

RESEARCH ARTICLE

"Transinsular" Music – Glissant's Opacity

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The author makes the case for "transinsularism" as a descriptive approach to address the complexities of Caribbean island identities. This approach accounts for the Caribbean islands' condition of being simultaneously isolated and connected, mobile and insular, and constituted in processes of relations with other island spaces. In the article, the concept of transinsularism is related to Glissant's reflections on the opacity of culture and the methodological implications of his approach. The author (Cubero) suggests an ethnographic contextualisation of Glissant's ideas by presenting an account of musical politics on the Caribbean island of Culebra, which is located in the north-eastern Caribbean. He argues for a continuance of Glissant's approach to identity as a performative act that finds expression in affective practices, rather than in predetermined structural markers of difference.

Keywords: transinsularism; Caribbean music; opacity; island identity

Introduction

My intervention is concerned with descriptive approaches that intersect Caribbean identity politics with musical practices. I will address thematic tensions that are suggested in narratives that describe Caribbean musical identities as local expressions constituted through processes of creolisation. I am specifically interested in the ways in which the interaction between narratives of musical insularism and creolisation informs descriptive approaches to Caribbean musical identity politics. By *insularism*, I refer to narratives that emphasise island nations, an idea that is rooted in the linguistic compartmentalisation of the archipelago, such as the Spanish, British, French, and Dutch archipelagos. I read creolisation as an opposing narrative that emphasises an experience constituted in movement, through travel, in an ongoing engagement of relations, or through a past that is embodied rather than documented or archival.

I am interested in approaches that consider Caribbean islands' condition of being simultaneously isolated and connected, mobile and insular, constituted in processes of relations with other island networks (see Wiedorn 2021). In this perspective, musical practices are rendered as the result of processes of interactions across, through and beyond multiple island networks, rather than as local appropriations of "foreign" music. However, the ethnographic record shows that this process of continuous interaction does not result in the islands folding onto one another into a singular musical space, as if transactions between islands were to result in a regional musical equilibrium. In effect, musical practices continue to be central to the reproduction of island identities and island politics.

In this article, I consider a "transinsular" approach that examines the ways in which islands reproduce a sense of specificity while maintaining interactive relations with various island networks. A transinsular approach maintains a critical stance towards distinctions based on the British, Spanish, French, and Dutch imperialist fragmentation of archipelagos and considers the instances of regional and global interconnections that shape an island experience. The emphasis of the transinsular approach is on maintaining creative tensions between narratives of insularity and states of impermanence, instability and hybridity. Such an agenda encourages a narrative that begins with interactions that transcend imperial classifications, values the interactive nature of creative practices, and relates those practices to the ongoing development of island identity politics.

The ethnographic contextualisation of my argument is based on a long-term relationship with musicians on the island of Culebra, an offshore municipality of Puerto Rico in the north-eastern Caribbean. Historically, Culebra musicians have been inspired by musical expressions outside their island-nation space when articulating a sense of musical heritage. The theoretical context of my argument is informed by Édouard Glissant's work, particularly his attempts to understand the world from the perspective of the creole experience. I have been inspired by Glissant's concept of opacity and the metaphor of the archipelago as a methodology to think through the complexities of identity politics in a creolised world. In the following, I offer ethnographic contextualisation on the music politics of Caribbean musicology in relation to Culebran musicianship. I then turn to a discussion on Glissant's concept of *opacity* and its epistemological potential to articulate a culture concept that is not bound to linear progressions.

Tension in the Caribbean "Musicscape"

I am interested in the research tradition that addresses the relationship between music-making, social practices, and the role of music-making in constituting a sense of place. Whiteley (2004) argues that debates arising from such discussions are united by the recognition that musical processes occur in particular places and are shaped by political and economic circumstances. According to Aparicio and Jaquez (2002), the Caribbean musical identification process is related to the affirmation of an island identity in its postcolonial and transnational context. Such approaches encourage politically-integrated narratives that take into account the structural conditions of power that are at stake in music-making. However, I would point out that the "island space" that is profiled in Aparicio and Jaquez is an integration of nationalist, linguistic and ethnic/racialist classifications that have their precedent in the American Colonial Period. Specifically, I refer to confluences between musical trends and island groups, such as what reggae, calypso, and soca are to the English Caribbean, or what salsa, merengue, son, and bachata are to the Spanish Caribbean, and what zouk, cadence and *compas* are to the French Caribbean. The kind of island space profiled in this approach is an isolated, geographically determined location with a set of relations limited to those that have been afforded by imperialist interests (i.e., Spanish, English, Dutch, French, and American).

In the literature, the discussion of different types of island music takes place within a wider discourse that describes Caribbean musical experiences as creolised, as the product of oceanic movements that have come together in an unfinished process of becoming (Trouillot 1992; Glissant 1981; Benítez-Rojo 1996, Mintz 1996). The approach imagines the Caribbean as a global crucible of histories, narratives and identities (Khan 2001) and the region as a node in a rhizome-like network that interlaces experiences, desires and "imaginaries" that are global in scope (Benítez-Rojo 1996). The scale of these interlacings approximates to a level of complexity that eludes explanation or rational containment:

I start from the belief that "Caribbeanness" is a system full of noise and opacity, a nonlinear system, an unpredictable system – in short, a chaotic system beyond the total reach of any specific kind of knowledge or interpretation of the world. To my way of thinking, no perspective or human thought – whether premodern, modern, or postmodern – can by itself define the Caribbean's complex socio-cultural interplay. We need all of them at the same time. (Benítez-Rojo 1995: 255)

In the scheme described in the quotation, the Caribbean is not contained by imperialist agendas and their concomitant categorisations. Rather, it is characterised as a cosmological chaos, a dense matter or "system" without a clear form that is constituted and reconstituted through global and inter-regional exchanges (Benítez-Rojo 1996). In describing 20th-century intra-Caribbean migrations, Hoetink (1985) writes about Curaçaoans working in Suriname, Barbadians in Peru, and tens of thousands of Jamaicans and British Virgin Islanders working in Panama and along the coast of Central America. During the 1980s and 1990s, many Dominicans moved to Puerto Rico, hundreds of British Windward Islanders worked in the refineries of Aruba and Curaçao, some 40,000 Guyanese were in Suriname, there was a significant Haitian presence in St Marteen, the French Antilles and French Guiana, and Trinidad absorbed thousands of migrants from the Commonwealth's smaller Caribbean islands (Hoetink 1985). Hoetink (1985: 76) concludes:

Such movements attest to the connections between all parts of the Caribbean that we have so artificially separated; they make the social fabric of the region more complicated and in some ways more unified; and they have in some instances profound influence on power, and hence racial relations. Islands such as those in the Caribbean never have been entirely isolated but have continuously invented migration; their Robinson Crusoes have always had a chance to sight a ship.

These mobilities and interactions suggest an incredibly rich musical context and allude to an untamed geography where people have travelled with their talents, curiosities and instruments across diverse musical fields. The musicological record on contemporary Caribbean music acknowledges this context of mobility as a formative feature of musical traditions. However, mobility serves as a state of pre-categorisation before the musical tradition is identified and turned into a marker of island identity – the chaos is ultimately followed by an orderly clustering of islands along imperial lines. In these narratives, the insularising agents are associated with the nation-building processes, which attach political aspiration to musical practices (Stuempfle 1995) and the capitalist music industry, that in turn are personified in music producers, musicologists and radio DJs, who produce an identifiable product for circulation (Guilbault 1993; Austerlitz 1997). In effect, the story is one of the gradual consolidation of an insular identity in a globalised world. The capitalist media and the nation-building process feature as forces that arrest the musical process and reify an ethno-national and insular location with an island-specific musical tradition that is sustained in a transnational context (Aparicio and Jaquez 2002).

My interest is in examining these tensions ethnographically and considering island experiences as ongoing phenomena in a continuous state of transformation. More specifically, I would like to make a case for insularism and mobility as instances of a productive contradiction whereby a ground for musical creativity is developed. However, I am interested in developing the story from the perspective of the individual musician. In doing so, I hope to value mobility and interaction as continuous and see the imperial categorisations of "culture" as the product, not the cause, of Caribbean music-making practices.

La Sonora Culebrense: The Geography of "Culebra's Sound"

The island of Culebra is located on the western edge of the Virgin Islands archipelago, between St Thomas and Puerto Rico, in the north-eastern Caribbean. As a municipality of Puerto Rico, it is linked discursively and politically to the USA's imperial project in the Caribbean. Culebra's Puerto Rican association would also provide a discursive link to the Spanish Caribbean, with its associations with Castilian language, Roman Catholicism and ethnic association with the Latin American mainland, the result of Spain's settler colonialist policies in the Americas. These associations distance Culebra from the rest of the Virgin Islands and their associations with Anglicanism, a larger percentage of African descendants who speak various forms of creolised English, musically associated with reggae and calypso, the result of Britain's extractive colonialism in the Caribbean.

The documented historiography of Culebra, however, consistently depicts the island space as constituted by relations that traverse the region. In 1881, the Puerto Rican colonial government ordered a small squadron of Spanish military forces to Culebra, then named *Passage Island*, to begin preparations for the civilian colonisation of the island. According to Delgado-Cintrón (1989), the mission to colonise the island through military force was a response to concerns on the part of the Spanish authorities in Puerto Rico regarding incursions by rival empires in the region, primarily the French and English. Military presence in Culebra increased throughout the 20th century when the United States Navy occupied the northern sections of Culebra and the surrounding waters in order to carry out military exercises. Parallel to that process of militarisation, the islander population maintained sustained contacts with people traversing the region, particularly through St Thomas' open harbour 19 kilometres distant from Culebra (Cubero 2017).

In the years after World War II, the United States Navy intensified their military exercises on Culebra, which included air-to-air bombings, sea-to-land bombings, maritime manoeuvres, and infantry landings. The increased military presence coincided with an increased emigration of Culebra islanders to the United States Virgin Islands (USVI), comprising St Thomas, St Croix, and St John. The three islands had been a colony of the Kingdom of Denmark since the 1750s until they were purchased by the USA in 1917 (Bojsen 2021). Musically, the USVI are associated with genres of the English Caribbean (i.e. reggae, calypso, soca, and the steel drum). These associations contrast with the Spanish Caribbean's musical heritage, which is associated with genres such as salsa, merengue, and son.

Victor Felix Munet (aka Cucuito), who was born in 1946, was of the generation of Culebra islanders who emigrated to the USVI during the United States Navy occupation. He completed his secondary school education in St Thomas before returning to Culebra. Cucuito learned to play the steel drum in his youth and founded numerous musical groups in Culebra, most notably La Sonora Culebrense (The Culebra Sound). This group featured Cucuito on the steel drum, playing lead, accompanied by a variation of orchestral arrangements. The orchestras' repertoire included original compositions, covers, and calypso arrangements of popular pieces. While their repertoire included numerous genres from the Spanish and English Caribbean, Cucuito's orchestras were renowned for their calypso arrangements of popular salsa and merengue songs.

The main feature of Cucuito's orchestras was the presence of the steel drum as the lead instrument, a novelty in the Puerto Rican and Spanish Caribbean musical context. The steel drum came to prominence in Trinidad and Tobago in the context of the islanders' struggle for independence from the United Kingdom in the late 1950s and the subsequent nation-building process that followed independence in 1962. The steel drum has since been circulated widely amongst the British Afro-Caribbean community in the archipelago and its diaspora, thus reproducing its association as an indicator of British Caribbean musicianship (Stuempfle 1995).

La Sonora Culebrense was a hit. It became the staple band that played at weekends in the dance hall on Culebra and at special events. It toured Puerto Rico extensively, where it played at almost all Puerto Rican carnivals. The band also played for radio broadcasts, in the stadium in the capital of Puerto Rico, and on television programmes, and for some of that time it was sponsored by Budweiser, the American beer brewing company. La Sonora Culebrense gained broader recognition following a television presentation and front-page coverage on an entertainment magazine with Puerto Rican circulation. However, just when the band seemed to begin to receive island-wide attention and at the beginning of a short tour of the Dominican Republic, key musicians took a break from performing. In the early 1990s, Cucuito left Culebra to move to Boston, USA, where he died in 2001.

Since I started visiting Culebra in the late 1990s, the La Sonora Culebrense brand has been used by various musicians who come together on an ad hoc basis and play Cucuito's arrangements. Cucuito, himself, is remembered fondly as a gifted musician and a charismatic, charming individual. He held various positions of leadership in Culebra, such as Director of Civil Defence, Head of the Municipal Police, and Director of Public Works. Notably, he is acknowledged for his contribution during the Hurricane Hugo crisis in 1989, during which he spent the entire storm and its aftermath in active recovery duty.

Opacity and History

Much of the theoretical context behind transinsularism has been informed by Glissant's writings on Caribbean identity. I have particularly been drawn to his reflections on the nature of the Caribbean social experience, the region's place in the world, and how this story can inform the tensions associated with global capital and democracy. Glissant's reflections on the literary and political movement known as *Antillanité* (Glissant 1981) offers material for reflection on the ways in which the Caribbean's historical experience of creolisation can contribute to an understanding of the tensions suggested by identity discourses in a global context.

Glissant's research programme presents an alternative to totalising narratives that are generated in an imperialist relationship, in which the hegemonic narrative is met or reciprocated by a counter-discursive approach. In this frame, the African "other" is homogenised in opposition to the hegemonic Euro-American, reproducing a binary set of relations predicated on an understanding of "culture" that is associated with filiation, roots, a sense of belonging that is inextricably linked to land, and which produces a community with "unique" origins that is propagated by the race. For Glissant, the Caribbean experience of creolisation presented an alternative that imagined the cultural experience as relational and complex. Rather than a pristine and homogeneous entity, Glissant elicits imagery of culture as an opaque substance that is not pure but made up of a diverse range of substances, and that is continuously renourishing itself through difference. Glissant describes the opacity of culture as a recognition of the impenetrability of culture (Dash and Dash 1995: 143).

In my reading, Glissant's opacity is not an adjective for culture, as in opaque culture. I read the term more as a verb that articulates the acknowledgement and/or recognition of the subject's irreducible density, in which the terms of an encounter are based on a mutual recognition of the parties' opacity. Glissant's opacity of culture has two salient characteristics: (1) the creatively unstable nature of identity, and (2) the inclusive nature of the intercultural process. From this perspective, "the human" is not imagined as a self-contained entity, as possibly suggested by Vitruvian imagery, but it is imagined as an "ever growing network of recognised opacities" (Glissant 1981: 245).

Thus, insularity is not viewed as an agoraphobic condition, as inward looking and as a pristine unit unto itself. Rather, the insular experience is recast as an interconnected opening, with each Caribbean island as a gateway and each subject presenting an opportunity for new connections, rather than as the destination of linear processes (Wiedorn 2021). A map of the Caribbean would not represent a series of unique units operating both in relation to and in opposition to their colonial condition. A Glissantian map of the Caribbean would represent identity as an interactive archipelago of signifiers, with each island experience constituted by its relations with other spaces. However, the islands do not fold into a singular location, as would be suggested by transnational theory. Rather, Glissant imagined an archipelagic field of islands where each island "represents zones of consciousness where *Antillanité* is manifested in a given linguistic, national and political configuration" (Dash and Dash 1995: 146–147).

The unifying factor in the Glissantian archipelago of relations would not be based on the idea that the islands share a common source, whether that would be European and/or African. For Glissant, a panoramic image of the Caribbean landscape suggested something akin to a submarine consciousness – floating, errant, and without a central trunk that would fix it in a determined place. The hypothesis of inexhaustible hybridity represents an alternative to nationalisms and counter-discursive ideologies. It demystifies the imperialistic myth of universal civilisation and hegemonic systems. Glissant's approach to *Antillanité* provides a way to articulate a localised project that bypasses categorical thinking and its associations with cultural purity, racial authenticity and ancestral origin.

While Glissant's writings were informed by the specificities of the Caribbean experience, the ideas driving *Antillanité* theory serve as a contribution to the discussion on the global experience (Wiedorn 2021). The Caribbean that is profiled in Glissant's writing is not a unique site but an indicator of broader social processes. The imagery evoked is not of a "Mediterranean in the New World", a centre circumvallated by empire and capital, but rather a seascape that explodes outwards and serves as a node in the vast set of relations that inform the global experience. In this paradigm, history is rendered through the imagery of an intricate branching and unceasing accumulation that is motivated by forces of attraction and repulsion, rather than a linear and totalising narrative characterised by conflict and triumphalism.

The process of writing the above-described history posed a challenge for Glissant. His writings display a concern about the limitations of language with regard to capturing the experience of the openness, "errance", and the unceasing contacts and transformations. For Glissant, the word and the book had the problematic effect of freezing and paralysing the dynamic nature of the corporeal experience of the Caribbean (Dash and Dash 1995: 151). By contrast, media such as music allow for a more direct and corporeal expression of the imaginative activity of "Plantation America" (Dash and Dash 1995: 151). This argument casts performative works as more than mere objects that either "stand for" or illustrate their social context – objects of study that musicologists can rely on to extrapolate social relations. Glissant's argument for performative media seems to suggest a position that sees musical performances as ethnography, where the musicians are active agents who sift through multiple expressions and play them anew. The result is music that informs and contributes to the articulation of *Antillanité* rather than its product or representation.

La Wiki Sound Machine

Jorge Acevedo was born in Hawaii to Puerto Rican parents in the early 1970s. He studied art in Boston, Massachusetts, and moved to Puerto Rico in the early 1990s. Jorge had an interest in Caribbean percussion and attended workshops run by the Ayala Family¹ in the town of Loíza, Puerto Rico, where he developed technical proficiency in congas. Jorge began visiting Culebra regularly and by the mid-1990s he had moved there permanently and established his studio on the island.

¹ The Ayala Family is a renowned Afro-Caribbean dancing and percussion group in Puerto Rico. They are probably the most well known group of its type in Puerto Rico.

Jorge approached Wiki Munet, Cucuito's cousin and member of the percussion section of La Sonora Culebrense, for information on how to play calypso beats on congas. The two men met irregularly for "jamming" sessions and were soon joined by Rubén Munet, Wiki's brother, who took with him the drum machine he had used when playing with La Sonora Culebrense. In 2000, the trio began playing as La Wiki Sound Machine.

Rubén programmed the drum machine to a specific structured beat that would keep Wiki and Jorge in time as they played variations and improvisations over the beats. During one performance in a bar, a guest disconnected the machine, presumably to heckle the musicians. To the trio's surprise, the absence of the drum machine did not affect their playing, nor did it affect the necessary communication between the drummers. For Jorge, that the disconnection of the drum machine was the best thing that happened to them because it meant they had to play while listening to each other and that culminated the process of making La Wiki Sound Machine fully acoustic. Rubén traded the electronic drum machine for percussion accessories, including a scraper and cow bells. The trio changed their name to "Wiki Sound". The three musicians complemented each other in a form of tension between keeping the assigned beat and improvising in distinction and in relation to each other.

The types of beats Wiki Sound plays have historical precedents in salsa, *guaguancó*, merengue, *plena*, *bomba*, samba, calypso, soca, and others, all of which are rhythms that require a specific metre and beat, which are reproduced through traditions of music playing and a documented recording history. The band's basic method of composition begins with attempts to cover their favourite beats. The three men discuss the beat shortly before a performance, attempt it, and improvise over it during the performance. Given that they do not rehearse, each presentation that they give is an attempt to build on the rhythmic patterns they have worked on during their previous performances. They repeat certain motifs if they decide they work, but the Wiki Sound trio is always looking for new ways to experiment and build on established rhythms.

Wiki, Rubén and Jorge all claim to be original in two ways. First, their originality stems from a combination of Caribbean rhythms that suggests a non-nationalist or pan-Caribbean musical conversation. According to Rubén, their knowledge of West Indian rhythms such as calypso and soca, and Latin American rhythms such as salsa, *plena*, *bomba*, and samba made their musicianship innovative within the percussion scene of Puerto Rico. Second, their originality stems from their practice of blurring distinctions between the rhythms as they attempt to reconcile and negotiate them. Musically, their performances consist of working in and around the differences of the rhythms, providing smooth transitions from one beat to the next and making necessary adjustments as the piece proceeds. According to Rubén, this gave Wiki Sound a unique and distinct sound.

After two decades of playing together consistently, Wiki, Rubén, and Jorge claimed to have composed original pieces. These compositions do not necessarily imply the invention of new beats or rhythms. The music they played every Saturday was, according to the musicians, the product of organised composition that was authored by Wiki Sound. Wiki Sound's music follows a repetitive pattern that keeps it within the confines of prescribed rhythms. However, in the course of playing a piece, they stretch, disregard, or otherwise break away from prescribed rhythms with improvised radical changes of speed and patterns.

I have never had the sense that the members are particularly interested in developing a professional musical career. They each have a steady job in Culebra and have prioritised their responsibilities to their immediate families. Wiki, Rubén and Jorge enjoy playing music together and share a passion for trying to decide on new directions for their music. I regard Wiki Sound's composition style and musical referencing as exemplifying Culebra's networked quality and cosmopolitanism, as well as a social environment that does not correspond to imperial history and its related structural markers of difference such as ethnicity, language, religion, and musical practice. Wiki Sound's performances are demonstrative of an island space that is characterised by an improvised set of relations. However, Wiki Sound is also illustrative of a Culebran tradition, a contribution to the *culebrense* musical experience. The brothers Wiki and Rubén are descendants of a long line of Culebran islanders and direct kin of one of the island's most prolific musicians and respected community leaders. Their performances and contextualisations suggest a project that contributes to a musical legacy of Culebra, which is authentic and unique to the island.

The case of Wiki Sound is not unique in Culebra. Culebran musicians have historically-referenced genres and playing styles from various musical areas in the Caribbean. For example, steel pan music is a regular feature of festive events in Culebra, such as Christmas, weddings and formal events. When live music is not being played, the bars and households in Culebra play an assortment of music that includes the standard Spanish Caribbean or Latin American playlist (salsa, merengue, bachata, and *reggetón*) and English Caribbean (soca, calypso, reggae, and steel pan music). This kind of musical displacement is reproduced through radio broadcasts from the United States Virgin Islands and the British Virgin Islands.

Conclusions

The Culebra case presents an alternative to the linear narrative that imagines a distinct insular musical identity that is preceded by creolised convergences. I suggest that a linear narrative runs the risk of depicting creolisation as a distinct event that ends once the musical identity is recognised as a distinct activity by the market, the state, or academia. I prefer to maintain the view of creolisation as a state of being-in-the-world that informs a way of making music that is characterised by continuous improvisation, convergence and interaction. In this regard, "creole culture" does not speak for a finite and identifiable identity but rather describes culture as an ongoing improvised convergence of relations.

However, the musicians and fans of Wiki Sound and other popular music groups in Culebra relate to the group's performances as an authentic expression of Culebra's musical culture, an insular practice that is unique and that fosters "island pride". This discourse reproduces the image of a distinct island that, while in relation to other sites, maintains a coherent sense of identity.

In this article I have made the case for *transinsularism* as an ethnographic approach to address the above-described complexities. My approach to transinsularism takes into account the Caribbean islands' condition of being simultaneously isolated and connected, mobile and insular, and constituted in processes of relations with other island spaces. Transinsularism is a condition that acknowledges the peculiarity of island narratives and understands that they are shaped in movement, in travel, in contact with otherness, and they rely on multiple references to constitute an insular world view. Transinsularism also acknowledges the ways in which islands retain and develop their specificity in relation to other sites, rather than assimilating, collapsing or otherwise folding into a single entity with its relational locations.

The music of Culebra has not been categorised by academia according to a definable rhythm or genre, nor is it officially recognised outside Culebra by the music industry. Culebra musicians are highly mobile, like the island population in general, which contributes an ephemeral quality to music bands on Culebra. Musical continuity in Culebra is maintained through the repetition of band names, musical concepts and a core of individuals, who, through their charisma and musicianship, reproduce locally recognised peculiar island music. Music in Culebra has a dual condition of being local and insulated by the sea, but also constituted and claimed through its openness. The musical networks of Culebra connect the island to a variety of discursive regions, both inside and outside the national and transnational spaces that are associated with Puerto Rico, the mainland United States, and the Lesser Antilles.

Island identities are not exclusive singularities that look onto themselves. They are necessarily networked, open, ongoing, and practice based. Transinsularism is an approach that takes seriously islanders' claims of insular identity and their experiences of mobility and relation. My approach to transinsularism argues for island specificities as they are constituted in a simultaneous experience of marginalisation and connection, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, obedient and irreverent, central and peripheral, and the rooted and the routed. It arises from a concern with trying to reconcile an island specificity that is flexible, in movement, constituted by travellers, and in the process of becoming something else.

The tensions created between the free-flowing and structured, the process and object, the inconsistent and the repetitious constitute a common theme in Caribbean music criticism. For example, in his narrative of the development of reggae in Jamaica, Hebdige describes the ways in which the practice of copying and repetition was instrumental in the formation of Jamaican reggae (Hebdige 1987). Hebdige cites the influence of repetitive Rastafarian drumming as an early element in the formation of reggae. He also notes that the practice of reappropriation and parodying of existing music is central to the formation and development of Jamaican dance hall reggae. In an analogous vein, Peter Manuel notes how Caribbean music emphasises rhythm characterised by the call and response motif:

[...] [A] related characteristic is what I call a *cellular structure*, meaning that pieces tend to be constructed by repetition and variation of a short musical cell or ostinato. Variety is provided by altering the pattern or by combining it with another feature, such as a narrative text. (Manuel 1995: 9; emphasis in original)

Transinsular musicianship can be approximated as an interaction that includes repetition and parody, articulated through a call and response. In this regard, the cellular, insular and specific are produced by and produce possibilities of relations, rather than function as self-referential entities. Glissant's vision of opacity and the ethics that are implied in an opaque encounter offer a methodological opportunity to think of the ways in which an encounter based on mutual recognition of difference is central to an authentic creative process.

Glissant's approach to Caribbean identity as an interconnected practice, informed by improvised relations on a global scale, provides arresting imagery with which to think about an interlinked Caribbean experience, rather than thinking of each island space as isolated and independent from each other. The broad agenda behind this approach is to contribute to the ongoing discourse on Glissant's approach and its application to describe the space between sameness and otherness, between mobility and insularity, between atavism and composite, and between the open and the specific.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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