Peter Tosh (1944–1987), was among the Reggae artistes of Jamaican descent whose influence was felt globally between 1976 and 1987. He was a contemporary of Robert (Bob) Marley and Neville Livingston (Bunny Wailer) with whom he played together as a group called “The Wailers” from the 1960s until their breakup in 1974. When they were together as a group, their experiences as black men in the Jamaican society, most especially on racism, poverty and underdevelopment, shaped their thoughts in using music as a means of social change. For Peter Tosh in particular, when he became a solo artist in 1976, his lyrics bore imprints of militancy until his violent death in 1987. The story of Peter Tosh as recounted here, is the story of Jamaica and Africa. It is a story embedded in the immortal words of Desmond Tutu to the effect that Nations are built through sharing experiences, memories, a history. That is why people have often tried to destroy their enemies by destroying their histories, their memories, that which gives them an identity².

As an African, Peter Tosh expressed clearly and defiantly, Africa’s deepest emotions as the most alienated and tormented continent in the world. He traced Africa’s problems to the Atlantic Slave Trade. His reasons for saying this were that the trade foreshadowed the alienation, poverty, marginality and racism which faced his forebears and him from the era of the plantation economy in Jamaica to independence in 1962. Against this background, Peter Tosh used his lyrics, his stage performances and press interviews as platforms to convey his deep seated animosity of the “Shistem” (his popular parlance) which had kept his black brothers down over the years. Consequently, in the words of George Santayana, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”².

He was born as Winston Hubert McIntosh on October 19, 1944. When he was born, his father, James McIntosh who was a preacher in a local church had abandoned him and mother as a result of hardship. So the young Peter grew up under the mother’s tutelage in his village until they migrated to Kingston in 1960 at a time of great hardship in the island³.
Peter Tosh was a militant Reggae artist whose debut in 1976, through an album entitled, Legalize It, brought him both fame and notoriety. His fans called the album, “marijuana anthem” because he called for the legalization of Indian hemp whereas the government of Jamaica, threatened by such a call, constantly harassed him throughout his life time.

He was killed on September 11, 1987 by Dennis Lobban, regarded as his friend in an apparent attempt to rob him. Since his death and that of Bob Marley, scholars and other publicists have eulogized the latter as the world’s greatest Reggae superstar but, have, ignored Peter Tosh. While it was quite true to stress that Bob Marley spread the message of Rastafarianism and Pan Africanism, through his band, “The Wailers”, Peter Tosh who had played alongside him for many years, did the same through his band, “Word, Sound and Power”. The main difference between the duo was their approach in spreading this message.

Bob Marley plied his trade with caution apparently to forestall any further assassination attempt on him as was done in 1976 while Peter Tosh had no scruple for pacifism because music must reflect the mood of the society one lives in. Consequently, he was more purposeful and aggressive than Bob Marley and as a result of this; he is called an African ideologue in this paper.

His image as an African ideologue can be gleaned from his insistence on being called an African; his religious proclivity was embedded in Rastafarianism, as against Christianity. (Bob Marley although a Rastafarian, was baptized in a Church prior to his death). Tosh advocated the legalization of Indian Hemp (years before Bob Marley released Kaya). Between 1976 to 1987, he took the stage, musically as an African spokesman against injustice and oppression. He also spoke for the liberation of the areas of the continent then under colonial rule. He expressed these views in his major albums namely: Legalize It (1976), Equal Rights (1977), Bush Doctor (1978), Mystic Man (1979), Wanted, Dread And Alive (1981), Mama Africa (1983), Captured Live (1984) and No Nuclear War (1987).

Peter Tosh Background to His Career
Peter Tosh’s antecedents as an African ideologue had a long history within Jamaica and Africa. Long before he was born as he recounted in Mama Africa, Jamaica, his birth place had had series of contacts with mainland Africa through slavery.

The island during the era of the Atlantic Slave Trade was the hub of African slaves on arrival from the Middle Passage prior to their sale and distribution to the plantations of the New World. In 1838, slavery was abolished