

“I came to take my place”: Contemporary discourses of Rastafari in Jamaican popular culture

Donna Hope

I came to take my place, Never you forget my face...
(Munga Honorebel's song, "I Came to Take My Place", 2007)

Resumo

Este artigo explora o lugar das representações do rastafarismo na cultura da música popular jamaicana do século 21, como um reflexo de um movimento discursivo para fora dos discursos tradicionais do rastafarismo, em direção a uma convergência com os discursos, em conflito, ocidentais de Babilônia, incluindo o material e o carnal. O texto rastreia brevemente o movimento do Rastafarismo na cultura e na música *dancehall*, por meio das primeiras manifestações de artistas de *dancehall* radicais que se tornaram DJs Rastas nos anos 1990, até a primeira explosão de artistas influenciados pelo Rastafarismo no século 21, e então para os representantes mais atuais do ideário Rastafári na música popular jamaicana, como refletidos na ascensão do híbrido entre *dancehall* e *rasta*, o *Gangsta Ras*. A manifestação do *Gangsta Ras* é especificamente examinada mediante a lírica, os vestidos e a autorepresentação do Honrável Munga na cultura *dancehall*. As inerentes tensões nesta paradoxal auto representação rompe as tradicionais noções do que significa ser Rastafari. Embora a ideologia e o discurso de Munga tem um parentesco com o grupo de artistas influenciados por los Rastafaris, os quais corriqueiramente andam pelos espaços dos *dancehal*, significando a recolocação dos Rastafaris dentro do espaço da cultura musical popular jamaicana, sugerindo uma variante renascida da masculinidade jamaicana na cultura musical popular.

Palabras-chaves: Rastafari, música popular jamaicana, *Gangsta Ras*, masculinidade

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Abstract

This article explores the place of 21st century representations of Rastafari in Jamaican popular music culture as reflective of a discursive move away from traditional discourses of Rastafari towards a convergence with “conflicted”, Western discourses of Babylon, including the material and carnal. It briefly traces the movement of Rastafari in dancehall music and culture through the early manifestations of the hardcore dancehall artiste turned Rastafari deejay of the 1990s, to the early 21st century explosion of Rastafari-influenced artistes, and then to the most current representation of Rastafari in Jamaican popular music as reflected in the rise of the hybrid the dancehall/Rasta or Gangsta Ras. The manifestation of the Gangsta Ras is specifically examined through the lyrics, dress and self-presentation of Munga Honourable in dancehall culture. The inherent tensions in this paradoxical self-presentation interrupt the traditional notions of what it means to be Rastafari. Yet, Munga’s ideological and discursive kinship with a cadre of Rastafari-influenced artistes who currently flit through dancehall’s spaces imply a re-placement of Rastafari within the contemporary space of Jamaican popular music culture and suggests a renewed variant of Jamaican masculinity in Jamaican popular music culture.

Keywords: Rastafari, Jamaican popular music, Gangsta Ras, masculinity

Resumen

Este artículo explora el lugar en el siglo XXI de las representaciones de los Rastafaris en la cultura musical popular jamaicana. Es una reflexión de un movimiento discursivo que incluye lo material y lo carnal, dislocando el tradicional discurso Rastafari a la convergencia con el conflictivo occidentalizado discurso de Babilonia. Este breve trazado del movimiento de los Rastafari en la música *dancehall*, mediante sus tempranas manifestaciones de la música dura del artista convertido en *DJs* Rastafari, durante los años 90 del siglo XX y los primeros años del siglo XXI.

La explosión de la influencia de los artistas Rastafaris conllevó a la representación de la música popular jamaicana como Rastafari, tal como se refleja en el ascenso del *dancehall* Rasta o Gansta Ras. La manifestación de los Gangsta Ras es específicamente examinada mediante la lírica, las ropas y la autorepresentación del Honorable Munga en la cultura *dancehall*. Las inherentes tensiones en esta paradójica auto representación rompe con las tradicionales nociones de lo que significa ser Rastafari. Aunque la ideología y el discurso de Munga tiene un parentesco con el grupo de artistas influenciados por los Rastafaris, quienes cotidianamente revolotean por los espacios de los salones de baile, significando la recolocación de los Rastafaris dentro del espacio de la cultura musical popular jamaicana, sugiriendo una variante renacida de la masculinidad jamaicana en la cultura musical popular.

Palabras claves: Rastafari, música popular jamaicana, Gangsta Ras, masculinidad

Introduction

This article explores the place of 21st century representations of Rastafari in Jamaican popular music culture as reflective of a discursive move away from traditional discourses of Rastafari towards a convergence with ‘conflicted’, Western discourses of *Babylon*. These include the material and carnal that is patently negated in Rastafari ideology. In setting the frame of reference, the paper explores the phenomenon of the *Gangsta Ras* in 21st Century Jamaican popular music by tracing a discursive pathway of Rastafari through Jamaican dancehall culture in three stages. First, it briefly examines the hardcore dancehall artiste turned Rastafari deejay of the 1990s, and then presents an overview of the early 21st century explosion of Rastafari-influenced artistes in the dancehall. In the final instance, this

paper focuses more particularly on the third and most current representation of Rastafari in Jamaican popular music, which is reflected in the rise of the hybrid the dancehall/Rasta or Gangsta Ras.

The manifestation of the Gangsta Ras is specifically examined through the lyrics, dress and self-presentation of the self-titled Gangsta Ras, Damien ‘Munga Honourable’ Rhoden in dancehall culture. In capturing the three related but different phases of this manifestation in dancehall culture, I adopt the musical notations, prelude, interlude and postlude to signify the related and intervening phases of Rastafari identified in the halls of Jamaican dancehall music over the last two and a half decades. In addition I attempt to capture the ongoing dialectic engagement that undergirds these Rastafari crossings within dancehall music and culture. In this regard the paper suggests that Rastafari and dancehall exist as mutually inclusive categories of Jamaican life and culture, therefore, their crossings, merging and other transitory relationships reflect the ongoing dialogic engagement of men and women with their levity.

Prelude: From deejay to rasta

Dancehall music and culture’s movement to the forefront of Jamaican popular music and culture in the early 1980s was perceived by many reggae purists as the death knell to the Rastafari-infused “conscious reggae” that dominated the cultural landscape of the preceding musical era, a kind of Dark Ages. In my earlier work, however, I suggest that the music of this era encapsulated a variety of themes and that “There is no clear

evidence that dancehall music deliberately sought to ignore the Marley-type refrain of black pride, race consciousness and social commentary but it is arguable that dancehall culture’s early superstars exhibited no clear attachment to the ideals and ideology of Rastafari and African pride because the ideology of capitalism encapsulated its own ideals – individualism, materialism and its attendant cultural values” (HOPE, 2006: 13-14).

Yet, despite dancehall music and culture’s rise to dominance in the 1980s and beyond, Rastafari continued its dialogic and cultural relationship with Jamaican life and popular culture. Within the dancehall, Mr. Mention/Buju Banton who entered the dancehall as a secular artiste at the beginning of the 1990s with the controversial hit *Love Mi Browning* and whose career floundered on the international outrage generated around the controversial and highly popular *Boom Bye Bye*, in 1993 converted to Rastafari and emerged as Ras Shiloh/Buju Banton by the end of that decade. Capleton who, in his secular manifestation had been popularized for such hardcore dancehall hits as *Bombo Red*, re-emerged as “the fireman”, inflamed with the ethos of Rastafari and touting an incendiary brand of dancehall lyrics that was peppered with the teachings and ideas of his Rastafari worldview. It is important to note at this juncture that, in Jamaica, the ideological/musical transition of a hardcore dancehall artiste to Rastafari is underscored as a glorious promotion. The common belief is that this ideological move (upward) from hardcore dancehall to Rastafari underscores the flowering of spirituality and intellectual depth that ushers these artistes into the halls of Jamaican music that are reserved for the keepers of the musical flame.

This is, in no small part, due to the global impact of reggae icon Bob Marley and others of his ilk, who popularized Rastafari and reggae music simultaneously and whose role in uplifting positive tenets (love, black identity, pan-Africanism etc.) continues to be lauded in contemporary Jamaica. Thus, while they maintained their links with dancehall as the current and popular manifestation of Jamaican music and culture, artistes like Buju Banton and Capleton also enjoyed a powerful and exceptionally positive response to their transition from secular dancehall to spiritual Rastafari. Other Rastafari artistes who inhabited dancehall's stage during this era included individuals like Anthony B and Sizzla. Without fear or favour, these Rastafari artistes disseminated songs laced with strong anti-Babylon tenets that chastised the establishment national, regional and international. Yet, the obvious cross-fertilization with hardcore patriarchal dancehall culture and patriarchal, incendiary, revolutionary Rastafari in the music and performance of this genre of artistes is epitomized in their "bunning" (burning) of the usual deviants, in particular politicians and male homosexuals, their claims of control over the female body and their uncontested and incendiary revolt against Babylon and/ or status quo. In this regard, Cooper reminds us that were he alive, Bob Marley would sound a lot like the fireman, Capleton¹ underscoring the patently obvious kin(g)ship amongst Rastafari artistes, even while they exist in different historical moments and ply their lyrical trade on different stages. I coin the next phase of Rastafari interruption of the dancehall space as the interlude. This was one of the most significant periods of Rastafari involvement in the dancehall genre.

Interlude: Rasta eruption in dancehall

The early days of the new millennium were characterized by an explosion of Rastafari artistes in Jamaican popular music. As with the era identified in the foregoing as the Prelude, this turn was heralded by many aficionados of Jamaican music as the “re-turn” to the ‘higher level’ of consciousness that had been associated with Rastafari and its progeny, reggae music, of the 1970s. Indeed, it was perceived as the re-turn of Bob Marley and the death knell for “dutty dancehall” with its explicit and extreme discourses filled with unclothed, erotic female bodies, erect phalluses and unsheathed lyrical guns. Many postulated that, based on this resurgence of Rastafari ethos in the music culture, Jamaica would soon experience a corresponding ideological rebirth and a much-needed social renewal.² Rastafari artistes bearing names like Natty King, Mr. Perfect, Gyptian, Ghandi, Fantan Mojah, Bascom X, I-Wayne, and Turbulance were among the prominent armour-bearers of this upsurge of Rastafari-influenced music and consciousness in Jamaican popular music. The status accorded to these men at that time is reflected in the prominence given to six of them at the annual staging of hardcore dancehall’s premiere year-end event Sting 2004 (See Fig. 1 - Sting Poster 2004). The placement of six of these artistes (Mr. Perfect, Ghandi, Fantan Mojah, Turbulance, Bascom X and I-Wayne) as a central core dubbed the Magnificent 7 (along with the then new female artiste Kriss Kelly) on this Sting 2004 poster implied their central role in dancehall music and culture at that time and suggested ‘higher levels’ of success for these artistes in the future³.

At the same time, while highlighting this resurgence of Rastafari energy in Jamaican music, these artistes also incarnated a new breed of Rastafari singers by signifying the kind of identity negotiation that would later cement itself in the persona of the Gangsta Ras.

Borrowing from the fashioned bodies of their hardcore, secular male counterparts in the dancehall, and brokering on the cross-fertilization with fashioned, coiffed dreadlocked hip hop artistes who “shave roun di rim”⁴, the mode of dress of this cadre of artistes moved swiftly away from the customary flowing robes, khaki suits, sandals etc. to colour co-ordinated t-shirts, fashionable jeans, and brand name sneakers and Timberland boots. Rastafari artiste like the then highly popular Turbulance (See Sting Poster at Fig. 1) were patently attentive to the aesthetics of the body and a materially fashionable self-presentation whilst holding fast to a firm belief in Rastafari and disseminating conscious lyrics in the conventional singing mode of Rastafari artistes. It is arguable that the discursive pathway to Gangsta Ras had been evolving since dancehall’s eruption in the 1980s and was coalescing into a new shape and form at the beginning of the new millennium.

Where the dalliance with carnality was concerned, Sizzla’s foray into carnal erotica with his song *Pump up Har Pum Pum*⁵ in 2001 was so far removed from the expectations created by his staunch Rastafari stance that many hardcore dancehall adherents were left in shock and awe. Dancehall’s hardcore warlord and Ghetto Gladiator, Bounti Killa suggested



Fig. 1 – Sting 2004 Poster.

that the Rastaman had “gone under frock⁶”. This apparently transgressive move into the erotic and carnal by a spiritual, de-sexualized, Rastafari artiste was difficult to digest. I recall being at a dance in Hellshire, St. Catherine the first time I heard Sizzla’s *Pump up Har Pum Pum* and being shocked immobile by the paradoxical presentation of this messenger, a spiritual, often de-sexualized Rastafari artiste, presenting these hardcore and very sexual lyrics:

Di woman seh pump up har pum pum pump up har
pum pum
She waan mi ram it up vroom!!!
Di woman seh pump up har pum pum pump up har
pum pum
Shot battybwoy my big gun boom!!!
Pump up har pum pum pump up har pum pum

[The woman says pum up her pum pum pump up her
pum pum
She wants me to ram it up, vroom
The woman says pump up her pum pum pump up her
pum pum
Shoot all male homosexuals with my big gun, boom
Pump up her pum pum pump up her pum pum]

Certainly this was the purview of hardcore, secular dancehall artistes? The social and cultural expectations of many adherents of Jamaican music were that lyrical discussions about the pum pum and punaany (i.e. vagina) through which dancehall's notions of sexualized, heterosexual male identity are discourses had been coded as hardcore and dancehall since the early 1980s. Rastafari, on the other hand, had been coded as spiritual, pristine and pure. In this regard, Rastafari had crossed an important threshold into the central halls of dancehall's overtly sexual discourses, and to borrow from a Jamaican statement, one could argue that - "Rasta buy out di argument" (Rastas have bought out/into the argument).⁷

Sizzla's move into the carnal and sexual suggested that ideas about the accepted content of public and musical presentations of Rastafari were in transition. Thus the sustainability of a re-invigorated Rastafari ethos in its purest form direct from the 1970s into the current era was debatable. Indeed, the Rastafari ethos parlayed by individuals like Fantan Mojah, Mr. Perfect and others the turn of the millennium was seemingly out-of-time at the forefront of hardcore dancehall of the 21st century. Consequently, this discursive path, even while patently signaling the transitions afoot, could not be sustained at the forefront of Jamaican popular music.

These artistes rose to the forefront of the music industry – and fell. And thus we move to the third and most current manifestation of Rastafari in Jamaican popular music – which I identify as the Postlude.

Postlude: Gangsta ras as dancehall/rasta – dis/junctured narratives of identity in dancehall culture

In 2007 Jamaican Rastafari stepped forcefully into the centre of 21st century dichotomies. There were several public indicators to this effect. The most astounding was in March 2007, when the Miss Jamaica Universe Beauty Contest hosted by Pulse crowned the first ever Rastafari beauty queen in the history of Jamaica. The unclothed female body of real Rastafari was put on public display for an international audience (See Fig. 2).

This nouveau presentation of a Rastafari woman as unclothed beauty queen generated intense controversy amongst ordinary and not-so-ordinary Jamaicans. Was she a real Rastafari woman? Was it just a hairstyle? Discussions in the media and amongst Jamaicans on the ground expressed a concern as to whether the patriarchal tenets of Rastafari supported the undressing of the Rastafari female body for the kind of internationalized public display that accompanied beauty competitions like the Miss Jamaica Universe and the more global Miss Universe at which Zahra would represent Jamaica. Many who were not Rastafari in their outlook validated the traditional ideas of Rastafari as linked to the patriarchal ideals of the wider Jamaican society, including the control of the female body, with their questions about the implications of this trend for tradition and culture in modern-day Jamaica.



Fig. 2 – Zahra Redwood, Miss Jamaica Universe 2007

In short, Zahra's apparent transgression suggested that there were changes afoot in the conceptualization of an identity that had been birthed in the crucible of 1930s Jamaica. I argue that it indicated the historical movements in the definitions of the Rastafari self - as female and as male within the capitalist-mediated spaces of 21st century Jamaica. It is in this historical moment that the Gangsta Ras materializes.

With hardcore dancehall contemporaries like Mavado,

Vybz Kartel and Busy Signal, Munga Honorebel’s plaintive Rastafari-laced cries, his crown of locks, his consistent lyrical signification of Rastafari as his ideological foundation, coupled with his dancehall DJ style and his overtly sexual lyrics, positions the man from Islington, Damion “Munga Honorebel” Rhoden, as the primary incarnation of this gangster/Rastafari mode of being. Integrally connected to the Jamaican music industry since his early foray at fourteen years of age into a popular local contest Munga Honorebel came to the forefront of this industry in 2007 with his song, *Bad from mi Born*⁸ taking the dancehall by storm. Harnessing the power of the word, Munga claimed the name Gangsta and Rasta, creating a dis/junction in the explicit self-narratives that colour the terrain of Jamaican popular music.



Fig. 3. – Munga Honorebel, The Gangsta Ras

As the Gangsta Ras, Munga Honorebel tampers with the ideas of Rastafari as artiste and cultural figure in radical fashion. In ordinary dialogue, the terms Gangsta and Rastafari are usually polarized or dichotomized, never conjoined. As such, their oxymoronic marriage cannot prosper except in a conflicted state. Within the sphere of Jamaican popular culture, it is generally accepted that to be Gangsta means to not-be-Rastafari. And, thus, the converse should also be true - to be Rastafari is to definitely not-be-Gangsta. In this regard, the *Jamaican Observer* newspaper of July 30, 2007 reported that, according to the “recently formed Ethio-Africa Diaspora Union Millennium Council⁹ (“EADUMC”), there is nothing honourable about the entertainer’s persona, as well as his assertion that “di gal dem love di gangsta ras.” The EADUMC further stated that “the misuse of Rastafari culture has diluted and marginalised the central tenets and creed of the Rastafari philosophy and way of life” and noted that:- “popular music, which has used much of the expressions of their faith, is an area that will be receiving a lot of attention. As such, the comments and image of Munga Honourable as the Gangsta Rasta are not acceptable”. Despite the loud protestations from many self-appointed protectors of traditional Rastafari mores and values¹⁰, Munga represents a growing cadre of young Rastafari men who continue to negotiate new ways of being in a new world with porous boundaries. Many flit rapidly across a variety of stages. One individual who showcases these new ways of being is, Chicago, who was the first runner-up of the JCDC Popular Song contests of 2007 and 2006.¹¹ He was a young man whose style of dress and self-presentation reflected

this Gangsta Ras image and this self-presentation included thick locks, fashionable sunglasses, colour-co-ordinated clothing and accessories (baseball cap, belt, shoes etc.) and the requisite bling jewellery (necklace with pendant, fashionable watch) that is now popular among young, black men in hip hop and dancehall culture. It is also popular among their peers offstage and in other forms of popular culture who consider this style of dress to be high fashion, stylish and hype.

Rastafari artistes who manifest the Gangsta Ras image continue to play with and into the very discourses that are associated with the ultimate image of Rastafari. Sizzla “Pumped up har Pum Pum” and thus continued a dalliance with an inherent tenet of Rastafari – the patriarchal control of female sexuality and the attendant productivity which is also an important tenet of dancehall and Jamaican patriarchy. The consistent and revolutionary burning of Rome and other symbols of Babylon lights the incendiary pathways of Rastafari rebels who join their dancehall/gangster brothers in chastising the state. Flowing robes and colourful garb created from the finest, and often most expensive organic fabric suggest that Rasta is fashion/able, sometimes even more so than their secular and less spiritual counterparts in the music and culture industries.

These obvious similarities and convergences aside, the contemporary image of the Gangsta Ras embodies traditionally accepted codes of Rastafari in their crown of dreadlocks, (not neatly groomed ‘fashion Rasta’ locks), longstanding conviction within the Rastafari faith, consistent utilization of traditional

Rastafari as a part of the dancehall-tinged musical dissertations. Shouts to Ethiopia, reverence for Jah, denunciation of Babylon and other themes of Rastafari colour the very lyrics that deliver hardcore dancehall themes about the Gangsta Ras.

For example, in his first popular hit single *Bad from Mi Born* Munga states:

Munga, mi hail King Selassie I di highest king
An mi par wid Shango the baddest king
An mi link with Kalonji the maddest king
If you dis mi your life ah di saddest thing
Munga bad from the first day
My birthday is next to Killa birthday
Mi we done yuh in the worse way
You diss me Wednesday, yuh dead before Thursday

[I, Munga, hail Selassie I as the highest King
And I spar with Shango (Capleton) the baddest King
And I link with (Sizzla) Kalonji the maddest king
If you disrespect me your life will be the saddest
thing
Munga bad from the first day
My birthday is next to (Bounti) Killa's birthday
I will finish you off in the worst way
You disrespect me on Wednesday, you are dead
before Thursday]

Like his revolutionary predecessors deep in Rastafari, Munga Honorebel is *Bad from him Born* and will defend this stance. In 21st Century Jamaica this badness is borrowed from the current and popularized linguistic renderings of a rebel that patently signals the cross-fertilization with North American hip hop culture. As a result, he is also a 'Gangsta' and in his song

Own Thing defiantly reminds his multi-faceted audience that:

Gangstas do them own thing,
Never left them chrome thing,
Hail King Selassie I first,
Ethiopians bun out the Pope and Rome thing,
Gangstas do them own thing,
Never left them chrome thing,
Munga praise Rastafari first, of course,
And that's a known thing, totally

Gangsters do their own thing
[Never leave their chrome thing¹²
Hail King Selassie I first
Ethiopians burn out (condemn) the Pope and Rome
thing
Gangsters do their own thing
Never leave their chrome thing
Munga praises Rastafari first, of course
And that's a know thing, totally

In addition, Munga is also a King-man among women. He is desirable and reminds us that *Di girls dem love di Gangsta Ras*¹³ in his popular song of that name. In his song *Wine Pon It*,¹⁴ Munga explores the boundaries of Rastafari male sexual engagement and exhorts his girl to:-

Wine pon it an talk to me
Girl I need to know what you want from me
How much love you have inna you heart fi mi
Girl, wine pon it an climb pon it an
Bubble pon it an talk to me

[Wine upon it and talk to me
Girl I need to know what you want from me

How much love you have in your heart for me
Girl, wine upon it and climb upon it and
Bubble upon it and talk to me

He continues this lyrical dialogue and explicitly claims the sexual potency of Rastafari:

But if yuh waan fasta mi will gi yuh fasta
If yuh waan harda mi will gi yuh harda
If yuh waan deepa mi will gi yuh deepa
Munga, mi nuh inna nutten wit no eata

First tings first girl yuh pretty like flowas
Next ting now Munga don't want nuh bowas
Oh, suh she waan feel di Rasta Man powas?
Two foot in the air like the Twin Towas

[But if you want (it) faster, I will give it to you faster
If you want (it) harder, I will give it to you harder
If you want it deeper, I will give it to you deeper
Munga will not have anything to do with any *Eater*
First things first, girl you are as pretty as flowers
Next thing now, Munga does not want any *Bowers*
Oh, she wants to feel the power of the Rastaman
Two feet (up) in the air like the Twin Towers]

As is routine in hardcore dancehall culture Munga trashes the *eatas*¹⁵ and *bowas*¹⁶, all sexual deviants who tamper with accepted notions of sexual engagement as a route to full heterosexual masculinity.

This new millennium discourse of a Rastafarian self as Gangsta Ras embodies a radical and overt convergence with carnality and hardcore materiality. This apparent departure from

the traditional discourses of Rastafari towards what could be deemed the conflicted discourses of Babylon is exemplified in the lyrics, dress and self-presentation of Munga Honourable as one current manifestation of Gangsta Ras in dancehall culture. Munga’s obvious discursive kinship with a cadre of Rastafari-influenced artistes who currently flit through dancehall’s spaces suggests a re-placement of Rastafari within the contemporary space of Jamaican popular music and culture. The Fashion Ova style culture that is dancehall and capitalist materialism grounds itself upon the bodies of these men as they move through the halls of Jamaican popular culture locally and internationally. Thus, Munga, as a child of the millennium, brings Rasta into the 21st century and squarely into the heart of the dancehall.

This is paralleled by the apparent unclothing of Rastafari femininity for the public gaze where ‘real Rastafari women’ in Jamaica have adopted the fashion and style preferences of their more secular counterparts. For example, popular female artiste, Queen Ifrica stands as a feminine reflection of Munga Honourable the Gangsta Ras in the halls of Jamaican music culture with her adoption of a new image. Queen Ifrica’s turn to carnality or, “going under di frock” with songs like *Thong* that speaks clearly to love, romance and sex, and *Daddy* that rips the mask away from the deviant sexual practices of incest and pedophilia, but which nonetheless tackle sex and carnal issues, is coupled with her new self-presentation as sexy and desirable. In this instance, as with Miss Jamaica Universe 2007, we are granted the opportunity to gaze upon a ‘real rastawoman’ with bared shoulders, brightly coloured locks, sporting lipstick and makeup, in similar fashion

to her secular and often eroticized counterparts. Like Munga, Queen Ifrica buys into the secularized sexualized and popular discourses that mark the progress of Rastafari into the 21st century and which dominate the halls of popular dancehall culture.

Conclusion

The markers of Western capitalism signified in the symbolic self-presentation and “re-turn” to dancehall-like discourse within Rasta suggest a transition in the inherent meanings of Rastafari that follows the discursive path traced through the halls of Jamaican dancehall since the late 1990s. One can argue that this is assimilation for survival or adaptation in the face of growing pressures on the psyche of men and women who seek validity in the halls of Jamaica, and more particularly on the stages of popular music culture. One can also question if these examples suggest a drastic ‘bowing’ to the dictates of ‘Babylon system’ or reflect the current manifestation of real Rastafari in a 21st century arena. Yet, regardless of the final resolution to these debates, I argue that the inherent tensions in the paradoxical self-presentation of the Gangster as Rastafari and Rastafari as Gangster in Gangsta Ras interrupt the traditional notions of what it means to be Rastafari. Consequently, the *Gangsta Ras* as epitomized in the persona of Munga Honorebel must be figured as a musical and cultural replica of the conflicted negotiations of self and identity in a materialistic world. He has come and he has taken his place.

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Notas

¹ See Cooper’s discussion on incendiary lyrics in dancehall and the lyrics of Bob Marley in her Chapter, “More Fire: Chanting Down Babylon from Bob Marley to Capleton” in *Sound Clash*, 2004, pp. 179-206.

² For example, I participated in several radio discussions in Jamaica during this period in which these ideas were foregrounded. See also the BBC Documentary, *Reggae: The Story of Jamaican Music*, released in 2004, which also highlighted this point of view.

³ Dimario McDowell, the creator and graphic artist of these posters, reminded me of the rationale behind the artistic placement on these posters each succeeding year. Artists were highlighted in tiers and accorded the top of the poster because of their role as veterans or superstars. Other artists, like those in the center of the poster for Sting 2004, were seen as up and coming (upcoming) superstars based on their performance and energy that year. This is a perception that sometimes becomes reality and, at other times, is simply not realized.

⁴ “Shave roun di rim” literally means “shave around the rim”. In Jamaican language and culture it incorporates the dismissal of men who wear locks that have been neatened by barber artifice and tools. In essence, they participate in Babylon’s rituals of aesthetic and personal care, therefore, they are not ‘real Rasta’. In many instances, these practices were associated with North American secularization and fashion.

⁵ “Pump up her vagina”.

⁶ “Gone under frock” literally translates into “Going underneath a woman’s dress”. In dancehall lingua it means delving into the socially forbidden discussions about the erotic and sexual.

⁷ Note that Sizzla’s explicit description of sexual issues in some of his tunes, plus his reportedly extravagant lifestyle, led to a break-up not

only with his Rastafarian ex-colleagues like Luciano, but also with the Bobo Ashanti order, whose elders repeatedly distanced themselves from Sizzla's music and lifestyle, while he still considers himself a Bobo Ashanti member.

⁸ I have been bad since the day I was born.

⁹ The EADUMC was chaired by Ras Junior Manning and claimed to represent a unification of the 13 houses of Rastafari.

¹⁰ During the summer of 2008, I participated in several radio discussions that sought to dismiss Munga Honorobel's role as disruptive and out of sync with the tenets and worldview of "real Rastafari".

¹¹ The JCDC or the Jamaican Cultural Development Commission is a public sector entity set up by the Jamaica government in 1963 to develop and promote the creative talents and cultural expressions of the Jamaican people and ensure that the nation's cultural heritage is preserved and sustained for future generations. The JCDC also organises the national Independence celebrations and other events of national significance. The JCDC Popular Song Contest was first named the Festival Song Competition and was organized in 1966 to showcase the talents of aspiring artistes, songwriters and producers. It is one of the annual cultural competitions that culminate at the Independence celebrations in August each year. Since 2008 the Popular Song Contest has been renamed the Festival Song Competition. Visit the JCDC's website for more information at: <http://www.jcdc.org.jm/index.php>.

¹² "Chrome thing" is a coded reference to a gun.

¹³ The girls love the Gangsta Ras.

¹⁴ Wine upon it.

¹⁵ *Eatas* or eaters are individuals who engage in oral sex which is considered taboo in dancehall culture, particularly when the female is on the receiving end. The term captures the use of the mouth, which should be reserved for the intake of food, which is used to "eat out" the recipient, usually a woman.

¹⁶ Like *eatas*, *bowas* (bowers) is also a term for individuals who engage in oral sex. It captures the act of bowing/kneeling in a subject position to deliver this pleasure to the receiving party. It suggests both masculine and feminine.

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