exploits the fluidity of I-an-I, that Tosh deploys elsewhere to posit himself as both one within the collective and a prophet set apart — but ‘dem’ is unambiguously other, unambiguously the enemy, and potentially intended to include the politicians, state officials and other power brokers among the audience. If, as I have claimed, Tosh is intervening in the 1970s contestation over the nature of Jamaican identity, it seems clear that his intervention is less black nationalist than black revolutionary. Jamaica is not yet the black nation that Tosh insists it must be; black people are not yet its full citizens. But I-an-I, as Tosh configures it here, is already powerful, and needs only revelation (of its true nature), righteousness, and collective resistance to achieve its long-denied emancipation.
Although some observers maintain that Peter Tosh’s persona and his work positioned him on the radical edge of the generally counter-cultural movements of reggae and Rastafari, it is not my concern here to argue for Tosh’s particularity as a militant, or to suggest that the historically grounded version of Jamaican blackness that he deploys in this performance is unique to him. He was, however, the uniquely and stridently dissenting voice at an event that otherwise suggested the harmonious (if temporary) integration of the ethos of reggae music with the agenda of the Jamaican political establishment. The One Love Peace Concert — and specifically the Marley-Seaga-Manley moment — has been cited as a rare moment of popular music having demonstrable political efficacy (Torres-Saillant 30–32). But in fact, the political unity celebrated on that evening preceded the concert, rather than being initiated by it, and disintegrated quite rapidly thereafter. That the iconic image persists in defining the concert’s legacy, while the depth, force and arguably prophetic quality of Tosh’s radical critique seems to have faded in popular recollection, is perhaps an object lesson in the inter-relationship between history and myth. Yet, listening to the recording from thirty years’ distance, one is struck by the relentlessness of Tosh’s performance, its salience at that particular historical moment, and the sheer rhetorical mastery with which he infuses righteousness into revolution; these things persist also.

NOTES

1 The quotations from Tosh’s speeches at the concert are taken from the liner notes to the CD recording of Tosh’s performance. The speeches — which appear in the liner notes in a bilingual edition, English translation beside the original patwa — are reproduced from Carl Gayle’s transcription, and were originally published in the magazine Jah Ugliman, vol. 1. I have amended the liner-notes version where it did not, to my ear, accurately reflect Tosh’s speech.

2 Other performers included Dennis Brown, Leroy Smart, Jacob Miller, Big Youth, and Ras Michael and the Sons of Negus. In several contemporary reports about the concert, Tosh’s performance is singled out for its confrontational quality.

3 Thus, Michael Manley notes in 1974, ‘While superficially accepting the notion of a multi-racial society, the truth is that Jamaica is not yet at peace with blackness or comfortable with its African heritage’ (61). In the preface to his 1970 book dealing with race and identity in Jamaica, Rex Nettleford observes that the country’s political leadership, when responding at the end of the 1960s to ‘protests on behalf of the black majority,’ was insistent ‘that the society is a multi-racial unit — if not in fact, then certainly with the capacity of becoming so in the foreseeable future’ (14). Further, Nettleford’s introduction to the 1998 edition comments, ‘The Rastafarian focus on Africa and things African gave many a reader problems at the time [of the first edition] and do [sic] to this day, especially those who refuse to see Jamaica as a predominantly black country and ritualistically invoke the national motto … as if it were reality rather than aspiration’ (viii).

4 It should be noted that Tosh did not write ‘Stepping Razor’; the songwriter was Joe Higgs. Nevertheless, Davies opines, “‘Stepping Razor’ penned by the late Joe Higgs, must have been written for Tosh” (np).
While I’m not aware of *chucky* as a noun in the Jamaican language context, to *chuck* someone is to push or shove them. Also, it is common to speak of a hyper-aggressive person as *chucking badness.*

Tosh, speaking later in the performance, refers with delightful ambiguity to ‘few lickle big guys’ who hinder the aspirations of the poor to social mobility.

See Edmonds, especially pp.354–55, for a description of the basic meaning and elements of livity.

‘Then the king said to the servants, “Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness; there is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be”.’


‘Redemption Song’.

Italics indicate lyrics that do not occur in album versions of the song.

**WORKS CITED**


Meeks, Brian 1997, ‘Peter Tosh and His Times’, paper presented to the Institute of Caribbean Studies panel discussion on Peter Tosh, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, 16 October.


Steffens, Roger 2000, liner notes, Peter Tosh Live at the One Love Peace Concert, JAD Records.


Tosh, Peter 2000, Live at the One Love Peace Concert, JAD Records.
