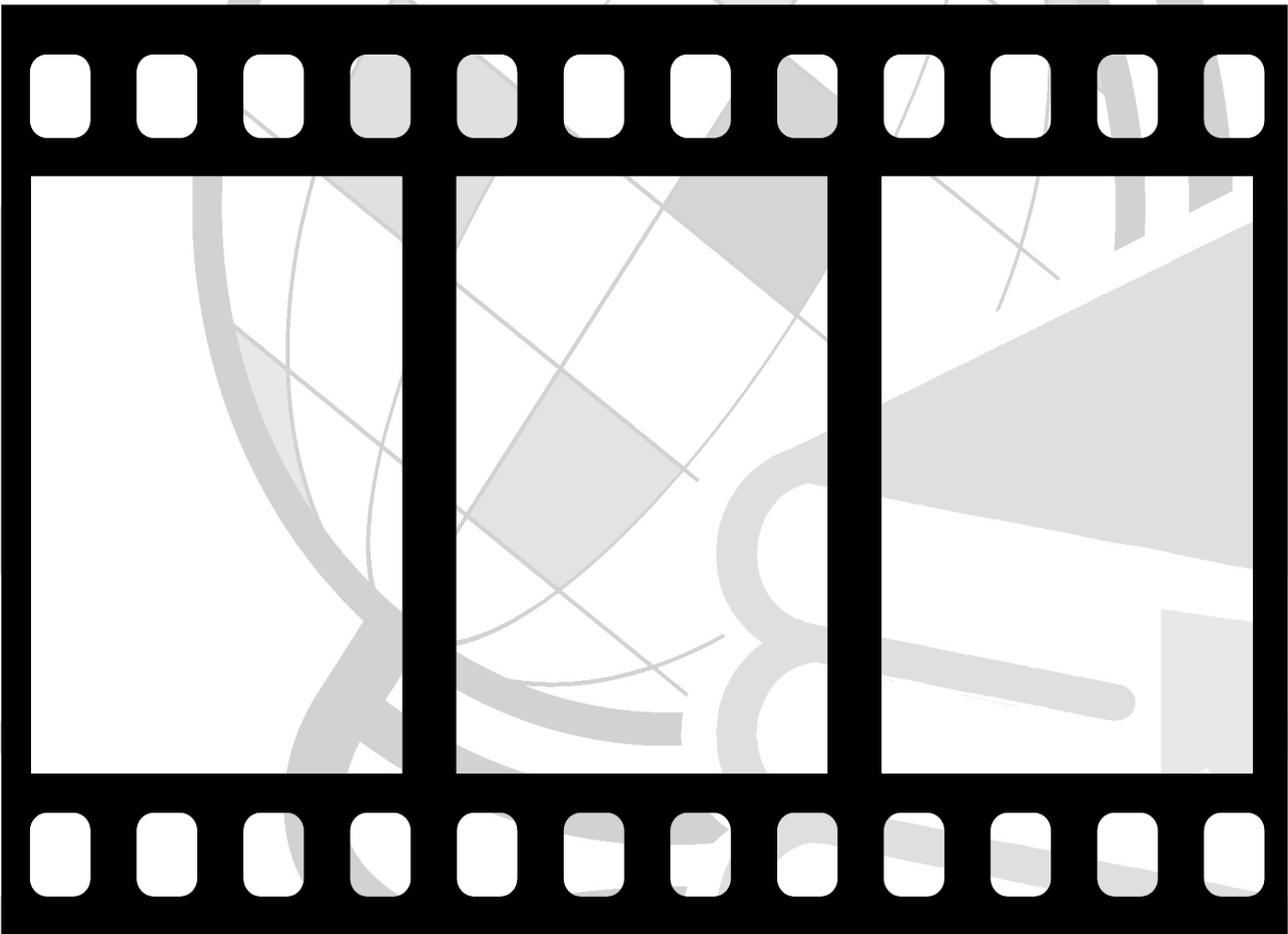


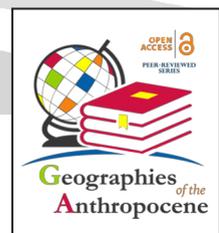
CINEMA, DISASTERS AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Enrico Nicosia, Lucrezia Lopez (Editors)



Foreword by David McEntire

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3. Countering Stereotypes in Jamaican Cinema as Discourse for the Anthropocene

Joshua Paul¹, Tomlin Paul²

Abstract

Jamaican cinema, as limited as it is, highlights the Anthropocene in a manner that emphasizes the limitations of a Third World society. Brian Clive Smith, political scientist, in his book *Understanding Third World Politics: Theories of Political Change and Development* (1996) identifies Third World countries as “a group of countries which have colonial histories and which are in the process of developing economically and socially from a status characterized by low incomes, dependence on agriculture, weakness in trading relations, social deprivation for large segments of society, and restricted political and civil liberties” (Smith, B.C. 1996, pg1) The examination of a nation that falls under this classification through the use of Anthropogenic theories becomes more important as not only is it necessary to look at the political and social underdevelopment, but also how this underdevelopment ties in with the natural ecology of the country. When identifying Anthropocene as a phenomenal discourse on a country such as Jamaica, critical emphasis should be placed on lack of socio-economic resources, excess urbanization, and rapid degradation of the ecological system through over-compensation for human survival.

Utilizing film director Perry Henzell’s 1972 film *The Harder They Come* as the main referential film for this analysis, we look at the subliminal portrayal of the Anthropocene Epoch and whether this is a relevant tenet within Caribbean cinema. The film focuses on the protagonist Ivanhoe "Ivan" Martin, played by notable reggae singer Jimmy Cliff, who migrates to the crowded inner city in search of life as an artist but instead falls into crime and gangsterism. The narrative is symbolic of Jamaica’s struggle as a post-colonial country, still reeling from European colonization and enslavement

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which from a socio-ecological framework, marked the beginning of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Cinema, Anthropocene, Jamaica, Post-colonial

1. Introduction

Within the Caribbean, Jamaica is seen as a cornerstone nation; the country stands out for many reasons, mostly its cultural impressions and how they have impacted the globe. Some of these elements include athletics - with dominance particularly in track and field and music - and references to one of the biggest global singers of all time -Bob Marley, exotic food, dance, and many other elements of a unique and intriguing culture. There is no doubt that the Jamaican brand is one of the most popular and enduring internationally. Despite the pull of tourists and the culture of “no problem”, Jamaica has struggled for decades in a post-colonial abyss of underdevelopment marked by low levels of economic growth and unacceptably high levels of crime. Jamaica has been often thought of as an ideal site for moviemaking and while a few films have been made on location over the years, Jamaica’s value in cinema and its contribution to the country’s development is yet to bear fruit. *The Harder They Come* (Henzell, 1972) is an appropriate film for use in this discussion as it is often regarded as one of the more significant films which have been made from Jamaica thus far. Part of this significance reigns from the relevance of the main star Jimmy Cliff at that time and his relevance to the reggae industry. The film itself underlines salient aspects of Jamaica’s infrastructure and the shortcomings within- all relevant material towards the Anthropocene conversation.

Grant Horner, associate professor of renaissance and reformation studies from Santa Clarita, California discusses the importance of film when highlighting culture. He places cinema within the categorization of a mechanism capable of deeper analysis and something which has the ability to spread a message across a wide range of audiences (Horner, 2010). Cinema in Jamaica, despite its slow growth, has struggled with its own identity in the portrayal of Jamaica as a natural paradise with enticing landscapes versus the harsh conditions of everyday life. This chapter analyses the struggle of the emergence of cinema in Jamaica as being caught in the effects of slavery and colonialization, factors which arguably are one of the roots of the Anthropocene (Lewis & Maslin, 2018). It will analyze the tradition of Jamaican cinema using Henzell’s *The Harder They Come* (1972) as the

proverbial lens through which we can look back and forward at the sociopolitical roots of the shared struggle for both society and cinema in Jamaica.

1.1. The Anthropocene considered

The environment in which we live has no doubt been influenced by human activity ranging from changes in the composition of the atmosphere and land surface. There is a sense that these changes are so significant that we are no longer in the Holocene Epoch but instead we have moved to the Anthropocene Epoch (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Crutzen, 2002; Zalasiewicz *et al.*, 2011). We are arguing here that mankind has had a significant impact on the earth's ecosystem; enough to label it as a new era, the Anthropocene.

The start date of the Anthropocene is debatable given the complexity of human existence and the heterogeneity of influences that are operating overtime. There are many different approaches to trying to locate when the Anthropocene actually began. These range from looking at the impact of fire (Glikson, 2013), pre-industrial farming (Ruddiman, 2013; Balter, 2013), industrial technologies (Zalasiewicz *et al.*, 2014), and socio metabolism (Fischer-Kowalski *et al.*, 2014). It is understood that no one theory or approach can fully explain the phenomenon. Taking the socio-ecological metabolism approach, changes in the use of land over time and related changes in land cover play a role in the global carbon cycle and impact Anthropogenic climate change (Brovkin *et al.*, 2004; Canadell *et al.*, 2007). In this respect, the European efforts at colonization and the transatlantic slave trade represent major socio-ecological disruptive forces that must be considered to an explanation of the Anthropocene.

In 1492, the Europeans arrived in the Caribbean with subsequent annexing of the Americas leading to the largest human population replacement in the past 13,000 years (Diamonds, 1997); that is, the establishment of global trade networks linking Europe, China, Africa, and the Americas (Mann, 2011). The Europeans coming to the Americas led to a large decline in the human population and changes in the flora and fauna of the region. Initially, the regional population was estimated at 54 million people which declined rapidly to a minimum of 6 million by 1650 (Denevan, 1992) due to diseases brought by the Europeans, war, enslavement, and famine (Kaplan *et al.*, 2011; Mann, 2011). This wholesale and complex assault on a population in their indigenous homeland, no doubt would have led to an irreparable process of social, cultural, and economic degradation.

There is a dearth of publications referencing the impact of 1492 and beyond as a direct stimulus for the Anthropocene. Seo (2020) in reference to Jamaica Kincaid's "A Small place", notes that the many sides of the Anthropocene are often obscured by a single holistic view. Kincaid's double gaze strategy highlights an expanded shape of the Anthropocene with Antigua's aboriginal and colonial acts of nature showing newly repeated sites of the neo-liberal era. The slow ongoing violence beyond 1492 and the era of enslavement are important considerations highlighting different facets of the Anthropocene. Jamaica, like Antigua as a small Caribbean Island with a fertile ecology, commonly referred to as the "land of wood and water", was at centre-stage in the colonization and enslavement debacle. Exploring Jamaica's experience in the Anthropocene through the vehicle of cinema brings synergy and at the same time an aspect of enlightenment to a local understanding of a global phenomenon.

1.2. The makings of Jamaican cinema

The early moving pictures in Jamaica date back to the colonial period when the West Indies Committee saw value in using the same to promote the colonies and encourage British and European settlement. The first moving pictures highlighting Jamaica and shot in Jamaica consisted of "a number of views in and around Kingston" (Jamaica Gleaner, 11 September 1901) filmed by an itinerant cameraman. A series of films were shot in 1901 to be released by the British Warwick Trading Company.

A scheme for advertising the colonies involved British photographer and cinematographer Alfred J. West who produced "a series of cinematograph, or moving, pictures" of "our life, industry and scenery" for "exhibition overseas." (Jamaica Gleaner, 26 March 1906). The Gleaner covered West's trip across Jamaica and reported his acquisition of moving pictures of "the magnificent scenery," "vegetable life in the locality," "the vegetable products of the island," and "the activities of life here," with the intention to display "what a magnificent opportunity the island presents" to potential investors and tourists (Jamaica Gleaner, 4 April 1906). West interestingly entitles his series "Westward Ho! Our Colonies (1906–1907)". This consisted of a series of travelogs, scenes, and phantom rides in twelve short films depicting Jamaican industries, sceneries, and "scenes of life." (Jamaica Gleaner, 6 October 1906). One major fact to note is the physical ecosystem's state in the pre-colonial era. The excess vegetation and lush, scenic greenery as aforementioned, can be deceptive if taken to indicate the minimal man-made

impact on the environment. However, at that time, the Europeans had already secured a strong foothold and were pursuing an expansion and consolidation of gains where the products of the local economy would be less applied to the development of the local population. By the 1930s, social conditions were so appalling in the colonies that the British were forced to set up major Commissions as a means of responding and placating the local population. These commissions and their subsequent interventions can be seen as indicators of underdevelopment that were enforced on the native people.

In an era of enlightened self-interest, the British colonial government saw Jamaica as an asset in which investments would return to the so-called motherland. But it is of note that even then Jamaica had enough of the lure and appeal to be seen as a marketable habitat for foreigners.

In the late 1920s with sound being introduced, filmmaking became more centralized and involved standard processes with studios. Most studios considered shooting on location too expensive and risky although it added realism. As such, location filming was more the remit of a result, location filming chiefly remained the domain of independent, low-budget producers who found studio rental more costly (Hozic, 2001, pp. 92-93).

Today we see many “moving pictures” in ads luring tourists to visit the island with the same goal of development and returns for those who govern. The irony is that after more than a century of promotion the country is no better off in terms of a sustainable economy. The European influx of 1492 and thereafter seems to have predicated a long sojourn of development malaise from which recovery carries a guarded prognosis.

The motives behind Jamaican cinema then and now are worthy of consideration and exploration in any discourse of Anthropocene with cinema as a metaphor. On the surface cinema operating as an art form brings its own rationale for existence and growth. That art form operating to entertain the population at another level is a deeper view tied to purpose and connected to a process of education and inspiration which are relevant to a developing post-colonial journey. Beyond this, cinema can represent protest and advocacy and a voice for change operating in a Freirean framework. Freire believed that education was a means to building a “critical consciousness” that would enable people to create change in their lives (Freire, 2000). Although his work did not speak to cinema, the extent to which Jamaica cinema has brought enlightenment and not just entertainment is at the heart of the discourse. Has the journey for Jamaica cinema been so intertwined with 1492 and enslavement that it itself has become a victim of these forces making it

impotent to address the Anthropogenic impact operating within the socio-ecological lens?

2. The “Harder they Come” as an Anthropogenic metaphor

The Jamaican film industry from an indigenous point of view started in 1972, with Perry Henzell’s feature film *The Harder They Come* being seen as a metaphor for Jamaica in this period (Ceccato, 2015) - young man and a young country, in search of freedom, wealth and independence, but also vibrant, full of energy, and “a bursting of creativity,” as Trevor Rhone the co-director defined it. The young man from rural Jamaica, Ivanhoe "Ivan" Martin (played by Jimmy Cliff) moves to the city of Kingston after his grandmother dies. His dream is really to become a music star although he is looking for work in the meantime with little success. He gets a single recorded and though the song is popular, he makes little money out of it as the record company has the upper hand. Caught in a difficult situation, Ivan turns to crime.

The narrative starts with Ivan living in rural Jamaica, making the decision to move to the urbanized Kingston city, in an attempt to look for work [to sustain himself] after the death of his grandmother. The film follows the struggles that Ivan faces whilst in the city and his slippery slope journey into gangsterism. One of the biggest aspects of the film which we can explore in correlation to the Anthropocene is urbanization. Jamaica is a small island with approximately 3 million in population. These numbers, matched with a surface area of 10,990 square kilometres, are inevitably growing more and more congested. Now the crux of the discussion is what does this congestion indicate? With the fast-growing number of persons residing in the city, we have an increasing demand for persons needing to be transported from one place to the next, increasing demand for persons to live and eat and a lot of these aspects of human survival come at a major cost to our ecological environment. The first two frames of our designated film highlight this. In the opening, we are introduced to beautiful, green vegetation, beaches, and the lushness of the unimpacted countryside that our protagonist drives across in a bus. Immediately, the director juxtaposes this with the harsh urbanized scenery of the city with limited greenery, a lot of motor vehicles, people selling products, and excess poverty also notably seen. The Anthropogenic nature of these issues regarding urbanization, congestion, and the negative effects of human beings on the environment stems from the systemic practices

of the Jamaican populace, further exacerbated by the lack of knowledge/resources and post-colonial stagnation.

Another point to note is that the congestion continues to extend towards the most recent times. Kingston as the capital city continues to grow not only in advanced architecture but also in population rate; this abundance of people has resulted in an excessive number of vehicles on the road, additional on-the-rise mining factories, and bigger farms and these elements are ultimately causing growing levels of deforestation, carbon emissions, soil erosion - all aspects that affect our environment. Climate change is now greatly evident based on rising temperatures, growing numbers of bushfires, and other natural disasters. Though our paper will look at the socioeconomic implications of a post-colonial era and how the history of the island has affected its people and quality of life pertaining to the Anthropocene Epoch, it is still quintessential to examine the physical elements that have been affected and how this is also shown on the silver screen. *The Harder They Come* as a benchmark film in the local industry showcases how the mass movement of persons to urban areas affects the ecology; also, it showcases how the move would affect a person's quality of life and mindset. This is one of the major aspects that will be discussed in this chapter as we look at the rise and fall of the protagonist of our respective films and his plummet into gangsterism which is a socio-economic issue [involving excess competition within the job market], these still all fall under the grand discussion of the Anthropocene.

3. Contesting and interpreting aesthetics of Jamaican cinema

The Harder They Come portrays the rough street life of Jamaica with poor living conditions, crime, and the daily hustle. Initially one sees the virginal Jamaican coastline, swept by rain and seemingly untouched moving to the tough entangling streets of West Kingston, where Ivan is shown the ropes of how to rip off his fellow brother. Despite the many films that had been shot on-site in Jamaica in the previous decades, this film is an important starting point for tracing the trajectory of the metamorphosis of Jamaican cinema. It was seen as the first true homegrown Jamaican film.

Many of the films since *The Harder They Come* have shown little experimentation with the aesthetic form of Henzell. Is there an aesthetic of Jamaican cinema? Jamaica's brand of reggae music and tropical island scenery has been an attraction to film makers over the decades and Henzell's portrayal of Jamaica, although representing a reality of life, has helped to cement an island life image of roughness and under development with the

daily hustle and hassles of street life. Without a thriving local film industry, local Jamaican theatre can be seen as a proxy vehicle for portraying the Jamaican film aesthetic. Many of the plays over the years have highlighted Jamaican life in ghetto-like communities with the “zinc fence” living conditions being the norm. At the same time the “zinc fence” is symbolic of lower-class experience in Jamaica and unfortunately has also been tainted with inner-city crime-riddled “bad boy” experiences. The aesthetic of the “bad boy” in Jamaican film prevails in this setting. The bad boy films such as Henzell’s *The Harder They Come* and Storm Saulter’s *Better Mus Come* (2011) are part of an emerging small group of films that explore Caribbean identity and history while located in a particular place.

One can argue that the “zinc fence” texture of Jamaican film represents a protest against the industry of mainstream Hollywood cinema with local filmmakers seeking cultural relevance and identity in what critics Ella Shohat and Robert Stam prominently discuss as “Third World Cinema” in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (1994).

This search for identity through cinema is one of the lasting streams of cultural interrogation with broad reach, that is important for a coming of age in Jamaican society. In this respect, cinema in Jamaica should be prioritised for development. The Jamaican Film Commission over decades has actively portrayed Jamaica as a film destination and in recent years has stepped up on projects aimed at developing local cinema although these efforts are small compared to what is really needed to stimulate and support wider development and impact.

With Jamaican cinema being seen on one hand as portraying the beauty of the “land of wood and water” and on the other hand, the perils of underdevelopment in scenes of poverty and strife, indigenous filmmakers must push against a tide of cultural scripting to bring novel creative streams to the screen. What should be the point of reference for a true Jamaican film script is debatable. While Henzell broke open the jar, there is still much to explore within the landscape of Jamaica’s repertoire of talent in arts, music, and sports. How this is portrayed is the thesis of anthropogenic analogy. The destructive impact on Caribbean indigenous life through European colonization and the ravages of enslavement has produced significant sociocultural regression that is far from any stage of reparation. What Henzell portrays on the reel is a real representation of the throbbing despair of the Jamaican experience. It is a moment in time that lies within the epoch of the Anthropocene. Henzell’s authenticity in cinema brings entertainment and enlightenment to the population but also creates a dilemma. If Jamaican cinema is itself to grow beyond the portrayal of “zinc fence” and “bad boy

gangsterism” and itself emerges from the impact of the Anthropocene on its own development, what should be the approach of filmmakers and the industry at large? How else can authenticity be derived for those who want to fly a Jamaican flag in cinema and not play to the tune of a neo-colonial presence still very much alive in Caribbean culture?

4. Cinema Representation beyond 1492 and the Postcolonial Era

In critiquing Jamaica’s post-colonial society, Warner (2000) notes in *The Harder they Come*, that “The flight of fantasy taken by the film’s hero is thus one with which many of its viewers could identify. The cinema scene became a virtual mirror.” At the same time in the 1970s Jamaica was already a consumer of many American Hollywood-type films bringing an alternative exposure and appreciation of cinema and its enlightenment. Moseley-Wood (2015) describes films such as “Harder they Come as “City Films” which privilege “the perspective of the underclass” and importantly relocate the representation of “postcolonial society” away from the elite and onto “the residents of ghetto spaces and others who have rejected or are unable to access traditional modes of social mobility”. *The Harder They Come* can also be seen as characterizing the fantasies of escape which Mason discusses as the need to transcend entrapment and escape certain types of “dominant” space. These authors make the point that cinema is an important art form in society with the power to dissect, analyze and speak to society. The Anthropocene is in need of cinema to analyze and articulate such a complex phenomenon that transcends disciplines. What better art form than cinema with the capacity to bring together all the appeals and dramatizations to tell the story of the Anthropocene. Not simply as a documentary but in the fullness of expression as Henzell did in 1972. There are many perspectives and views on a story. Scores of movies have been made depicting the horror of the Jewish holocaust. Yet the closet is bare for movies on Caribbean exploitation and the resulting Anthropocene.

The stereotyping and counter-stereotyping seen in the protracted genesis of Jamaican cinema is a necessary case study in the Anthropocene. Jamaica’s underdevelopment and “struggle in the periphery (Manley, 1983) like most of the Caribbean, can be traced to slavery and colonialism.

Geography professor Kathryn Yusoff (2018) in “A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None” argues that predominantly white geologists and geographers need to acknowledge that Europeans decimated indigenous and minority populations whenever so-called progress occurred. She defines the

start of the human planet as the period of colonisation marked by the spread of deadly diseases such as smallpox and transatlantic slavery. In the Caribbean, the arrival of Columbus followed by the deliberate persistent process of eliminating the socioecological arrangements of the original inhabitants were precursors to globalization and the generation of capital to produce the destructive and anthropogenic effects of industrialization (Davis and Todd, 2017). Jamaica has been caught in this web of causation.

What can be seen in analyzing the decolonial work of the Caribbean, particularly that of Glissant is how to make sense of its history of a people who were translocated through human trafficking and then faced tremendous abuse of enslavement. In describing the dilemma of the Caribbean, J. Michael Dash (1989, p. 32) (the translator of Glissant's Caribbean Discourse): says "The Caribbean, in general, suffers from the phenomenon of non-history. No collective memory, no sense of chronology...." This sense of non-history is a symptom of Anthropogenic malaise and creative atrophy. Jamaican cinema has also fallen victim to this phenomenon with its own demonstration. As an industry, film is still largely viewed as a means of getting investment from the US and Europe. No different than the early days of the colonial government using "moving pictures" to woo Europeans to come to settle in Jamaica.

In the Caribbean context of 'non-history,' Glissant speaks of two types of identity – "root identity" versus "relation identity", the latter referring to connections to some systems of relation (Glissant, 1989, 1997). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) notes that the decolonial movements and initiatives have produced very rich vocabularies inclusive of terms such as radical black tradition, racial capitalism, black feminism, black power, Rastafarianism, dismemberment, remembering, decoloniality, epistemologies of the South to decolonial turn' (p. 47). He sees these as concepts "developed in the struggle" and representing an expansive decolonial archive and thought. Walter D. Mignolo (2000) sees these concepts as the intersection of "local histories" with "global designs". Such thinking provides some epistemological referencing to an application of cinema and the Anthropocene.

The Harder They Come can be seen as enriched with the symbolism of the wider black struggle though not portraying an organised and structured movement but more a literal struggle of the black man. Burton (1975) notes that "*Ivan is—and Ivans are—everywhere that economic and cultural oppression breed them.*" There is much content in this Anthropocene era for Caribbean cinema to find its identity. In fact, the very era provokes an urgency for this to be contemplated if only to find meaning and impetus for progress and development. There may be, as Glissant suggests, different

streams of identity branching around “roots” and “relations”. But without such consideration, there is likely to be very little meaningful contribution made to society or less on enlightenment as opposed to entertainment.

5. Reflection and Conclusion

What then should be the response of Jamaican cinema to the current epoch where humanity has become a significant and dominant geophysical force? Given that most films produced since *The Harder They Come* have mirrored Henzell, “following its example, appropriating some themes and technical devices and adapting them to the changing times to reach the same goal” (Ceccato, 2015), one can argue that Jamaican cinema is caught in the same Anthropocene warp of effects as society itself: that of underdevelopment and stagnation. If cinema is not to be seen as a victim of the Anthropocene but part of the solution then its view has to go beyond a past and a future and pivot to a more wholistic embrace, an acknowledgment, and appreciation of the roots of this epoch. And then what? Will it have the position, power, and purse to re-program and move beyond 1972?

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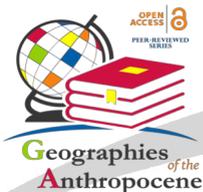
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The Anthropocene concept identifies a geological era in which human action leads to changes on a planetary scale with long-term irreversible effects. This volume collects insights into geographical research, with a specific look at the challenges of the future, and the potential of visual communication offered by cinema, documentaries and television series. In fact, fiction could represent the appropriate medium to examine the notions of the Anthropocene, being a language of global diffusion and highly evocative since it uses the engagement of narration and entertainment to convey messages of vital importance, arousing emotions in the viewer, shared awareness and, finally, responsibility. In the Anthropocene era, the challenge of climate change is not a problem of science but a failure of politics. And politics fails because the Great Acceleration has led to the good life and certainly a better life for people everywhere. Who is willing to give up the great stuff of the Great Acceleration? What would that new life look like? What kind of challenges does the future propose? Some of these questions, among others, are raised in the chapters of the present volume. The different geographical contexts and approaches, here collected, can play an important clarifying function, to reduce the complexity of (today's) social, economic, political, and technological reality, presenting a much deeper vision of reality than it appears to us, and at the same time offering us the means to navigate it. Thus, the volume deals with these issues in three sections, moving from narrative methods to the representation of ecological disasters and finally analysing a more specific topic.

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