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BOB MARLEY AND SEPULTURA: REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR IN REGGAE AND METAL MUSIC

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ABSTRACT:

In 1976, Bob Marley adopted lyrics from Haile Selassie's *United Nations Address* (1963) in his song "War", aligning the idea of war with diasporic sentiments, resistance, and postcolonialism. This transformed the song into a Reggae anthem against colonialism, making Marley a rebel symbol. In 1997, the Brazilian band Sepultura recorded a metal music version of Marley's song, emphasizing the violent aspects of war and framing it as a struggle for subjugation. I aim to understand the nuances in meaning underpinning two versions of the same song to identify the representations of war in different circumstances. Considering Metal and Reggae specificities, I proceed with a music and lyrics analysis to investigate meaning-making processes. Then, to understand Marley's and Sepultura's articulations of popular music, politics, and war, I examine each conjuncture as a historical framework where disputes over power and meaning are fought. I compare them for two reasons. First, to demonstrate how popular music can make sense of historical experiences to foster different interpretations of complex concepts. Second, to shed light on ideological struggles that differentiate or equalize Reggae and Metal Music. Though both renditions address war as a consequence of the coloniality of power, Marley's version in the 1970s portrays it as a tool for liberation while Sepultura's in the 1990s interprets war as a means of the Global North asserting its dominance. I contend that these variations are shaped by the utopian ideals associated with

decolonization in Marley’s rendition, juxtaposed with the neoliberal ethos of a “slow cancellation of the future” (Fisher 2022, 19-50) evident in Sepultura's cover.

KEYWORDS: Bob Marley; Sepultura; war; representation; coloniality of power; neoliberalism

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1. Introduction

In 2006, I arrived home from school just in time to catch my uncle listening to Marley's album *Rastaman Vibration* (1976). He was really vibing with it, singing along with all the choruses. However, when "War" started to play, my older cousin joined, saying that he liked Marley, but he would prefer to listen to Sepultura's version of the same song. My uncle firmly agreed. They took the album *Blood-Rooted* (1997) and listened specifically to this song twice. I liked both renditions, but couldn't figure out the meaning of the lyrics. On asking my uncle to explain them, in a loud voice, he told me that these songs were anthems against imperialism, which had tried to suck out our lands and lives. I was ten years old at the time, but I still recall the strange feeling of joy and anger these records and words made me feel.

Still under the spell of these feelings, in this paper, I aim to investigate the differences between Bob Marley's and Sepultura's versions of "War". This is a curious comparison since Reggae music is often associated with calmness, chilling out, and spirituality, while metal music evokes anger, movement, and anti-religiosity. Several questions guide me through this exploration. How does "War" connect Marley and Sepultura? What specificities does each rendition hold? How do the genre specificities of Reggae and Metal influence the ways of meaning-making in these songs?

Metal and Reggae hold important similarities in their structure and history. Both are genres that have been globalized in popular culture and are rhythm-based styles of music that derive to some extent from North American black music: mainly blues and rock in Metal, but also soul and jazz in Reggae. Further parallels are also perceivable between the Jamaican Bob Marley & the Wailers and the Brazilian Sepultura: both bands, to use Gilroy's ironic remarks, were represented in the Global North as "third-world glamour" (2005, 228)[1], exotic primitives

[1] The term "third-world glamour", introduced by Paul Gilroy (2005, 228), is employed throughout this paper to describe and analyze how Marley and Sepultura were represented and received in Global Northern popular culture. It encapsulates the construction of difference and Otherness as it was used in popular culture of the Global North to reproduce the coloniality of power through signs that emulate exoticism. Through the use of this term I aim to underline the colonial power hierarchies they were embedded in and hence do not signal any endorsement of the hierarchical classification of the world into first (developed), second (socialist), and third (undeveloped) (Escobar 2011, 21-54).

playing exotic music. Nonetheless, they also became signs of rebellion and social critique for the audiences of the Global South.

However, the genres also hold stark differences which were particularly strongly marked by the structure of feeling and the conditions of production of each conjuncture. Reggae emerged in Jamaica in the 1960s rooted in the Rastafarian long tradition of racial contestation and struggle, while Metal Music came out simultaneously in the UK and the USA in the late 1970s, already inside the powerful marketing apparatus of globalized popular culture. Whereas the first was created by the hands of the "Wretched of the Earth" (Fanon 2004, 37-47) and articulated their hopes, critiques, and utopias (Gilroy 2005, 226-245), the second emerged in the North embedded in imaginations of whiteness, old European nationalism, and mythologies (Spracklen 2020, 15-81). Only in a later phase, was Metal appropriated by the Global South. This is represented by Sepultura's trajectory, who first played music similar to the famous Northern bands, but from the 1990s on, started to merge it with cosmologies of the South.

Bob Marley & the Wailers are the most successful Jamaican Reggae band in history. From their humble beginnings in Trench Town, Kingston, and in a short career from 1963 to 1981 with twelve records, they popularized Reggae in the globalized popular culture through songs embedded in romantic love, Rastafarian spiritualism, rebellious politics, and utopianism. Although a robust bibliography of their works is already established in Caribbean Studies, the sheer contradiction between a revolutionary posture and commercialism still ignites debates, especially concerning diaspora and blackness (Alleyne 1994, 224-241; Gilroy 2005, 226-245; Edmonds 2023, 215-232). Yet, their relationship with anti-colonial struggles in the 1970s, a theme that "War" tackles directly, needs further development.

Sepultura stands out as the sole metal band from Brazil that has succeeded in the metal music circles of the Global North. After nearly three years of playing a generic Satanic style of metal, Sepultura took a significant step forward with its third record in 1987, on which their music developed into a more sophisticated form. Initially recorded by Cogumelo Records and available only in Brazil, the band gained global recognition through informal fan networks, exchanging handwritten letters and trading cassette tapes.[2] Then, in the 1990s they migrated to the United

[2] As Melina Silva (2018, 241-249) argues, the circulation of fanzines, cassette tapes (featuring recordings, demos or albums from amateur and professional bands), and letters played a crucial

States, which was a marked moment of regionalization as they implemented Afro-diasporic or Brazilian music elements to their style of composition. Much has been said about this turn towards hybridization (Avelar 2018, 329-346; Kahn-Harris 2000, 13-30; Garcia 2019, 60-93), but so far Sepultura's covers and approaches have not been connected to an anti-colonial discourse.

While both bands under consideration are from the Global South and achieved recognition and visibility in the Global North, they also addressed the coloniality of power through the globalized means of hegemonic popular culture. Indeed, it must be emphasized that Sepultura was never as popular as Marley; the success of the band was confined to metal music circuits. However, what matters for this paper is how both Marley and Sepultura articulated in their music an awareness of their own positionality in a colonial power structure. They had not only witnessed the inequalities between their home countries and the "developed world," but were also treated by the media as "third-world glamour", figures representing the primitive Other. They were not seen as equals by Europeans and North Americans. In Anibal Quijano's (2007, 173) conceptualization, they were perceived as inferior objects of knowledge, and not as subjects capable of reason and action.[3]

Therefore, the relevance of this study lies in understanding how popular music can articulate experiences of inequality, make sense of historical struggles between hegemony and counter-hegemony inside a given conjuncture, and even challenge structures of power. This approach is supported by David Hesmondhalgh's (2013, 1-13) emphasis on how music can organize experiences, feelings, and affects, not solely for the individual, but also for the whole community around it. However, this is a complex process, involving very many factors. Even two versions of the same song articulate different meanings as music is always experienced under the mediation of a historical framework, a discourse, a genre, and a performance. Thus, these two renditions of "War" employ different stylistic features in different historical moments that directly affect how the lived-in

role in shaping the global metal music circuit. These informal networks of reciprocity were established through exchanges, particularly in an era preceding widespread internet access.

[3] The representations of both, Marley and Sepultura, as "primitives" employed common strategies, often depicting them as hyper-sexualized men emerging from the "jungle." Additionally, they were portrayed as more emotional and spiritual than rational, a key tactic used by the coloniality of power to justify domination, as argued by Quijano (2007). For an analysis of how this impacted the mainstream media in the Global North, see Avelar (2018, 329-346) for Sepultura and Gilroy (2005, 226–45) for Marley.

experience, the structure of feeling of a specific moment in time, is articulated through the respective musical form.

Hence, the best way to answer my research questions is through a historicization of these songs to understand the processes of articulation and meaning-making, i.e., by a conjuncture analysis. I proceed with my analysis, assuming an understanding of popular music as a dynamic "ground of transformation" (Hall 2018a, 273-292), an active site where social meanings are created, contested, and transformed: a battleground where different groups struggle over the meanings and interpretations of cultural symbols and practices, as well as a space where representations are articulated. Therefore, I investigate each rendition of the song in order to situate them historically and point out the differences and connections between Marley and Sepultura.

Popular music in the context of mass media is not solely governed by the imperative of profit. The success of a song or an artist is closely linked to how meaning is organized in a given culture through ideological and hegemonic struggles. The concept of "articulation" (Hall, 1986, 53) offers me tools to analyze how music can produce meaning through a rearrangement of symbolic elements already recognized by an audience. It refers to the process by which cultural meanings, identities, and social relations are connected with each other to form a temporary unity or configuration. Hence, "articulation" refers to the linking of different elements (such as economic practices, social institutions, political contexts, and cultural forms) in a way that they come to function together, even though it may be "a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (Hall 1986, 53).

The concept of "articulation" is particularly relevant when analyzing popular music and its expressions in globalized media, as it destabilizes claims of cultural traditionalism or essentialism. Instead of working with a normative definition of popular music, I treat it as a dialectical space where conflicting interests collide, giving birth to articulations that may or may not align with hegemonic forces. According to Richard Middleton, the adjective "popular" in popular music refers to a space of struggles, a "ground of transformations" that "always contain contradictions" because "in class society, the society is internally contradictory" (Middleton 1998, 7). Thus, the concept of "popular music" addresses "that space, that terrain, of contradiction – between 'imposed' and 'authentic', 'elite' and

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'common', predominant and subordinate, then and now, theirs and ours, and so on – and to organize it in particular ways" (Middleton 1998, 7).

For this reason, popular music is a privileged space for the systematization of meanings that circulate throughout society. Stuart Hall (1997, 13-74) defines this process as representation, the specific way in which people use signs to understand and describe the world in line with ideological or hegemonic structures. It is a symbolic process that involves different factors. Thus, a concept like *war* may assume different connotations when in articulation within different music genres – reggae and metal music – that are shaped by discourses that display different approaches to ideology and hegemony.

Consequently, this process is always localized both in time and space, marking thus the specificity of Cultural Studies as the study of conjuncture. As Lawrence Grossberg (2019, 38) proposes, drawing from Antonio Gramsci's distinction, a "situation" is an extended period of historical transformation and rupture, while a "conjuncture" is a set of more immediate changes that may contain continuities. Thus, he proposes a methodology to understand the dispute over meaning in a historical framework: 1) to recognize the conjuncture as a "war of positions" which involves an understanding of the "articulations between old and the new interacting across levels"; 2) to map the problematics in the analyzed space; 3) to identify how the "war of positions" and the problematics are unified by an organic crisis as "Sites of lived crises", "Including modes of engagement and consent" (Grossberg 2019, 43).

However, my intention is not to foreclose possibilities of meaning, but only to offer an interpretation of how historical and cultural experiences are sedimented in aesthetic form. Considering that music is an art form that unfolds over time, it is essential to explore how a piece of music develops sequentially and temporally. By examining its progression, it is possible to better understand the dynamic evolution of musical themes, motifs, and structures, appreciating how they interact and transform throughout a piece. While it should be noted that most fans do not pay close attention to form while listening to music (Hudson, 2003), nevertheless, I will demonstrate that the form of a song is a privileged space for the construction of its narrative meaning.

Given the exposed, in the first part of this study, I analyze Bob Marley & the Wailers' version of "War" as recorded in *Rastaman Vibration* (1976). From this

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song, I propose an interpretation of how Bob Marley & the Wailers' music articulates a postcolonial and diasporic proposal of utopia. Then, I claim that their version of "War" was not only directed at the coloniality of power but framed by an expectation for a future beyond racial differences and social inequalities. In the second part, I analyze Sepultura's rendition of the song released on their album *Blood-Rooted* (1997). Further, I contextualize the emergence of metal music within the rise of neoconservatism and neoliberalism to demonstrate how this "War" is about how "Babylon"[4] still employs the coloniality of power to ensure domination over the Global South, eradicating any sense of utopia in a present and future suffocated by capitalism.

2. Bob Marley: Struggle for a Postcolonial Utopia

In 1963, the emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie addressed a speech to the United Nations in which he presented an ultimatum: secure the interests of all mankind instead of only some nations, or "risk annihilation" (1963, 2). The main argument developed by the emperor was the necessity to establish "true equality among men" (Selassie 1963, 2). While maintaining a close alliance with the West, Selassie tried to manage different interests and argued for the immediate decolonization of Africa. This position is pretty clear throughout this speech in which he starts praising the accomplishments of the UN and concludes with a flaming defense of war against racism and colonialism.

This speech may have resonated in young Bob Marley's heart, who had suffered discrimination at the hands of both whites and blacks due to being identified as mixed race. Furthermore, as Rastafarianism combined elements of Protestant Christianism, mysticism, and pan-Africanism, this religion saw Ethiopia, the land of black kings, as the Promised Land and Haile Selassie as god-incarnated, a Messiah who would bring freedom to all people of Africa and the African diaspora. Hence, his words may have been interpreted as a divine message by

[4] Mentioned in Genesis 11, "Babylon" (coming from Babel), was the world's first city. As Ana Sobral argues, Rastafarianism and reggae musicians "appropriated the Old Testament to narrate the history of enslavement and deportation of Africans to the West Indies" (2010, 210). Hence, "Babylon" is where the black African diaspora are exiled, but it also generally refers to Western society and capitalist ideology. Indeed, Edmonds claims that for the Rastafarians, "Babylon is the forces of evil arrayed against God and the righteous (Selassie, Rastas, and the poor). The forces of evil, however, are not metaphysical entities, but human attitudes and activities that are out of touch with the divine, natural order" (2003, 45), for this reason it also represents the oppression that Africans experienced under colonialism and its legacies.

Marley who converted to Rastafarianism in the late 1960s, hence at a moment when the new rhythm-based songs emerged that would lead to the establishment of Reggae as a genre.

I will not delve much into religiosity or try to justify an interpretation through authorial intentions since it is unclear who the rightful composer of this song is. Its lyrics are credited to Allen "Skill" Cole (former football player and Marley's friend) and its music to Carlton Barrett (The Wailers drummer). However, it is known that Marley faced struggles with receiving royalties for his songs, and thus credited several of his works under friends' names (Davis 1988, 50-60). In any case, what interests me is identifying how the divinization of the figure of Selassie and Rastafarianism played an important role in Marley's music and impacted his utopian project of a future beyond racial difference and discrimination.

"War" quotes directly passages from Selassie's speech, particularly the 27th paragraph that describes how colonialism breeds segregation and threatens peace. Following the speech's tuning fork, the song starts with a violent strike in guitars, saxophone, and bass, following the one-drop intro of the drums – a rhythmic pattern that characterizes reggae music, popularized by Carlton Barrett[5], consisting of a backbeat on the third beat of every four. This introduction creates an atmosphere of expectation for the song's message, which enters a rhythmic stasis in a simple but efficient melody progression between variations of B Minor to A Major chords. The bass line plays a key role in this piece of music, it creates tension and resolution with a particular flavor caused by the Minor 7th flat 5th chord due to its constant repetition.

After everything is set musically, Marley sings the first strophe of the lyrics. It is noteworthy that throughout the whole song, the verses follow the same melodic line rooted in B minor which captivates the listener through the management of tension and resolution of the chord progression.

> Until the philosophy which holds one race
> Superior and another inferior
> Is finally and permanently
> discredited and abandoned
> Everywhere is war, me say war.

[5] For further exploration on the contributions of African-Jamaican percussion to globalized popular music, as well as an updated historiography about its development, see Bilby (2010, 1-21).

Marley's voice holds tension in "and another" outlined in the Minor 7th and the Minor 9th, then released in the following verse with the Major 3rd. This strategy creates a sense of painful disclosure that must find resolution when it "is finally and permanently/ discredited and abandoned". When quoting this whole section of Selassie's speech that demands the dismantlement of systemic inequalities fostered by colonialism, the song keeps repeating the same melodic and rhythmic stasis. This is significant because it connotes that the permanence of this order only leads to war, which is why the song is suddenly interrupted by "Everywhere is war", followed by a strong bass line in B minor accentuated by the 9th C-sharp, and the echoing backing voices repeating "war".

Hence, the musical form matches the content of the lyrics in significant ways. The constant use of the C-sharp, which is the dominant 9th chord, creates moments of dissonance in the song, especially when used in the bass line which marks the end of each strophe of the lyrics. After the echoing of "war" by the backing voices, Marley's voice returns to the melodic and rhythmic stasis to introduce what should be done to overcome this critical state.

> That until there are no longer first class
> And second class citizens of any nation
> Until the color of a man's skin
> Is of no more significance than the color of his eyes
> Me say war.

Marley's and Selassie's claims resonate strongly with radical equality beyond racial or national differences. The lyrical self implies that the markers of inequality are constructs that should be abandoned. To put it in Quijano's (2007, 168–78) concepts, in the world of the coloniality of power, the racialized populations from the Global South do not consist of subjects as the ones from the North, on the contrary, the people of the Global South are merely regarded as objects, inferior by nature. The same is applied to race differentiation, as Frantz Fanon stated; for black men and women it is impossible to perceive themselves as equals to white men or women because they experience "being through others" (1986, 82) who see them as inferior. Bob Marley and the Wailers are critiquing this separation of the world between "inferior" and "superior" men as they are performing through this song the "postcolonial thinking" that "stresses humanity-in-the-making, the humanity that

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will emerge once the colonial figures of the inhuman and of racial difference have been swept away" (Mbembe 2006, 2).

For this reason, the song keeps calling for an overcoming of this state of inequality. In this sense, war is not only a consequence of the coloniality of power that fails to see the population of the Global South as subjects, but it is also rightful as the fury of the oppressed arises to claim equal rights.

> That until the basic human rights are equally
> Guaranteed to all, without regard to race
> Dis a war.
>
> That until that day
> The dream of lasting peace, world citizenship
> Rule of international morality
> Will remain in but a fleeting illusion
> To be pursued, but never attained
> Now everywhere is war, war.

I consider it important to understand this song framed by the conjuncture of postcolonialism that Stuart Hall (2018, 110-140) defines as a chronological and epistemological movement. The chronological character of postcoloniality arises from its referencing of the period that witnessed the crumbling of the lasting colonial reigns in the second half of the 20th century. On the other hand, its epistemological nature criticizes the Eurocentric standard of knowledge, thereby searching for an overcoming of the power-knowledge binomial. As Achille Mbembe states, the postcolonial being perceives "the colonized person" as "a living, talking, conscious, active individual whose identity arises from a three-pronged movement of violation, erasure and self-rewriting" (2006, 3). For this reason, in the following strophe, the song gives examples of what they are denouncing.

> And until the ignoble and unhappy regime
> That hold our brothers in Angola
> In Mozambique
> South Africa
> Sub-human bondage
> Have been toppled
> Utterly destroyed
> Well, everywhere is war
> Me say war

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Both Angola and Mozambique, at the moment of Selassie's speech in 1963, were struggling against the Portuguese colonial regime and pursuing independence in a war that lasted for almost fourteen years (1961-1974). South Africa was fighting British colonial rule at the same time to achieve independence and to finally leave the British Commonwealth in 1968, however while keeping its black majority under "sub-human bondage" until 1994. Through these examples, war is seen as the destiny of the coloniality of power and the only way to "utterly destroy" this regime and overcome the state of inequality. That is why the song comes with a strong bass break emphasizing the idea that "everywhere is war", then Marley's voice screams while the saxophone keeps repeating the bass line, producing a tense effect.

War in the East
War in the West
War up North
War down South

War, war
Rumors of war
And until that day
The African continent
Will not know peace
We Africans will fight, we find it necessary
And we know we shall win
As we are confident
In the victory
Of good over evil

Good over evil, yeah!
Good over evil
Good over evil, yeah!
Good over evil
Good over evil, yeah!

Selassie's speech has a similar tone, it proposes a solution to put an end to the wars as it claims equality among human beings, but the emperor explicitly says "We Africans will fight, if necessary, and we know that we shall win, as we are confident in the victory of good over evil" (1963, 3). Marley's song ends with the same realization that war against colonialism is rightful, it is a war for liberation. Musically, the passage from C-sharp to B Minor, from Dominant 9th to Root, producing tension throughout the song, gives a particular chromatic flavor to this discourse. In other words, a moment of ultimate conflict that breaks the stasis may

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lead to a resolution. Therefore, as the 9th C-sharp is necessary for the tension and release dynamic of this song, war is necessary to shatter the colonial hegemony and the coloniality of power to move towards the liberation of Africa, thus opening utopian horizons of radical equality among humanity.

Hence, "War" proposes a postcolonial utopia that will be born from the struggle. As Michel Lowy and Robert Sayre (2016, 210-214) argue, in the 1960s and 1970s utopianism and romanticism were still alive in mass culture imagination. In the conjuncture of the Cold War (1945-1991), the ongoing battle between capitalism and socialism left blank spaces to create utopias. This was accentuated as the news of the struggles for the decolonization of Africa spread through the Western progressist sectors. As Achille Mbembe stresses, "postcolonial thought is also a dream" that brings North and South together to imagine "a new form of humanism" beyond differences in a "dream of a polis that is universal because ethnically diverse" (2006, 11).

Although the postcolonial imagination of the 1960s and 1970s plays a great role in the articulation of the meaning of this song and its particular representation of war as a struggle for liberation, this framework might not be sufficient. It is also necessary to read the song through the prism of diaspora. This is of particular relevance, in the Caribbean-Jamaican context, where a rediscovery and reimagining of Africa as the place of origin for large parts of the population was ongoing in the second half of the 20th century allowing the emergence of Rastafarian Reggae (Hall 2018b, 46). Therefore, instead of analyzing Bob Marley's "War" within its national scope, I think, it is much more prolific to understand it as Paul Gilroy (1993, 10-41) proposes: embedded into the entangled stories of the Black Atlantic, as a piece of diasporic music.

In a sophisticated reading of Bob Marley's legacy for the twenty-first century, Paul Gilroy asserts that the acceptance and success of his reggae music in a global setting has much to do with his utopian claims for a diasporic community beyond race. Rastafarian Pan-Africanism, therefore, is not about returning to an imagined ancestral homeland but about embracing blackness and overcoming its limitations through solidarity. Consequently, according to Gilroy, Marley transcended racial divisions and presented a "broader humanistic outlook that followed the simple anti-racist logic articulated by Haile Selassie in the famous speech that Marley set to music under the title 'War'" (2005, 243).

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Gilroy's reading proposes important guidelines to understand the construction of Bob Marley as a hero, a rebel idolized by both North and South audiences. Through my preceding analysis, I have aimed to build upon this understanding by proposing an interpretation of "War" as an articulation that stands between Gilroy's (1993, 10-41) understanding of diaspora and Mbembe's (2006, 1-10) theories on postcolonialism, and situated within the broader conjuncture of the 1970s Cold War. I have thereby aimed to understand the representation of war in popular music particularly framed by the discourses present in Reggae by linking it with a reading of the coloniality of power. I considered this methodological step necessary because it recognizes the lyrics and the musical form as a sedimentation of the lived experience, an area that Gilroy does not address since he is more concerned with Marley as a political figure.

However, I do not propose a naive celebration of Marley's work since I am aware of how the visibility of his music was only possible thanks to marketing strategies performed by the cultural industry. As Mike Alleyne (1994) argues, Jamaican Reggae was stripped of its place of origin and spiritual relevance through its commoditization inside the cultural hegemony of mainstream media of the Global North, which potentially emptied political discourses in favor of reaching broader audiences. These cultural industry strategies are notorious in *Rastaman Vibration*. Recorded in the Jamaican studio Island, its musical rendering emphasized elements associated with rock such as loud distorted guitars, as well as an exploitation of Marley's and the Wailers' rebellious image through pictures and album covers. Although Jamaican Reggae was already born from hybridisms and encounters with American blues, jazz, funk, and soul music in the 1960s, Alleyne (1994, 227) claims that its global popularization was a result of adjustments of image and sound to achieve the expectations of North rock audiences.

Unlike Alleyne though, I do not see these adjustments only through a commercial lens. Indeed, Marley was supported by the global music industry, however, as Gilroy (2005, 227) describes, there was a meaning "surplus" in his music that triggered political, utopian, and contestatory articulations worldwide. After all, this reveals the contradictory character of popular music as a "ground of transformation" that contains dialectical movements, "between 'imposed' and 'authentic', 'elite' and 'common', predominant and subordinate" (Middleton 1998, 7).

On the one hand, globalization was crucial for the articulation of meaning for Marley's songs because, as David Simonelli (2013, 245-249) argues, the North rock audiences were immersed in the 1960s and 1970s counterculture rebellious idols such as Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, and the Beatles. Marley, thus, joined the ranks of the aforementioned musicians and icons, blending elements of counterculture, anti-colonialism, anti-Vietnam War movements, and Civil Rights movements. As Gilroy (2005, 235-243) argues, this fusion played a crucial role in solidifying his rebellious image, appealing to white audiences already receptive to music associated with blackness, thanks to the established popularity of blues, jazz, and soul music.[6]

On the other hand, Marley also became an idol for audiences of the Global South thanks to the globalized means of the hegemonic Western popular culture that represented him as an Other, as not white, and thus an exotic icon of resistance and subversion born from underdevelopment. Thus, he became a source of inspiration for these audiences as well, a common point of solidarity for all those who were not from the center, for all the Others. Therefore, I agree with Gilroy, "There is something more to his unbounded appeal than a domestication of the alien other and the accommodation of the unruly Third World inside the seductions of corporate multiculturalism" (2005, 227). Therefore, his integration into the hegemonic Western popular culture was not unilateral and did not only flatten his meaning but also provoked counter-hegemonic reactions and reappropriations, among those Sepultura's cover of "War", which proposed an interpretation of how the war was still a tool used by the coloniality of power in the 1990s.

3. Sepultura: Accepting Neoliberal Dystopia

Unlike Bob Marley & the Wailers' rendition which is famous and symbolic in the band's trajectory, Sepultura's "War" is a minor track in their career that was primarily used as a special song for ending live concerts. After Max Cavalera left the band in 1996, the company *Roadrunner Records* compilated unreleased tracks on *Blood-Rooted* in 1997 as an attempt to profit once more from the icons of the

[6] That this association of Marley with protest and rebellion has been relevant long after the 1960's and 70's has been pointed out by Ana Sobral (2010, 199-224), who demonstrates how contemporary pop musicians across the world who claim kinship to protest movements still evoke Bob Marley as an icon and reference, which is Manu Chao's case, for example.

original lineup.[7] However, among Metal Music fans, this compilation is now recognized as a valuable object because it contains different covers from other bands such as Black Sabbath, Celtic Frost, Ratos de Porão, Titãs, and of course, Bob Marley.

Since the beginning, Sepultura's "War" employs the tensions created by the root B and the Dominant 9th to produce tension and dissonance in an introductory riff conducted by guitar and bass. The rhythmic accent is changed, it is not a one-drop style as in Marley's rendition, thus the emphasis is on the first beat of the drums that marks this 50 seconds-long intro as it gains sound robustness due to the distorted guitars. Therefore, this song is more atmospheric, hazier, almost contemplative, and not as straight to the point as the original version.

Metal Music consists of rhythm-based songs, conducted by riffs (horizontal motifs that sacrifice melody to produce complex rhythmic patterns) in distorted guitars and bass that emphasize dissonance through the use of modal scales. It is also often characterized by an accelerated tempo. This, however, is not the case for Sepultura's "War" which follows what was established by Marley's version. However, as a Metal song, it has sudden changes in rhythm and tempo, as well as characteristically growled vocals that introduce the first verses of the song through whispers that suddenly evolve into screams during the chorus.

> Until the philosophy which holds one race
> superior and another inferior
> Everywhere Is War
>
> War in the East, war in the West
> War up North, war down South
> War

The last verse of this strophe is screamed in a potent growled vocal while accompanied by the bass line in B-flat 9th chord that marks the passage of sections in the original song. In this regard, Sepultura's "War" follows a similar structure as Marley's, since it consists of a blend of passages that keep the pace while after the aggressive bass line, a vigorous chorus emerges. The same happens with the following verses:

[7] This did a disservice to the remaining members of the band who had wanted to create a new image in a different music project, as well as to Max Cavalera himself who at the time was starting a new band called Soulfly (Barcinski and Gomes 1999, 90-120).

Until the color of a man's skin
is no more significant
than the colour of his eyes
I got to say there'll be (no?) war

War in the East, war in the West
War up North, war down South
War

Therefore, Marley's original lyrics are summarized, many verses are omitted, and the emphasis is on the cathartic chorus that unleashes aggressiveness through distortion and dissonance. In Marley's version, this passage only appears once in a vigorous moment almost at the end of the song, however, in Sepultura's cover, it works as a screamed chorus. Hence, only the mentions of the word "war" are characterized by this violent music strategy, the calmer passages are atmospheric and the verses are whispered.

That until the basic human rights are equally
guaranteed to all, without regard to race
There'll be a war

War in the East, war in the West
War up North, war down South

War (8x)

The alternation between calmness and agitation happens one last time, then the chorus is repeated, but in a different fashion that changes substantially the content of the original version. After each growled verse, a mechanical voice reminiscent of a military transmission comments on it and gives a different meaning from that evoked by Marley.

War in the East (it's a war)
War in the West (now everywhere is war)
War up North (it's a war)
War down South (now everywhere is war)
War in the East, war in the West
War up North, war down South

War, war (we find it necessary)
War, war
War, war (we find it necessary)
War, war
War (and we know we shall win)

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(and we are confident)

The growled vocals screaming “war” grow in aggressiveness while the commentaries become more incisive, “we find it necessary”, “we know we shall win”, and “we are confident”. After this passage of violence that simulated military commands and words of order, the song returns to the introductory stasis of calmness conducted by the bass but introduces shamanic chants, Afro-Brazilian percussion, and acoustic guitar. It is through this contrast between the violence of the mechanical voice and the use of non-electric instruments that the message of this version of “War” becomes clear. In Marley’s version, the above-mentioned verses imply the rightfulness of a war against colonialism, however, here, this subtext is omitted and fundamentally changed; what is at stake is war as a tool to ensure the dominance of the Global North, represented as a cold, mechanical war-machine. With the use of acoustic instruments and shamanic chants, Sepultura’s “War” evokes the presence of the formerly colonized people through instruments and forms of singing considered less evolved and primitive. Final whispers name this presence explicitly:

War in Africa or America
North America or Brazil
Or Australia, it doesn't matter
(We're the same)

These final whispers are not military or mechanic, they are pronounced in a tone of complicity, as if in a friendly conversation. Curiously, Asia is not mentioned, but Sepultura addresses a similar point as Marley: racist inequalities – “the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior” – persisted into the 1990s. Thus, as a sign of resistance, it is crucial to advocate for a humanity that transcends racial differences. Sepultura claims such equality through stating “we’re the same” and by musically blending different source materials bringing North and South together. However, the last statement – “we are the same” – echoes in a melancholic way, being crushed against the certainty of the military voice. In difference to Marley’s version, here, utopia is absent.

There is no “victory of good over evil”, which was sung aloud by Marley’s “War”: these same verses are omitted in Sepultura’s rendition, indicating the

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realization that wars in the neoliberal age are not fought for liberation, but only to ensure domination and the coloniality of power.

I propose to listen to these verses and musical elements considering the nature of the wars making up the historical conjuncture at the moment of the song's release. Hence, a possible interpretation is that Sepultura is suggesting that all that is left is a war of domination, where no "victory of good over evil is possible", but only the victory of the military command lines of the North who "are confident" and know that they shall win. Thus, the voice fades and the song marches to an end with this blend of ethnic chants, percussion, acoustic guitar, and bass.

The Falklands War (1982), the Gulf War (1991-1992), and the Palestinian crisis in the 1990s taught the Global South that war was a tool to ensure dominance and to keep Western hegemony in effect whether by peacefully achieved or violently forced consent. These events impacted Sepultura on many occasions, as evident in the songs "War for Territory" and "Refuse/Resist" in the album *Chaos A.D.* in 1993. Furthermore, the 1990s were a decade marked by wars on different fronts, not only the above-mentioned but also the wars in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the USSR, and the several civil wars in Africa and Asia after decolonization. These were not wars for liberation, they were marked by a particular brutality exactly because no utopias were guiding their ideals. These were wars over domination in a global arena that watched the rise of conservative and nationalist ideas in line with neoliberalism as an economic doctrine that intensified the predatory characteristics of capitalism. Stuart Hall (1983, 3–17) demonstrated how Margaret Thatcher's regime (1979-1990) forged its representation of the Falklands War to legitimize conservative claims while playing with nostalgia for the lost empire.

In fact, Douglas Kellner (2001, 81-100) analyzed how Hollywood cinema helped to create a neoliberal and neoconservative consensus during Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981-1989), employing especially military imagery and symbolism. He further showed how, later, media narratives about the Gulf War (1991) – initiated by George H. W. Bush (1989-1993) – were important to establish the U.S. claims of global hegemony after the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the same time, this conflict was narrated as a military spectacle that boasted American patriotic ideals while representing Iraq as "absolutely evil and a threat on a par with Hitler and the Nazis" (Kellner 2004, 143).

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In these various instances it becomes apparent, how media narratives were actively employed in an attempt to militarize society out of fear of the Other, particularly fear of the populace of the Global South, whether as migrants (domestic enemies) or as overseas threats. This process, as defined by Wendy Brown (2006, 690–714), signifies the emergence of neoconservatism as moral panic and neoliberalism as an ethos of economic libertarianism. Therefore, I understand neoliberalism, following Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2016, 13-34), as "a new rationality" that emerged in the late 1970s and established itself in the global contemporary. It is about the development of market logic as a regularized normative logic at work at every level of societal organization, from the State to the individual. It is not a simple implementation of the economic doctrines developed between the 1930s and 1960s by economists such as Ludwig Von Misses and Friedrich Hayek. Thus, neoliberalism is a government rationality implemented by policies that consider the market, the flow of capital, and the competition (among States, companies, and individuals) as the core of society.

Furthermore, the implementation of these policies in the North happened under a conservative rhetoric, as a means to mend the broken pride of losing the Vietnam War (in the USA) or the empire (in the former European metropolises) through a militarization of society against an enemy, an Other. The Other could only be accepted – not only in this conjuncture since Marley faced the same treatment during the Cold War period – as the exotic. Simon Frith (1996, 75-98) demonstrates how this was reflected in the music industry marketing strategies that were trying to earn profit from World Music as a market label in the late 1980s. Without a doubt, this double process of domestication and bestialization of the Other as an enemy continued to be framed by the coloniality of power. Anibal Quijano analyzed this historical process that led to Eurocentric postcolonial domination, when "European culture became the universal cultural model", which consisted of a "subordination of the other cultures to the European" and the "colonization of the imagination of the dominated" (2007, 169); a process further intensified by the appropriation of these imaginaries and practices of power by the imperialist ideology of North American global hegemony (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati 2013, 3-64).[8]

[8] Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati analyze this process in Africa, but they suggest it can be generalized for the Global South as a whole. Even after the end of the European colonial empires,

Sepultura became icons just like Bob Marley & the Wailers: exoticized by the North but also celebrated by the South. Sepultura were the first Brazilian Metal musicians to gain visibility in the globalized media circuit. After the release of *Roots* in 1996, an album that blended Afro-Brazilian percussion, Native Brazilian chants from the Xavantes tribe, and Metal Music, they inaugurated a new era for bands from the Global South who started to valorize their endogenous cultures as source material. Nelson Varas-Díaz (2021, 9-30) even claims that this album paved the way for decolonial practices inside the Metal Music subculture in the Global South. Metal Music "made it to different regions, was appropriated reflexively, and returned to the metropolis with a vengeance" (Varas-Díaz et al. 2023, 10) inside a movement conceptualized as the Distorted South:

> […] as both a geographic and symbolic space where oppressed peoples of the world impacted by the modern/colonial project use metal music to critically reflect on their experiences, inform others about their situations, build (internally/externally) critical communities, and act upon those experiences through liberatory practices. (Varas-Díaz et al 2023, 10)

Paula Rowe (2023, 137-162) stresses that Sepultura was a landmark in this process of politicization of Metal Music in the Global South.[9] However, similar to Marley, Sepultura's image for the North audiences was painted by exoticization and Otherness (Keith Kahn-Harris 2000, 13-30), as the band members were called "jungle boys" by the mainstream press (Avelar 2018, 329-346). For this reason, *Roots* embraced this marketing strategy as the band sold itself as primitive. This is substantiated by the band members' own statements in interviews (Barcinski and Gomes 1999, 139-155; McLever and Cavalera 2013, 60-93), where they underline that Sepultura's turn towards the Global South was motivated by their realization

the continuities of this imaginary and practice of power were appropriated by the imperialist ideology propelled by North American global hegemony.

[9] Although the decolonial impact and influence of *Roots* are indisputable, Sepultura employed a particular reading of Brazilian popular music that was in line with a musical nationalism embedded in colonial misconceptions and myths about the historical formation of Brazil that corroborate the epistemologies of the North (Souza Santos 2014, viii). In a book chapter for the Brazilian Music Association (ABMUS), I analyze the historical construction of Sepultura's album *Roots*. I argue that Sepultura utilizes ahistorical and anachronistic representations of Afro-Brazilian and Native American musical elements, constructing a narrative about Brazilian popular music that aligns with a form of musical nationalism historically rooted in racism and colonial stereotypes and claims about the birth of Brazil as a nation. While I critique these problematic elements, I also acknowledge the album's decolonial legacy. *Roots* has inspired a generation of metal bands from the Global South who utilize the genre to criticize colonialism (Alecrim forthcoming).

that they were perceived as inferiors, primitives, and exotics by the North Metal environment which is still strongly rooted in nationalism and whiteness (Hoad 2021, 5-21). But unlike Marley in the 1970s who embraced utopian thinking, the 1990s conjuncture was marked by the victory of capitalism over communism, signifying "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1992)[10], the "slow cancellation of the future" (Fisher 2022, 19-50) without any option in imaginations of the future other than dystopia. Consequently, only dystopia reigned.

As Punk and Metal Music evolved together from the late 1970s and onwards, their political content became obscure while a cynical acceptance of neoliberalist policies was expressed in the lyrics as hedonism and catastrophism (Waksman 2010, 11-39). For this reason, Sepultura's "War" cannot imagine a utopia, since it is deeply articulated within the structure of feeling of late capitalism. The most this song can do is identify that the coloniality of power still exists and is used by the North as a tool to assert dominance over the South.

In an ethnomusicological appreciation of the phenomenology of Metal Music, Harris Berger demonstrates how this hopelessness and inability to imagine the future struck the fans in the 1990s in emotional and material forms.

> The death metal fans I spoke with were all too painfully aware of their lack of economic opportunities. Over and over they explained to me that the greatest danger in their world was apathy – a stultifying hopelessness that descends like a fog and incapacitates as surely as a bullet to the brain (1999, p. 172)

Capitalism in its neoliberal era posits itself as the only possibility for human societies: to use Margaret Thatcher's slogan in the 1980s, "There is no alternative". This economic stance of competition, shrinking of the Welfare State, individualism, and consumerism resonated in media culture. Kellner (2001, 377-418) demonstrates how this intensification of capitalist practices resulted in a lack of utopian imagination, leading to dystopias consistently represented by Hollywood cinema and cyberpunk literature. Not surprisingly, Metal Music – and Sepultura's work is no exception – is flooded with lyrics describing the nuclear Armageddon, the

[10] Francis Fukuyama, in *The End of History and the Last Man*, argues that after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Western liberal democracy—and by extension, capitalism as a mode of production—ascended as the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the "final form of human government" (1992, xi). Mark Fisher explores the concept of the "end of history" and demonstrates how this notion philosophically served as a gravestone for the imagination of the future. Consequently, it paved the way for a "reflexive impotence" (2020, 42) that reinforced the neoliberal mantra of "there is no alternative".

ecological cataclysm, and the wars that destroy the world. This dystopian view of a world heading towards self-destruction might be best captured by what Mark Fisher conceptualizes as "capitalist realism" (2020, 10-15). Therefore, Sepultura's rendition of "War" was articulated within the deflated expectations of the neoliberal age. Consequently, even when they called for a future beyond racial inequality along with Marley, their song was tainted by melancholy, reflecting the era's prevailing sentiment that "there is no alternative". In 1997, there was no war of liberation, only wars that maintained hegemony and domination.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined two distinct renditions of the song "War" by Bob Marley & the Wailers and Sepultura. Through the analysis of Marley's version from *Rastaman Vibration* (1976), it was revealed how Bob Marley and the Wailers' music embodied a postcolonial and diasporic vision of utopia, challenging racial and social inequalities. Sepultura's rendition from *Blood-Rooted* (1997) reflects the emergence of Metal Music within the context of neoconservatism and neoliberalism, highlighting the continued dominance of "Babylon" over the Global South.

I have thus demonstrated how the above differences in the two renditions were connected with and produced by the distinctiveness of their respective conjunctures and musical genres. Despite the globalized success and shared rhythmic roots in North American black music (blues and rock for Metal, soul, and jazz for Reggae), Metal and Reggae diverge significantly in their historical context and social meaning. While Reggae emerged in 1960s Jamaica as a voice of racial struggle, Metal arose in late 1970s North America, entangled with commercial media and ideologies of whiteness.

This initial disparity is exemplified by the contrasting trajectories of Bob Marley & the Wailers and Sepultura. Marley, even when facing "third-world glamour" stereotypes, emerged as a symbol of rebellion admired both in the Global North and South, resonating deeply with audiences through his powerful blend of counterculture, anti-colonialism, and Civil Rights movements. Sepultura, initially derivative of Northern metal bands, moved to the USA and faced the consequences of the coloniality of power by being treated as "inferiors" or "primitives." In response, they engaged with and incorporated Southern cosmologies into their

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music. Consequently, Sepultura endeavored to forge connections with the Global South, employing and reappropriating signs and representations of "third-world glamour" crystallized in popular culture.

As I argued, the passage from the 1970s to the 1990s was marked by the closure of the utopian imagination articulated within popular music. The concept of war was represented differently by Bob Marley and Sepultura, not only because of differences in musical style and taste but also because of the larger ideological frameworks of each conjuncture. Marley's vision offers hope for a future beyond colonialism, while Sepultura's portrayal reflects a bleak acceptance of capitalist hegemony imposed by the Global North and of the "slow cancellation of the future" (Fisher 2022, 19-50).

Hence, Marley's version proposes a radical change – "Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned", war would continue to be extant. However, a war for liberation against colonialism, against race discrimination, and for the construction of a utopia, is rightful and legitimized as it will lead to "the victory of good over evil". This rendering of war is embedded in the 1960s and the 1970s, which saw powerful contestatory movements both in academia and in popular culture that criticized capitalism and pointed towards a future beyond market and profit rationality. Different parts of the world were connected by a left-wing imagery with romantic and utopian features (Lowy and Sayre 2016, 203-210). From the reinvigoration of Marxism by the New Left in the Anglophone world, through the events of 1968 in France, to the decolonization movements in Africa and Asia, and the movements against military dictatorships in the Americas, the driving force behind all these struggles were imaginations of better futures. Hence, I first analyzed the song "War" to examine Marley's postcolonial and diasporic articulations toward a representation of war. Subsequently, from the elements gathered, I historicize Jamaican Reggae's struggle within the coloniality of power in the 1970s conjuncture.

Sepultura's "War" is characterized by violence, reflecting a somber acknowledgment of the enduring influence of the coloniality of power in contrast with Marley's utopia of overcoming racial injustices. Sepultura's interpretation lacks this utopian optimism. Instead, it portrays a resigned acceptance of prevailing military dominance, devoid of any triumphant victory. The fading voice and

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melancholic musical arrangement underscore this bleak outlook on the perpetuation of war and inequality. In the late 1970s, as David Harvey (2007, 64-86) writes, a backlash movement aimed to regain class power through the systematic creation of inequality and market rationality. In the neoliberal era, capitalism is seen as the only viable option, sabotaging utopian imagination and fostering dystopian narratives in media and Metal Music, including Sepultura's work. Consequently, conflicts are represented as ways to perpetuate hegemony and domination, rather than seeking liberation beyond racial discrimination.

Through the examination of these two distinct renditions of "War", I have thus demonstrated that popular music as a dynamic ground of transformation can articulate experiences of inequality and make sense of historical struggles between hegemony and counter-hegemony. Thereby its analysis can offer crucial insights into the cultural dynamics within a given conjuncture. It can express distinct affects and worldviews and incorporate cultural identity as well as cultural struggles. Further, as exemplified by my childhood anecdote of my cousin and uncle, popular music by definition possesses a ubiquitous presence in everyday life. Thus, to sum up, it can work as a potent medium for articulations of historical experiences, constructing meaning through negotiations of symbols while accepting or wrestling with power.

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