

Survival in ‘Survival’: A Multimodal Analysis of Bob Marley’s Lyrics

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ABSTRACT ---- *This paper presents a multimodal analysis of the theme of survival in Bob Marley’s 1979 ‘Survival’ album. The paper employs a multimodal analytical approach where attention is given to how the cover design of the album, literary devices and other aesthetic ways by which the theme of survival is projected in the ‘Survival’ album. Findings show that the cover design of the album speaks volumes and is loaded with meaning in projecting the theme of survival. Besides, Bob Marley employs repetition, allusion and metaphor in projecting the theme of survival in the ‘Survival’ album. Finally, the name of the album as well as those of the songs and their order of arrangement all contribute tremendously to building the theme of survival right from the first to the last song of the ‘Survival’ album.*

Keywords---- Bob Marley, survival, multimodal analysis, lyrics

1. INTRODUCTION

Speeches, conversations, poems, discourses and lyrics have been analysed and discussed as text types in a number of linguistic and literary studies. Some of these studies are as recent as Author (2018), Ben Khalifa (2017), Kubi (2018, 2017) and Salahshoor, Baggali and Behin (2013). While so much attention has been given to the former four and the like, lyrics continue to receive little attention in discourse analysis. This paper presents a multimodal analysis of one the world’s greatest music icons of all time – Bob Marley. The paper focuses on Marley’s 1979 ‘Survival’ album. The main purpose of the paper is to unearth the many ways by which Marley projected the theme of survival in his album aptly titled ‘Survival’. The rest of the paper is sectioned as follows: research questions, literature review, method, discussions, conclusion and suggestions.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper answers the following questions:

1. How does the album’s cover design convey the theme of survival in Bob Marley’s ‘Survival’?
2. What literary devices are employed in conveying the theme of survival in Bob Marley’s ‘Survival’ album?
3. What other aesthetic ways have the theme of survival been projected in Bob Marley’s ‘Survival’?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no lack of information on Bob Marley’s music, his person and what he stood for, his religion and his transient life. Some of these works are Frith (2001), Stephens (1998), Stephens (1999) and Dawes (2012). The majority of these works on Bob Marley are more biographical, social and cultural in nature. Many of these works eulogise Bob Marley’s person and his music as well as the social revolutions he stood for. There are, however, a few scholarly works that study his music from a scholarly angle rather than treat it as a social issue. One of these works is Alleyne’s (1994) “Positive vibration?: Capitalist textual hegemony and Bob Marley” where Alleyne (1994:224) submits that “it is implicitly asserted that the analytical criteria usually applied only to scribal texts are equally relevant to the contextual interpretation of music.”

We note from the above the unintentional but effective neglect for the analysis of music as a text. From Alleyne (1994), we note two key points; music can be classified as a text and that music, like any other literature, must be studied from context. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 293) define a text as

...not just a string of sentences. It is not simply a large grammatical unit, something of the same kind as a sentence, but deferring from it in size – a sort of a super sentence, a semantic unit. A text best is thought of as not a grammatical unit at all, but rather as a unit of a different kind: a semantic unit. The unity that it has is a unity of meaning in context, a texture that expresses the fact that it relates as a whole to the environments in which it is placed.

According to this definition, a text is ‘something of the same kind as a sentence’ or a ‘supersentence’. Halliday and Hasan (1976) call a text a ‘supersentence’, implying that although a text may comprise a number of sentences, these sentences can be understood and interpreted as though they were one sentence or one ‘semantic unit’. By ‘semantic unit’, Halliday and Hasan (1976) are saying that a text should convey meaning as does a single lexical item. Meaning, therefore, is central to what a text is. In that regard, any piece of information that is meaningful, for example, a whole book, a paragraph, a sentence, or a single word or indeed a song is a type of text. The question of whether or not lyrics are examples of text is therefore unfounded. Lyrics, like poetry, are meaningful ways by which humans express their thoughts, feelings, emotions and ideas (Singhi & Brown, 2014). Suffice it now to say that lyrics are texts that warrant analysis as do other text types.

Another point we glean from Alleyne (1994) is that like other texts, lyrics are contextual and can be analysed so. The context of Bob Marley’s ‘Survival’ album is already known and is not the focus of this paper. White (2006), one of Marley’s main biographers captures the context around which the ‘Survival’ album was composed. He submits that ‘Survival’ was a deep and powerful meditation on the historical struggles of black peoples in general, and a plea for the liberation and unification of Africa in particular. The theme of survival, as we shall see, therefore, runs throughout the songs of the ‘Survival’ album.

There are a few discourse analyses of lyrics such as Risdianto (2016) and Arbain (2016). Risdianto studied a song titled ‘We will not Go Down (Song for Gaza)’ from contextual, lexical and grammatical points of view and found that context, the background and experiences of the composer, is closely related to the ideas in the lyrics. Moreover he found the employment of cohesion and coherence as the grammatical aspect of the song text. These findings prove that song texts are as qualified as other discourses for analysis and that their neglect, whether or not intentional, has left a huge area in discourse analysis to be filled.

Arbain (2016) also analysed songs from Eminem by employing Fairclough’s model of Critical Discourse Analysis. He found that there was a transcultural process in the song lyrics. Findings reveal African American vernacular English and American slang language in the lyrics of the song ‘Love the way you lie’. Without the mention of song lyrics in Arbain’s (2016) study, the assumption would have been that this study is about another text or discourse type such as a speech. We have, however, seen how lyrics can also be analysed just like any other text type.

The researcher of the present paper believes that just as speeches and utterances of the world’s great men and women have received many linguistic and literary analyses, so should lyrics be given the attention they deserve. The world’s great as regards music, like Bob Marley, must be given the linguistic and literary honour of their songs and the information they carry studied and published.

4. METHOD

This paper is purely qualitative in that findings are not reduced to numerical bases. The paper employs a multimodal analytical approach, making the paper altogether descriptive. This approach is deemed appropriate because of its all-encompassing nature as a discourse analytical approach. LeVine & Scollon (2004:2) argue that all discourse is multimodal and that ‘language in use, whether this is in the form of spoken language or text, is always and inevitably constructed across multiple modes of communication, including speech and gesture not just in spoken language but through such “contextual” phenomena as the use of the physical spaces in which we carry out our discursive actions or the design, papers, and typography of the documents within which our texts are presented’. Since this paper investigates such things as cover design, arrangements of lyrics as well as other aesthetic phenomena, a multimodal analysis is deemed the most appropriate approach for it.

5. DISCUSSION

This section answers the research questions one after the other. The first question seeks to unearth how Bob Marley employs the album cover design to convey the theme of survival in his ‘Survival’ album. As we have noted in multimodal analysis of discourse, everything counts and tells a story. First the ‘Survival’ album cover is decorated with the flag of 48 independent African nations of that time and Papua New Guinea who gained her sovereignty in 1975, four years before the ‘Survival’ album. And at the background of the flags is the depiction of the deck of Brooke’s ship, a great symbol of the infamous trans-Atlantic slave trade, with ‘SURVIVAL’ written in block capitals along the slave ship. It is obvious from this pictorial depiction that the theme of survival reverberates like the rhythm of reggae through the vista of time, right from the ugly and inhumane era of slavery right down to independence of Africa, both home and abroad. By the employment of visuals, Marley is publishing the triumphant history of the African from the ash of struggle in slavery to the full freedom of independence. White (1998:333) acknowledges thus: “Always a history buff, Bob had begun working on ‘Buffalo soldier’ after reading about the black American soldiers decorated in the late 1800’s.” The foregoing shows that Bob Marley is an autodidact and an ardent student of history. The cover design of the ‘Survival’ album as well as many other songs such as ‘Buffalo Soldier’, as noted by White (1998) and ‘So Much Things to Say’ all reveal Marley’s passion for history as he has incorporated it into his songs and in the album under study in particular, this passion is responsible for his bringing the theme of survival to the fore.

Besides, the inscription ‘SURVIVAL’ along the historical slave ship is not a coincidence. Marley, is in effect saying by visuals that the survival of the black race, Africa, begins from the dark days of slavery where the African, therefore, rises from the deck of a slave ship to an independent man.

One other important thing we could note is that the visuals of the 'Survival' album do not include any non-African country that is home to the Black race like Jamaica, Haiti, Barbados, except for Papua New Guinea who gained her sovereignty just five years before the birth of the 'Survival' album. White (2006) and Bordowitz (2004), two of the many biographers of Bob Marley, all submit that some of the figures that influenced Marley were Marcus Garvey and Haile Selassie I. And one of Marcus Garvey's popular stand was that the black race regardless of place of origin belongs to Africa. This was espoused in Garvey's 'Back to Africa' project (Garvey, 1986). There is no denying that Marley shares this view especially that his one-time companion and fellow Wailer Peter Tosh expressed the same mentality in his song 'Africa'. So by using only independent national flags of African countries and Papua New Guinea, Marley refuses to acknowledge non-African countries as the original home of blacks. In effect, we can deduce that the African, home and abroad, has survived notwithstanding her dark past. The Addition of Papua New Guinea was another confirmation from Marley that one Black country has also just 'survived' colonialism and deserves to be recognized as a symbol of survival.

Another thing that clearly conveys the theme of survival in the 'Survival' album is the arrangement of the national flags of some key historical African countries at the top row from left to right, notable among them being Ethiopia, Kenya, Angola, Cote D'Ivoire, Egypt and Ghana. This arrangement is intentional forasmuch as the roles of these countries towards the collective struggle for the freedom of Africa are concerned.

Ghana, for example, is the first African country south of the Sahara to gain independence. Ghana's role with Ethiopia in forming the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has also been captured by Marley to the fore. Besides, Ethiopia, a place Marley calls home, had never suffered colonialism. Ethiopia in this regard has been a survivor and would naturally lead in the survival of the rest of the African continent. For Egypt, it is clear why Marley includes it at the top, Egypt has a long history, a onetime world power and a home of civilization (Grimal and Shaw, 1992). Such a history and Egypt's place in the world certainly tell why Marley places it at the top row of the cover design.

For Angola and Kenya, we see in their flags traditional war implement. We see the shield and spears for Kenya and a machete for Angola. War implements are for fighting against the enemy as well as for self-protection. Marley is in effect reiterating that Africa would fight to protect herself from her enemies and for her survival. These are clearly packaged in the lyrics as we would consider ahead. Suffice it to say, however, now that on the cover design of the 'Survival' album, a lot has been said without words to project the theme of survival.

6. LITERARY DEVICES

The second research question seeks to discuss the literary devices by which Bob Marley expresses the theme of survival in his 'Survival' album. Marley has employed repetition, rhyme, parallelism, metaphor (simile), allusion (historical, biblical and personal) and imagery to portray the theme of survival in his 'Survival' album. Discussed below, one at a time, are how these figures of speech are employed to express the theme of survival.

6.1 Repetition

Repetition as a literary device permeates 'Survival' from its first song 'So much trouble in the world' to the last 'Wake up and live'. The 'so much trouble in the world' in the song is repeated, either directly from Marley or from the backing vocalists for more than seventeen times out of thirty-nine lines. The significance of this repetition is being true to happenings and acknowledging the fact that there really is 'so much trouble in the world'. The acknowledgement of the presence of trouble in the world per se places the theme of survival right in context. If there is so much trouble in the world, and there is 'no care for you and no care for me', we would have to fight to survive, Marley seems to say. Right after acknowledging the prevalence of trouble in the world, the theme of survival rings in the repeated succeeding lines – 'give a little' – repeated nine times. By this, Marley sets the tone that a little hard work towards survival would suffice but has to be done regularly and with dedication. He seems to say that little efforts from each African or African state would eventually be enough to keep the African alive and be free to live his own life.

In the song 'Zimbabwe', the name 'Zimbabwe' is repeated almost twenty-six times along "Brother you're right" a great number of times. Dupriez (1991) and Fleak et al (1933) submit that repetition as a figure of speech brings fullness to a story or a literary piece of work. No doubt, taking away repetition from Marley's songs, as it is in the case of many songs, would render the songs very lean face. We also note that it is the core points that emphasize the theme of survival that receive the endorsement of repetition in Marley's 'Survival'.

The repetition of 'Tell the children the truth' in 'Babylon system'; 'We're the survivors' in 'Survival'; 'Africa Unite' in the song 'Africa Unite'; 'Feel it in the one drop' and 'I know Jah's never let us down' in 'One Drop', 'Ride Natty Ride', 'Ambush in the Night' and 'Wake up and live' all go into the pool of projecting the theme of survival in the 'Survival' album. It is remarkable that some of these repetitions end up as the title of some of the songs, from the first of 'Africa Unite' to the final of 'Wake up and live'. By that Marley employs repetition to achieve fullness to his songs and at the same time emphasize the theme of survival in his 'Survival' album.

6.2 Allusion

Besides repetition, Bob Marley also employs allusion to project the theme of survival throughout his 'Survival' album. Dupriez (1991) says of allusion that it is a reference made to a person, idea or a thing outside a given information. There are, therefore, types of allusion such as historical allusion, where a reference is made to a historical figure or happening;

biblical allusion where the Bible serves as the point of reference, literary allusion where reference is made to any literary figure or idea and personal allusion where one refers to another content in which one appeared to explain a current situation. Marley employs Biblical, historical and personal allusions in portraying the theme of survival in his 'Survival' album. Below are some examples:

1. You see men sailing on their ego trip blast off on their space ship – 'So much trouble in the world'
2. We've been trodding on the winepress much too long – 'Babylon System'
3. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – 'Survival'
4. How good and how pleasant it would be before God and man ... – 'Africa Unite'
5. Ambush in the night
All guns aiming at me – 'Ambush in the night'.

In Example 1, Marley employs a historical allusion. By mentioning 'ego trip' and 'blasting of spaceship', he refers to space travel, first realized by Yuri Gagarin. In effect, Marley is saying that the true achievement of a people is first and foremost the issue of survival and as they survive, they would be able to achieve anything outside 'ego trip'. This historical allusion in the song 'So much trouble in the world' suggests that the advancement in any field of human endeavor in the midst of trouble is not as important as the survival of the human personality. To Marley, the survival of Africa and her people first is more important than any other achievements such as those of the 'ego trips' of space travel. Example 2 is a Biblical allusion where Marley zooms in on the words of Joel Chapter 3, particularly verse 13 which says:

Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come get you down, for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great (King James Version, 2009)

Joel Chapter 3 relates the Lord's anger with nations that were persecuting his people and promised to judge them in their wickedness. By this allusion, Marley is telling the perpetrators of injustice against the 'black survivors' that there is a higher authority from whom justice would be served one day, and by that authority, the collective African survives.

Example 3, another Biblical allusion, also hammers the theme of survival. If Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could survive naked fire heated to an unbearable degree, and Daniel could survive the den of hungry lions, the 'black survivors' would survive any pressure mounted on them from 'Babylon'. We note that the Biblical story itself is about God's people taken captive in Babylon. According to Whyte (2006), Marley sees the unjust system of any type as Babylon. In effect, any system, regardless of source, that oppresses Africa is 'Babylon' to Marley. And just as the Biblical Babylon crumbled while God's people survived, so would the 'black survivors' survive amidst the den of colonialism and the fiery furnace of the suppression of Africa.

Africa's survival is captured in yet another Biblical allusion in Example 4. Here Marley quotes from Psalms 133:1 which reads: 'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity'. The book of Psalms itself in the Bible is a group of songs. By this allusion, Marley points to the solution for Africa's survival to be divine – from the Holy Bible. In all, the Biblical allusions reveal the strong belief Marley has in the supernatural as regards the redemption of Africa.

A final allusion in this discussion is a personal one to Bob Marley himself. Example 5 is a personal experience in Bob Marley's life. In an assassination attempt on Marley's life, he sustained gunshot wounds in his arm and was treated and discharged. By singing the words of Example 5, he is assuring the 'black survivors' of his personal experience and is in effect saying that, "If I have survived an assassination attack, you all can also survive anything. He sees himself as the symbolism of the entire black race and his survival a symbolic survival of the black race. No doubt the theme of survival is very obvious and permeates the entire album, title by title, line by line, stanza by stanza and song by song.

6.3 Metaphor

A final literary device employed by Marley in his 'Survival' album is metaphor. Found in these metaphors is profound imagery that gives depth to the very theme of survival Marley touches on. Below are a few examples:

6. Babylon system is the vampire,
Sucking the children day by day
Sucking the blood of the sufferers – 'Babylon System'
7. We got something they could never take away
And it's the fire – 'Ride Natty Ride'

In Example 6, we see the direct comparison between 'Babylon System' and 'vampire' – a bloodsucking imaginary bird. By referring to 'Babylon system' as the 'vampire', not like the 'vampire', reveals Marley's conviction of the pressure other world systems put on Africa, as they are 'sucking' Africa's 'children' and 'sufferers'. We note that in this metaphor, Africa is 'children' and 'sufferers', ones already pathetic and vulnerable but at the receiving end of the vampire 'Babylon systems'. The imagery created in the metaphor of Example 6 is phenomenal; it paints a bloody picture of the cruelty of sucking Africa's blood, her very livewire of existence. Marley's knowledge of the exploitation of the wealth of Africa throughout history has without a doubt informed this imagery which has perfectly projected the theme of survival as long as Africa continues to survive notwithstanding the sucking of her blood. This imagery lays it out so plainly that 'Babylon system's' intent is to take Africa's life away. Here Africa's blood is her precious gems that have been plundered by colonialists, who are the 'vampires'.

In example 7, Marley says of the ‘something that they could never take away’ as fire. He goes on to reiterate the destructive nature of this fire that it consumes everything in its way. There is no denying that that ‘fire’ the collective African has is the survival instinct, never to give up under oppression or colonialism. In all the core theme of the ‘Survival’ album, survival, is brought into focus again. Marley has, therefore, employed literary devices in artistic fashion to project the survival of the African.

7. OTHER AESTHETIC WAYS

The third and final research question of this paper seeks to unearth other aesthetic ways, besides visuals and literary devices, that Bob Marley conveys his theme of survival in his ‘Survival’ album. After a thorough study of the songs of the album, the researcher believes that the names of the songs as well as their arrangement are purposely done by Marley to convey his theme of survival that moves through this album. This conclusion is reached on the back of Marley’s response to a question in an interview. When he was asked whether his music’s development has been a conscious effort, Marley responded thus, ‘Yeah, conscious and deliberate’ (Bordowitz, 2004: 95). Marley asserts that the development of his music is ‘conscious’ and ‘deliberate’. The succeeding paragraphs, therefore, discuss the consciousness and deliberateness with which Marley chooses the names of the songs on the album as well as their arrangement and how these project the theme of survival.

The first song of the album ‘So much trouble in the world’ is an acknowledgement by Marley that to be able to struggle with a problem and overcome it, one must first acknowledge the presence of that problem. The theme of survival is triggered here in the sense that the African has accepted that he is oppressed and with this knowledge, he can strive for survival. We see in ‘So much trouble in the world’ the line ‘No care for you, no care for me’, stressing to the African that his survival is in his own hands. ‘Know the truth about your suffering and work hard to overcome it and survive’, Bob Marley seems to tell the African.

After acknowledging that the world is full of trouble in ‘So much trouble in the world’, Marley moves right into ‘Zimbabwe’ to fight for that country’s independence. He substantiates the acknowledgement of the knowledge shown in the first song into the second, ‘Zimbabwe’, by saying that ‘Brother you’re right’ to fight for right, to fight for independence and that there should not be any ‘internal power struggle’ because the ‘true revolutionaries’ are those who fight for the good of all.

After independence, there is something else you must know, Marley suggests in the third song ‘Top ranking’; the ‘Top ranking’ do not want them to unite. In that case, Zimbabwe has just won independence and must beware of top ranking ones who do not ‘mean what you’re saying’. The African must focus on deeds, not the words of top ranking ones in order to survive. This is because the top ranking people, African or not, are deeply involved in ‘Babylon system’, the title of the fourth song of the album.

As we saw earlier, this “Babylon System” is the ‘vampire, sucking children day by day’. Marley goes on to point to the danger of the universities and churches of this ‘Babylon system’ who graduate ‘thieves and murderers’ and who are ‘deceiving the people continually’. In effect, Marley is emphasizing the power of knowledge as a key to survival of the African. Being conversant with the tactics of ‘Babylon system’, it would be easier to fight it and survive.

The next song, the fifth on the album, is also consciously titled and placed. First, the album title song is what the whole album is about – the theme of survival. Second, it is the fifth song of the album. Since the song ‘Survival’ can be likened to the human heart as it is the heart of the entire album, no doubt it is beautifully placed close to the middle of ten. Five is almost midway of ten and for this song to be placed so means that Marley regards the survival of the African one very important thing to live for. It is the heartbeat of his entire personality. White (2001) acknowledges that Africa means a lot to Marley and so he was very concerned about her survival politically, economically and religiously. The placement and the name of the fifth song on the ‘Survival’ album says it all.

There is no wonder why right after the song ‘Survival’ that a piece of advice follows to the African on how he can survive in ‘Africa Unite’; Africa must unite to be able to survive. And the moment Africa unites, she would be able to, as the seventh song on the album says, jam on the created rhythm of ‘One drop’ which is ‘resisting against ism and schisms’ of ‘Babylon’. The advice to make merry on the ‘drumbeat’ of the heart is one key source of survival – being happy. A major reason why Marley encourages the African to be happy in ‘One drop’ is that he knows ‘Jah’s never let us down’. Marley appeals to the higher authority of Jah to come to the rescue of the African so that he can still ‘raps’.

Following from the advice to be happy and enjoy the ‘One drop’ rhythm of reggae, Marley moves on to the eighth song of ‘Ride Natty Ride’ where he shows that no matter what Babylon does, the African would continue to ride in ‘storm’ or in ‘calm’. One passion that characterizes Marley’s belief in the collective rise of the African is espoused in his performance of ‘Ride Natty Ride’ in Santa Barbara in California in 1979. A few songs preceded ‘Ride Natty Ride’; Marley sings all these with his usual passion, with his guitar in hand and singing by a microphone stand. However, when it comes to ‘Ride Natty Ride’, he puts his guitar down, takes the microphone off the stand so he could move and dance freely, make use of the space on stage without hindrance from a guitar or a microphone stand. We also note that his removal of the microphone from the stand happens while he is already singing ‘Ride Natty Ride’, all these reveal the special attention, ‘conscious and deliberate’, that Marley has given to this song. The physical demonstration towards this song is without a doubt summed up in the survival theme of the African riding in ‘calm’ or ‘storm’. His reference to Biblical characters like Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and their survival in Babylon, as we saw earlier, is a forecast of the African’s

survival. A concrete example of Africa's survival is captured in the ninth song 'Ambush in the night' which narrates Marley's own escape or survival from death. If it happens in the case of Daniel and his companions and me, Marley suggests, it can happen in the case of all 'black survivors'.

In the light of all these troubles Africa faces, Africa can still 'Wake up and live' as the tenth and the final song of the album says. We note that this final song, 'Wake up and live', is the longest of all the songs of the album and intentionally made and placed as the final song. The durations of each song on 'Survival' ranges from the shortest of 2 minutes 55 seconds to 4 minutes 55 seconds – 'Wake up and live' being the longest in duration. This suggests that no matter the pressure from Babylon, the 'black survivors' must be happy by waking up to live, life must be enjoyed even amid troubles.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has revealed by multimodal analysis ways by which Bob Marley has projected the theme of survival in his 1979 album by the same name. Marley has employed visuals which encompass the design of the cover of the album to portray the theme of survival in 'Survival'. Besides, he has used some key literary devices such as allusion, and metaphor to portray this theme. Finally, Marley's choice of titles for his songs of this album as well as the position of each song on the album all form part of the conscious, deliberate and artistic use of music to encourage an oppressed people 'to wake up and live'.

9. SUGGESTION

As pointed out in this paper, a lot of work still needs to be done in the area of analyzing music as discourse. Attention should be given, therefore, to music in linguistic and literary analyses so as to close the huge gap that has been created over the years between music and other discourse types.

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