

Babylon East

PERFORMING DANCEHALL,
ROOTS REGGAE, AND RASTAFARI
IN JAPAN



MARVIN D. STERLING

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appear on the last printed page of this book.

For my mother,
Winnifred Sterling,
and in memory of my father,
Kenneth Sterling

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PREFACE

This book explores Japanese engagement with Jamaican popular culture. I begin this exploration with “The Politics of Presence: Performing Blackness in Japan.” In that chapter, I locate Jamaica and Japan on the map of a global imagination of blackness, an imagination which I argue turns significantly on racial demography and political history. The four following chapters root this broad theoretical discussion in ethnography, exploring the lives and performances of the practitioners of Japan’s Jamaican subcultures. Although I discuss performance in each subculture in general terms, I also focus on particular modes of performance. I have done so not because I feel each performance mode is exclusive to a given subculture, but simply because I believe that it offers particularly interesting insights into the life of this subculture. Chapter 2, “Music and Orality: Authenticity in Japanese Sound System Culture,” explores the creative use of Jamaican music and spoken language by Japanese sound systems members as well as DJs, tracing the transnational routes these performers take to accumulate this musical and verbal symbolic capital. In the chapter, I explore how, once back in Japan, they draw upon these resources in the process of creating an “au-

thentic” Japanese dancehall culture, both for their Japanese audiences and more subtly for each other.

“Fashion and Dance: Performing Gender in Japan’s Reggae Dance Scene” is the third chapter. It addresses the cross-cultural issues of gender and sexuality, morality, and class invoked by the dress and dance of Japan’s reggae dancers. Disturbing the moral conventions of Christian, middle-class, British-identified Jamaican womanhood (Cooper 1997, 2004), the dance scene is the primary space for female participation in Jamaican dancehall culture, one otherwise dominated by male declarations of lyrical agility, sexual bravado, and willingness to use violence. I use fashion and dance to explore the extent to which the gendered body politics evidenced in the Jamaican case also appear in Japan.

The next two chapters shift from dancehall to Rastafari. The fourth chapter, “Body and Spirit: Rastafarian Consciousness in Rural Japan,” picks up on the previous chapter’s concern with embodiment but focuses on its relation to Rastafarian notions of spirituality. The chapter explores how Japanese express their identification with the movement in bodily terms, including the wearing of dreadlocks, diet, and medicinal practice. I will consider how one group’s participation at an annual festival in several of the the members’ hometown becomes a vehicle through which they bridge the gap between their selves as dreads and as residents of their rural community, and between their global experiences and those of a mythologized local.

The fifth chapter is “Text and Image: Bad Jamaicans, Tough Japanese, and the Third World ‘Search for Self.’” The first part of this chapter explores the interest of some Japanese dreads in a body of popular writings in which Japanese are imagined to be the true ancient Israelites. Jamaican Rastafarians make the same claim for themselves; the independent existence of this literature appears to these Japanese dreads to help legitimize their own claim to Rastafari. In the second part of the chapter, I examine nonfictional and fictional writings on Japanese travel to Jamaica. I link these works to the recent discourse of *jibun sagashi* (search for self)—a popular term in Japanese public discourse since the 1990s—particularly as this search has centered on narratives of Japanese travel overseas. I focus on a novel by Jah Hirō (1991), about a Japanese man who travels to Jamaica to discover himself through contact with the third world. I explore the author’s textual “performance” of the protagonist’s search for a stronger, ideologically actualized self, in part through an analysis of the novel’s imaging of Jamaicans.

I use the sixth and final chapter, “Jamaican Perspectives on Jamaican

Culture in Japan,” to resolve my discussion of how Jamaican subcultures afford insight into the performance of social identity in Japan. I begin to consolidate my discussion of race in a global context by exploring Jamaican perspectives on the popularity of Jamaican culture in Japan. I leave this discussion to the end of the book, at some risk of appearing to marginalize this perspective. But it is precisely because of the importance of a focused discussion of this Jamaican point of view that I have left it for the end. This discussion leads into what I consider the bigger picture of this research: what is in the social scientific literature a still-underexplored concern with the global politics of race and ethnicity beyond the West and the African diaspora, including as evidenced in Afro-Asian contact. With this concern in mind, I identify three key discourses of global race evident in this research.

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INTRODUCTION

On the upper floor of a rural *ryokan* (inn) overlooking a hillside in Nara prefecture, home to one of Japan's ancient capitals, seven men in their twenties, thirties, and forties dress for a *matsuri* (festival) for which this small town enjoys some national renown.

It is midmorning, early in July 2000. Standing about the dimly lit, tatami-matted room, the seven men are dressed only in *handako* (short laborers pants) and *tabi* (socks). Tiny pockmarks make similar patterns on each of their sinewy backs. As they move, massive dreadlocks like tree roots sway across their backs, chests, and thighs. Some of the men have bound their locks with *hachimaki* (ceremonial headbands), or contained them in tams.

As the one woman in the room moves busily about, the men work in pairs. One man in each pair stands with his arms raised to shoulder level, lengths of *sarashi* (a long spool of white cloth about the width of a forearm) wrapped tightly around his ribs. The second man grips the other end of the cloth. Pulling away from his partner with all his strength, he grunts as, with loud snaps, he tugs the *sarashi* taut. The first man revolves slowly to wrap

the cloth around his upper body. When the men are wrapped, they begin strapping towels to their shoulders.

Finished, the men sit cross-legged on the floor, chatting quietly. The decorative centerpiece of the room is a painting, framed by lines of red, green, and gold—Rasta colors—of three Hindu deities. Lord Vishnu, seated, plays a sitar on the left; Ganesh, robed in gold, sits on the right; and Lakshmi, in the center, cradles two red lotus flowers. Two white elephants, trunks solemnly aloft, face each other in the background.

The men, reggae musicians, listen to a portable radio that plays a tape of their recent live performance of “Exodus,” originally recorded by Bob Marley, the Jamaican reggae superstar.

Exodus, movement of Jah people,
Open your eyes and look within.
Are you satisfied with the life you’re living?
We know where we’re going; we know where we’re from.
We’re leaving Babylon, we’re going to our fatherland.
Exodus, movement of Jah people.

Soon it is time to leave. The men—still bare-chested except for the sarashi wrapped tightly around them—gather their belongings, walk downstairs, and wait outside.

A minivan picks the dreads up and whisks them through the town, whose trees are gaily decorated by origami frogs. The men arrive at a restaurant. Loud and energetically happy, they eat omelets stuffed with fried rice and tiny bits of meat, and drink iced *ocha* (green tea).

The men soon leave the restaurant, without paying. Their expenses have been covered. Today is a special day.

Late on a Friday night a few months earlier, only days before the start of the new millennium, much of the city of Kawasaki has grown still. Most of its glass-fronted boutiques, restaurants, and cafes have closed, or are about to. A few clerks and businessmen move along the darkened sidewalks toward the nearest train station. Now and then a car passes, edging through the narrow streets toward the highway home.

But one upscale mall in this city between Tokyo and Yokohama grows more crowded by the minute. Here, dozens of people in their teens and early twenties mill about or sit on the ground outside a wide, attractive building. Above its closed doors, the words “Club Citta” glow brightly in

silver letters. The young people chat with each other or into tiny *keitai denwa* (cellphones). Laughter and the sudden roar of motorbikes punctuate the chatter.

Mixing the styles of Kingston rudie, b-boy, and West Coast slacker, the men wear baseball, ski, and Muslim skull caps; huge down jackets; baggy pants; and limited edition sports shoes. Some have shaved heads; others wear their hair long; and still others have short, salon-managed dreadlocks. Many of the women wear hooded, thigh- or ankle-length pink-and-white down coats, and black, calf-high platform boots. Several women wear their hair in perms or braids. Others have frizzy hairdos bound with woolen bandanas.

The club doors open to the crowd, now numbering in the hundreds. As the loud young people file inside, they shed their jackets, revealing—in the case of the women most steeped in Japan's dancehall reggae culture—bodies clad in tight pants, skirts, or short shorts, and torso-baring tops. They cram their winter coats, purses, and book bags into 200-yen¹ coin lockers.

Before long, farther inside the club, the dance floor has become a pulsing fray of darkness, bodies, and bass. People push toward the elevated stage. Directly in front of them, spotlit in white from high above, about four young men work in a maze of amplifiers, turntables, and mixers, each machine linked to the others by wiring lying tangled on the floor. With electronic effects and his own shrieking voice, the MC punctuates the roar of the crowd, the organic bass, and the gruff voices of infamous Jamaican artists. Turrets of speakers flanking the stage thunder a heavy sound. One of the four young men—the group's selector—rifles through crates of records stacked toward the rear of the stage, carefully placing one record after the next on the turntable. The throng includes a few Jamaican men and women, many from the naval base in nearby Yokosuka. Attendance at this event otherwise appears to be exclusively Japanese.

Based on two years of research conducted in Japan between 1998 and 2000, as well as briefer periods of fieldwork in Japan, Jamaica, and New York between 2000 and 2010, this book explores contemporary Japanese engagement with Jamaican culture. Like in Jamaica, this engagement manifests itself as a continuum ranging from the sacred, as illustrated in the first vignette above, to the popular cultural, as illustrated in the second. Many Japanese drawn to Jamaican culture on both ends of this spectrum involve

themselves with it only superficially. Some attend dancehall events as fans with only a general interest in a range of so-called black music, perhaps including hip-hop and rhythm and blues as well as reggae. Many Japanese who dreadlock their hair know or care little about Rastafari, the anticolonialist movement that views Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie as black people's messiah. (Much the same, of course, might be said for "fashion dreads" in other countries, including Jamaica itself.) Although I explore the entire spectrum of Japanese interest in Jamaican popular culture, I focus on the lives and performances of the artists who are most fully steeped, as *practitioners*, in reggae music. I consider the smaller number of Japanese—like the men in the first vignette—engaged not only with reggae, but also with Rastafari as a spiritual movement, who use the religion as a primary means by which to lead their spiritual lives.

In this book, I argue that reggae and Rastafari represent productive lenses through which to view a range of aspects of social identity—such as gender, class, ethnicity, and nationhood—in contemporary Japan. The motivations for Japanese engagement with Jamaican popular culture are at least as complex as the notion of identity itself. The presence of such subcultures in the country should partly be understood as belonging to a new spirit of internationalism in Japan today. This internationalism demonstrates a shift from the long-standing dialectic between Japanese particularity and Western universality, in which the Japanese are seen to construct a sense of modern nationhood primarily in relation to the West, to a broader Japanese engagement with the world at large. This broader engagement is informed by Japan's ongoing status as global power, on the one hand, and its economic decline in recent years, on the other hand.

I argue that both of these aspects of the contemporary Japanese situation mobilize diverse—and, thus, diversely consumable—imaginings of ethnic and racial difference, including that of blackness. Indeed, while the study has an ethnographic focus on the performance of social identity in such aspects as class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality, I focus on race. A significant aspect of the Japanese cultural encounter with the Jamaican evidences itself, albeit discreetly in many cases, in racial terms. Blackness in consumerist, information-age Japan is a commodity that is largely divorced from its human referents, to be enjoyed through, for example, the playful consumption of dancehall music. However, especially given Japan's long economic recession, which began in the early 1990s, blackness can also be something deeper, a way of rethinking one's life circumstances, such as

through immersion in Rastafari. (This is not to say that it is only possible to identify with dancehall as something superficial and with Rastafari as something deep.)

“Race” in Japan, must be seen in terms of its particular ethnonational inflections. Nevertheless, it remains powerfully informed by its Western provenance. This provenance is of great importance for the way in which the Afrocentrisms evident in dancehall, reggae, and Rastafari are consumed in Japan. The significance of this provenance becomes especially pronounced as Japanese travel beyond Japan to such spaces as Jamaica, New York, and England. Thus a major concern of this study, both within and beyond the ethnographic center of Japan, is thinking about blackness beyond the African diaspora and, more broadly, race in a global context. I frame this interest largely within the emergent scholarship on the intersections between the African and the Asian experiences in the modern world, and I regard this study as one of if not the first multi-sited ethnographic monograph of the Afro-Asian. I inflect this Afro-Asian focus to further position the study as a rare ethnographic monograph on blackness in a global context, and on the transnational cultural exchanges between Japan and a non-Western country as well as between two non-Western countries in general. By positioning the study in these ways, I wish to destabilize the tendency to view ideas of race as sited within the West, and between the West and the postcolonial non-West. I want to open up the conversation to include how these ideas of race also flow within more rarely considered realms of the non-West (such as Asia) and across them (such as between the African and Asian diasporas).

Babylon East

The concept of Babylon is one point of entry for considering the implications of my framing in this way the presence of reggae and Rasta in Japan. “Babylon” is the Rastafarians’ term for the immoral West as a space, a history, and a way of thinking. It cites the biblical city riven by vice and confusion. Imperial Britain particularly was Babylon, as is capitalist Euro-America and the destructive neoliberalism of such institutions as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Jamaica, too, until recently a colonized country dominated by these pirates and their allies, was Babylon: in the famous Rasta idiom, “Jamaica is an island, but it is not I [my] land.” Jamaica is hell, and Africa is true home. Paradoxically, Jamaica localizes the

irredeemable evil that is Babylon, but it is also the site of a long-running hope for its eventual suppression.

By using this term in the title of this book,² I want to recognize a connection that many of my research subjects made between the Jamaican and Japanese situations. This connection has to do with the sense that Japan, like Jamaica, is part of the Babylonian world dominated by the West, including through the adoption of Western ways of thinking. When the reggae musician Sawa lyrically describes himself as a “raggamuffin inna Tokyo City / raggamuffin inna Babylon City,” for instance, 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. At the same time, Japan—like Jamaica, a land in which Rastas have much invested—is not a place of irredeemable evil. 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.

But even as Jamaica and Japan have much in common viewed vis-à-vis Babylon, the two are differently positioned in the overall political and economic order of nations. When some Japanese practitioners of Rasta describe Japan as Babylon, they object to modern Japan’s participation not only in a capitalism that has exploited many Japanese, but also one that exploits poor people around the world. They object to a Japanese colonialism that has done great harm to its Asian neighbors. “Babylon East,” then, speaks to the domestic and international political terms of Japan’s engagement with the Jamaican: Japan as the East dominated by the West, and as such partnered with Afro-Jamaica; Japan as partner in the colonial and capitalist domination of non-Western people, thus linked to Western power and distanced from Afro-Jamaica; and Japan as a domestic space experienced as independent of the international. “Babylon East,” therefore, complicates African diasporic assumptions of Babylonian power as strictly Western, and deepens the recognition that the effects of its oppressiveness, as well as resistance to this oppressiveness, evidence themselves outside of the African diaspora. None of this, however, is meant to ignore the fact that the heavier ideological investments of the practitioners I focus on are balanced by easier mainstream consumptions of the difference of the Afro-Jamaican.

Before discussing these issues in fuller ethnographic depth, I will say something about the Jamaican cultural forms that will be the lens through which I explore this encounter between the Jamaican and the Japanese.

Reggae, Rasta, and Dancehall in Jamaica: A Brief Introduction

Reggae is a genre of folk music emerging from the Afro-Jamaican underclass in the late 1960s. It belongs to a musical genealogy that can be traced back to mento music of the colonial period and to even earlier West African musical practices, but more immediately to ska and rocksteady. Best known for its up-tempo, trumpeted, syncopated beat, ska conveyed the exuberance of the Jamaica that gained its independence in 1962. The message of reggae's more immediate musical predecessor, rocksteady—slower and heavier than ska, its syncopated beat now played on guitar—dominated the Jamaican musical scene briefly in the mid- to late 1960s. Lyrically, rocksteady spoke to the experiences of tough, urban “rude boys” who were often recent migrants to Kingston from the countryside. Reggae—its beat even slower and heavier than rocksteady's—emerged in the late 1960s. It soon gave rise to a number of subgenres, most notably roots reggae. This music is deeply influenced by the message of Rastafari.

The term “dancehall” has been used in a number of ways. The first refers generically to Afro-Jamaican social gatherings going as far back as the days of slavery (Stolzoff 2000). The second refers more specifically to such gatherings in the period immediately after the Second World War, when records (especially African American rhythm and blues and, later, Jamaican music) were played at entertainment venues. A third use of the term “dancehall” refers to a new form of reggae music that began taking shape in the 1970s, even as roots reggae was at the peak of its popularity. In this third aspect, dancehall is a direct ancestor of several genres of popular electronic music today, including hip-hop. One aspect of this kinship is the development of the “toasting” style of speech-song pioneered by Count Machuki as he introduced the records he played at parties in the 1940s and 1950s. Another is the remixing of records, pioneered by King Tubby in the late 1960s. Tubby's sampling of prerecorded songs, and combining them in the studio with the toasting of DJ U-Roy in the early 1970s, set the musical stage for the development of dancehall as it is known today.

From the 1970s to the early 1980s, live dancehall, in this third aspect, involved toasting over live musical instrumentation and is associated with such artists as Sugar Minott and Yellowman. The fourth aspect of dancehall—also called “ragga” or “raggamuffin,” especially in the United Kingdom—is the specifically digitized form of the third aspect and has

dominated Jamaican popular music since the mid-1980s. (Some argue that the third kind of dancehall is a general category to which the fourth belongs.) When I use the term “dancehall,” I refer to all these readings, but most immediately to the fourth—that is, dancehall as patois-based toasting to digitized beats, and the subcultures associated with it.

Regarding these associated subcultures, dancehall today consists of two, largely gendered scenes. The first is centered on the sound system. Sound systems can refer both to mobile audio equipment and to the small group of people, usually young men, who play records on this equipment at clubs and outdoor venues. In sound-system culture, the MC introduces musical selections and urges the crowd on throughout live events. DJs are vocal artists who perform over musical tracks. They might do so as recording artists whose records are played by sound systems at live events, or as live performers over digital musical tracks—“riddims”—laid down by the sound systems. (In dancehall and hip-hop culture, then, MCs and DJs play opposite roles.)

Donnettes make up the second scene. They are the extravagantly dressed—and often underdressed—women who attend dancehall events, either as individuals or “posses” in the audience, or as professional dancers on stage. 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.

Enter the Japanese

The annual World Clash and National Dancehall Queen competitions are the two events, respectively, with the highest profiles in these two scenes. Sound clashes are competitions between rival sound systems, and the winner is the system that judges determine have received the most cheers from the audience. In the World Clash of 1999, held in Brooklyn, New York, Mighty Crown, a Japanese sound system, was the only non-Jamaican competitor. Wielding to the surprise of many the agonistic, subculturally deep patois needed to “big up” their sound system and down their rivals, Mighty Crown stunned the international dancehall community by winning the

event. Three years later, Junko Kudo, a dancer from Japan's burgeoning donnette scene, became the first non-Jamaican to compete in Jamaica's National Dancehall Queen competition. In this event, contestants are judged, among other things, for their skill in erotic dance to the beat of dancehall tunes, for the creativity of their (often minimal) costume, and, in the manner typical of beauty contests, for their performance during a brief interview. Victory guarantees the winner at least minor celebrity status on the island and in the Jamaican diaspora of North America and Great Britain.

In what might have been an even more surprising turn of events for the dancehall community than Mighty Crown's victory, Kudo won the event. As Jamaica's National Dancehall Queen for 2002, she became a Jamaican celebrity, one of the most popular dancehall queens since the legendary Carlene Smith—who, as a measure of her success, has had her own television talk show. Mighty Crown is also very well known in the sound-system scene on the island and remains a major force in international competition. In fact, the group again won the World Clash competition in 2007.

Jamaican Popular Culture in Japan

How did the Japanese interest in reggae music come about? How did the Japanese scenes that produced Mighty Crown and Kudo evolve? Japanese engagement with Jamaican culture may be traced through five phases, which I delineate below.

1. BIRTH: MID-1970S TO EARLY 1980S

The oldest Japanese reggae fans I consulted during this study reported first discovering reggae and Rasta culture through a number of sources. As was the case for many reggae fans in other countries outside Jamaica, the 1973 Jamaican film *The Harder They Come*, starring reggae singer Jimmy Cliff, was what introduced some of the fans I interviewed to the music. Others reported first hearing it not on Jamaican reggae albums per se, but on punk music albums imported from Britain.³ With the opening in the late 1970s of a small number of shops specializing in reggae imported directly from Jamaica, Japan had a true pipeline to the island's music. A few tiny reggae bars, clubs, and live houses opened across the country. Tokyo's Club 69, established early in this first period, is credited with being the first such establishment; this regularly packed club, which played only roots reggae,

was run by Jah K. S. K., one of several Japanese who were part of the hippie scene before becoming attracted to reggae and Rasta culture. Other early clubs were Hot Corocket, Chocolate City, and Pigeons (More 1994).

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, and helped to distinguish it from calypso, an older genre of Caribbean music which some years before had been briefly popular.⁴ Reggae did not immediately achieve *būmu* status ("boom": a full-fledged, mainstream popular cultural fad): Marley, around whom an underground youth interest had developed, and around whom such a *būmu* could have been centered, died of cancer in 1981 at age 36. 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 (Tagawa 1985). Even after Marley's death, Japanese interest in reggae music has remained intensely centered on his iconic figure, as well as, particularly during this first stage, such artists as Sugar Minott, the Mighty Diamonds and Freddie McGregor.

2. LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: EARLY 1980S TO MID-1980S

From the early to mid-1980s, something of the corporate foundation of Japan's reggae scene was being laid. Overheat Music began publishing *Riddim*, and Tachyon published *Sound System*, which would evolve into the industry mainstay *Reggae Magazine*. Through the magazines and sponsorship of reggae concerts and club events, the two companies would evolve into major managers of reggae's later popularity in Japan. While *Reggae Magazine* is no longer in business, as of this writing, *Riddim* still exists as a free paper with a national circulation of 75,000, has a presence on the Internet,⁵ and has long been a main artery of information about the reggae scene in Japan.

Recognizing the potential market for reggae in Japan, representatives from small music companies like Overheat traveled to Jamaica in the early 1980s to form business relations with reggae musicians there, and thus served as conduits between the most famous Jamaican talent and the relatively small number of fans in Japan at that time. During the early to mid-1980s, Overheat signed several major Jamaican artists to album deals, and in 1985 promoted the Mighty Diamonds' live Tokyo performance. At

an outdoor venue with a capacity of 3,000, the performance drew about 2,500 fans: a modest success. Although the scene was still small, this was an early sign of the viability of reggae music in Japan. Reggae Sunsplash, a world tour of Jamaican reggae artists, began including Japan as part of its circuit around this period, and, along with the concerts of a number of individual artists, was another major route through which reggae music continued entering the country.

During this second period, a number of local reggae artists who would become the main figures in the third period of Japanese reggae began establishing their careers. These include artists like Nahki; PJ and his band, Cool Runnings (credited with being the first all-Japanese reggae band); Chieko Beauty and Sister Sayoko; and ska bands like Mute Beat, the Ska Flames, and the internationally renowned Tokyo Ska Paradise Orchestra (which fuses ska, jazz, and rock, and which is largely responsible for creating the category “J-ska”). Not only would Rankin’ Taxi, now the elder spokesman of Japan’s reggae scene, go on to become one of the first big Japanese dancehall reggae DJs, but his Taxi Hi-Fi became the country’s first popular sound system. A number of early Japanese DJs emerged from Taxi’s crew of vocal artists. Banana Size, based in Yokohama, was also among the very earliest sounds; other early sound systems included the Tokyo-based Massive and V.I.P., and Osaka’s Brainwash and Earthquake.

3. BOOM: MID-1980S TO MID-1990S

In 1985, Tachyon held its first Reggae JapanSplash concert. The concept behind this annual tour for the dozen years it was run by Tachyon was to bring not only established but also new, up-and-coming Jamaican musicians to Japan. This way Japan would have direct access to Jamaica’s biggest stars even before they hit their stride back home. Reggae JapanSplash grew into a major concert event in Japan, drawing tens of thousands of fans every summer. At the height of roots reggae’s popularity in 1994, the tour drew over 100,000 fans nationwide, making it the largest outdoor concert tour in Japan.

As evidenced by the success of this annual event, reggae, Rasta, and other things Jamaican during this third period truly boomed in Japan. Many books, articles, and television documentaries about the Caribbean island appeared in the Japanese media. In Tokyo alone, scores of tiny reggae bars and clubs opened. Specialty and mainstream record shops sold not only reggae CDs, but also movies, documentaries, and concert videotapes made

in and about Jamaica. During the 1990s, more and more Japanese tourists, including many honeymooners, began traveling to Jamaica. According to Jamaica's Ministry of Justice, the number of Japanese visitors to the island rose every year between 1980 and 1995, from 29 to 11,534. Managerially linked to Reggae JapanSplash, *Reggae Magazine*, the industry mainstay until it went out of business in 1997, 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. Nearly all major Jamaican reggae stars performed in Japan, and their concerts, even with other reggae events taking place at the same time, sold out quickly. This third period saw a flowering of the Japanese reggae scene. For instance, Nahki—who has released nine albums and who had one single sell 400,000 copies—is a veteran of Japan's reggae scene. The Japanese release of the 1993 Disney feature film *Cool Runnings*, about Jamaica's bobsled team, became part of this Jamaican craze, and as a result of the movie, the real Jamaican bobsled team received an ovation at the Nagano Winter Olympics. Jamaica's soccer team, dubbed "the Reggae Boyz," were minor celebrities in Japan in 1998.

4. CONTRACTION OF ROOTS REGGAE: MID-1990S TO LATE 1990S

By the late 1990s, Jamaica was already close to fifteen years into the transition from the dominance of roots and early dancehall—that is, dancehall in its third aspect as discussed above—to the prevalence of the digital riddims of contemporary dancehall reggae. Japanese popular awareness of reggae music in the late 1990s, however, continued to be dominated by roots and early dancehall. Only in the fourth period did contemporary dancehall become predominant. Both the waning roots and the rising dancehall had significant fan bases at this point. As a result, although in Jamaica the distinction between roots and dancehall can be made more clearly according to fan age—these respective musical genres having each run fuller courses on the island—in Japan, where one mature musical import arrives soon after the last, interest in these genres is less distinctly differentiated along generational lines. This is not to say that Japanese fans and performers of roots and dancehall cannot be distinguished at all according to age: after all, as discussed above, many older Japanese became interested in reggae music as early as the mid-1970s, and most dancehall practitioners and fans have emerged much later, since the late 1990s. However, most

roots fans were first popularly introduced to that music in the early to mid-1990s, and most dancehall fans were introduced to dancehall music not much later (often indirectly through the popularity of roots reggae), starting in the mid-1990s. (The youngest dancehall fans are teenagers currently being introduced to the music.) Whether one is a roots or dancehall fan in Japan thus depends less on age and more on personal choice, itself a reflection of factors such as area of residence. Although there are many exceptions, 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, old and young, who see dancehall as nothing but grating noise and chatter.

Although reggae in the Japanese popular consciousness near the end of the third period was defined by a mix of roots and early dancehall, with roots predominating, by the late 1990s, the roots reggae boom was clearly contracting. Many of the roots bars and clubs that had cropped up across the country were closing their doors for lack of business. The number of Japanese travelers to Jamaica, while still high, began a steady decline. The format for Reggae JapanSplash changed dramatically when Tachyon folded in 1997, ceding the name "Reggae JapanSplash" to the management of Inter FM, a national radio station. During this period, Reggae JapanSplash booked big-name Jamaican reggae (as well as non-Jamaican, nonreggae) stars, much to the chagrin of many purists who miss the days when young Jamaican unknowns had their first shot at stardom on a Japanese stage. Those fans miss the days when all of the biggest Jamaican reggae musicians flocked to Japan, rather than only a couple, and rather than only musicians like, during this period, Diana King, Big Country, and En Vogue, whose music reflected an American crossover appeal.

When Tachyon and *Reggae Magazine* went out of business, 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. Reggae now had to compete more directly with other cultural imports like tango; salsa; Indian dress, cinema, and cuisine; and, indeed, the *esunikku* (the ethnic), a hybrid stew of global ethnic culture. Roots reggae as a distinct trend in Japan during this period did not hold nearly the same level of interest it had a decade earlier. Little does in the ever-changing mixture that is popular culture in Japan. Yet roots reggae still has an appeal for Japanese—

measured not only in raw numbers of fans, or in the stories of those who have shed their dread wigs for trendier or more conservative wear, but also in the stories of those for whom an interest in reggae culture has deepened over time to become a way of life.

Artists who flourished during the third period found it necessary to come to terms with the new musical economy of the fourth. Nahki and Rankin' Taxi, two veteran artists mentioned above, and Sister Kaya serve as illustrations. The popularity of Nahki, one of Japan's first and most successful reggae musicians, came in part from a combination of his close links with Tachyon, the marketing of his "alien" mystique (discussed below), and the fact that, having lived in Jamaica and the United States for several years, he uses English and Jamaican Creole with ease. Nahki's verbal delivery reflects the deejaying popular in Jamaica in the late 1970s, and, accordingly, his style as a musician has revolved around live instrumental production. His career took shape during the early 1980s, when the DJing style of speech-song was well under way in Jamaica, but when the rough vocal quality and multiple DJs' use of single digital riddims, all common in contemporary dancehall, were not. Instead of riding this bandwagon, at the time of our interview in 2000, Nahki was experimenting with a "salsa ragga" sound, fusing the live sound of earlier dancehall reggae with salsa music. This move toward salsa ragga was apparently intended to use his reggae credibility to increase his popularity at the time of a salsa craze in Japan. More recently, Nahki has moved into the realm of contemporary dancehall, producing an album for three of the biggest stars on the scene today, the dancehall duo Megaryu, and Pang, a female singer. Nahki continues to perform, including a 2006 appearance with these artists at a sold-out event at Crash Mansion (whose capacity is about 1,500) on New York City's Lower East Side. The performance there appears to be in recognition of New York's status as a city where Japanese artists, including reggae musicians, develop their skills and prove their worth beyond the confines of Japan.

The veteran DJ and MC Rankin' Taxi has not had far to go in order to adapt to the new trends, because he has long performed in contemporary dancehall's musical idiom. Taxi still performs as a DJ; his sound system, Taxi Hi-Fi, appears at many major dancehall events across the country. He is now an elder statesman who educates up-and-coming Japanese talent on deejaying and the art of the sound system. Sister Kaya has used her success as a roots singer to create a niche for herself within Japanese dancehall in several capacities. She has promoted a number of dancehall events and

produced albums and videos showcasing female talent, even while she most often performed at strictly roots events. I discuss below one of the DVDs her company produced, on Japan's reggae dancers—as female dancehall dancers are now known in Japan.

5. THE RISE OF DANCEHALL: LATE 1990S TO THE PRESENT

By the late 1990s, dancehall in Japan, as had happened many years earlier in Jamaica, had surpassed roots reggae as an urban subcultural force. More recently, however, it has also moved to some degree into the realm of mainstream culture. 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. When I asked fans and people in the industry about dancehall's popularity, the very consistent reply was that it had to do with Mighty Crown's victory in 1999, as well as Kudo's in 2002. Mighty Crown's Masta Simon, in describing the growth of the dancehall scene in Japan since 1999, said:

It took time. It took two, three years [for the music to] spread to the people. Because nobody knew what World Clash was all about, [except for] industry people. The underground street kids, they knew what was going on. They were, like, “Yo, Mighty Crown beat 'jaro, 'jaro that we used to listen to way back.” Because nobody really thought that a Japanese sound could beat Kilimanjaro. So it was . . . history . . . right there.⁶

This great ebullience surrounding Mighty Crown's and Kudo's victories has much to do with the sense that they helped legitimize Japanese reggae internationally, and therefore in Japan itself. The degree of enthusiasm for Japanese acts, I think, significantly distinguishes this most recent boom from the first boom, of roots reggae. This enthusiasm resonates recognizably with other Japanese excursions into the international. The upsurge of interest in reggae following these victories is not just about love for reggae music, but also about the possibilities of Japanese accomplishment on the international stage. It is very much part of the pride Japanese have felt about other Japanese successes overseas, including animation, comic books, dolls, and horror films (Kelts 2006; Tobin 2006; Belson and Bremmer 2004). Another expression of Japan's global cultural power (McGray 2002) has been the success of Japanese athletes like the baseball players Hideo Nomo, Ichiro Suzuki, and Hideki Matsui. Sometimes there are specif-

ically racial dimensions to this pride. Many Japanese revel in Matsui's accomplishments, particularly as a power hitter able to compete with some of the most prolific (black, white, and Latino) home-run hitters in American baseball. Japanese television, films, literature, magazines, and comic books routinely work through similar anxieties and enthusiasms about Japanese performance in other sports requiring strength and speed, such as track and field, professional wrestling, mixed martial arts, and boxing. Slight Japanese youth are depicted in manga (comics) for boys, for instance, as overcoming the knotted, hulking, black and white athletes they compete against. Similar anxieties manifest themselves in a more nuanced way in Japanese engagement with such art forms as jazz (Atkins 2001) and tango (Savigliano 1995), to whose progenitors certain ethnoracial passions, which Japanese sometimes imagine themselves as lacking, are ascribed.

This pride, however, is only part of the story of Japanese dancehall's rise in recent years. Another is the way in which Japanese dancehall has become linked to Jamaican dancehall as mediated through the United States. Jamaican dancehall artists have been making incursions in the American market since Shabba Ranks in the early 1990s. The early 2000s have witnessed a similar process. Flavoring their dancehall sound with hip-hop and rhythm and blues, the Jamaican DJs Shaggy and Sean Paul have had significant crossover success. Shaggy had a no. 3 hit in the U.S. *Billboard* Hot 100 Charts in 1995 ("Boombastic") and two no. 1 hits after that ("It Wasn't Me" and "Angel" in 2001). Sean Paul has had three no. 1 hits ("Get Busy" and "Baby Boy" in 2003, and "Temperature" in 2006). Newcomer Sean Kingston's singles "Beautiful Girls" in 2007 and "Fire Burning" in 2009 reached no. 1 and no. 5, respectively, on these charts, and continues the tradition of reggae-hiphop fusion. Bounty Killer, Elephant Man, and Beenie Man, Jamaica's three most popular DJs for many years, have also enjoyed some success in the United States. Dancehall's crossover into American markets has guaranteed a heightened popular-cultural (as opposed to strictly sub-cultural) profile for dancehall in Japan, given the country's sensitivity to U.S. trends. In 2004, "Good to Go," an album by Elephant Man—whose extreme savvy in courting the Japanese market has led to a sold-out tour by the same name as the album—went gold (sold over 100,000 copies) in the country. "V.I.P. Presents Dancehall Lovers Best," an album compiling songs by such Jamaican dancehall artists as Beenie Man and Elephant Man, was the eighth most popular album on Oricon's (comparable to *Billboard* in the United States) "Western music" charts in late May 2007.

In addition to Mighty Crown's and Kudo's victories, an early major milestone in the rise of what is now called "J-reggae" in Japan—a sign of the growing sense that reggae music in Japan is distinct from Jamaican reggae—was the Osaka DJ Miki Dōzan's no. 1 hit, "Lifetime Respect," in 2001. Delivered with an adroit lyrical flow and in regional dialect, the love song, which sold around a million copies, was a favorite at wedding parties that year. In summer of that same year, several television stations across the country ran reports on Japanese dancehall culture as a hot new discovery. In June 2006, Megaryu's second album, "Garyu Senpu," hit no. 1 on the national charts. "Day by Day," a song from this album, was featured in a national Yokohama Tires television ad campaign. In addition to these artists, among the most well-known reggae DJs and singers are Moomin, Ryo the Skywalker, Fire Ball, Hibikilla, Pang, Chehon, Papa B, Pushim, Minmi, Munehiro, Shonan no Kaze, U-Dou and Platy, and Mighty Jam Rock. Many of these artists were part of the underground dancehall scene years before it boomed nationally.

Riddim remains a major published source on dancehall in Japan; the publisher of the free paper *Yokohama Reggae Times* has also begun a new, more expensively produced free paper called *Strive*. A new, major monthly magazine called *Rove: Reggae Life-style Magazine* has recently appeared on the scene, and other magazines have run special editions on dancehall music. A further manifestation of the increased mainstream presence of dancehall in Japan was that dancehall fashion as of summer 2004 was clearly a style boom: two fashion magazines published special editions on dancehall fashion in the same month that year. Noticeable since 1998, when I began my fieldwork, is a significant overlay of a key element of Japan's reggae subcultural imagery—the Rasta colors of red, green, and gold—with the black, green, and gold of the Jamaican flag still favored in the videos of Elephant Man and other Jamaican artists in heavy rotation for a while on MTV.

As a result of Mighty Crown's acclaim, Yokohama, the group's hometown, has today developed Japan's strongest dancehall following (dancehall is also popular in Osaka). In the summer of 2004, Yokohama Reggae Sai (festival), produced by Mighty Crown Entertainment, attracted around 20,000 fans. In 2006, that number reached over 30,000, making it arguably the largest one-day reggae concert in the world. Mighty Crown has done much to brand its name, as Yokohama Reggae Sai illustrates. A high point of this effort was announced at the 2006 event: the sound system received a shoe contract