

WORDS OF WISDOM AND REVOLT IN BOB MARLEY'S LYRICS : A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Summary : This article is about the words of wisdom and of revolt in Bob Marley's songs. It is based on our own discographic and bibliographic investigations through listening to the words by the singer from Jamaica. Bob Marley is one of the greatest Third World singer and the greatest reggae legend. We do a linguistic analysis of his songs (discourse analysis). His albums are fraught with wise sayings, biblical quotations and revolt ideas. In fact, Bob was not only a singer but also an ideologist.

Key-words : wisdom, oppression, downpressor, freedom, creation, war.

MOTS DE SAGESSE ET RÉVOLTE DANS LES PAROLES DE BOB MARLEY : UNE ANALYSE DU DISCOURS

Résumé : Cet article porte sur les mots de sagesse et de révolte dans les chansons de Bob Marley. Il est fondé sur nos propres investigations discographiques et bibliographiques à travers l'écoute des mots du chanteur de la Jamaïque. Bob est l'un des plus grands chanteurs du Tiers-monde et la plus grande légende du reggae. Nous faisons une analyse linguistique de ses chansons (analyse du discours). Ses albums regorgent de dictons sages, de citations bibliques et d'idées de révolte. En fait, Bob était non seulement un chanteur mais un idéologue.

Mots-clés : wisdom (sagesse), oppression, downpression, freedom (liberté), creation (creation), war (guerre).

Introduction

Songs are expressions of feelings and realities of life. People sing about many facts in life. While some songs are romantic others are full of wisdom. This article sheds light in Bob Marley's vision of life and philosophy. From "No woman no cry" to "Zion train", we have pieces of words full of wisdom and lessons of life. The Jamaican singer focuses on man, the hereafter and life per se.

We are going to explore the most significant proverbs, sayings and views in some of the artist's famous compositions.

Before Bob Marley we have wailing music in the Negro Spirituals and in Rock and Roll and Jazz. Singers like James Brown (Black is beautiful) paved the way the great revolutionary songs in front of oppression and racial segregation. The difference between the African American singers and Bob Marley was that the kind of segregation they lived was a bit different as it was more appalling in America and Bob was a mulatto.

Nevertheless, Bob focused in Africa and had as masters Marcus Mosiah Garvey named The Black Moses and Haile Selassie I. While most of the African American wanted to fight in America and claim their civil and human rights in America, Rastafarians wanted a coming back to Africa. Our theory is to find the implicit meaning of the texts or lyrics by Bob Marley.

Stephen Davis gives a biography of Bob Marley in an eponym-book. The King James Bible gives justifications to Rastafarian beliefs. Velma Pollard decodes, in *Dread Talk: The language of Rastafari, the language of the Rastafarians*.

As one listens to Bob Marley's songs, one comes across a wide range of teachings. Marley's Lyrics are full of meanings. This is the case of his song entitled *Small Axe* in which he says: "Whosoever diggeth a pit shall fall in it".

1. *"The road of life is rocky and you may stumble too"*(*COULD YOU BE LOVED*)

We can learn from these words that when somebody is mistaken, needless to make of that an event. We have to take about everyday but a lesson that teaches that what happens to someone can also happen to us and that we have not to rejoice about the misfortunes of others. We have also to remember that some day we did the same in the past. That is why Bob follows: "**So while you point your fingers, someone else is judging you**", meaning that while we know about somebody's mistakes somebody else knows about ours. All we have to do is to learn about our mistakes and the others'.

2. *“What has been hidden from the wise and the prudent has been revealed to the babe and suckling.”*

Here, implicitly theorized, we have to remember that knowledge have no age and is a gift of God. There is no age for wisdom and we have to the modest and not be disregarding about the other’s opinions. God gives knowledge to whoever He likes and that there is no age, race or birth to be gifted.

3. *“Wisdom is better than silver and gold.”*

Here, Bob attacks the capitalistic and materialistic world. To him, this is ephemeral and that the only real rich or wealth is wisdom. A Senegalese proverb states that when the people rush for wealth, I advise you to rush for knowledge. That is the reason why he warns: **“Don’t gain the world and lose your soul.”** In fact, for those who only live for wealth and joy, damnation is the last reward, and salvation is the reward for those who worship God and thank him for life, as he is the giver of life. And even Bob wants people to believe that the world will end some day.

4. *“Destruction of the poor is in the poverty, destruction of the soul is vanity.”*

Here we have another teaching: the poor die from poverty but vanity destroys the soul. Some people, in fact, are bad because they are poor. So they are doing evil things in life like robbing, killing or mugging but those who boast off because of their fine positions are worse than those people. A man, whatever has must remain the same.

5. *“Who so ever diggeth a pit shall fall in it”.*

In this life, some wicked people goes on doing bad things. But they do not know that evil things will return to them some day. The philosophy behind is that when you do good things, your reward will be good, but when you do evil things, your reward will be evil. Anyway, we reap what we sow.

6. *"There is no hiding place from the Father of creation"*

These words show how Man is weak and dependent on God. We can do everything we want and feel powerful, but this power will wither away in front of God. In reality, we cannot escape God and we have to realize that we are limited in this life. There is a super power beyond us on whom we depend: God the Almighty.

7. *"Don't jump in the water if you can't swim"*

A person must know their capacities and abilities. If in this life everybody does what they were incumbent to, there will be no trouble. We should do what we can in matter of abilities and capacities. In fact, knowing one's abilities will not limit someone but is a kind of warning in this life. Just do what you can!

8. *"Who Jah bless, no one curse"*

In life, some people, most of the time, wish others failed their lives. But they are often disappointed because the more they hate you, the more you succeed. In fact only God is the giver of tremendous life and security. Therefore, whatever the forces arrayed in front of you, believe in God and live your life.

9. *"The truth is an offense, but not a sin"*

Bob Marley is absolutely right here. The truth may be bitter to hear but it will always overshadow lies and will prevail over every fallacy. No matter what, tell and live the truth. It is better to tell and admit the truth than to commit a sin or crime.

10. *"One bright morning, when man's work is over he flies away home"*

We are adamant that the only definiteness in life is death. The latter shows our limits in this life, which can be considered to be a dream. Our final destination is a grave and our first was a cradle. So, from the cradle to the grave, Man has to fulfil his aims on earth, though sometimes the time allotted to that is not enough.

11. *“Have no fear for atomic energy ‘cause none of them can stop the time”*

This revolt against the super powers who detain atomic energy and who represent, with their atom bombs, a threat to the Third world is really audacious. No one except God can end the World and life, though noxious effects of Man’s science and technologies can be a danger.

12. *“Be what you are and let the others be what they want to be”*

No obligation to be by force what somebody else is like must exist in life. Judgment is free but being is also. Being able to tolerate or let the people choose their way of life as long as that is not destroying you must be a must.

13. *“The fittest of the fittest shall survive”*

The law of natural selection is true in Bob Marley’s caricaturing Babylon. In fact, in 2019 the Covid 19 appeared and claimed millions of people in less than one year. But there were people who, without staying in or wearing face masks have never caught the corona virus. In dangerous situations created by Man or created to destroy Man, there will always be survivors who will tell the tale or story to other future generations. To add more, this is rule of natural selection. In the world, we have an arena and the name of the game in it is that you should resist to persist.

I. The words of revolt

Bob Marley said that he started by crying. What made of him a revolutionary and a revolted was that he was abandoned by his father and was different in his colour to the others of his generation. That is the reason why he say that the stone that the builder (his father Captain Norvall Marley) refuses (himself as a natural child) shall be the head cornerstone.

14. *“Get up, Stand up, Stand up for you rights. Get up, Stand up, don't give up the fight”*

The Rastaman is hailing at people to fight for their rights because only fight can bring liberation and improvement of the plight of the down trodden black men.

15. *"We are sick and tired with the isms, schisms"*

Nationalism, Liberalism, Socialism, Capitalism...etc. All these ideologies end by *ism* and divide people (*schisms*). What the Rastas want is love and peace.

16. *"Rise O falling fighter, Rise and take your stance again"*

This is an appeal for fighting to freedom fighters. Thought beaten, they must take their stance again on the battlefield. This is also a call for revolt and revolution. We see the semantic field of fight. Falling is not very significant, what is important is to take one's stance again on the battleground. Bob is calling for revolt here. Wailing about one's plight without doing anything is not important. What is important is to do something out of the yoke of oppression (downpression) .

Bob Marley was a revolutionary, a true revolutionary but also a Panafricanist and a wise man (a philosopher). In *The heathens*, he says:

17. *Rise o fallen fighter*

Rise and take your stance again

If you fight then run away

You'll have to fight another day

These words talk about resilience and no delay in a present fight or battle.

He follows in the same song:

18. *As the man sow shall he reap*

And I know the stock is cheap

But the hotter the battle

Come a sweeter Jah victory

The above verses encourage people who experience hard ordeals or hard times. Indeed, good things are on the thorns. Sufferings do not last forever. They help

fathom out who we are and in which ideal we believe. This is a way to teach determination and boldness in front of a relevant and true ideals, and even ideas because just ideas never fall in oblivion. Gratitude to God (Jah) will come after difficult experiences.

19. *"In desolate places we find our bread"*

In fact these words in the song "Trench Town" is revealing of exploitation of the grassroots in Jamaica.

20. *"Many are called a few are chosen"*

This is the law of natural selection. A kind of calling many people, for example and choosing only a limited number of them. Another law of natural selection is "the fittest of the fittest shall survive", i.e. only the best have a place in a competitive and capitalistic world dominated by machines and robotics.

21. *"We've been trodding in the winespread much too long. Rebel, Rebel! "*

This call for rebelling is nothing but a quest for liberty in a situation of exploitation and hard labour by the "powerful black race".

22. *"We're gonna chase those crazy*

Chase those crazy baldheads out of town"

This is a call to get rid of the non-Rastas, the Baldheads. The capitalists and exploitators of mankind in general and black race in particular.

22. *"Every time I Lear the crack of a whip*

My blood runs cold"

This is a reminiscence of how slaves were tortured and tantalized on the slave ships by their "masters". No doubt during the harsh voyage, many slaves died before the arrival in destination. Not only were they beaten by the slave owners but also they were put in very harsh conditions, occasioning the death of many of them during the transatlantic voyage.

23. *(the) Cost of living get so high
The rich and poor and stay to cry
No the poor must get strong!
They're singing "oh what a tribulation!*

This is a cry in front of dearth of food and lack of good living condition on the island of Jamaica.

24. *Most people think great God will come from the sky
Take away everything and make everybody feel high,
If you know what life is worth
You will look for yours on earth*

Here, Bob Marley wants to be clear: none but oppressors (downpressors) can change their lot. God will not help those who do not help themselves. Moreover, life is so precious and dear that everybody should save their one before waiting for providence to solve our problems and harms.

25. *"The road of life is rocky and may stumble too.*

So while you point your finger someone else is judging you"

Life is full of ordeals and sly idiosyncrasies. If you judge another person, someone else is also talking about yourself. So judge not but try to be good.

26. *"Open your eyes, look within
Are you satisfied with the life you're living.
We know where we're going
We know where we're from
We're living Babylon
We're going to our fatherland"*

These words in "Exodus" are revealing of the repudiation of the western life and the capitalistic world (Babylon). Bob was asking Africans and the oppressed of the

western world composed of Black men to “open their eyes” and to get rid of the western culture and everything related to it so to join back in Africa (the fatherland).

*27. “How can you be sitting there
Telling me that you care
When every time I look around
The people suffer in the suffering
In everywhere, in everywhere
No, no, no, no! We’re the survivors
Yes the Black survivors !”*

In these words in the song “Survival”, we see the quest for altruism and an appeal to be of more consideration about the sufferings of the downtrodden. Being in one’s corner and self-rejoicing is no solution to the suffering of the greatest number of people notably of the black race.

On top of that, Bob Marley criticized the egoistic people who pretend they care while the others are suffering. In actual fact, it is shameful to rejoice alone while the others are suffering or dying for want of good living conditions.

Bob Marley was a champion of altruism and a true revolutionary defending the oppressed and downtrodden, in reality.

*28. “They just want to be the leaders
In the house of the rising sun
No matter what the crisis is”*

In fact the super powers create wars, sell weapons to fighting parties to get rich. People are fighting and brothers are killing their own brothers and are backed up by the same people: the super powers.

And what is appalling is that they (the super powers) who are friends today may become foes tomorrow. The name of the game is that they back you and you preserve their interests, otherwise they eliminate you through dirty plots or military coups.

29." *They don't want to see us unite
They don't want to see us live together
All they want us to do is keep on
Killing one another, top-ranking"*

A cry for unity of all oppressed and notably the Black race in front of the top-ranking man who is no one else but the capitalist.

Bob Marley was a Black defender and revolutionary whose language, through music, was not only full of wisdom but also words of revolt and rebellion or revolutionary struggle

30." *Every man gotta right to decide his own destiny
And in this judgment there is no partiality
So arm in arms with arms we'll fight
This little struggle
'Cause that's the only way we can
Overcome this little trouble"*

This time, the supposed non-violent Rastafarian is advocating military struggle for the

31. *"No more internal power struggle
We come together to overcome this little struggle
So soon we will find out who is the real revolutionary
'Cause I don't want my people to be contrary"*

independence of South Rhodesia which, with President Robert Gabriel Mugabe, will become in 1980 independent Zimbabwe.

Moreover, the song "Zimbabwe" is a call for unity as shows these lines:

Those lines show once again how Robert Nesta Marley who was a revolutionary ideologist beg upon Africans and Zimbabweans to unite and to stop waging war among and between themselves since "they don't want to see us unite" as he puts in the song "Top Ranking"

32. *"How can you give your more
To receive your less?"*

These verses show the degree of exploitation of the black race by the capitalists. You work a lot and you are ill-paid, meaning you are paid a bit. This is a denunciation of the exploitation of man by man. Was Bob a communist? We do not know but, he was a revolutionary.

33. *"Give us the teachings of His Majesty
'Cause we no want no devil philosophy"*

As a Rastafarian or a Rastaman, Bob Marley rejects any other kind of indoctrination from Babylon-which is different from the one by Haile Selassie I. What he advocates is life through the ideas of Tafari Makonen (Emperor Haile Selassie I). He rejects the teaching of the "devil".

34. *"These are the big fishes
Who always try to eat down
The small fish"*

These verses in the song "Guiltiness" show again the degree of exploitation of the "downpressed" (oppressed) by the "downpressors" (oppressors). The life people lead is like that in a jungle, of the sea, where the weak are always the preys of the powerful.

35. *"Keep your culture
Don't be afraid of the vulture"*

These words found in the song "Rastaman live up" are a plea against uprootedness and strength in front of the world dominated by a "throwaway society"

36. *" You see men sailing on their ego trip
Blast off on their space ship
Million miles from reality
No care for you, no care for me"*

We see through those lines that before exploring the moon or other planets or the sky, it is first necessary to solve hunger and poverty on earth ("no care for you, no care for me"). These space explorations, according to Bob Marley, bring but more poverty and danger on Earth (they are a "time-bomb").

37. *"Man to man is so unjust
Children you don't know who to trust
Your worst enemy could be your best friend
And your best friend your worst enemy
.....
Who the cap fit
Let them wear it"*

In this life, we do not know what is lurking behind people's personality and real intentions. You may be wrong when you think that the people you believe are your bosom friends may be "wolves in sheep clothing". They can smile to you but you don't know their real intentions and personalities until they disappoint and show you their real face by betraying you.

As say the Wolofs of Senegal: "nit da fa lëndëm", that is to say literally "Man is dark".

Only a person themselves and God know their real personality. No one can really know someone else except themselves.

38. *"Someone will have to pay
For the innocent blood
They shed every day
O children mark my word
That's what the Bible say"*

In every bad action accomplished by the evil-doers or wrong-doers, there will be scapegoats. In a world where bloodsheds -notably the killing of innocent people or those who fight for their well-being-are abundant, there will be God's justice

through acts of God such as disasters and catastrophes like floods, diseases, hurricanes, volcanoes. If there is justice, there will be peace; and no justice, no peace!

39. *“Check out the real situation*

Nations fight against nations

When did this all begin?

When will it end?

Well, it seems like total destruction

The only solution”

Bob is deeply affected and disgusted by the everyday situation in the world we live in. wars, starvation, man-slaughters, political assassinations, diseases are the lot of our generation and we do not know what tomorrow people will become.

Refugees and displaced people cannot bear up the “total destruction”. And while soldiers are at the frontlines, diplomats in suits and millions of dollars are having meetings and are the real decision-makers in the wartime situations.

Those are some of the reasons why Bob is showing his desolation in front of his impossibility to solve the “real situation “he is talking about. The climax of his weakness in front of this situation is: **“There ain’t no use. No one can stop them now”**.

With a sorrowful voice, though determined, he denounces this fact of instability.

The reader will notice that the revolt quotations are longer , just because if we do not quote from the beginning to the end of an idea, there will be a bias analysis. To avoid any confusion, we have put quotations in bold letters. And then follows our own analysis.

Conclusion

Bob Marley was a philosopher and great freedom fighter. He marked his generation and the following ones. Almost, everywhere in the world is celebrated his birth (6 February 1945) and death (11 May 1981) anniversaries. He was a gifted singer, a soothsayer whose lyrics still make sense. Almost any lyric corresponds to a given

situation in life. He read the Bible and his songs are full of biblical thoughts. May his soul rest in peace!

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Lyrics:

1. Babylon system
2. Could you be loved
3. Crazy bald head
4. Crisis
5. Exodus
6. Get up stand up
7. Guiltiness
8. Jah live
9. Man to man
10. Misty morning
11. No woman no cry
12. One drop
13. One love
14. Rastaman chant
15. Rastaman live up
16. Real situation
17. Redemption song
18. Root natty root
19. Slave driver

20. So much trouble in the world
21. Survival
22. The Heathens
23. Top ranking
24. Trench town rock
25. Trenchtown
26. We and Dem
27. Zimbabwe
28. Zion train