

## THE VOICES OF AZANIA FROM CAPE TOWN Rastafarian Reggae Music's Claim to Autochthonous African Belonging

The political role of popular music has been nowhere as evident as in South Africa, where urban music genres were essential for the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) in building a popular opposition against the apartheid government. Later, urban music styles were also a way to envision the “African Renaissance”, which Deputy President and future President Thabo Mbeki proclaimed as the guiding political slogan of the independent nation four years after the dismantling of the apartheid system in 1996. Musicians imagined in their sound and lyrics what this new African nationalism might mean in the genres of hip-hop and kwaito (Becker & Nceba 2008; Coplain 2001; Allen 2004). However, by the time that the icon of the South African independence struggle, President Nelson Mandela, passed away on the 5th of December in 2013, the South African state had arrived to a chronic legitimacy crisis. The general optimistic mood of the post-independence years had faded, as the ruling party and a former anti-apartheid resistance organization with roots in African socialism, African National Congress (ANC), remained in power with yet another landslide victory, despite the fact that the party had experienced one corruption scandal after another. The ANC has been widely criticized across the national media and it has lost much of its former credibility as the self-proclaimed torchbearer of the independence struggle, but no formidable political alternatives are in sight after the elections.

It seems clear that in the current stagnated political moment, musicians reinterpret the legacy of the independence struggle again in a different manner than in the optimistic years of the African Renaissance.

In this ethnographically grounded article, the main research question is to analyse how South African national history is reimagined in reggae music in the city of Cape Town.<sup>1</sup> As a musical genre, reggae provides an especially interesting prism for analysis of postcolonial nationalism for several reasons. First, reggae emerged in the 1970s as one of the first music genres from a third-world postcolonial nation – Jamaica. By the end of that decade, reggae was incorporated and acknowledged as the national music of Jamaica by both of the competing political parties on the island. At the same time, reggae became a soundtrack to pan-Africanism and the anti-apartheid movement internationally with several reggae artists directly addressing the South African struggle for independence in their music. Thus, reggae was explicitly incorporated to the anti-apartheid ideology and the formation of both Jamaican and South African postcolonial Black consciousness. (King 2002: 95–97; Chude-Sokei 2012: 224–236). Secondly, more recently in the 2000s, reggae has connected with the claiming of indigenous identifications in different places around the world and voiced a stark critique to prevailing hegemonic national narratives. This claiming includes the rise of Native American reggae and Australian Aboriginal reggae music; both celebrate specific ethnic minority identifications (Alvarez 2008; Bilby 1999). Thirdly, reggae and the Rastafarian social and religious movement related to it witnessed a rapid growth in South Africa during the past decade, especially in the province of Western Cape and in the city of Cape Town (Bain 2003; Olivier 2010 & 2013; Reid 2014). Thus, the primary research task of the article is followed by the question of whether reggae music in Cape Town is also linked to claims of autochthony or indigeneity, and if so, how these identifications are asserted in the music.

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## Research data, methods and the ethnographic context

The present ethnographic inquiry is based on three months of fieldwork by the author that took place in Cape Town from September to December in the year 2013. The aim of the fieldwork was to document the activities of Rastafarian reggae musicians in the city. The current analysis focuses specifically on four reggae vocalists: Teba Shumba, Crosby Bolani, Daddy Spencer and Korianda. All of the research participants had been born and immersed in reggae culture in Gugulethu, which is a township located around 20 kilometres away from the central business district of Cape Town. According to the census of 2011, the population of Gugulethu in the 6.5-km<sup>2</sup> township area is around 10 000 and predominantly from a Xhosa ethnic background. Almost half of the population is under 25 years of age. Many people experience extreme poverty and about half of the households live in makeshift informal housing (City of Cape Town 2011a). Despite this, and partly because of its relatively central location between the central area of the city and more remote townships, Gugulethu has recently gained a reputation as a culturally vibrant location with a growing middle class. During the recent years, the township has also emerged as a central hub of reggae music production in Cape Town.

In the present article, the song lyrics of these four artists form the primary research material, because my direct observations of their live reggae performances were scarce and I was not able to focus on the performances of any individual vocal artist consistently. David Coplain (2005: 25–26) warns against reading ideological meanings directly from the song lyrics of South African urban music forms, where often bodily movements, sonic references and the social context of the live performances are highly significant. In addition, South African ethnomusicologist Lara Allen (2004: 2) points out that conscious political intentions are hard to pinpoint with the method of musical analysis. To avoid these pitfalls of textual analysis in music research, I juxtapose the song lyrics with artist interviews, which I conducted during the fieldwork period, as well as with my own ethnographic observations from my encounters with the artists. I interviewed three of the main research participants, Daddy Spencer, Teba Shumba and Crosby Bolani, twice during the fieldwork. My lack of data from the performances in Cape Town also reflects the fact that the attention of these musicians is focused

outside of South Africa to Europe and I will contextualize this musical orientation more in the course of this article.

The following analysis focuses on “articulations”, as discussed by Stuart Hall in his seminal works, and which James Clifford (2001: 477–480) has applied further to ethnographic methodology. Clifford understands articulation as a process in which connections between different established bodies of cultural meanings are established or dissolved. These connections are always temporary, plural and under constant social contestation. In the following analysis I examine the ways in which the Africanist ideologies surrounding transnational reggae music are articulated to the history and current social conditions of Gugulethu. These articulations are plural as belonging to Gugulethu and the Western Cape and are constructed in various ways by different generations of reggae musicians.

Teba Shumba and Crosby Bolani were my initial contacts to the field site as they had collaborated with Finnish reggae musicians and performed in Finland and I was able to acquire their contacts before the fieldwork period. Both of these vocalists have recently toured extensively outside of South Africa in Europe with different ensembles. Teba Shumba was a part of a pioneering kwaito group, *Skeem*, before venturing to his solo career with reggae at the beginning of the 2000s. During his solo reggae career, he has released two self-published albums (Shumba 2005; Shumba 2013c). Crosby Bolani was a member of the reggae group, *Chronic Clan (African Dope 2004)* in the early 2000s, but at the time of my fieldwork he was also about to release his first solo debut album through Oneness Records, which is a German production team and record label specialising in reggae music. Both vocalists had also co-operated with numerous foreign producers and they had released singles as online releases and in compilation albums in both South Africa and Europe. However, their main audiences in Europe are confined to a relatively small group of reggae aficionados. For example, a music video for Crosby Bolani's (2014) track *Heart of a Lion* released on Youtube received approximately 5000 views in a year. In this article, I will analyse their music mainly in the social context of Cape Town and Gugulethu, as I have discussed the international tours of these artists elsewhere (Järvenpää, forthcoming).

Through Crosby Bolani and Teba Shumba I soon met Daddy Spencer and Korianda, who were part of the same social circle of Rastafarian vocal artists. In ad-

dition to Teba Shumba, Daddy Spencer had also been involved in kwaito music and in a group named *Trybe*, which was commercially successful in the 1990s in South African domestic markets. Later, he also has ventured into a solo career in reggae and toured together with Shumba and Bolani in Europe; he also worked with foreign producers and released singles through Shilo-Ites Records from Sweden (Daddy Spencer 2007 & 2012) and Segnale Digitale from Italy (Daddy Spencer & Anthony B. 2014). Korianda had not yet had this kind of breakthrough, so he was searching for international music contacts and was about to release his first self-published solo album locally in Cape Town and as an online release at the time of my fieldwork (Izajah Korianda 2013b). Three of the vocalists had other sources of income outside of their musical activities during my fieldwork: Shumba was a director of primary school students' drama clubs, Bolani ran an informal home studio for music production, Korianda worked as a freelance film maker.

For the sake of clarity, these four research participants are referred to frequently with the term "Gugulethu vocalists" or "Gugulethu reggae", even though they are certainly not the only reggae artists in this community. During the fieldwork, I interviewed 28 reggae vocalists, instrumentalists, selectors and organizers in total. Most of the people interviewed were from Gugulethu or had been residents of the township before. I use these interviews as a further tool in contextualizing the primary material. For various practical reasons, I did not manage to contextualize the histories of these musicians and organizers as close as I did with the four primary research participants or to acquire their recorded music. Several of these other musicians were also older than the primary research participants and I will return to this generational aspect of the Capetonian reggae culture several times later on in this article.

There are also numerous vocalists in the community, who either have international aspirations or already established international careers in music, but whom I did not manage to contact during the brief fieldwork. Some artists from this group, who were omitted from this study include JJ Alcapone and Black Dillinger. Both have toured several times outside of South Africa and worked with foreign producers. Other notable vocalists from Gugulethu include Zolile "Zoro" Matikinca and Vido Jelashe, who have later both emigrated to Sweden and Germany respectively to pursue their music careers. Virtually all Gugulethu reg-

gae musicians, including the primary research participants, subscribe to the Rastafarian faith in their music and are involved mainly in the dancehall subgenre of reggae, which typically features individual vocalists and digital productions instead of instrumental ensembles (Chude-Sokei 1994). The lyrics of the music are generally performed in both isiXhosa and Jamaican Patois.

When discussing the South African context, I apply the standard terminology on the ethnicities of the country, as used in the work of Nadine Dolby (2001: 133), where the term “Coloured” refers to members of the heterogeneous South African ethnic group, with a mixed ancestry who speak Afrikaans as their mother tongue. As an ethnic description, the term “African” refers to all people in South Africa, who hold one of the Bantu languages, such as isiXhosa or chiShona, as their mother tongue. The term “Black” refers to all South African ethnic groups who were the victims of the apartheid, including Coloureds, Asians and Africans. Lastly, the category of “White” refers to the English- and Afrikaans-speaking minorities, who developed distinctive white South African nationhood (see also, Ballantine 2004).

The four primary research participants are all from African ethnic backgrounds, although they represent different generations and language backgrounds: Shumba was born in 1974 to a chiShona-speaking Zimbabwean father and a Setswana-speaking mother. Daddy Spencer was born in 1975, Korianda in 1980 and Bolani in 1982. All three were born to isiXhosa-speaking parents who had migrated to Gugulethu from the Eastern Cape Province. After the removal of the apartheid pass laws in 1986, which restricted the number of African population in the city, Cape Town and Gugulethu in particular was subject to intense migration from the rural areas of the country. Due to the migration, the informal housing settlements around townships such as Gugulethu have grown rapidly and the number of people from African ethnic background in Cape Town has exceeded the former Coloured majority of the city only during the recent years (City of Cape Town 2011; City of Cape Town 1996).

Besides migration from other parts of the country, Cape Town has also been a destination for African immigrants from abroad. Jean and John Comaroff (2001) observe how the fast human movement to urban centres, the porousness of national borders and continuing economic instability and inequality, have made the public claims of “autochthonous belonging” increasingly common in the

South African metropolitan areas, such as Cape Town. With autochthony, the Comaroffs refer to a process where the connection between a certain human group and place is justified by naturalized arguments, usually by claiming that they have been the first inhabitant of a place. In South Africa, as well as in various other Southern African countries, autochthony has developed to be a central political rhetoric that unites different ethnic groups as the autochthons vis-a-vis the perceived aliens.

Urban centres of South Africa have recently experienced reoccurring waves of xenophobic street violence. Jean and John Comaroff argue (2001) that the state's public campaigns and autochthonous political rhetoric against illegal immigrants in the public sphere have contributed significantly to the xenophobic atmosphere. These campaigns have been connected to racial hierarchies, as it is specifically the African immigrants or economically marginalized Black South African citizens that are perceived as immigrants, who have been the main targets of both the police campaigns and xenophobic violence. The Rastafarians are drawn especially from these marginalized sections of the Black population and they have been in the middle of various land disputes over their settlements on squatted land in the outskirts of the city (Barnes 2008; Tolsi 2011; Nicholson 2008). The socio-economic marginalization of the growing informal settlements and the lack of public infrastructure in these areas have also recently been a source of wider public debate and demonstrations in Cape Town (see, for example, Underhill 2013).

Thus, in the contemporary South African situation, political questions on belonging to an abstract national community are secondary and increasingly replaced by questions on the legitimate claims to specific areas and to their social and natural resources. Because reggae in Cape Town is a popular music form that is strongly connected to the African migration to the urban areas, the scholarly discussions around autochthony also provide the main theoretical underpinning for the following discussion about the reinterpretation of the legacy of the independence struggle in reggae music.

## “Do you remember the days of apartheid?” – Rastafarian reggae music in Gugulethu

Jamaican reggae has been a part of the South African musical landscape for forty years. It was widely censored by the apartheid regime, but the music began to circulate in the African and Coloured townships and homeland areas<sup>2</sup> through informal networks already in the 1970s (Chawane 2012: 172–176). The 1970s, and especially the year 1976 with the uprising in Johannesburg in Soweto Township, are now considered as turning points in the apartheid struggle and as a time of awakening of shared Black consciousness in the country. This consciousness meant that the urban township population began to recognize the common blackness and shared oppression of the different African and Coloured ethnic groups, despite the attempts of the government to portray them as racially distinctive by allocating them to different township areas. International black cultural currents, such as reggae music and the American Black Power Movement influenced and empowered the local Black Consciousness Movement that emerged in South Africa more as a loose cultural ideology than as an organized political force (Frueh 2002: 45–48, 65–93).

In the 1970s, Rastafari was introduced to Cape Town as a philosophical and spiritual stance that was part of the larger emerging urban Black counterculture and attached to Jamaican reggae music (Chawane 2012: 172–176). According to the research participants, in Cape Town reggae and Rastafarian faith music became popular among male African migrants of Xhosa ethnic background, who were allowed stay temporarily in the predominantly White and Coloured city throughout the apartheid era to fill the shortage of cheap labour in the city. During the waves of protests in the 1970s, some migrant workers engaged in struggles for Black urban permanency as a part of wider movement against apartheid, but the clear majority of the migrant labourers found themselves on the opposite side of the conflict, because of their strong roots to the rural homelands (Frueh 2002: 65–93). David Coplain (2001: 110) observes that this widened the gap between urban popular music and the perceived rural and ethnic forms of popular entertainment that were supported by the cultural policies of the apartheid state.

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<sup>2</sup> In the apartheid era homelands or Bantustans were nominally independent territories for the different Black ethnic groups of South Africa. Compared to the White territories of the country, homelands were underdeveloped and overpopulated.



The political juxtaposition between rural and urban cultures has also continued in the post-apartheid state, as uncontrolled migration from rural areas to cities has been seen as major threat to the nation in political discussion (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001).

Some young Rastafarians in Cape Town reported that the early Rastafarians, who were determinedly urban, lost their family links to their rural kin in the process of migration and some sought to abandon their native Xhosa language, isiXhosa, altogether in favour of a Rastafarian form of English. The development of urban Rastafarian counterculture outside of conventional ethnic identifications, during the apartheid era bears parallels to the emergence of the movement in West Africa during the same era, where the movement also consisted mainly of socially excluded urban youth who constructed Rastafari as a Pan-African identification across ethnic borders as Neil Savihinsky (1994) concluded in his seminal work (see also, Chude-Sokei 2012).

As in most townships in the urban centres of South Africa, political violence was commonplace in Gugulethu throughout the 1980s as the resistance against apartheid intensified. This time had also affected profoundly the life histories of the research participants. In the following quote, Crosby Bolani explains the close intergenerational entanglement between political activism and Rastafarian conviction in his parent's family. Bolani's father, Ras Benjamin, was involved in anti-apartheid community movements and Bolani attributes his father's turn to Rastafari directly to the Pan-African political conviction of his grandfather, who named one of his sons after Haile Selassie, a messianic figure for the Rastafarian faith:

My father - - followed the [Rastafarian] movement in the 1970s already, the late 70s, just because of the fact that his father was a part of a political party called the Pan Africanist Congress. - - It happened that my father's brother was given the name Selassie, because their father was also inspired by the Emperor, you know what I mean? Because of the stories he had heard, mysterious stories he had heard about the King of Kings. So my father kinda like carried on with the faith from then on, you know what I mean? My grandfather passed away in 1978 and my father became Rasta I think in 1979. He started locking his hair and all of that. (Crosby Bolani & Daddy Spencer 2013.)

In Crosby Bolani's account, the respect for the Ethiopian emperor was also a common ground between the Rastafarian faith and local Black political activism at the time. Bolani's account demonstrates how the Rastafarian religious and political symbols were adopted in Cape Town as markers of the international cause of African and Black liberation.

The history of the independence struggle is central to the postcolonial nationalism of South Africa as well as to the social memory of the local Rastafarians (Chawane 2008). In Gugulethu, the most physical example of this remembrance is the Gugulethu Seven memorial that was erected in a central place in the township in 2005. The memorial is for seven local young men from the township, known as the *Gugulethu Seven*, who were affiliated with the armed wing of ANC, uMkhonto weSizwe (MK), and killed in a conflict with state security forces in 1986. They are also celebrated as heroes by the Rastafarians in the township, and according to them, the Gugulethu Seven were Rastafarian adherents. In 2004 an established Capetonian reggae band *Azania* released a whole tribute album to the Gugulethu Seven (*Vivian Jones and Azania band* 2004), featuring lyrical slogans such as "Do you remember the days of apartheid?" This type of active remembrance of colonial oppression and the histories of resistance, or "the half of the story, which has never been told" as the reggae singer Bob Marley put it, has become an international feature of the Rastafarian movement in different localities around the world. For example, Midas Chawane (2008) has documented a similar type of social remembrance of the local apartheid resistance among South African Rastafarians in the township of Daveyton in the city of Grahamstown. The commemoration of struggle in reggae bears a strong connection to earlier South African genres of crossover and crossed-over jazz<sup>3</sup> in which similar historical themes were central in the 1990s. However, with the rise of kwaito and house music over the domestic music markets since the beginning of the 2000s, commemoration of the independence struggle has moved away from the central focus of urban popular music (Allen 2004).

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<sup>3</sup> Here I follow Lara Allen's (2004: 92) terminology, where she refers with the two terms "cross over jazz" and "crossed over jazz" to the same musical genre, where the cross-fertilization of different ethnic music traditions was central. With the former term she refers the music genre in the era before the independence and with the latter she refers to the same music genre after the independence.

## Musical claims for Black indigenusness and autochthony in Cape Town

During my fieldwork in Cape Town, there were virtually no formal record labels, music clubs or events that would have featured reggae, despite the notable number of Rastafarians in the city. One of the only formal commercial actors in the local reggae culture was a tour company named *Coffee Bean Routes*, which organized tourist visits to a reggae dancehall and to a Rastafarian community in the township area. The current CEO of the company and a former head of a small record label, Iain Harris, explained to me that the general lack of commercial interest in local reggae music is due not only to the strong stigma attached to the cannabis use of reggae aficionados, but also to the backgrounds of reggae audiences and artists, who are known to be drawn from the economically marginalized underclasses of Cape Town:

Unfortunately, the music economy, live, completely depends on selling alcoholic beverages - - If there is a rock show. - - 90% audience smokes ganja, but they also drink. - - Whereas the reggae audiences, I don't want to get locked down to the ganja part, it's just small part of it, it's more about the legacy of apartheid and where the reggae fans live, the kind of access to transport that they have, the kind of access to income that they have. So it's less that they would not want to spend, but that they have less means to spend - - Its apartheid legacy and its economics, and ganja is just the last kind of stepping stone. (Iain Harris 2013.)

The above quote indicates how reggae is viewed as a commercially marginal and informal music genre in Cape Town, despite its relative popularity among the township audiences. In spite of this marginalization, the reggae artists are conscious of the commercial potential of the music genre among European audiences, which they seek to reach with their online releases. In the absence of formal performance and recording opportunities, the artists also rely on digital and informal mediation in spreading their music among local reggae aficionados of Cape Town.

The earlier research on Jamaican dancehall music has noted the connection between the artists and their urban home communities, routinely named in the

music as “ghettoes”, as ideologically paramount (Chude-Sokei 1994). The urban territorialism is also visible in Gugulethu reggae. In earlier ethnographic research, Heike Becker and Dastile Nceba (2008) have examined the ghetto identification of the Rastafarian musicians from Xhosa background in Cape Town and concluded that this identity project is a highly politicized act in the metropolitan context. According to them, the framing of Cape Town’s townships as ghettoes addresses social inequality within the city and claims symbolic cultural space for the working class African youth. Becker and Nceba argue that with their ghetto identification the Xhosa Rastafarians musicians have adopted the racial pride from the African Renaissance discourse of the government, but deployed it in their music as a way to assert recognition for themselves as legitimate residents of the city, despite their class background and marginalised position in the hierarchical urban geography.

In the post-independence years of the African Renaissance, the Rastafarian movement grew substantially in Cape Town especially among the Coloured youths. In the South African colonial ideology, the category of Coloured existed as a liminal group between Africans and Whites. Pauline Bain (2003) and Lennox Olivier (2010) have attributed the appeal of Rastafari among the Coloured youth to their feelings of cultural dispossession as a population caught between different racial categories. Although there are no reliable statistics on the Rastafarian population in the Western Cape area, it seems clear that the majority of Rastafarian adherents in the area are now from a Coloured background. Due to my snowballing method in the acquisition of research participants, my field study was confined mainly to the vocal artists of African and especially Xhosa ethnicity. There is a vibrant reggae dancehall culture and reggae artists active in the Coloured townships surrounding Gugulethu, but so far, they have not had similar kinds of international breakthroughs as their Xhosa peers.

Scholars (Bain 2003: 48–54; Olivier 2013; Reid 2014) have documented how Rastafarians from the Coloured backgrounds have generally seen this ethnic category itself as a colonial term that denies their African origins, and have sought to rediscover their African roots by defining themselves as Khoisans instead of Coloureds. Khoi and Khoisan people were the indigenous inhabitants of the Western Cape area, when the Dutch first established a colony at the site in 1652. By the beginning of the 20th century, most of the remnants of this indigenous

population had been assimilated to the ethnically mixed Coloureds. The reclaiming of Khoisan identity has also been a larger cultural movement within the wider non-Rastafarian Coloured population, but Rastafarians have been closely connected with the process during recent years. Claiming of Khoisan identification appears as a very different identification to Rastafari, than the one that was fostered by the early Xhosa adherents, who specifically sought with their conversion to distance themselves from their Xhosa ancestry and its rural rootedness to the Eastern Cape.

My hypothesis is that the contemporary reggae artists from African ethnic backgrounds also claim space in the city by forming musical connections between the Rastafarian movement and the natural environment of Cape Town in addition to their urban ghetto identification. However, as isiXhosa speakers, the Gugulethu reggae artists are not claiming indigenous Khoisan identification, but instead imagine this autochthonous connection with discourses that they draw from African cosmology and political history. I argue further that this claim that the Rastafarians are the successors of “the first inhabitants of Cape Town” is a highly significant counter discourse for the hegemonic discourses of the state and the municipality, where the African migrants are seen as aliens to the city (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001).

As Louis Chude-Sokei (2012; see also Bilby 1999) points out, Rastafarian identification fits for naturalized claims for belonging especially well, with its overriding use of the metaphor of “roots”. Autochthonous rhetoric has been prevalent for example in reggae music in Côte d’Ivoire, where reggae songs are frequently engaged with theories on which of the country’s ethnic groups “came from where, when and why”, as Anna Shuman notes (2009: 124). Schuman states that, paradoxically, at the same time that reggae celebrates peace and universalism, it asserts a natural belonging for certain ethnic and racial groups to the land of Côte d’Ivoire. Bearing this multiplicity of potential political subject positions of reggae music in mind, I dedicate the rest of this article to the analysis of the oeuvre of Gugulethu artists. First, I discuss in detail the various ways in which the history of South African national history and Pan-Africanism are reconstructed in the music and then I analyse how this interpretation of history is connected to claims on autochthonous belonging.

## “The lovely country of Azania” and the logic of incompleteness

Teba Shumba's track *Lovely Country* is a typical example on the ways that the history of the South African nation is represented in Gugulethu reggae music. *Lovely Country* was released in 2013 in Shumba's second self-released album *The Voice of Azania* (Teba Shumba 2013c) and recorded as well as produced with the Azania band. The song is an explicit narrative of the “lovely country” of South Africa, as the chorus of the track proclaims: “Come, let me talk ‘bout me lovely country / Where mumma just wash dem dirty laundry / ‘Nuff Africans across the boundary / People hungry, ah badman hungry”.<sup>4</sup>

According to Colin Wright (2013), as a genre Rastafarian reggae has historically used three lyrical motifs in the Jamaican context that he identifies as “criticizing Babylon”, “love and unity” and “historical consciousness”. All three are heard in *Lovely Country*, but in a form that is adapted to the context and history of Gugulethu. Wright (2013: 9–10) identifies the first one, criticizing Babylon, as a militant trope that draws from the Biblical metaphor of Babylon, which is aimed at the postcolonial state of Jamaica. The trope acknowledges that the Jamaican state, in Wright's words, “pretends to include everyone, but in the very same gesture of inclusion effectively excludes the real sufferers” of the economic underclasses. Lennox Olivier (2010) has argued that precisely this Biblical trope of Babylon has resonated well with South African Black Christian traditions and provided a language and aesthetics for local Rastafarians to express their feelings of political disillusionment. In *Lovely Country*, Babylon is explicitly named as the governing political leaders, whom the narrator has to “tap down” from power that they have used to repress the “Black people to cry economically”. In the lyrics, the speaker sets itself on the side of the “ghetto youths”, who the narrator is bringing together against Babylon: “Politics lie, so fire haffi' burn / Ah dem pull the trigger and ghetto youth run / - - Many are called, I am the chosen one / Whole heap a ghetto youth haffi' bring as one”.

The second lyrical motif, love and unity, is, according to Colin Wright (2013: 12), “solidarity built upon the recognition of a common humanity - - beyond the differences typical of the colonial ‘divide and rule’ tactics”. This is usually brought about with the positive identification to Africa with the symbols of

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<sup>4</sup> I have maintained the original Jamaican Patois pronunciation of the English words in the transcripts of the song lyrics.

Haile Selassie and Ethiopia. In *Lovely Country*, these symbols are absent, and the speaker places his affection rather on “Rastafari”, “the ghetto youth”, the “working class” and ultimately “the revolution” at the end of the song by proclaiming: “Towards the liberation we strive/People survive, revolution has arrived/Working class haffi rise”. Thus, love and unity are filtered through socialist language instead of Jamaican religious symbols. This language on “revolution” is generally more frequent in Gugulethu reggae music than explicit references to Selassie and Ethiopia, although these features are also used occasionally. Wright (2013: 12–25) maintains that a similar mutation happened in British reggae already in the late 1970s, where the works of Linton Kwesi Johnson were strongly influenced by Black socialist thought, more than by Rastafari as a religion. Johnson’s music was in fact one of Shumba’s first musical inspirations and he expressed to me that Johnson’s explicit socialist rhetoric fit to the revolutionary political situation, which he experienced in his teenager years in Cape Town.

Colin Wright (2013: 5–8) names the final roots reggae motif, historical consciousness, as a form of imagination that challenges the symbolic closure of post-colonial nations. This has been evident in the way that the Jamaican Rastafarian musicians have refused to see Afro-Jamaican people as Jamaican, but persist in seeing them as Ethiopians, who have been forced to live on the island. Together with the two other motifs, this forms “the logic of incompleteness”, that Wright sees as a musical process that draws continuities to the past injustices to run against the dominant constructions of national unity. Immediately at the beginning of the first verse of *Lovely Country*, Teba Shumba does not identify his historical belonging to either Ethiopia or South Africa, but rather to Azania, which was a commonly used protest name for South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle: “Azania ah the country where I’ya was born/Where gangsta use knife and police use gun/Where Mandela run things and Sobukwe is gone”. A South African political party called the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), led by Robert Sobukwe (1924–1978), popularized the name and it was associated especially to this party from the 1950s onwards. During my fieldwork, the name Azania was widely used in Rastafarian music and speech and considered as the original African name for the area known today as South Africa.

I interpret that in *Lovely Country* the invocation of the name Azania constructs a form of alternative historical imagination on the nation or “counter-national-

ism" (see Pöysä & Rantala 2011: 9–12). As opposed to the multiracial nationalism of ANC, the main political thesis of PAC in the 1960s was that that only the Black majority itself could overthrow the institutional racism by direct action. PAC's political philosophy was also influential for the Black Consciousness Movement in Cape Town in the 1970s and 1980s. (Frueh 2002: 45–48; Saunders 2013). As was shown earlier, the philosophy and activism of PAC was closely linked to the early Rastafarians of Gugulethu for example in Crosby Bolani's family. In *Lovely Country* identification to PAC is further invoked in the way that the narrator refers to the founder of the party, Robert Sobukwe, by mentioning that he is gone and now Nelson Mandela "runs things".

PAC's leadership fell into disarray due to apartheid repression in the late 1960s and lost its popular support further in the late apartheid era (Saunders 2013: 295–297). Gugulethu artists do not hold formal membership in the current PAC, which still exists as a tiny political party in South African electoral political. Rather the history of PAC fits to the logic of incompleteness, which challenge the hegemonic narrative on South African nationalism. In this narrative, the ANC frequently attempts to portray itself as the sole representative of the unified Black majority and as the political movement that brought about the peaceful transition to independence. In various South African musical genres national identity has been celebrated through the commemoration of the victory over apartheid (Allen 2004: 91–101; Ballantine 2004: 107–113). In contrast to this, Shumba's lyrical interpretation of the history of Black Consciousness presents the struggle against apartheid as an incomplete event, rather than celebrating it as a victory. A similar re-reading of national history has been seen in Jamaican roots reggae, where the Caribbean slave trade has been seen as an injustice that continues in the independent nation (Wright 2013; King 2002: 45–65).

Teba Shumba's references to Sobukwe being replaced by Mandela can be read as expressing a sense of exclusion from the hegemonic constructions of national community and history. In the social context Gugulethu, where Pan-African political currents have been historically strong, Shumba's re-reading of the national history can be seen as an attempt to construct class consciousness and history for the growing urban African underclass of Cape Town, who are in many ways marginalized in the city and perceived as aliens in the hegemonic discourses surrounding urbanization (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001).



As a further indication of his disillusionment with Nelson Mandela's legacy and the ANC, Teba Shumba included in his previous album *20-5-2-1 Manifesto* (Teba Shumba 2005) an interlude where the listener first hears the voice of Nelson Mandela giving a speech, "to all the nations out there", addressing a variety of issues. At the end of this two-minute interlude, Mandela proceeds to proclaim that next, he will light his marijuana cigar, and it becomes apparent that the track is the work of an imitator of Mandela rather than a speech by the leader himself. In this interlude, South African national history is again rearticulated into Rastafarian counter-nationalism and Mandela is placed as a promoter of African nationalism instead of multiracial democracy.

### Autochthonous belonging in *Icuba Labathwa* album

Celebration of cannabis is an international genre feature of reggae that was instrumental in marketing the music to wider audiences outside Jamaica (see King 2002: 89–104). The same marketing process is also evident in Cape Town. For example, Crosby Bolani reported that his cannabis anthems, such as *Gimme de weed* with his group *Chronic Clan* (*African Dope Soundsystem* 2004), had been by far his most successful track. To his initial surprise, these anthems also received an enthusiastic response in Assembly, which is a rock-music nightclub in the centre of the city with predominantly White patrons.

As an aspiring but not yet as established artist, Korianda had developed a similar lyrical approach around cannabis following Crosby Bolani's example. During the fieldwork, he had just started to distribute his first self-released reggae album, on which he had aimed to keep the cannabis theme in the forefront of the album by naming it accordingly as *Icuba Labathwa* (Izajah Korianda 2013b), which is a vernacular isiXhosa term for cannabis. He described his amazement when he first heard that during the European tours of other Gugulethu artists, the western audiences had shown interest not only in tracks done in Jamaican Patois, but also in the reggae tracks that featured isiXhosa. This had led Korianda to develop his first album to a direction, where he would alternate between isiXhosa, Jamaican Patois and chiShona, which is the main language of the sizable Zimbabwean diaspora in Cape Town. Having learnt some chiShona, Korianda

aimed to target his music to the Zimbabwean markets as well, where reggae was allegedly already in prominent position. In the album, he wanted to explore themes varying from African nationalism to his Xhosa roots and Rastafarian faith. According to Korianda, all these different elements could best be brought together in the celebration of the use of cannabis plant.

*Icuba Labathwa* is also translatable as the “herb of the Khoi people”. Korianda was convinced that the name *Icuba Labathwa* indicates that hemp was a native plant to the Western Cape and the Xhosa people learned the use of marijuana from the Khoisan people already in the ancient precolonial times. He stated that by building the concept of his album around the song of *Icuba Labathwa*, where he uses isiXhosa language in a humorous manner to describe a court case where he begs President Jacob Zuma to release marijuana from captivity, he sought to highlight how the use of marijuana unites the Khoisan and the African ethnic groups. It is also evident that with this particular naming of marijuana, Korianda can claim belonging to the Western Cape and its Khoisan history, from his own Xhosa background.

The similar envisioning of shared Black history of the nation, which is evident in Korianda's music, was one central musical themes in the genre of crossover and crossed-over jazz, where elements from different ethnic music traditions were mixed to form a South African sound. Several crossover artists, such as Pops Mohammed, have also claimed continuity to Khoisan music traditions (Allen 2004: 91–104; see also, Ballantine 2004). The discourse on the common history of the Khoisan and African ethnic groups is also linked to the wider history of Black political consciousness and Pan-Africanism in South Africa, to which we saw that Teba Shumba's *Lovely Country* was also linked. Xolela Mangcu (2012: 33–78) demonstrates that the late anti-apartheid thinker Steve Biko (1946–1977) and the Black Consciousness movement were influenced by earlier 19th century Xhosa writers advocating interethnic consciousness between the Khoi and the Xhosa against the White colonisers. Gugulethu artists, such as Korianda, are well aware of these historical musical and political currents that have acted as strong influences for their music.

Many of the artists interviewed during the fieldwork reported racist prejudices between Rastafarians from different ethnic backgrounds, suggesting that the ideal of Black consciousness between the Khoisan and the Xhosa Rastafarians

is not very widely shared on a practical level (see also, Olivier 2010: 4). Rather, it exists as an idealized musical imaginary, that “mobilizes the imagined past and gives meaning to the ambivalent present” to quote the words of David Coplain (2001: 113) on maskanda music. The philosophy of Black consciousness constructed from the widely shared, but at the same time deviant, cannabis use in different ethnic groups, accommodates the Gugulethu reggae musicians, who seek to cross boundaries of ethnicity and class when aspiring to be successful in their craft. This border crossing bears strong resemblance to another group of Rastafarian entrepreneurs in Cape Town: the herbalists. During the last decades, the growth of the Khoisan Rastafarian movement has been linked to the revival of the use of traditional medicine in Cape Town, where it is now common to see Rastafarians work as herbalists (Olivier 2013; Reid 2014). For the Rastafarian herbalists, the illegal cannabis trade forms an important source of revenue alongside the sale of medicinal plants. According to Andrew Reid (2014: 24–60), cannabis is symbolically central for the herbalists, since its ritual use is seen to foster peace across ethnic borders. Reid analyses how the cannabis trade requires complex networks of social contracts based on personal trust and how in the Western Cape the cannabis trade has historically cut across different social and ethnic borders.

The sociability of cannabis use was also evident in the fieldwork, where I witnessed how for the main research participants, cannabis was present in their encounters and collaborations with musical contacts from different ethnicities, music genres and religious convictions on numerous occasions. In these encounters, the use of the criminalized substance fostered a shared social commitment.<sup>5</sup> This implies that cannabis has similar meanings for Rastafarian musicians, as for the Rastafarian herbalists that Andrew Reid (2014) examined in his work. For Rastafarian musicians, cannabis is seen to foster both personal connections as well as social mobility by connecting their music to different audiences across ethnic and class lines and ultimately national borders in a particular way. Lennox Olivier (2013) has demonstrated in his ethnographic work how through the use and harvest of various natural plants, the Rastafarian herbalists form a close spiritual affinity with the natural areas surrounding Cape Town. Furthermore, in Korianda’s music, the cannabis plant and the social practices around it con-

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<sup>5</sup> I have discussed the methodological problems that the cannabis use among Rastafarians posed to the fieldwork in detail elsewhere (Järvenpää, forthcoming b).

structs a naturalized connection to the surrounding nature of Western Cape and its Khoisan ancestry.

The celebration of cannabis is a musical imaginary, where the potential disputes and disruptions in social networks around cannabis are absent. In addition, Crosby Bolani expressed that he had lately become increasingly uneasy about his cannabis anthems. He felt that in the process of crossing over to other audiences, such as the rock-audiences of the Assembly club, he was easily labelled solely as an artist celebrating drug culture instead of a socially conscious or political artist, as he wanted to be known. Thus, the cannabis anthems can become a double bind, which on the one hand have been instrumental in the breakthrough of these artists across different ethnic and social borders, but which also depend on conventional stereotypes of Rastafarians. Bolani's frustration speaks perhaps also on the wider balancing, that the Gugulethu reggae musicians have to do while aspiring to combine their aspiration to cross social borders with their quest for rootedness to the land and its ancestry.

## Messages from the natives – Negotiating the place of ancestors in Rastafarian reggae

Although Korianda's *Icuba Labathwa* album envisions the mythological and interethnic history of the Rastafarian movement, the isiXhosa language still dominates the album. As with all four Gugulethu vocalists, Korianda's music is deeply connected to vernacular isiXhosa expressions and proverbs, which roots his music to Xhosa ethnicity from which the older Rastafarians sought to distance themselves. According to the research participants, the introduction of isiXhosa to reggae music is a fairly recent development that has been strongly criticised by older Rastafarians. In the following quote Korianda explains to me how the pioneering Rastafarians perceived their Xhosa ancestry and why Korianda himself has started to incorporate isiXhosa to his music:

Rasta and culture [?], Rasta and Xhosa, they clash when it comes to cultural practices: slaughtering - - In order for a lot of our elders to be Rastas, they had to leave their homes. 'Cos their families just would not accept that. - - Thus, the

community that we have, the Rasta community that we have, it was put together by a lot of Rastas who had to leave their homes, some in very tough situations, ja, like ten years, fifteen years without seeing their parents and family, just because of those things. That's why personally I believe, that it is our responsibility to close that gap before it is too late. (Korianda 2013.)

The above quote speaks for the generational differences between Rastafarians, where the elders, who are often also the religious authorities within the movement, had attempted to break their links to their rural kin. Korianda expresses that with the adoption of isiXhosa language in reggae music, the present generation of Gugulethu dancehall artists is trying “to close the gap” that older Rastafarians have allegedly maintained from the larger Xhosa community. Korianda mentions the rejection of slaughtering as the main difference that sets Rastafarians apart from other Xhosa people. In the Xhosa life-cycle rituals, slaughtering is essential in the burial ritual known as, *umkhapho*, where cattle sacrifices are required for the deceased to join the ancestors (Hirst 2005). A vegetarian diet and the rejection of slaughtering and ancestor or spirit veneration has been seen by scholars as the defining break that Jamaican Rastafarians made in the 1960s from other Afro-Caribbean religions. In Rastafarian theology, suffering and misfortune are not attributed to disturbances in ancestral relations, but to the workings of the devilish “Babylonian” colonial system (Chevannes 1994: 145–170). During the fieldwork, several Rastafarians expressed that they reject the Xhosa slaughtering tradition altogether in the manner that Korianda describes here. This has probably been one the concrete factors that distanced urban Rastafarians from the Xhosa ethnicity, since the life-cycle rituals link the individual to the lineal family or clan (Hirst 2005).

In South Africa, as elsewhere in Africa, traditional African cosmology has been remarkably flexible and co-existed with and within other religions, such as Islam and Christianity. Rastafari is not an exception to this. For example, Darren Middleton (2006) notes that in the Ghanaian context, the social practices of spirit healer and Rastafarian increasingly influence each other. According to Korianda, some older Rastafarians are suspicious that similar unorthodox synthesis of Xhosa cosmology and Rastafarian religion might develop by the mere use of isiXhosa. It has indeed been the case that “closing the gap” between the isiXhosa

and Rastafarian music has also entailed novel local theological re-interpretations of Rastafari. This is very apparent in Teba Shumba's music where he at times utilizes the notion of ancestral spirits. He specifically considers his tracks in isiXhosa, such as *Ababhansi* and *Azania* (Teba Shumba 2013c), as messages from the "underground". Here he talks about his track, *Ababhansi*:

*'Ababhansi'* means ancestors; loosely translated *'phansi'* means 'on the ground' or 'underground', so those who are underground or those who have passed away - - So in the song it talks about the natives of the land, who are dis-satisfied with the present situation including the new Black politicians, who have compromised our struggle for the benefit of the few - - When I sing in vernac, or with African language it is kind of limiting, but it is also invoking the spirits. The African spirits. These songs - I would classify them as songs that come from the ancestors - I believe that I don't really write the songs; I am just used by the spirits to express the songs so the spirits own the songs. They just use me as a tool. (Teba Shumba 2013.)

In his account above, Shumba explains that the African spirituality in his music is closely connected with the Rastafarian social critique towards South African politicians and politics. In *Abaphansi*, Shumba has combined the concept of Babylon with the voice of the ancestors, who are dissatisfied with this corrupt structure. The track *Ababhansi* also features spirit healers singing in isiXhosa and shaking their rattles. In this musical context, the message from "the natives of the land" implies in an autochthonous manner that the African ethnic groups hold an ancient ancestry to Western Cape, even though they are currently often seen as aliens to the area in the hegemonic discourses about the uncontrolled urbanization.

Shumba's account of his role as a spirit medium resembles the historical role of the praise poet, or "imbongi", in the royal courts of Xhosa clans. Poets have commonly invoked the voice of the ancestors and besides giving praises to the kings; they were also expected to give public criticism of the rulers. (Oppland & McAllister 2010; Mangcu 2012: 75-78). Even though the track *Ababhansi* is in this manner rooted specifically to the Xhosa cosmology and praise-poetry, Teba Shumba remained adamant that his music and his ancestry are "universally African". In the following quote he answers my question about what separates him as a Rastafarian from the traditions of the Xhosa and the Tswana:

I can go to Ethiopia or I can go to Gambia and if I am coming through as “I’m Rasta” I am in the mix. But if I go to Botswana and say “I’m XHOSA”. Then I am in that box and then they will treat me like that. - - It’s a universal African connection. And Rasta is anti-tribalism. There are positive things that are tribal, but most of the tribal things are negative. They cause conflicts and discrimination among African people. (Teba Shumba 2013b.)

In the above quote Shumba emphasizes that he sees his heritage, and also his ancestors, as universally African and not attached to any specific ethnicity. In the context of Johannesburg and Zulu ethnicity, David Coplain (2001: 119–123) has discussed a similar case, where a Rastafarian musician, John Sithole, acts as head of a drumming group that draws heavily on ethnic Zulu traditions. Like Teba Shumba, John Sithole is a committed Pan-Africanist and sees no contradiction between his ethnic musical style and Rastafarian universalism. In both cases, the artists see that their ethnic music styles and universalist Black consciousness can be ultimately combined in Rastafarian identification. In their songs, both Sithole and Shumba have also negotiated the pronounced tension that has historically existed between South African urban and rural musical styles (Coplain 2001).

As the critique of the older Rastafarians indicates, the incorporation of ancestral voices to reggae music is a recent development. In the group of the main research participants, only Teba Shumba had used the ancestral voice in his music. One factor behind Teba Shumba’s incorporation of ancestral spirits to his isiXhosa lyrics might be his own social distance to the Xhosa life-cycle rituals, where the agency of the lineal family ancestors and Rastafarian religious beliefs might contradict more comprehensively in the requirement for ritual slaughter. Teba Shumba grew up in Gugulethu in an urban environment, not with a Xhosa family, but with Tswana and Shona parents, and is, as he put it, a “product of western missionary education” from a Capetonian Catholic boarding school. Shumba’s view that ancestors are attached to the land and not to any particular ethnicity, resonates with earlier scholarly observations that autochthony can be constructed outside of ethnic demarcations in a manner that a specific claim to indigeneity to the land can unite individuals across ethnic borders (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001: 254–258).

## Conclusions

At the beginning of this article I asked how South African national history is reinterpreted in the Capetonian Rastafarian reggae music, since the genre has been known paradoxically for both its postcolonial social critique as well its central role in the nationalist projects of the postcolonial states. In addition, I asked how reggae artists might construct indigenous identifications, since the socio-political commentary of contemporary reggae music has been linked to such identity claims around the world (Alvarez 2008; Bilby 1999; Wright 2013; King 2002: 95–97).

I analysed reggae music vis-à-vis the social claims of urban permanency by the African migrants to Cape Town. I discussed how the experiences of urban exclusion were voiced in the music by connecting the Rastafarian identification with the radical African nationalism of the historical PAC party and Black Consciousness movement. In addition, I analysed how the musicians claimed a naturalized belonging for themselves as Africans to the city of Cape Town. This connection was forged through imagining the ritual use of cannabis use as a common tradition between the Xhosa and the Khoisan and the cannabis plant as natural to the Western Cape as well as incorporating the ancestors of the land to their political project of African nationalism.

The aforementioned themes of Gugulethu reggae music bear continuity to various urban South African musical genres. Lara Allen (2004) discusses how crossed-over jazz enjoyed popularity with a lyrical approach where serious socio-political themes were central and mythical and interethnic African history was envisioned. However, crossed-over jazz lost popularity to more party-oriented kwaito, where the celebration of urban territorialism and township identity were central and which connected the genre to the international Black popular culture of the time. Even more recently, the genre of conscious hip-hop has gained popularity with blunt political criticism (Coplain 2005: 19–25). Contemporary reggae music can be seen to negotiate the thematic differences between these urban South African musical styles. Rastafarian artists in Gugulethu simultaneously subscribe to a ghetto-centric celebration of Gugulethu, envisioning a mythical African history and rootedness and voice a direct socio-political critique of the political establishment. This variety of different subject positions in Gugulethu



reggae is also typical for the music genre in the international context. The enduring success of dancehall reggae lies partly in its ability to envision the particular, but interconnected histories of marginalized Black urban communities as manifestations of the same Black Atlantic cultural network (Chude-Sokei 1994).

I argued that Gugulethu reggae is still based on African (counter) nationalism, despite the current legitimacy crisis of the ANC and the declining vision of African Renaissance. For the Gugulethu artists, Africanness does not imply a closed national community as it does in the usual political discourse surrounding the concept of African Renaissance, where Africanness is deployed vis-a-vis the alleged aliens, who threaten the prosperity of the nation (see also, Becker & Nceba 2008: 27–29). As Jean and John Comaroff (2001: 249–250; 254–258) remind us, in this hegemonic political discourse on African Renaissance, the limits of the natural order of things are authenticated, new political distinctions interpolated within it and some objects or people are rendered as unnatural. I argue that rhetoric on the attachment to the land is used in Gugulethu reggae in a countering manner. Instead of bordering the limits of the natural order, the naturalizing discourse of reggae music assimilates the Rastafarian movement and specifically the young working class African men, into the natural world in place of Cape Town. Although the previous discussions on autochthony in Africa have connected the phenomenon strongly to xenophobia and patriotism (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001; Schuman 2009), these features were absent from the analysed Gugulethu reggae music. In this music, the counterpoints for the Rastafarian autochthony are not alien groups of people, but instead “the Babylon” and “the new Black politicians” whom the musicians feel have excluded them from the national community. Here the musicians draw from the tradition of the South African Black Consciousness Movement in which blackness was envisioned against the political establishment of the apartheid government as an indicator of oppression rather than an essential racial category (Mangcu 2012: 267–287; Frueh 2002: 45–48).

Jean and John Comaroff (2001) note that issues of land use and ownership of natural resources are concrete economic issues in South Africa, but their significance lies also in the assertions of social identities and alliances. The claims of indigeneity by the Rastafarian reggae musicians are not claims of the redistribution of the land away from the perceived aliens or celebration of ethnic chauvinism, but they are “about finding ways to exist *in* a multiplex modernity, but

with a difference, a difference derived from cultural tradition, from landedness, and from ongoing histories of displacement, travel, and circulation” to quote the words of James Clifford (2001: 483) on the land claims of the indigenous people movements of the Western Pacific. The search for rootedness, which has been a dominant theme in the history of Jamaican reggae music (Chude-Sokei 2012), has in Cape Town become an apt symbol to construct shared social identification across ethnic boundaries for the working class African men from different cultural backgrounds. What is common amongst them is that in Cape Town they find themselves in similar culturally and socially marginalized positions as did the first Rastafarians in Jamaica, where the movement was born in the fast migration to the shantytowns of Kingston from the rural parishes (Chevannes 1994:44–77).

The described form of rootedness has been developed by the current generation of younger Xhosa musicians, whose approach to Rastafari differs from Neil Savihinsky’s (1994: 42) seminal interpretation of Western African Rastafari as a youth subculture with “open disdain for anything having to do with indigenous African religious systems”. Reggae musicians in Cape Town have constructed novel forms of Rastafarian identifications in relation to the Jamaican movement and thus created new distinctively South African Black subjectivities (see also, Ballantine 2004: 106–107). However, Savihinsky’s description fits better to the older generation of Rastafarians from Xhosa background, who have distanced themselves from the Xhosa cosmology. This older generation has also criticised the main research participants for their introduction of elements of Xhosa cosmology to reggae music. This indicates further that at the moment Rastafari in the Western Cape is a fast-developing, multigenerational cultural form with different age groups and its own internal value tensions.

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