

# JUMPING NYAHBINGHI YOUTHS LOCAL ARTICULATIONS OF ROOTS REGGAE MUSIC IN A RASTAFARIAN DANCEHALL IN CAPE TOWN

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## ABSTRACT

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The Rastafarian movement has experienced fast growth during recent years in South Africa and especially in the province of Western Cape. This article examines this process through an ethnographic account of a weekly reggae dancehall event held by the Rastafarian Marcus Garvey community in the township of Philippi in Cape Town. During the course of three months of fieldwork the author investigated how recorded Jamaican dancehall music is used in the community and how it is articulated to different Rastafarian identifications within the dancehall space. Several scholars of Rastafari have suggested that contemporary Jamaican dancehall music has had theological impact on the Rastafarian movement, particularly outside of the Caribbean. The article provides an empirical contribution to these discussions by demonstrating that Rastafarians in the Marcus Garvey community have made significant innovations both theologically and musically in relation to their Jamaican counterparts, reorienting contemporary Jamaican popular music as a spiritual practice linked to religious purity norms informed by an international Rastafarian organization, the Nyabinghi Order. As a result Jamaican dancehall music is taking a central position in various moral negotiations within the Marcus Garvey community.

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Keywords: Rastafari, localization, ethnography, Jamaican dancehall music, ethnic identity

### *Introduction<sup>1</sup>*

Rastafari is a religious and social movement and a way of life, which is centered on the belief in the divinity of the late Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie. The movement emerged in the 1930s among the Jamaican black population, initially comprising small urban groups under the charismatic leadership of older preachers. It spread internationally in the 1970s due to the breakthrough of Rastafarian reggae artists in the global music markets and was subsequently localized in different contexts around the world. In this process, recorded music has been central in forming both imagined and personal links binding the international Rastafarian community together. Recently, scholars have acknowledged that contemporary Jamaican reggae artists, such as Sizzla, Capleton and Jah Cure, have

been in the forefront of new theological and stylistic developments within the movement, holding a specific charismatic authority within it (Bernard 2012; Hope 2009; Stanley Niaah & Niaah 2009). However, no detailed empirical analysis has been conducted on the ways in which the authority of Jamaican vocal stars functions outside of Jamaica in contemporary Rastafarian communities and the religious use their music possibly might have in these contexts.

In order to contribute to these theoretical discussions, the current article provides an ethnographic case study of a Rastafarian reggae dancehall in Cape Town in the province of Western Cape in South Africa. The account is based on three months of fieldwork in 2013 in Cape Town where the aim was to document Rastafarian reggae culture and to examine how recorded Jamaican popular music is performed and localized in this specific South African Rastafarian community. In Cape Town and in the surrounding province of Western Cape, the Rastafarian movement has been growing rapidly during the last decades and a number of scholars have recently analyzed the movement from various perspectives (Becker & Dastile 2008; Chawane 2008, 2012; Lennox 2010, 2012; Bain 2003; see also a journalistic account by Tolsi 2011). These authors have suggested that economically and socially marginalized youths from the urban underclasses are especially drawn to the movement in the area. They have further noted that reggae festivals and dancehalls are one of the core social institutions for Rastafarians in Western Cape, and that the majority of Rastafarians have been attracted to the movement through music although reggae events are frequented by non-Rastafarians as well as they are more inclusive than explicitly religious Rastafarian ceremonies (Chawane 2008: 138–142, 2012).

During fieldwork, I ultimately selected a Rastafarian neighborhood named Marcus Garvey in the predominantly African<sup>2</sup> township of Philippi as a principal site of ethnographic investigation. At the time, the neighborhood consisted of around 100 Rastafarian households and was one of the main Rastafarian centers in Cape Town. I observed the weekly reggae dancehall event in the Marcus Garvey community hall for approximately one and a half months and interviewed both the selectors—a term which, in reggae terminology, refers to disc jockeys—and local residents and patrons. The event was organized by a sound system group named Triple Crown Sound System, which at the time of my fieldwork consisted of three selectors and a shifting number of more irregular members. The main selector of the group, King Yellow, became a key person for my research in Marcus Garvey, and I will examine the community and its dancehall events primarily through his personal history and work as a selector.

The term ‘dancehall’ can refer both to a contemporary genre of Jamaican popular music (Cooper 2004) or to a performance context featuring recorded reggae music (Henriques 2011; Stolzoff 2000). In this article, I differentiate the term by using ‘dancehall’ to refer to the mediated performance context and ‘dancehall genre’ or ‘dancehall music’ to the musical style. The historical roots of Jamaican dancehall culture extend beyond the era of recorded music and deep into colonial history, during which African slaves appropriated Western musical instruments and styles. Ever since then dancehalls have been sites where transnational black identity has been constructed outside of the immediate reach of colonial hegemonies. Simultaneously, they have been sites of recurring battles over cultural values and meanings resulting in different, mutually contradictory, notions of gender, ethnicity, tradition and religion. The co-existence of Rastafarian religious messages with

lyrics celebrating gun violence and hedonistic lifestyles in these spaces has been one of the tensions that the selectors have had to negotiate in the performances (Cooper 2004; Stolzoff 2000; Hope 2009).

In historical accounts of Jamaican popular music, Rastafarian religious themes are commonly attributed to the roots reggae genre and its golden age of the 1970s instead of dancehall music, which is often seen as characterized by more mundane lyrics. Besides this lyrical difference, roots reggae is often associated with live performance and conceptualized through musicological characteristics, such as offbeat ostinato. These genre boundaries were blurred, however, when several artists with Rastafarian convictions emerged in dancehall music in the 1990s (Veal 2007: 185–195). The Triple Crown group is also negotiating these genre differences by playing almost exclusively contemporary and electronically produced Jamaican dancehall music, but at the same time identifying themselves with roots reggae. This is because they saw the label not as a musically defined category, but as an ideological category for all kinds of Jamaican music that fit the religious framework of the indigenous Rastafarian movement, where, for example, alcohol consumption is taboo. By framing their music in this manner, the selectors sought to negotiate the potential ideological differences between Jamaican dancehall culture and localized Rastafarian spirituality in South Africa. I use the term ‘roots reggae’ in this emic meaning, contextualizing this ideological position of the selectors in detail in the course of the article.

To analyze the construction of the ideological category of roots reggae from mediated Jamaican popular music and the social negotiations it entails in the dancehall space, I use the concept of articulation as described by Stuart Hall (Slack 1996) and Richard Middleton (1985). According to Hall, articulation refers, in the most basic sense, to the ability to make discursive phenomena comprehensible in their immediate context, which entails combining separate discursive elements. This desired result is, however, open to contestation and subsequent re-articulations. Such articulations, like for example Rastafarian identifications in dancehall music, are thus not born out of conscious individual or artistic activity, but formed in negotiation with, and as a part of larger social processes. According to Middleton, possibilities for musical articulations are not tied by factors of social class, gender and race, but they are still profoundly affected by these variables and at the same time construct and reproduce social identifications.

In line with Middleton’s argument, several authors have observed that Rastafarian reggae has contributed to the formation of new racial consciousness in colonial and postcolonial societies around the world. According to these authors, roots reggae has had special appeal for ethnic groups who have been positioned as racial others and underclasses in a similar manner to the black population in Jamaica (Alvarez 2008; Savishinsky 1994; Jaffe & Sanderse 2010). In South Africa, several scholars have observed a parallel process where different shifting racial identifications and demarcations have been constructed through Afro-American popular culture throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century by various actors and communities (Erlmann 1999; Coplan 1985). This study contributes to these research traditions by demonstrating how young South Africans construct intersecting religious, class and ethnic identifications with Jamaican Rastafarian music.

Most of the existing research has offered descriptions of South African Rastafarians in the context of national history and urban migration, without exploring in depth their

relationship to Jamaican popular culture (Chawane 2008 & 2012; Lennox 2010 & 2012; Bain 2003; Philander 2012). I argue that in this case Rastafarians in the Marcus Garvey community have not only localized or imagined belonging to a global Rastafarian community with dancehall music, but have also made significant theological and musical innovations in the use of dancehall music in relation to their Jamaican counterparts. Innovative local black cultural forms constructed from Afro-American popular music have been common in Southern Africa and these types of appropriations have deeply rooted histories in the area (Erlmann 1999; Coplan 1985). Consequently, several scholars of the Rastafarian movement have called for empirical accounts of this type of Rastafarian cosmopolitanism in locations outside the Jamaican diaspora in order to understand the current developments and the transnational nature of the movement (Yawney 1995; Wittman 2011).

*South African Rastafarians and transnational religious exchange across the Black Atlantic*

Rastafari was born in the Caribbean from a history of black resistance and cross-fertilization between protestant Christianity and African ritual practices. According to Barry Chevannes (1994), an indigenous form of Christianity, called Revival Zion, provided the root from which the Rastafarian movement emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Jamaica Revival Zion was initiated as a part of larger movement of Revivalism in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, when a variety of new religious movements emerged on the island, drawing from both Christianity and African ritual practices and beliefs. Revival Zion groups, which broke away from the protestant mission churches, were typically centered on individual prophets and preachers, and often featured belief in a reincarnated black Christ. Rastafarians made a definite break with Revivalism in the 1930s by abandoning the outpouring of spirit in the form of spirit possession and glossolalia. Despite this, internal organization based on the prophetic charisma of male elders and the theology of a black Christ were carried over from the earlier Revivalism to the Rastafarian movement.

As Chevannes (1994) notes in his work, Revivalism was not an isolated or exclusively local phenomenon. The development of distinctive African Christianity from mission churches also took place as parallel development in South Africa, where the so-called Zionist and Ethiopian Churches split away from the protestant mission churches in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century to produce charismatic churches that shared theological similarities with the Jamaican Revival Zion, such as the authority of individual prophets and beliefs in a black Christ. In the context of apartheid South Africa, these indigenous churches grew as major religious forces in black homelands and townships, with their explicit aversion to white Christianity (Muller 1999; Comaroff 1985; Sundkler 1961). In Jamaica, their development took a different turn when most Revival groups were assimilated into Christian Pentecostal churches and to the early Rastafarian movement in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the shared religious developments in these two colonial locations, the Rastafarian movement did not spread from Jamaica to South Africa until the global spread of reggae music in the early 1970s. During the 1970s and 1980s, Jamaican roots reggae lyrics often spoke directly to black South Africans, addressed the country's political

situation and advocated pan-African consciousness. Rastafari was not, however, initiated in the country as an organized movement during the 1970s and 1980s, but rather existed as a subculture, mostly among young black men (Chawane 2012). Despite this, Midas Chawane (2012; see also Savishinsky 1994) has argued that Jamaican reggae had religious connotations for South African youth, even at this early stage, which seem to have been built around pre-existing South African charismatic traditions, since the adherents had little knowledge of Rastafarian theology outside of reggae music. Because of restricted entry to the country, and the international cultural boycott, South African Rastafarians did not generally have direct contact with the Jamaican movement during the apartheid era. As a result, religious institutions central to the movement in Caribbean were rarely known or practiced in South Africa during these early years of the movement. Indeed, the first research on South African Rastafarians by Gerhardus Oosthuizen in 1986 mentions that Rastafarians at that time could hold a number of different beliefs derived from reggae music, for example a faith in the divinity of Bob Marley (Chawane 2012). In line with Chawane's arguments many of my interviewees remembered how Marcus Garvey dancehall sessions were regarded as the 'church' at a time when they were not yet aware of Rastafarian religious liturgies.

The nature of the South African Rastafarian movement changed after Independence in 1994 when the borders of South Africa opened to foreign Rastafarians and reggae artists. Direct connections between South African and Jamaican Rastafarians were formed and the movement was more formally organized in the Western Cape (Chawane 2012). Carole Yawney (1994, 1995) has demonstrated how, in the 1990s, the older Rastafarians holding authority within the Jamaican movement became concerned about their own position in the global perspective because the movement had spread so rapidly across the globe with reggae music that it was about to lose its structure, previously centered on the authority of the Jamaican elders. As a result, Jamaican Rastafarians organized missionary activities throughout the 1990s, which aimed to strengthen the global links between Rastafarians, and were also extended to South Africa, where a substantial indigenous Rastafarian movement already existed.

In the Western Cape, the most active group in these campaigns has been a Rastafarian sect called the Nyabinghi Order which is, both internationally and locally, the most influential Rastafarian organization, even though most Rastafarian individuals prefer to remain outside strict organizational membership. The order has its origins in groups of young Jamaican ascetic Rastafarians, called the Dreadlocks, who started to promote spiritual revival and religious orthodoxy within the movement in the 1950s. This was done by rejecting what they saw as the influence of spirits, which included practices such as lighting candles for ancestors or spirits (Chevannes 1994: 145–170; Homiak 1995). As a result, the Nyabinghi groups introduced their own regular Rastafarian ceremonies, called Nyabinghis or Grounations, to the movement in the early 1950s by drawing influence from a number of older Afro-Jamaican folk rituals and musical forms. Nyabinghi ceremonies emerged as overnight sessions of drumming, preaching, dancing, praying and sacramental use of cannabis, and are currently the main collective gatherings of the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica and in the Western Cape, also attended by Rastafarians who are not formal members of the Order (Bilby & Leib 2012).

Besides ritual gatherings, the Nyabinghi Order developed a set of bodily norms of purity, often referred to as *livity*, where the ideal is to adhere to the taboos of the Old Testament and avoid violence to living beings, and the use of industrially manufactured products. In addition, social contacts with menstruating women are often seen as impure, and this practice, together with other purity norms, has led to the enclosing of female spaces and tight gender roles in the order (Rowe 1998). The introduction of Nyabinghi livity represented a significant break with the older Rastafarian practice where, for example, slaughtering animals during religious gatherings was still commonplace in the late 1950s. Livity is often, however, adapted to individual circumstance and few Rastafarians are able to follow these ideals consistently (Chevannes 1994: 145–170; Homiak 1995).

The original founders of the Jamaican Nyabinghi Order, such as Ras Boanerges, made several visits to Cape Town in the mid 1990s which had significant impact in the area: the religious regulations and ceremonies of the Nyabinghi Order were widely adopted, and Rastafarians started to organize religious ceremonies according to the Nyabinghi model. Today, weekly Nyabinghi ceremonies are held in the Marcus Garvey neighborhood, where the ceremony closely follows the patterns described by scholars of the Jamaican movement (Chevannes 1994: 145–170; Bilby & Leib 2012). Although my main interest lay with dancehall activities in the community, I visited these ceremonies briefly during the Coronation<sup>3</sup> festivities. King Yellow remembered Ras Boanerges expressing the opinion that reggae music was impure for Nyabinghi Rastafarians during his visit to Cape Town, but the Marcus Garvey community and individual Rastafarians seem to have largely ignored Boanerges' contempt for reggae, because, after all, the music seems to have been for many the initial source of attraction to the movement. Thus dancehalls continue to be key institutions for the movement in Cape Town even today, though debates are waged between Rastafarians on what type of reggae is morally and spiritually acceptable for Rastafarians.

### *Marcus Garvey Community and the Rastafarian movement in Western Cape*

The recent growth of the Rastafarian movement in the Western Cape has been attributed to the steady growth of urban informal settlements in Cape Town as well as to the feelings of dispossession among the Coloured population, who comprise a significant segment of Cape Town's inhabitants. Olivier Lennox (2010, 2012) has argued that Rastafarian reggae has provided the growing numbers of urban poor in the Western Cape area with a new political language and consciousness. Lennox's study, as well as the rest of the existing research on Rastafarians in the Western Cape, has dealt specifically with its Coloured majority whose adoption of Rastafarian consciousness has involved the renouncement of the label 'Coloured' in favor of African Khoisan identity as a claim for indigenous identity (on indigenous identities and reggae see also Alvarez 2008). Various Khoisan groups were the indigenous inhabitants of Western Cape before the arrival of the Dutch settlers in 1652, but they were later largely forcefully assimilated and classified into the Afrikaans-speaking Coloured population of the colony during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Capetonian Rastafarians consider the label Coloured a colonial term, which is seen to deny the African roots of this population with a mixed ethnic ancestry (see also Bain 2003: 48–54).

Alongside the critique of the Coloured label, Rastafarians have continued to interpret the new South Africa as a 'demoncratic' state, which does not recognize their rights as an ethnic and religious minority. From the perspective of the municipality, the use of cannabis as a part of Rastafarian religious practices has been especially problematic. Lennox (2012: 55–65) quotes Rastafarian elders, who see the question of cannabis as fundamental to their identity as Rastafarians. The South African Rastafarians have likened their struggle for recognition with the radical political black conscious thought of the anti-apartheid struggle (Bain 2003: 41–54). I observed that this school of political thought was more prevalent among Rastafarians from African ethnic backgrounds, where individuals preferred continuity with these black movements instead of designating themselves Khoisans. My research participants explained to me that Rastafarians from African backgrounds, especially the first generation, generally attempted to make a break from their families and from what they saw as the tribal identities of the apartheid state by embracing Pan-African philosophies and by adopting Rastafarian 'dread-talk language' derived from English as their mutual means of communication instead of vernacular Bantu languages (see also Chawane 2008: 153–180). Scholars have noticed a similar tendency among Rastafarian converts in West Africa, who seek to distance themselves from specific tribal ethnicities (Savishinsky 1994; Middelton 2006; Wittman 2011).

In the Western Cape, the Rastafarian's struggle for religious rights has been closely connected with land rights issues (Lennox 2012). Rastafarians in Cape Town often stated to me that their goal is to attain grounds for both their religious rituals and for self-sustainable living, ideals which held a specific significance in Cape Town's informal settlements, since most of these communities have been erected as squatter settlements on municipality land. Conflicts over squatted land have sometimes escalated into open violent conflicts between the Rastafarians and the police, according both to news archives (Barnes 2008; Tolsi 2011; Nicholson 2008) and to the memories of my research participants. The Marcus Garvey neighborhood has been at the center of these struggles.

The community was first established in the late 1980s as a squatter commune on municipality-owned land in the woods on the outskirts of the city in Philippi by Rastafarians of African Xhosa background who had originally arrived in Cape Town as migrants from the rural areas of the economically deprived province of Eastern Cape. The commune was enmeshed in a struggle for land rights with the municipality throughout the 1990s. In 1998 the police finally invaded the area, razed the community structures, and the Marcus Garvey area was designated an open residential area in which Rastafarians were offered free government flats as compensation for the destruction of their informal settlements. Thus, the Rastafarian community continued to exist alongside the new residents. Currently, Marcus Garvey is no longer an isolated commune in the wilderness, but a part of a growing residential area which has remained a destination for new Rastafarian and non-Rastafarian migrants mainly from Xhosa backgrounds. Consequently, the community is a combination of formal and informal township areas where various social problems are on the rise. Despite this, the Marcus Garvey community is still a central gathering place for Rastafarians from around the metropolitan area during the religious festivities and the weekly dancehall events.

*'Going across the road'—A short biography of a Rastafarian reggae selector*

The leading selector of the Triple Crown Sound System, King Yellow, was born in 1972 and grew up in what he describes as a secular, middle-class Coloured family in the township areas of Cape Flats nearby the Marcus Garvey community. In the early 1990s, he experienced a strong conversion to the Rastafarian way of life during a time when he was also involved in anti-apartheid politics as a member of local Students' Representative Council. He explained vividly how this conversion happened gradually through his interest in cannabis, through which he made his initial contacts with Rastafarians, who used the substance alongside reggae music in their religious gatherings:

I grew up in a middle-class family. Not a very religious family, but we had our own plumbing business since 1953 I think. So I grew up in a very good home. (...) I have an elder brother, who is an alcoholic (...) So alcohol never ever appealed to me. I used just herb.<sup>4</sup> Just herb, but never used cigarettes. Then thinking where would get the best herbs? (...) I am sure it would be the Rastas! In our neighborhood, (...) literally a road separates middle class from lower class, you've seen it yourself? So you go across that road and you find the ghettos that there is the Rastas! I'n'I<sup>5</sup> just went across and went to check the rastas out! (...) I think this was 1990 ja! 1990 or 1991 (...) It intrigued me so much. And then I just started, because it was not far from my house, after that day I kept on coming back. Every day they just used to open the Bible and talk to me and obviously play the sound... (King Yellow 2013)

It becomes clear in King Yellow's account that the Rastafarians represented a lower social class in relation to his parents' family, and that he sees his class allegiance shifting from 'middle-class' to the side of 'the ghetto' when he 'went across' and adopted an identity as a Khoisan Rastafarian instead of a Coloured. In the apartheid ideologue, Africans were below Coloureds in the social hierarchy, and maintenance of the Coloured classification required a certain social distance from African ethnic groups. Pauline Bain (2003: 48–54) observed that, because of this, for many Rastafarians from Coloured backgrounds the adoption of signifiers of African ethnicity, for example in the form of dreadlocks, often meant a break away from their initial Coloured communities.

Soon after this first contact with Rastafarians, King Yellow encountered the Marcus Garvey community and eventually moved in and became a resident for several years, thereby transgressing apartheid residential laws by living as a person classified as Coloured in a designated African area. At the time, he was the sole Khoisan Rastafari in this predominantly Xhosa neighborhood. In addition to this ethnic difference, King Yellow was also one of the few Rastafarians in the commune from a middle-class background, something which had been a factor enabling him to acquire and maintain sound system equipment, which is financially out of reach for the vast majority of Capetonian Rastafarians. King Yellow often conceptualized himself as culture breaker or a mediator occupying a third position between Khoisan and Xhosa ethnicities, which he clearly distinguishes as separate groups existing in the Rastafarian movement:

Sometimes I just stand in the dance and I'll look around and check that I am the only person who is not Xhosa or... I am the only Khoi-person here. It's strange, but it's not strange. This is who I am, you know (...) You get a lot of racist wars here in the Rasta community also (...) Me, that's why I went to live in Marcus Garvey to break that barrier... (King Yellow 2013)



Because of his good command of both Afrikaans and English, he was also actively involved in negotiations with the municipality over the land right issues of the Marcus Garvey community. After the government decision to open the area for other residents, however, he left the community with his family because of what he felt was its ghettoization within the swiftly growing urbanization. Meanwhile, he continued to run the weekly dancehall in the community hall for which he has been responsible since the mid 1990s—as a social and spiritual mission, as he described it. During my fieldwork, he was selecting with two younger ‘apprentices’, King Themba and Ras Acha, who had arrived in Cape Town as migrants from Zimbabwe.

As a senior and committed Rastafarian, King Yellow occupies a position in the council of Nyabinghi Order elders, who are the religious authorities and leaders of the community. In addition to his middle position between ethnic identifications, he also occupies a sensitive middle position between religious and musical cultures by being both a religious authority in the Nyabinghi movement and the leading reggae selector in the community. His Rastafarian name ‘Yellow’ can be seen to reflect this position, since it carries association with the Jamaican dancehall world through its similarity with the moniker of the Jamaican albino vocalist Yellowman, who was known in the 1980s and 1990s especially for his sexually explicit lyrics. Yellowness can also be seen to describe the lighter skin complexion of King Yellow in the predominantly African neighborhood. Despite these middle positions, or perhaps because of them, he had been apparently successful in building the community dancehall event, which during my fieldwork was one of the most prominent events in the township reggae circuit of Cape Town.

*The case of the mystical power cuts in the Marcus Garvey dancehall*

Suddenly, electricity goes off in the dance. The hall is now pitch black. Music and lights are out and I start to feel anxious. This is my first night in this part of the Cape Town, and all the warnings of my white friends start to echo in my head. There are maybe two hundred people in the community hall, but everybody is surprisingly silent, even though there is some quiet mumbling and complaints from the front row. One of my contact persons in the community, a local Rastafarian vocal artist, suggests that we should go outside to wait for the problem to be fixed. He holds his cellphone as a flashlight and I follow him out to the street.

Outside the community hall, we pass a crowd of young male Rastafarians who are standing beside the entrance. I am later told by the selectors that every week a number of reggae aficionados wait outside until the wee hours of the night, when the 10 rand entry fee to the dancehall is removed and the event becomes free for the last few hours. The community hall is made of wood and tin, and standing amidst a sea of smaller tin shacks and matchbox houses. Just next to the hall is the ‘Tabernacle’, with ceremonial grounds and a wooden church building, where the religious gatherings of the Rastafarian community, such as weddings, burials and Nyabinghis, take place every week. More people decide to leave the hall and the street fills with dreadlocked people of all ages. A strong smell of marijuana is in the air. In this crowd, my eye is caught by a group of young, barefoot, bearded men, who are wearing what appears to be sack cloth. I am told

by my friend that they are 'Sakman', members of a local Khoisan Rastafarian sect, who surrender their life completely to devotion and supposedly live in isolation somewhere outside of the city.<sup>6</sup> I had seen some of them earlier, sitting on the floor in the dance, selling fruit, marijuana and other medicinal herbs.

Finally, the loud booming bass goes on again in the dancehall and cuts our conversation. We move back inside. Tonight's dance is a fundraising event for the upcoming Coronation celebration in the Tabernacle. It is still dark inside and the few lights are flickering, but I can see how men and women form separate groups where pipes are smoked and shared from hand to hand. All the women have covered their dreadlocks with scarfs and are wearing long skirts, except for a few non-Rastafarians who are present. There is no alcohol on sale, but the Sakman are now re-establishing their marijuana and fruit stall on the floor. The selectors play a track by Jamaican vocalist Munga several times in a row. The lyrics tell the mythical story of the Emperor's coronation day: '*...It's a day to remember/ 1930 the second of November/ (...) it was a Coronation day/ Salvation day/ Black people hope and pray...*'<sup>7</sup> Most of the people seem to dance lost in their own thoughts, many holding their hands in the position of Rastafarian prayer: 'the two sevens', where thumbs and index fingers are connected. As the tempo of the music increases the younger men start to jump up and down in front of the DJ stall.

Now King Yellow takes over the selecting from two younger members of the collective. Even though the tempo of the dance is now very intensive, he lets all the tunes play for several minutes, often mixing, or 'juggling' according to reggae terminology, them together. He introduces each tune by first playing its instrumental version, and then mixing in the vocal version. There seem to be no romantic themes at this event, only tunes carrying spiritual messages from contemporary Jamaican artists such as Sizzla, Capleton and Chronixx. King Yellow mixes in a new song, and I recognize the voice of Capleton. Young male dreadlocks, and few of the older Rastafarian men, start to jump and shake their hair in a wild manner in front of the selectors. The beat has an intensive and electronic tempo. Capleton's rough voice screams with a high pitch, almost like his voice is breaking down: '*...Hotter fire gonna burn<sup>8</sup> dem down! / Tell them Nyabinghi going to chant dem down! / Me say a fire gonna burn dem down! (...) In a seat of corruption many sit/ Looks like from the corruption them benefit...*' During my stay in Cape Town, this tune, 'Burn dem down' was played by this sound system as a high point of their set on every occasion I witnessed them performing. Burn Dem Down plays for an extended period of time and the atmosphere is ecstatic. This trance however comes to an abrupt end when the electricity goes off again. This time the crowd yells from disappointment and even King Yellow, normally confident and calm, shouts something out of frustration into the dark hall.

It is already almost three o'clock in the morning, and my friend suggests that maybe we should head back, since it is a long drive to the center of the city. As the people pour out of the dancehall, we take our car and offer lifts to Rastafarians who are heading in the same direction. Our car fills up and we start to maneuver our way through the crowded and narrow street. My friend is driving and I am in the front seat. On the back seat we have two female Rastafarians and one man, who all are familiar with each other. A lively conversation develops. One of the women asks in the middle of our small talk: 'Did the organizers remember to pray before the dance?' Usually the dance is opened with a prayer,

which is delivered by one of the elders in the community. We realize that nobody in the car was at the dance early enough to witness whether there was a prayer or not. The matter is crucial since this week there had been a sudden death in the community: one of the respected Rastafarian elders had perished. Then the young male Rastafarian states, maybe half-jokingly: 'I am sure that they forgot to pray and that's why the elder came back as a ghost to disrupt the dance tonight!' We smile at his creativity, and somebody adds that it was good that we finally discovered the root cause of the blackouts.

### *Negotiating thug realism in the dancehall*

During my visits to Marcus Garvey, the selectors did not include any South African reggae in their playlists, but played almost exclusively the very newest Jamaican tracks. In addition to their contemporary orientation, the selectors were adamant that they play only music with a Rastafarian religious message and without profanities. This meant that the prevailing Jamaican lyrical dancehall tropes on conspicuous consumption, fashion and sex (Hope 2010) were filtered out of the selections or existed only in a minor role. Instead, the music played is dominated by the intertwined tropes of ghetto reality, religious revelation and masculine power. The selectors built the high points of the event around tracks that describe the struggle that the Rastafarian 'ghetto youths' face during the course of their faith and as marginalized members of society. During my stay in Cape Town Burn Dem Down was an anthem that epitomized these themes by describing the purification of society's corruption with a spiritual fire and the empowerment that this fire gives to the excluded ghetto youths at the same time.

Although the Marcus Garvey event was attended by both men and women of all ages, the young men were the most active dancers. In the Jamaican context, Donna Hope (2010) notes that the masculine lyrical messages construct dancehall events as strongly gendered and class-based identity rituals for economically disempowered young black men, describing dancehalls as 'sites for embodying fantastic masculinities'. Brad Weiss (2002) has described similar case of male identity construction in the Tanzanian city of Arusha where working-class young men engage with North American gangsta rap. Instead of inhabiting and recreating this culture of 'thug realism' themselves, the men consider it endemic to the mythical West Coast of the USA. Weiss' interpretation of this is that gangsta rap is a powerful fantasy to engage with, specifically because it is situated away from Arusha in a global center of power. To reproduce it in Arusha would mean diluting its power. In this manner, the engagement with gangsta music itself also expresses the alienation of Tanzanian youth in the global geography of power. In a similar way, the young reggae aficionados in Marcus Garvey seem to be fascinated by the very latest Jamaican reggae, even though there is a growing body of homegrown local South African and Capetonian Rastafarian reggae, and several recording vocalists in the community itself doing reggae in the isiXhosa language (Becker & Dastile 2008). Contemporary Jamaican artists seemed to be more powerful indexes to Rastafarian identity than local reggae.

The appeal of Jamaican vocalists and their music in the Marcus Garvey dancehall seems to reside in their ability to combine distanced thug realism with prophetic religious message in a meaningful way, or rather in the possibility for the selectors to combine these

themes through them (Stolzoff 2000: 163–168; Hope 2009; Cooper 2004: 179–206; Bernard 2012). Maureen Rowe (1998) has demonstrated that street gangs, known as the rude boys, affected Rastafarian theology in Jamaica from the 1960s onwards and they were instrumental, for example, in placing the women in a subordinate position in the movement at the time. The streetwise gangster figure, known in South Africa as ‘the *tsotsi*’,<sup>9</sup> also resonates with South African black musical history. David Coplain (1985: 143–182) notes that South African *tsotsi* culture was born in the urban centers as a result of cosmopolitan imagination in the 1950s wherein North American cinema and popular music inspired the criminal subcultures of young black men in a similar manner as they inspired the Jamaican rude boys. In South Africa, *tsotsis* were closely associated with different forms of African jazz, and in recent years the image of a gangster has featured prominently in kwaito and hip-hop. Coplain interprets criminal identifications in South African popular music as a response to the social marginalization of the black population, to which the emergence of the South African Rastafarian movement is also connected. In the same vein, Veit Erlman (1999) interprets the emergence of the gangster character in South African popular culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to be the result of a liminal position through which several new type of black male identifications have subsequently been constructed with foreign popular music and fashion.

The religious authorities in Marcus Garvey, on the other hand, saw the current blending of the Rastafarian message with gangster identification as a disintegrative and violent force within the religious community. As a Nyabinghi elder, King Yellow himself adamantly resisted this musical trend which, according to him, is more prevalent in the other township dancehalls. In these dancehalls there are supposedly sales of alcohol, music with the so-called gun lyrics and recurring violent clashes between criminal youth gangs, who have started to identify themselves with the Jamaican music labels, Gaza and Gully. The names for these brands referred originally to the home communities of two rival Jamaican dancehall vocalists, Vybz Kartel from the city of Portmore and Mavado from the parish of St. Andrew. In dancehall terminology the term ‘gully’ has become synonymous with Jamaican inner city communities, such as Mavados’ home community, Cassava Piece, which exist on the fringe of a physical gully. Vybz Kartel has in turn branded his inner-city origins and musical community as ‘Gaza’ after the Middle-Eastern war-zone. These musical ghetto identifications are linked to the broader history of territorialism in Jamaican dancehall music, which has often been entangled with politically orchestrated street gangs. In recent years Gaza and Gully have expanded from music labels to imagined communities that have offered identity positions for their male aficionados across the Black Diasporas (Hope 2010: 43–65). King Yellow did not see identification with these labels as suitable for Rastafarians, even though the selectors play music from these artists, such as Vybz Kartel’s track ‘Selass-I Love We’, when it is compatible with their Nyabinghi ideologue. In Jamaica and, according to King Yellow, also in Cape Town the musical rivalry of these labels has at times transformed into actual street violence between their aficionados:

King Yellow: ...You get dancehalls where Rastas go to MASH each other my man. Guns out! Last dancehall in [X<sup>10</sup>] someone was shot through the head. Gaza and Gully! (...) Because the music plays such a big part, we find it now influencing the Rasta community. Rasta community starts to come violent! Start to be drunk! Rastas start to drink now heavy!

TJ: Gangsta Ras<sup>1</sup>...

King Yellow:...Gangsta Ras vibe is BIG in Cape Town! Big I-ya! Rastas start to come in numbers, bakkie-loads to fuck people up. You know what I am saying! Like that! What was the opposite before. You got Rastas to come to break the fights. Now you get Rastas to come to fight! (...) Me, I have to hold the energy. 'Cos there is lot of youths coming to the dancehall, they must know it's not the way. This is still the way! This is still the way! (King Yellow 2013)

Clearly, King Yellow sees it as his mission to spread the orthodox Rastafarian revelation to the youth and uphold strict social regulations in the dance based on Nyabinghi ethics. This claim for authentic Rastafarian identity nevertheless speaks to the prominent position that the thug imagination is said to hold in the Rastafarian dancehalls across the townships (on Rastafarian authenticity in South Africa see Bain 2003: 67–70). Paradoxically, clear features of fantasized thug masculinity were also audible in Triple Crown's selections on spiritual fire by artists such as Capleton. For example Donna Hope (2010: 79–80, 2009) has discussed the Rastafarian trope of burning fire as deeply conflated and cross-fertilized with other dancehall tropes on patriarchal power (on Capleton's lyrics see also Stolzoff 2000: 164).

There were no explicit signs of gang membership in the dancehall crowd and King Yellow assured me that administrators from the community actively control access and behavior in the dance. Despite this, some of the young crowd at the Marcus Garvey dancehall did not share King Yellow's views on the mutual exclusivity of the identities of Rastafarian and a gangster. In the next extract, King Yellow explains how these young Rastafarian dancehall aficionados embody the music to such an extent that they use finger signs related to Gaza and Gully gangs while dancing. These signs appear to be a local addition to the Jamaican identity positions since, according to my knowledge, they have not been documented elsewhere.

They show me finger signs. You know mos' Gazas and Gullies, got finger signs. Now they got so excited in the music, they go finger signs jumping there in front of me. I must WHOOP them sometimes. I got a stick there in the dj box. I just...whoop! Hit them on the hands like that. Don't show me that bullshit. 'Cos there is always a big picture of emperor behind I'n'I (...) That's who we represent, still Selassi-I. You know, so show me two sevens and yeah no problem you can get excited like that. Don't show me finger signs. [laughter] All this Gaza and Gully; all this kind of nonsense. No! That's [?] in Jamaica. Don't bring that bullshit here into Africa man. We try to clean the vibe... (King Yellow 2013).

Actual criminal violence is painfully present in the Philippi township and youth gangs and Rastafarians allegedly have close connections, for example in the marijuana trade. From the point of view of the religious authorities the young male Rastafarians in the township face a constant risk of sliding into gangsterism (on the relationships between gangs and Rastafarians in South Africa see also Bain 2003: 49–54). According to King Yellow's narrative, it seems that the dancehall actually becomes a place where some Rastafarian youngsters imagine an allegiance to Jamaican music labels, and claim both the identities of a streetwise thug and a Rastafarian, even though it might happen at a risk of physical attack from the selectors. This can be interpreted as an example of a very concrete battle over the articulations of the social meaning of a music genre with various contradictory lyrical positions.

According to Weiss (2002) American gangster rap offers space to imagine and form new black masculinities in the East African context, precisely because it contains strong narratives about physical male power and because it is distant from the local realities of urban social marginalization. Similar distancing is taking place in the Marcus Garvey dancehall event, where the Triple Crown group strongly defines itself against the local gangster culture, even though its preferred Jamaican dancehall music is often filled with violent lyrical metaphors. This helps us understand further why Jamaican music is preferred over the local reggae, since it is specifically Jamaica recorded music, distanced from local criminal life, that creates ideal conditions for blending Rastafarian charisma and streetwise thug life together in a single powerful musical bricolage in which selectors attempt to equate violent lyrics exclusively with Rastafarian spiritual power. King Yellow's narrative suggests, however, that this distancing is losing its function, since symbols of Gaza and Gully are being adapted to Capetonian gang culture and associated with concrete street violence.

The aim of the Triple Crown group is to act as a moral Rastafarian mission among the disadvantaged black youth, an orientation that is linked to the relatively privileged class background of the selectors in relation to the Rastafarian crowd in Philippi township. Sharlene Swartz (2009) concluded in her research on adolescents' conceptualizations of morality in a township in Cape Town that morality becomes a heavily underlined issue in township areas, where impoverished material conditions make the adherence to moral ideals increasingly difficult. Because of his mediatory position between the young dancehall aficionados and Nyabinghi elders, the cultural capital of King Yellow seems to depend on his moral behavior in the dance. Swartz conceptualizes morality in the context of the townships as a capital, which is interconnected to cultural and economic capital and can be accumulated or lost. This can be seen in the ethnographic description in the previous section, for example, which touches on how audiences expect prayers at the beginning of every dance, and how the credibility of the event is threatened if they are not carried out. Similarly it is seen in the way King Yellow must confront the gangster finger signs in the dance in order to retain his position as a Rastafarian religious authority. King Yellow also recalled that he has at times hosted the other Nyabinghi elders in the dancehall, so that they could witness that there are strictly no profanities mentioned in the lyrics and no promiscuity taking place in the dance. The moral position of the selectors thus comes under explicit moral evaluation by both the religious authorities of the community and the Rastafarian crowd.

In the Marcus Garvey community, the Triple Crown selectors have to actively distinguish themselves from youth gangs, and negotiate their moral position in relation to this street culture. Jean Comaroff (1985: 194–263; see also Sundkler 1961: 200–237) has demonstrated how rapid disintegration of older community structures and moral norms, as a result of colonial exploitation, gave rise to the Zionist norms of religious purity in many South African black communities. According to Comaroff, the Zionists attempted to control the processes of social alienation through these norms and their ritual bodily practices, which, from one point of view, can be seen as attempts to transcend this alienation. A similar type of spiritual and moral purity, informed by Nyabinghi livity, seems to have underlined a role for King Yellow of holding the Marcus

Garvey neighborhood together specifically as a moral Rastafarian community outside of gang culture and criminal violence. In this situation the weekly dancehall events of the community have become sites to experience and embody Nyahbhingi spirituality.

*Dancehall music as a part of Nyahbhingi spirituality in the Marcus Garvey community*

The cultural capital of the Triple Crown selectors is built from their direct and ongoing contact with the Jamaican music industry in addition to their moral position, and, as the leading Rastafarian selector collective in the city, Triple Crown Sound System also organized events with visiting international reggae artists. In the next quote King Yellow explains how he organized Capleton's first performance in Cape Town in 2012, taking into consideration the high expectations of the young Rastafarian audience, while giving advice to the Jamaican music star on how to conduct himself while in Cape Town:

You are really not doing it here in entertainment purposes. It's not like that. Like I explained to Capleton: I said: 'My man, when you come in here, you coming here as the Prophet.'<sup>12</sup> He came from Zimbabwe, Johannesburg, Cape Town, ne? I picked up him at the airport, took him to the hotel, sat with him, smoked a spliff.<sup>13</sup> He even lit a beedi!<sup>14</sup> And I already said: My king!<sup>15</sup> We don't smoke beedis here. Beedi is cigarettes! [?] defended: 'Nah! It's not a tobacco.' 'So like my man, it is an Indian cigarette. Chuck it out the window!' He chucked the whole packet of beedis out of the window. I said, you must respect I'n'I here in Cape Town, that you know. People see you smoking beedis they think you are a duppy,<sup>16</sup> I-ya! You unclean! You know what I am saying! You are the Prophet! You must know when you come, is almost like the Emperor coming to Cape Town. At the show, the people broke the barrier, to get to the man, I-ya. He was... shocked, my king. He even told me after the show, long time since the people break the barrier. He never seen so much rasta youth go so crazy for him. You know what I mean, like three and half hour show. Some... cleaning his shoes on the stage and the whole trip I-ya! (King Yellow 2013)

In his quote, King Yellow states how he was concerned about Capleton not obeying the religious code of the Nyabinghi Order by smoking tobacco instead of marihuana, thus conflicting with the prophetic image projected onto him. Capleton is known for his affiliation with the Rastafarian sect of Bobo Ashanti, whose livity practice differs from the Nyabinghi sect, even though they share many similarities (Chevannes 1994: 171–188). This conflict was not an isolated incident, since King Yellow explained that the Triple Crown Sound System had had similar concerns with other prominent visiting Jamaican Rastafarian vocalists who had shocked the local Rastafarian crowd—by drinking alcohol in public, for example.

King Yellow's narrative suggests that the recorded voice of the vocal artists in the dancehall is linked to a supernatural prophetic voice, and this prophetic charisma is endangered if the artists transgress the moral boundaries of the Marcus Garvey community, where spiritual purity is seen as central. This displays continuity with the prophetic traditions of South African Zionist churches and traditional religions, where the ritual purity of the prophet or diviner has been essential to their powers of divination and healing (Muller 1999: 54–87; Comaroff 1985: 194–263; Sundkler 1961: 200–237). As King Yellow had noticed in his meeting with Capleton, this differs from the Jamaican

dancehall tradition, where the vocal performer is often expected to master different and seemingly contradictory roles and tropes from a divine prophet to masculine sexual conqueror or streetwise thug (Cooper 2004).

The Triple Crown Sound System has consciously sought to enforce this prophetic nature of the music by adapting and localizing the sound of reggae significantly during recent years. King Yellow maintained that he was the first reggae selector in Marcus Garvey and in Cape Town to utilize beat mixing—‘juggling’ in reggae terminology—in his music selections. As I noted above, he is especially known for selections where he juggles different tracks together and lets the same beat and musical composition, known as ‘riddim’ in reggae terminology, continue for an extended period of time and blend as smoothly as possible into the next tracks. Often this aesthetic involved the introduction of a new riddim by first playing the instrumental version before adding various vocal versions to the mix. In contrast to this, I did not hear either him or other Triple Crown selectors in Marcus Garvey sessions utilize ‘pull-ups’ or ‘rewind’ techniques where the beat is rapidly suspended and then repeated or switched to the next riddim. This is a major local innovation, since these features have been fundamental to Jamaican sound system aesthetics (Henriques 2003: 125–172). Julian Henriques argues that the rapid suspensions of the beat are also a sexual metaphor in Caribbean culture. Thus it is interesting to note that these techniques are rejected in the Marcus Garvey Dancehall, where open romantic contacts between Rastafarians are not encouraged. King Yellow proudly explained that he himself had innovated this new way of playing dancehall music in order to build a spiritual atmosphere in the dance, and he maintained that this form of Rastafarian energy in the dance is unique to Cape Town and the Marcus Garvey dancehall.

Central to the spiritual soundscape of the Marcus Garvey dancehall is the continuous and acousmatic male voices of the Jamaican music stars. Michael Chion (1999: 17–30; see also Henriques 2003: 175–206) has developed the term ‘acousmatic’ to describe disembodied voices which evoke impressions of omnipresence and omnipotence. Judeo-Christian religious traditions have conventionally linked acousmatic voice to revelation and to spiritual ecstasy. Several authors have acknowledged that spiritual visions and personal revelations are part of religious life both in the local black South African context and among Jamaican Rastafarians, and that visions are given religious interpretations in many Rastafarian communities (Lennox 2012: 41–71; Chevannes 1994: 111–114; Sundkler 1961: 265–275; Muller 1999). Triple Crown selectors further enforce the association of this acousmatic voice to the local notions on prophecy and to the Nyabinghi concept of purity by refusing to play any openly sexual content from Rastafarian artists although many of these have addressed explicit sexual themes in their lyrics (Hope 2009; Bernard 2012). In the context of Cape Town, the continuous reggae beat innovated by Triple Crown bears an immediate resemblance to the sonic aesthetics of house and kwaito music, the dominant black music genres in post-apartheid South Africa. Contemporary Jamaican musical material is thus fused with black South African aesthetics at the regular Marcus Garvey events.

Micheal Veal (2007: 185–219) maintains that the electronic sound of dancehall, with its diverse range of lyrical tropes and polyrhythmic musical structure, exhibits significant continuity with Jamaican black folk music traditions which have, in turn, been heavily influenced by Revival religions, such as Pukumina, and their musicality. In Jamaica these



musical traditions are typically accompanied by ritual dance and spirit possession that generally requires both a repetition of the beat for an extended period of time, and its rupture, so that the dancers can lose consciousness. This type of ritual music and spirit possession has also been documented in South African religious rituals and they have been incorporated into Zionist churches as well (Sundkler 1961; Comaroff 1985). The internationally-oriented roots reggae and its off-beat ostinato represented in some aspects a musical break with these African spiritual music traditions, but Veal argues that African musical and cultural influences were strengthened in Jamaican popular music with the emergence of the dancehall genre in the 1980s (on these continuities see also Cooper 2004).

According to King Yellow, the Triple Crown Sound system emphasizes the hypnotic quality of the beat in their selections in order to create spiritual energy, although this has only become possible through technological developments which have enabled beat mixing and which are also fairly recent phenomena in Philippi. In the following extract, an older Khoisan Rastafarian,<sup>17</sup> not from Marcus Garvey but from a nearby community, gives a typical critique about blending the Rastafarian message with this dancehall sound. According to him, the youth dance in a possessed way and they are not informed about the lyrics like the older generation used to be:

You know, when you go to a trance party; and you go into the trance party. What the people do? They do the same thing. They jump the same. Today you go into a dancehall, when you go in there you don't even now listen to the lyrics. You just go in and the music hits you and you jump all the same style. This way reggae music is being translated into trance music, without knowing it! (Rastafarian elder 2013)

In an explicit sense, 'trance music' refers, in this quote, to the electronic dance music which is dominant in the central nightclub circuit in Cape Town, and often seen as the preferred choice of white backpacker youth. Besides this, the speaker can be interpreted as referring implicitly to the possibility of spirit possession in the dance. According to Barry Chevannes (1994: 1–43; see also Rowe 1998: 76–78), the rejection of spirit possession and glossolalia were significant for the initial break that Rastafari made with Revival religions, and an aspect which the Nyabinghi Order further enforced. The elder's comment seems to imply that dancehall music and the possibility of spirit possession it entails could undermine Rastafarian identity (on possession and reggae see Veal 2007: 196–219). Concerns about the spiritually corrupting nature of dancehall music were also repeatedly mentioned by older Capetonian Xhosa Rastafarians who represent the first generation of the movement in South Africa. This suspicion of spirit possession is relevant since, as I noted in the ethnographic description, the belief in Xhosa ancestral spirits was articulated at the time in the community, even though the existence of spirits or ancestors is not acknowledged in formal Nyabinghi theology (on spirits and Rastafari see also Lennox 2012: 41–71).

The dance performed at the event bears little resemblance to Jamaican dancehall traditions, where open displays of female sexuality have been prominent, as demonstrated, for example, by Carolyn Cooper (2004). In Marcus Garvey women and men remain separate and young men display their physical abilities by jumping, thereby resembling the ritual music and dance in Zionist churches where control of female purity has been

central and where glossolalia and outpouring of the holy spirit or the ancestral spirits have also been included in the sacred dance (Sundkler 1961: 197–198; Comaroff 1985: 194–251; Muller 1999: 161–198). I argue that for many of the elders, most of whom arrived in Cape Town as migrants from the rural areas of the Eastern Cape, the dance brings the Marcus Garvey event dangerously close to indigenous Christianity and its ‘trance music’. This does not seem to be the case for the younger dancehall aficionados, many of whom were born in the townships or even in Rastafarian communes, or for King Yellow, who grew up in a secular, urban and Coloured middle-class environment with a definite social distance from Xhosa communities. King Yellow expressed to me that for him being a Rastafarian has specifically meant rediscovery of what he termed African spirituality, a type of exploration of African roots that has been typical for many Rastafarians from Coloured backgrounds, according to Lennox (2010, 2012) and Bain (2003). At the same time it seems that in the Marcus Garvey community the older Rastafarians from rural Xhosa backgrounds have actively tried to break away from charismatic religious groups, often associated with specific tribal identities with their turn to Rastafari and to its pan-African philosophies.

To conclude, I argue that the liminal position of King Yellow in the Marcus Garvey community has enabled the innovation of articulating Nyabinghi livity, African musical aesthetics and contemporary dancehall music within the same space. Furthermore, his cultural and moral capital in the community has so far enabled him to sustain this articulation despite the resistance it has faced from the older generations of Rastafarians.

### *Conclusions*

In the course of this article I have described two overlapping identity articulations that co-exist in the dancehall space in the Marcus Garvey community. First I described how the Triple Crown Sound System has often unintentionally offered a space for young men to embody both the signifiers of Jamaican gang culture and Rastafarian Nyabinghi spirituality in their habitus in dancehall dance. Following Donna Hope (2009) I conceptualize this combination as ‘Gangsta Ras’ identification which draws on the lyrical tropes of Jamaican dancehall music where battles against the assumed adversaries of the Rastafarian movement, such as police, politicians and heathens, are central. I attribute the pervasiveness of this identity articulation to the concrete and symbolic power which both the criminal gangs and Rastafarians hold over the impoverished Philippi townships as well as the long historical trajectories of urban gangster culture in black popular music in South Africa.

I have also described a second articulation, existing in relation to the previous one, where dancehall music is conceptualized exclusively as spiritually potent Nyabinghi music, which I argue exists as a fusion between the contemporary and swiftly evolving sound of the Jamaican music industry and older African spiritual and musical practices. The head of the Triple Crown Sound System, King Yellow, has aimed to utilize roots reggae music as a spiritual force which could hold Marcus Garvey together as a distinctively Nyabinghi Rastafarian community. For him, Triple Crown was a ‘Nyabinghi sound’, as he described

it, and ritual purity was seen as essential both for vocal artists and the selectors affiliated to it. As a result, the dance becomes a place to experience Rastafarian spirituality through the lyrical messages of Jamaican artists. I compare this imaginary with South African charismatic notions of prophecy as described by Bengt Sundkler (1961) and Comaroff (1985), and conclude that the requirement of moral purity it entails displays continuity with the charismatic theology of Zionist and Ethiopianist churches. This is a significant local development, since the Nyabinghi Order in Jamaica has been suspicious about the influence of Jamaican popular culture on the movement: dancehall music has not been as incorporated as a spiritually potent ritual for Nyabinghi Rastafarians in Jamaica or elsewhere in black diaspora (Yawney 1994, 1995; Homiak 1995).

The described articulations take place, neither at the level of musical production nor in 'live' musical performance, but in how recorded reggae music is utilized and embodied. Because of the contradictory possibilities that recorded dancehall music offers for identifications, the Rastafarian sound system selectors in the community find themselves in a sensitive position in terms of the different segments of their audience. This further demonstrates how Jamaican dancehall music and its Rastafarian imagery can inform in various, yet often mutually conflicting, ways what it means to be both a black African and a moral subject in post-apartheid South Africa.

#### NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Here I have adopted the standard South African terminology used for example by Nadine Dolby (2001), where the term 'Coloured' refers to a heterogeneous South African ethnic group with mixed ancestry and who speak Afrikaans as their mother tongue; the term 'African' refers to all people who hold one of the Bantu languages as their mother tongue; and the term 'black' refers to all South African ethnic groups who were the victims of apartheid, including Coloureds, Asians and Africans.

<sup>3</sup> The coronation of Haile Selassie as king of Ethiopia is celebrated annually and internationally by Rastafarians on the second of November, one of the main Rastafarian holidays.

<sup>4</sup> In Rastafarian speech herb refers often to cannabis.

<sup>5</sup> In Rastafarian speech 'Tn'I' or 'I' refers either to the speaker, to a Rastafarian individual, or to the Rastafarian movement as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> On the Sakman Rastafarian sect in Western Cape see Lennox 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Here my transcription is based on my field notes as well on the released mixtapes of the Triple Crown Sound system (Triple Crown 2013a, 2013b), which feature most of the tracks played by the group during my stay in Cape Town.

<sup>8</sup> Burning has a many interconnected meanings in Rastafarian language. Most often it is, however, connected to Biblical judgment (Cooper 2004: 179–206).

<sup>9</sup> According to Coplain (1985: 162–163) the term 'tsotsi' initially derives from the urban African pronunciation of 'zoot suit', which was a symbol of urban sophistication drawn from American popular culture.

<sup>10</sup> I have decided to anonymize the name and location of this particular dancehall. This tragic incident was brought up in other interview sessions and also connected to the rivalry between supporters of Gaza and Gully.

- <sup>11</sup> The term which I suggestively drop into the conversation, ‘Gangsta Ras’, was coined by Jamaican reggae vocalist, Munga, who blended his Rastafarian identification with violent gun-lyrics. (Hope 2009).
- <sup>12</sup> ‘The prophet’ is one of Capleton’s stage names. I argue that here this naming also has implications for his religious role in the Marcus Garvey community.
- <sup>13</sup> ‘Spliff’ is a slang word for a marihuana cigar.
- <sup>14</sup> ‘Beedi’ is an Indian cigarette.
- <sup>15</sup> In the Rastafarian idiom all Rastafarian men are often called ‘kings’ and women ‘queens’.
- <sup>16</sup> Duppy is a word for ghost or malign spirit in black Jamaican vernacular.
- <sup>17</sup> Here I have consciously decided to anonymize my respondent.

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RECORDED INTERVIEWS

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**King Yellow 2013**, recorded 30.10.2013, 98 minutes, in the possession of the author.

**Rastafarian elder 2013**, recorded 27.10.2013, 74 minutes, in the possession of the author.

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