

THE KINGSTON-CAPE TOWN CONNECTION: RASTAFARI IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Jakes Homiak and Carole Yawney

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THE KINGSTON-CAPE TOWN CONNECTION: PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Top left: Ras Dawit and Ras Elphy at Bush Radio, Cape Town, interview Ras Mortimo Planno in Jamaica, on the occasion of Bob Marley's birthday, February 6, 1997.
2. Top right: Ras Mortimo Planno and brethren in West Kingston hang Ian Smith and Harold Wilson in effigy. The Dungle, Kingston, 1960s.
3. Middle: Jakes Homiak and Clem Marshall interview Ras Mortimo Planno in Jamaica, February 21, 1999, to prepare a video message for Rastafari in South Africa.
4. Bottom left: Hanging Smith and Wilson in protest, as above.
- 5, Bottom middle: Carole Yawney, Bush Radio, Cape Town, South Africa, 1997.
6. Bottom right: Ras Jessie Congo I on the air with Ras Mortimo Planno, February 6, 1997.

## **Introduction.**

This paper is a collaborative initiative written in cyberspace but grounded in the spirit of Rastafari reasoning. This style represents for us an encapsulated version of Rastafari history - from yard roots to international branches, building on both face-to-face orality and complex communication technologies. It is an experimental work-in-progress. Carole Yawney and Jakes Homiak have fifty years of Rastafari ethnographic experience between them: in Jamaica; elsewhere in the Caribbean; in North America and the U.K.; and recently in South Africa. We have decided to share our resources in order to come to a better appreciation of Rastafari. And since we reason obsessively upon Rastafari all the while, why not expose some of our backstage musing to frontstage scrutiny?

Our joint exploration is based on a relationship of trust which we have developed over the years. In order to produce this paper, Carole has given Jakes a range of materials from her research in South Africa. This includes documents, newspaper articles, videotapes, transcriptions of interviews, and so on. The understanding is that any of this material can be included in papers which we write, but is not to be made available more widely otherwise. Both of us have an interest in theorizing about the globalization of Rastafari and in developing appropriate methodological styles. To this end, we are turning our mutual exploration to a particular case study i.e. South Africa—and setting it within the perspective of our sense of the globalization of Rastafari in general.

**Carole:** The inspiration for the title of this paper came from Dudley Thompson's book "From Kingston to Kenya: The Making of a Pan-Africanist Lawyer". I really enjoyed the section where he discusses his experience of George Padmore's home in London after the war, and how it served as a meeting place for foreign students of a pan-Africanist persuasion, and other anti-colonial activists. Many of the people who met up at Padmore's went on to become nationalist leaders in their respective countries.

**Jakes:** Well, I have a reaction to the title based on how I see pan-African liberatory politics as part-and-parcel of an ideology and culture as it emerges and functions within an international formation. In this sense, Kingston and Cape Town are more than merely geographical locations—they are "capitals" of struggle and resistance within the African world; points of embarkation and arrival in which identity has been rooted and routed as part of an international network of resistance. Kingston-to-Cape Town is a route which mediates and is mediated by other contacts, movements, and associations within the Black world.

But by referring to this connection as a "route", I'm trying to move beyond the familiar root/route pun which appears in much postmodernist literature. My point is that Jamaica and South Africa can be seen as flash points for galvanizing sentiments of African exclusion as well as African unity over much of the past century. For example, in explaining the appeal of the Garvey movement and general pan-African consciousness in South Africa, Ruppert Lewis has pointed out the similarities in colonial policies of oppression and discrimination as they operated in the Caribbean and in South Africa (e.g., expropriation of African land intended to create slave and indentured wage labor, racist policies, etc.). These, he argues, "created conditions of repression and labor exploitation for the African rivaled only by the conditions of trans-Atlantic

slavery” (1988:140). Its also well known that West Indians were prominent in the Garvey movement in Cape Town, as they were elsewhere in Africa (Lewis 1986:118); moreover, conditions in South Africa were frequently the focal point for articles in the African press (including Garvey’s organ) and these served as rallying points throughout the African world at least up to the time of the Italo-Ethiopian crisis (S.K.B. Asante 1977:233). Given this shared history of oppression and similar responses in Ethiopianism, Garveyism, and pan-Africanism, its hardly surprising that Jamaica and South Africa should be linked today via the culture of Rastafari and reggae.

**Carole:** You and I have discussed in the past our sense of the “invisible history” of international communication, actually trying to trace in as precise a way as possible how ideas and influences are transmitted globally person-to-person. This was actually a perspective that Ras Mortimo Planno encouraged me to develop when I was first working with him in Trench Town in the early 1970s. His sense of history was very much informed by an appreciation of how people networked backstage. Indeed, his own open yard policy meant that an endless stream of visitors, both local and from foreign, passed through his hands. And he has maintained this style over the years. Reading about Padmore in London resonated for me with Planno in Kingston.

**Jakes:** Well, your resonance with Padmore and the pan-African sphere of influence he created in London is, I think, relevant to how we’re speaking about both places of cultural location as well as discursive space. One of our goals should be to define what we mean by globalization. At a minimum, I think its about how people, places, events, and ideology become mutually tied up with one another, in this case through common structures of historical experience. With Rastafari—as with Garvey and pan-Africanism—globalization entails a politics of location as

much as it does a movement of people, ideas, symbols, sounds, and images. Its also entails the ways in which the inhabitants of local places—Kingston, Cape Town, or wherever—are engaged in thought, activity, or ideology about or with others in distant locations who share simialar experiences of marginalization, oppression, and struggle. In this regard, Rastafari culture—and Caribbean culture more broadly, has long been “deterritorialized.” Much of what is cycled through the discursive space of Rastafari yards, Nyabinghi centers, dancehalls, reggae sessions, community centers, concert tours, street meetings, protest marches, and the like bears the imprint of this simultaneous engagement with peoples beyond the boundaries of one’s place. Rooted and popular cultural forms are collapsing and cross-fertilizing each other in this complex space.

This mutual involvement between diasporic and African peoples has been going on for a long time. And, I believe, the Rastafari are themselves increasingly aware of these connections—both historically and in the present. We’ve shared some examples of this “invisible history” from our own fieldwork, but another example is evidenced by Jabulani Tafari’s discussion of the Garvey movement in South Africa and the cross-fertilization with Garveyism in the diaspora (I Jabulani Tafari 996:94) as well as the contribution of reggae in the anti-apartheid struggle. In terms of our own wider movements among Rastafari in recent years, it is clear that there is now a cadre comprised both of Elders and Rastafari community <sup>sts</sup> activities who now routinely move between sites in the diaspora and those on the continent (Kingston-and-Cape Town is an important nexus—while also <sup>ing</sup> folding in London, Toronto, New York, Washington, Ethiopia, and various other sites in the Caribbean). Telecommunications, video, radio, as well as print media

are among the resources that have accelerated the flows of communication and exchanges between these international emissaries and the Rastafari communities they connect.

Perhaps some of these processes are foregrounded in the case of South Africa because of the historic importance of the anti-apartheid struggle and the fact that South Africa was/is the final stronghold of European domination. This makes it a focal point of Rastafari concern perhaps second only to Ethiopia. Coupled with this is the fact that various Jamaican and diasporic Rastafari have, in recent years, repatriated and now live in South Africa and other parts of the continent. All of this give us a way to think differently about how Rastafari culture inhabits global space. I think its fair to say that a great deal of everyday thought and activities of individuals on both sides of this connection are actually oriented to people and places that form part of this global network. This perhaps casts a different light on a statement by Ras Mortimo Planno—which you recently published: “His Majesty seh that communication quicken progress...” These connections have been at work for a long time. The challenge is really in tracking the kinds of links and their specifics which have created a cross-fertilization of these ideologies

**Carole:** As far as I can tell, Rastafari as we know it in the Jamaican context, started to emerge in South Africa in the mid-1970s. There is no doubt that reggae music inspired its initial manifestation. However, the Rastafari seed fell upon the fertile ground of Ethiopianism, Garveyism, and Black Consciousness. Tony Martin writes:

Southern Africa played a critical role in the very formation of the UNIA.  
...The UNIA spread rapidly to Africa in general and South Africa in particular. Cape Town especially, as a major seaport, became an important

focus for the spread of Garveyite activity to surrounding areas. The 1921 Report on the South African Development of Native Affairs noted the presence of Garveyite propoganda in Cape Town and Johannesburg and reported four UNIA branches operating in the Cape Peninsula. (Martin, 1983:134)

Based upon my observations in South Africa, the Cape Town area has the highest concentration of Rastafari in the country. While it has never been possible for political reasons to do a Rastafari census, we are definitely talking several thousands. For example, in the 1994 elections the ANC thought it politically expedient enough to appeal to the Rastafari vote in the Western Cape area. "Greetings I-N-I" one flyer reads, followed by "ANC speaks to RASTA". With photo icons of Marcus, Marley, and Mandela, the handbill invites one and all to a rally at the Guguletu Civic Centre, with speakers and "irie music from Jamdown to Cape Town". On the other side of the page are listed several reasons why Rastafari should vote for the ANC, including:

1. The ANC is here to serve you! We put people first!
2. We all have a roll(sic) to play under an ANC government.
3. Mandela is a world leader, a symbol of hope and pride for black people throughout the world.
4. He is a symbol of liberation to African and Caribbean countries.
5. We will see that South Africa become part and parcel of the OAU.
6. Your religion and beliefs will be guaranteed and respected.
7. Many Rastafarians run small business. The ANC will support self-help initiatives from the people."

**Jakes:** In this regard, the ANC found itself in a similar position as the PNP and JLP after Independence. Now the trick was how to transform the black masses into an electoral constituency. The fundamental difference was that in Jamaica the Rastafari were initially seen as an impediment to this process whereas in South Africa they were seen as a facilitating vehicle.

**Carole:** Well, the notice goes on to declare that: "The ANC recognizes that Rastas are part and parcel of the oppressed masses. We all know of the important role of the international Rasta movement has played(sic) in the Liberation Struggle in bringing to the attention of the World the message of our struggle through music and culture". I'm quoting at some length here, because I will be discussing below how the relationship between Rastafari and the ANC state has deteriorated in several ways since these heady days of 1994, both in terms of objective social relations and symbolically. For example, I was in South Africa to witness Mandela's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party celebrations which consisted of a banquet and a cultural concert broadcast live on national television August, 1998. Local celebrities and foreign guests such as Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson vied to pay their respects. But many Rastafari asked why there was not one reggae performer included?

**Jakes:** This is all the more ironic in light of the proclamation that Winnie Madikezela-Mandela made during her recent visit to Jamaica.

**Carole:** Yes, to be sure. On a recent trip to Jamaica, Winnie Madikezela-Mandela affirmed the role that Rastafari reggae music played in boosting the spirits of freedom fighters in the anti-apartheid struggle (Share, 1999: 10). Indeed, a Jamaica Rastafari cultural activist who lived in South Africa during the year leading up to the 1994 elections, was actually contracted to provide the reggae sound system on the occasion of Mandela's acceptance speech. In fact, several Rastafari performers travelled to South Africa from Jamaica for this event. I happened to be in Jamaica at this time, when even the eighty-two year old auntie with whom I was living arose at 3:00 am to watch the ceremonies on Jamaica national television.

These South African activities were widely reported in the Jamaican media, and the subject of public celebrations, even though the event in Mandela Park was marred by riot-like runnings, much to the embarrassment of many Jamaicans. (It reminded people of the police/crowd violence that occurred at the National Stadium on the occasion of Winnie and Mandela's state visit, soon after his release.) *In fact, anti-apartheid South African activists were frequent visitors to Jamaica during the struggle.*

**Jakes:** Yes, we've talked before about the visit of Merriam Makeba and Stokely Carmichael to Back 'o Wall in 1963. I discussed this at some length with a Jamaican Elder, formerly of Back 'o Wall, now of Washington, D.C. It was event known throughout the Jamaican Rasta community at the time.

**Carole:** (See for example, E.S.P. McPherson's correspondence regarding the visit to Jamaica of prominent ANC members, such as Oliver Tambo, Neo Muzana (Chief ANC representative at the UN), and Frene Ginwala (who went on to become the Speaker of the House in the ANC administration) in 1987. McPherson, 1991:176). Nor indeed, have such linkages ceased. For example, only a couple years ago a South African community activist with international experience visited Jamaica, which included an lengthy meeting with Elder Mortimo Planno. Since the end of state apartheid in South Africa several Rastafari (as well as non-Rastafari) with Jamaica experience have repatriated as individuals to South Africa [THERE IS A SENSE OF BEING PART OF A COMMUNITY VIA THE STRUGGLE], usually via North America and the U.K. Others have passed through on sojourns of varying lengths. It is difficult to address some of these exchanges in detail without jeopardizing precarious relationships. Rastafari report to me that generally speaking in Africa it is difficult to process one's papers towards citizenship.

Repatriated Rastafari make substantial contributions to the local community, working in such areas as media, reggae music, tourism, crafts exchange, and trade - in addition to the promotion of Rastafari culture per se. Some of them have developed more extensive Rastafari networks in southern Africa, as well as Ethiopia. *The mediating role of the U.K. Rastafari community in this regard is crucial.*

**Jakes:** The U.K. connection is another thing we've discussed in terms of the movement of Jamaican and diasporic Rastafari to and throughout the continent. One of the Jamaican Nyahbinghi brethren who sojourns much of the time in London refers to it as "the gateway to the continent."

**Carole:** In November, 1996, for example, the House of Nyahbinghi in the U.K. and Jamaica, coordinating with representatives from other Rastafari mansions, both in South Africa and abroad, organized a Rastafari trod to South Africa. The ranking Elder on this mission was Ras Boanerges, someone who had already travelled extensively in the United States, Canada, the U.K., and Ethiopia. Other delegates included younger idren with international experience as well. One of the main outcomes of this mission was the construction of the first Nyahbinghi Tabernacle in South Africa, in the Marcus Garvey Camp near Cape Town.

I arrived in South Africa a few weeks after the visitors had departed, so the events were still fresh in people's minds. In addition, there is a brief account of the visit by Ras Jabulani in the U.K.-based Rastafari publication, JAHUG (Jabulani, @1997: 28-29, and 33). While it appears that Rastafari in South Africa were enthusiastic about meeting such a Patriarch as Ras Boanerges, there was also *a certain amount of tension generated by this Elder's orthodox position against reggae music as a contaminating influence on Rastafari*. I was familiar with this

position of Ras Boanerges because I had worked with him in the past on a Nyahbinghi mission to Canada in 1984. It was a shock to many Rastafari in South Africa because they are grateful to reggae music for promoting the message of Jah in state apartheid times.

**Jakes:** I see this as an example of the complex and contested nature of discursive space that exists within the current context of the movement's globalization. Traditional Elders like Ras Boanerges have a very different experience of reggae in terms of their own ritual biographies within the movement than do brethren and sistren in South Africa—not to mention many of those in Rastafari communities outside of Jamaica.<sup>1</sup>

**Carole:** Well, there's actually more to this issue. Ras Jabulani describes this conflict in some detail (Jabulani, @1997:28). He also suggests that: "In Cape Town they say they don't want to be ruled by black Afrikans and they see Bob Marley as their King because he is a coloured, and Haile Selassie I is not their God and King"(Jabulani, @1997:28). This comment serves to emphasize a possible source of tension in the South African community between Rastafari who would have been classified under state apartheid as "black" or as "coloured". These labels still have salience today, referring as they do to historic cultural orientation as much as to skin colour. For example, Rastafari who would be considered "coloured" frequently speak both English and Afrikaans, while other Rastafari might speak both English and one of the other South African official languages.

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between Nyahbinghi and reggae are but two different points of references within Rastafari. The different meanings which traditions Elders in Jamaica as opposed to Rastafari in South Africa may attach to reggae not only has to do with when and how individuals became Rastafari and with what cultural resources they did so, but it speaks to the point made by Paul Gilroy about the difficulties in tracking the meaning of vernacular diasporic musics under conditions of globalization (Gilroy 1993:110).

When this issue of JAHUG became available in South Africa, many Cape Town Rastafari told me how much this article disturbed them because, as they stated and as I witnessed, they do indeed give praises to Haile Selassie I as God and King, and not to Bob Marley. On another occasion, at a Nyahbinghi assembly which I attended, one of the speakers proclaimed that Rastafari is love, universal love, demanding that whether I and I be Khosa or Coloured, we must become one to overpower the separation they sought to overcome by the old regime.

Again, in November, 1997 there was another House of Nyahbinghi trod to South Africa, with Jamaican Elders via the U.K. The ranking Jamaican Elder on this mission was Ancient Bongo Thyme, who also has considerable international experience. This mission was more ambitious, including travel to Rastafari communities in most of South Africa's provinces. On December 28, 1997 in Palm Springs, near Soweto, at a national conference the Rastafari National Council was officially established. Its first Chair and current HQ are located in Kimberley. In January, 1999 the Rastafari National Council celebrated its first anniversary in Cape Town.

One of the RNC's stated goals is to settle two Elders permanently in South Africa by the year 2000. In fact, it was in Kimberley that Ancient Bongo Thyme, the acknowledged High Pirest of the Nyahbinghi Order, applied for South African citizenship. *Historically, politically, and symbolically, Kimberley has emerged as a central focus of the Jamaican South African connection.*<sup>2</sup> While Rastafari in Kimberley have developed a strong presence, good relations with

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<sup>2</sup> Much of the work on this connection has been done by Robert Hill. Among other things, Hill has traced connections between the South African pan-Africanist Solomon Plaatje and Shepard Athlyi Rogers, the author of the Holy Piby, a book which provided the doctrinal basis for Rogers' "Afro-Athlican Constructive Gaathly", with headquarters in Kimberley, South Africa (Hill 1981:62). Hill has also traced connections between the early congregations mobilized by Leonard Perceival Howell and followers of Athlyi Rogers in Jamaica (unpublished paper, University of Maryland, October 8, 1998).

the local community, and have even been successfully negotiating for a land settlement, they are uncompromising in how they understand their relationship to the “new” South Africa. The Chair of the ~~RWC~~ has clearly told me that there can be no reconciliation until the diamonds are returned to Galeshewe, otherwise known by its Babylonian name, Kimberek. When I visited there, brethren made a point of taking me to The Big Hole, to see the devastation wrought by the scramble for diamonds. They feel their resources have been stolen to build Johannesburg, Cape Town, and even Switzerland. Since many Rastafari in Kimberek have worked in mines and have experiences in unions and organizing workers, they are prepared to engage politically as well as culturally.

It seems that several mansions of Rastafari as we know them in Jamaica have had some kind of contact with post-apartheid South Africa, though not all to the same degree. Here I would include Twelve Tribes, the House of Nyahbinghi, and even the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. However, Rastafari in apartheid South Africa necessarily developed their own forms. Some Rastafari served mainly as independent messengers of Jah, promoting reggae through deejaying, such as Ras Jessie Congo I of Cape Town, one of the Elders, or developing reggae bands such as Ras Manchi and the Sons of Selassie, or Harley and the Rasta Family. Others organized communities, such as the Burning Spear Movement, and one of its guiding lights, Ras Bernard Brown, another Elder, or the Marcus Garvey Camp in Philippi. Some Rastafari made a point of settling in more remote areas, such as the hills around Paarl, in order to pursue a more Ital lifestyle.

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Below I have extracted some of the reasoning between myself and Ras Isaac, recorded on August 5, 1998, reproduced with his permission.<sup>3</sup> I didn't have the opportunity on that visit to interview any non-Rastafari living in the community or any representative from the government. The main theme in our reasoning was the struggle by the Marcus Garvey community for access to land where they could live as they wished. The land being contested below is idle government land that was "captured" by both Rastafari and other needy people. By the time I did the interview, this Rastafari community had been displaced twice, and was currently situated on a dusty, arid marginal piece of land between a hydro corridor and a train track, with port-a-johns provided by the local authorities. At this time, about 400 people lived in the camp.

**Jakes:** Well, I've read the newclippings you've sent. But just to put a fine point on how global and local spaces intersect at this current moment, I can also say I at least have a feel for this camp because you and I screened a videotape of it in Jamaica recently along with Ras Mortimo Planno and other brethren and sistren. In fact, the videotape, *I-story: Rastas in Cape Town*, seemed to be pretty much the focus of attention in Ras Planno's gates, including the historical clip—which appear in this video—of Bredda Mortimo disembarking Emperor Selassie I from the plane at Pallisadoes in 1966. [Transition to Interview]

**Ras Isaac:** Actually this camp was formed in 1989. We came in Marcus Garvey in 1990. We've stayed here about eight years.... We used to live in the bush according to our culture, we'd like to make some fire every day. Whenever we've got some celebrations we have to burn fire. So the place that they are removing us to now is like desert to us, we don't like it, we really don't like it. We've stayed because we are forced to come here.

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<sup>3</sup> Carole Yawney conducted this interview in the presence of the community's legal advisor because they've been making on-going legal representations concerning their situation. In fact, the legal advisor, Ras Garreth Prince, has received much media attention in the last couple of years because as a Rastafari previously convicted for the use of dagga, he has been refused admittance to the bar despite his successful completion of all requirements. Ras Prince has a case in progress which is expected to develop into a constitutional challenge on the grounds of religious freedom.

....So (other people living in the community), they said to us, Rasta, you'd better go find your own place because you don't want to involve yourself into politics. We didn't want to be involved in that and we were living in the bush... Nobody can own the land, they say it's government. So they (other people living in the community) said to us, if we don't agree of that, we have to pack and go. They even give us one day. Otherwise if we don't do that they gonna burn our shacks down. This is back in 1990. So they said to us, you better Rasta go find your own place. We didn't argue with them that day did find us there. We do realize more or less better go find another place. Let's leave them just like this. Then we left them there. We move one day and it was suffering to build houses. Especially shacks, you know, because if you are breaking the shack, take the material, you can't build it same as it is. Yes, because other woods, they get broken. And we were given one day. And we were men and women and children.

When we got in the bush it was too late. It was past 2:00 pm in the afternoon. We have to build only just one tent, a big tent, just for the women and children to sleep together inside. And all Rastafarian men were sleeping outside around the big fire we had made. And we slept outside. Just over here where you can see. And the following day we keep on building houses two by two until we finish.

So 1996 after we been living there, and we been living there until 1994 without water.... We talked to an official about water and they supply us in 1994. They did supply us with water. After a long while waiting because the government at that time, it was still apartheid time. They didn't care for our demands. Even before we came to this bush we went to Parliament first.

We were taken a march to Parliament demanding for Rastafarian's land. That was 1990. I don't remember the date. But the first march all Rastafarians who were there were captured. 1990. The first march we took to the Parliament. About 35 Rastas was arrested. They say that we took march and that march was not legal. Yes, it was in the paper as well. Then we came back again. Then we did apply again for a march to go to Parliament again for a second time. And the march was succeed. It was a big march but there was no response from them. It was also 1990. There was no response from the government....

*....We moved here in this bush. But 1996 came Reconstruction and Development Forum.* We're in the bush there. They said to us they want half of the land from us to give to other people who are suffering. So we said okay, we don't mind, if you say that we are living in a big area so that we can share inbetween we don't mind you can take half the land then we can remain with the piece that we has. Right? We gave it to them. After a few weeks we heard a new story, that the place we had given to the people is going to build a stadium for the Olympics. We asked them, where's the place for the people. Why should they start with stadiums and so on while the people are suffering for the place to stay..... Yes, you could see. There is a stadium standing there. It is not finished. They came to us again. They said, no, Rasta , we see you are living in a big area. We need another piece of land. You see, the way they push us, little bit, little bit, to the corner....

***Carole: How did they decide how many people can live on that land? Do they have a rule?***

**Ras Isaac:** We don't know, we really don't know, because we didn't allow even census to come and count us. They came with a helicopter. That's why they found forty houses. They said that

we were forty families in the bush because they come with a helicopter and the bush was too thick. When did they do that?

**Ras Isaac:** It was lasy year, during the census.

**Carole:** So Rastafari participation in the census was an issue too?

A: Yes, yes. In order why we rejected the census because they were used to calling Rastafarians hooligans. And people who just smoke dagga. It's what they do, what they said. Now we are asking ourselves why should the government, if the government counting people for the whole world, why must they count the hooligans too? Because if we are the hooligans we are not supposed to be counted as human beings.....

....Because we see that the government, it seems that it doesn't care for us. And we are living a specific life than other people, you see, a special life. We said to them, as they say they want to mix us with other people, we said to them no, we cannot allow that because we used to stay with those people and they have complaints that we are playing a noisy music and we smoke a lot of dagga in their community halls. That's why now we don't like to mix up community halls with them. They always give us instructions. Sometimes they say that we are bringing some rude boys coming close to them. Sometimes Rasta have an event, maybe rub-a-dub, dancehall. They says many boys from other areas they come in there....

... We said we can allow the people to come and stay, but they must give us our own place, and our own place for facilities. And this place here, this one over here now, this triangle out there, it was for animals. That's why you could see the bush there. We used to stay with springboks in the bush there. Yes, wild animals....

... Yes, sometimes you could see them come inside the door, because you see, we didn't harm them. And there was no hunters amongst us. No meat eaters. So they do love people. Sometimes they come, you give them orange.

*Carole: Okay, when did they come in and bulldoze and move you out of the bush there?*

**Ras Isaac:** June, 1997.... They were pulling machines in to bulldoze the bush so the police were standing guard.... But since I saw the police that morning, I wake up and I go to Legal Resources Centre. And ask about what's happening. And the Legal Resources Centre take action and then they came and they reasoned. They removed the police away. And they said they must give us a chance to reason about this issue. After we have reasoned about that issue we were given that we are getting this land here because the mess was already been done. Because they have already bulldozed the whole bush and we were just sitting in the island. And the problem that we were facing in that time you see, we used to use the bush as a toilet because we didn't have toilets.. ... -

We told the idren, it's better, let's take what they give, because by now we are suffering. Okay. We went with the Province to the Legal Resources Centre with the lawyers as well. We discussed the matter. They give us this piece of land . They said the whole land beyond the electric pylons is the one you can occupy. And this one with the bush here is for springboks as I have said. [...] And we told them that we need a place for a Tabernacle and community hall. They said to us alright, we are going to get it here in the same area where we are.

*Carole: What's wrong with where the Tabernacle and community hall are now?*

**Ras Isaac:** That land which is in dispute now we told first time that we need it in the centre here because we wanted to live like Twelve Tribes. Like settled. They said no, it's going to cost a lot of money to make those joins. And drainage. They show us the boundary of the houses as each has been marked here. And the boundary of the facilities.....(End of transcript section.)

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**Carole:** At the time of the interview, the Rastafari Tabernacle and a small adjacent community centre were located on land on which the government wanted to settle more people. It had allocated to the Rastafari another smaller piece of land for their community functions, and the Rastafari were contesting this. Then, during the first week of November, 1998, during H.I.M.'s Coronation Nyahbinghi in the Tabernacle at Marcus Garvey Camp, with international visitors in attendance, local government representatives tried to close the Tabernacle. Police were sent in and a conflict ensued. According to reporter Chiara Carter: "Police representative Captain Jacques Wiese confirmed that members of the public order policing unit had fired rubber bullets, teargas, and stun grenades on Monday morning. He said they were called in after workers were intimidated and prevented from demolishing the structures" (Carter, 1998:2). The Mail and Guardian reported this event with a front page photograph of Rastafari chanting and drumming as they witnessed the "bulldozers of Babylon" razing the Tabernacle to the ground. According to Carter, at least four Rastafari were shot (Carter, 1998:2). The use of such force and the choice of the Nyahbinghi celebrations date were criticized in several quarters. Even people not particularly sympathetic to the politics of Rastafari were shocked by what reminded them of the days of apartheid, and not the "new" South Africa.

**Jakes:** To anyone familiar with the local history of Rastafari in Jamaica, there are profound parallels here—particularly to the struggle of Rastafari during its first three decades. The ethos of separation and collective search for and settlement on unoccupied Crown lands is just one. The raids on Pinnacle in the 1940s and 1950s as well as the destruction of Rasta communities in the aftermath of the Coronation Market riot in 1959 come to mind. But even moreso is the bulldozing of Back to Wall in 1964(5). Curiously, this key Rastafari settlement fell because of the state's agenda for development—and it did so not that long after was visited by Merriam Makeba and Stokely Carmichael in 1963. The bulldozing of the Marcus Garvey camp occurred on the heels of the visit by a mission of Jamaican Rastafari—individuals who traced their roots to the development of Rastafari in West Kingston. Is that prophecy or history, or both?

\* \* \*

**Carole:** Well, continuing on. During the three trips I have made to South Africa since 1997 I have spent most of my time trying to develop a sense of the extent of the Rastafari presence there. It should not be surprising, given the joint role of the Cape Town area as a seaport and international travel destination, as well as its history of Garveyism and other kinds of Africanist activity, that the largest concentration of Rastafari in South Africa seems to be in the Western Cape. And that is where we find more experienced Rastafari who have been active since the mid-1970s. In addition, when I spent my 1998 summer in South Africa I had the opportunity to travel along the south coast, and diagonally southwest to northeast across the country from Cape Town to the Venda area, up near the Limpopo River that defines the border with Mozambique. Always moving in the spirit of Rastafari with Rastafari fellow travellers, we checked for idren wherever we passed through.

After celebrating HIM's July 23 Earthday with the Burning Spear Movement in Cape Town, I and I caught up with HIM's Earthday Nyahbinghi in Knysna, a tourist destination on the Indian ocean, where Rastafari have founded a small community called "Judah Square". Here I met several Rastafari delegates from other parts of South Africa who invited me to visit them. Later as we zig-zagged across the country, we checked for idren in Beaufort West, Kimberley, Palm Springs (near Soweto), Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Thohoyandou, the capital city of the Venda area. In fact, even upon walking across the bridge into Zimbabwe to visit Beitbridge, we met a Rastafari idren, with a local taxi service who promptly offered to orient us to the local community.

What emerged for me was a picture of the longstanding contribution of Rastafari in South Africa to the anti-apartheid struggle and to the post-apartheid nation building process, but in a very specific uncompromising Rastafari style. Whether remaining in South Africa or participating from exile, whether politically non-aligned, ANC or PAC, Rastafari manifested all kinds of works. This history needs to be told. It's the project to which I have now turned my attention, having already laid the groundwork to make a collaborative effort to document it. This would be a good opportunity to introduce a discussion of the post-apartheid, post-1994 elections process of nation building in South Africa. Rastafari there must be appreciated in this context because the question arises: *what is the role of Rastafari in the "New South Africa"?*

In December, 1997 I had an opportunity to participate in a conference at the Cape Town Democracy Centre, sponsored by IDASA, on the theme of "Multicultural Citizenship in the 'new' South Africa". After years of armed struggle against apartheid, violent repression, and massive civil conflict, a political settlement was negotiated. The South African economy has a

major investment in a peaceful transition to democracy but the reality is that the legacy of apartheid persists.

The majority of the population in South Africa continues to struggle for the means of among blacks and five years after the end of apartheid only Brazil has greater inequality of income than South Africa" (Stoddard, 1999:A20). Murray has documented in more detail the persistence of post-apartheid poverty, arguing that until such economic racism is rectified, "Albie Sachs' words about the liberation movement, spoken in 1992, still stand: We have achieved a great victory. We have de-racialized oppression. We have done something that apartheid never succeeded in doing - we have legitimised inequality" (Murray, 1997: 8).

Under such circumstances how does the process of nation building hope to stabilize the "new" democratic South Africa? The image of South Africa as the "rainbow nation" has been promoted as panacea for the above ills. According to Gary Bains:

"Since coming to power, the ANC has sought to promote an inclusive nationalism and non-racialism. At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that the Charterist ideological strand has prevailed over the Africanist tendencies in the movement. The ANC's nationalism envisages common citizenship for all, irrespective of race. Non-racialism evokes respect for, and tolerance of, the difference of the other." Bains (1997:4)

At the same conference, Robin Turner presented a paper on the new South African educational programme, known as "Curriculum 2005" (Turner, 1997). This is an outcomes-based education agenda designed to encourage the new citizen of South Africa to be non-racist and non-sexist, and to have a non-racialized national identity (although presumably

gender identification is unavoidable). The reality of the situation is that access to resources in South Africa is de facto racialized, despite the fact that every effort is made in public discourse, and even private discussion, to avoid the use of the “R” word. Unfortunately, it is also a persistent and seemingly necessary part of public and private discourse in South Africa to continue to refer to not just Blacks and whites, but to the category “coloureds” as well as other groups racially identified under apartheid. This has implications for understanding Rastafari as we shall see below.

Just before the ANC’s historic party conference in Mafikeng, in December, 1997, in which Mandela officially announced that he would stepping down before the next elections, one writer addressed the problem of national unity in the following manner:

“What will be on the table, if not on the agenda, is how the kernel question of race in the rainbow nation is to be dealt with now and into the new millennium. There is a strong argument to be made that South Africa is more racially charged at the end of 1997 than at any time since democracy was achieved three and a half years ago, following three and a half centuries of racial oppression....Is there going to be the start of an honest and constructive debate about race and how we are going to deal with the legacy? is the rainbow nation still the honorable, unifying ideal for our society? If not, what is?” (Johnson, 1997)

In his lengthy State of the Nation address at the Mafikeng conference a few days later, Mandela made it very clear that in his assessment “the leaders of the apartheid system, who perpetrated a vile crime against humanity, have treated both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the country as a whole with utter contempt” (Mandela, 1997:5). Then Mandela went on to argue that it would require an “African Renaissance” to bring about all the objectives

of a democratically transformed South Africa. Since that time, the concept of “African Renaissance” has taken off in public discourse, raising all kinds of questions about its relationship to the “rainbow nation”. As Mandela conceives of it, African Renaissance refers to a programme of liberation for the African continent, “a popular movement for the fundamental renewal of Africa” (Mandela, 1997:6), in which presumably South Africa would play a leading role. This agenda, as Bankie Bankie, has correctly analyzed it, represents a Continentalist orientation, rather than a Pan-African one (Bankie, personal communication).

**Jake:** And, of course, the point here is that this is a quite different orientation <sup>than</sup> that espoused by <sup>^</sup> Rastafari in its pan-African and universalistic version.

There are several reactions I have to these developments. One is that there appears to be an almost inverted pattern with respect to how the state has responded to Rastafari over time in Jamaica and South Africa. The early Rastafari movement was suppressed in Jamaica and coopted only after the Rastafari evolved an internationally acclaimed popular culture of resistance. In the postcolonial period, Rastafari symbols, ideology, and culture became a central feature of an emergent Jamaican nationalism around the same time anti-apartheid themes began to appear in Rasta music. By contrast, the convergence of reggae music and the anti-apartheid movement provided a strong impetus for Rastafari from its inception in the mid-1970s. Now apparently Rastafari does not fit so neatly into the path of nationbuilding which the ANC architects have charted.

At the same time, there appears to be a tendency to romanticize and commodify Rastafari in South Africa. For example, a Cape resident and respondent to my one of my cyberspace solicitations for information about films on Rastafari in South Africa made the following observation:

“...Rastafarians are getting quite a sympathetic press in South Africa, especially in Cape Town. With the escalation of the HARD drug problem in our country—and especially in Cape Town—the authorities are turning an unofficial blind eye to the smoking of dagga (marijunana) and there are often stories about Rastafarians, in which they go on the record about their smoking habits, which do not result in their being pursued by the police. Rastafarians make a variety of most attractive items from wire and tin and sell these at traffic lights—they are generally well-liked and seen as a part of the charm of the Cape” (John Badenhorst, March 25, 1999, African Cinema Conference)

**Carole:** In reviewing the press and media stories on Rastafari since the 1994 elections in SA, I'd say I have to agree with John Badenhorst in that there's been some excellent coverage of Rastafari issues. But your point is well taken. There have been some articles that tend to romanticize Rastafari, such as the one by Diana Streak on the Rastafari community in Kynsna which she portrays as escaping Babylon (Streak, 1996). Having visited that settlement, I can assure you it has a central role to play, both in terms of the larger Rastafari community in South Africa, and in the contribution it makes to the local non-Rastafari scene. I can also see how you read commodification of Rastafari into the piece on “Da Bruddahs and Sistahs of Jah” as well (Coleman, 1995). With its emphasis on the Rastafari use of cannabis or “dagga” in the Marcus Garvey Camp for example, and its colourful photographs, one could draw conclusions about Rastafari as an entertaining addition to the local scene. However, it lacks historical depth in not documenting the very long struggle of the Marcus Garvey Camp, since apartheid days, to rightfully occupy the land on which they live. Even a 1992 article on the Marcus Garvey Camp emphasized lifestyle and ganja use, when at that very time its members were passing through fire over the land issue.

This tendency to almost trivialize Rastafari issues was pointedly expressed in the front page coverage of the opening of the Parliament in Cape Town in 1997. There under a picture of

Mandela and his associates the headlines read: “Children and Rastas add spice to opening fanfare” (Gumede and Aranes, 1997). The article goes on to cover the arrest of a few dozen Rastafari who were protesting outside Parliament to free cannabis. On the other hand, there has been some serious press about political concerns that Rastafari have raised.

**Jakes:** Okay, let me make a different observation. Based on moving with and moving through Rastafari communities in South Africa, you talked about the role which Rastafari there played in the anti-apartheid struggle. This is now apparently a subordinated history in the context of South African nation-building. Here again, there are parallels to the Jamaica situation (i.e., a selective presentation of a history) and there are also parallels to the American Civil Rights movement. AS I’m moving through the article on “The New South Africa” , the comparisons to the US situation is chilling. It drives home that fact that “remembering and forgetting is essential to the ways in which nationalism has been/and continues to be constructed” (Appadauri 1998:155). Historical amnesia plays a role in both Jamaica and South Africa—only Rastafari remembers, as the binghi chant that goes “...cast in de pit of for-get-ful-lness, only I-n-I in re-mem-ber-ance. Never to be remembered...Babylon, you gone!” There is a ready-made segue from this poetic rootical theme to initiatives in the popular-political side.

In terms of this “remembering” and foregrounding one’s history, Rastafari truly is the “modern-antique”—combining “ancient” symbols of identity with modern technology as the means to create and sustain a global movement. Rastafari initiatives in the realm of media and documentation (being critical to a construction of nationhood), and are not to be underestimated. One of the main thrusts from the International Conference in Barbados (Aug 1998) was to put in place a media council. And there were at least several leading bredrin intent on collecting

documentation of the struggles, trials and tribulations wherever they have occurred. I see that this same theme was apparently reiterated at the same time in England—when the South African delegation visited and took in the Hershire ‘binghi (Bongo Thyme being at least one of the Jamaican links). I’ve noted the broadside by the “Association of Rastafari Media” (ARM), the flyer of which Ras Elphie carried back from England to South Africa. This is a convergence of interests and initiatives with far-reaching implications.

This documentation of flows puts us back to the point that “Kingston-to-Cape Town” are connected with a matrix of routes—the England connection being critical—especially from the media side when we consider the racial politics which RT have faced there—and the organized nature of their response—especially around the Centenary events. One might even speculate that connections to the continent are being channeled back through the original routes of colonial domination. (e.g., I remember talking to Ibo in London and having him say to me, “England is the gateway to the continent”—meaning, it was easier from him, as a Jamaican, to gain entry to Ethiopia, Kenya, etc via England....).

**Jakes:** And changing gears again, I want to pick up on your comment about how South African Rastafari have gone about things in a very “uncompromising Rastafari style.” This suggests that there is something more than just symbols and ideology which links brethren and sistren in the Jamaica, the island of Rasta’s birth, and in South Africa. In this regard, we’ve talked about something called a common “vibe”—a way of being—and the role which popular and rooted forms of Rastafari culture play in reproducing this vibe globally.

I was struck recently in reading an honors thesis by Gareth Morgan (1994), which I’ve sent you, in which he argues that knowledge of Rastafari by adherents in South Africa was

produced through the way they processed the message of reggae music as a form of international and spiritual communication. The result was a gravitation to and interpretation of the “natural mystic”, a concept popularized by Bob Marley.

There’s a natural mystic blowing in the air...  
Listen carefully now...you will hear...

Perhaps this is yet another instance of what you, Carole, have talked about as being produced in “ether zone” of transnational space. We’d certainly want more information on this, but this understanding of a “natural mystic” has, in Durban, apparently served to reproduce a version of Rastafari very close to that which I have written about elsewhere—that is, an acetic Ital version of culture (i.e., Higges Knots) which existed in Jamaica in the 1950s and 1960s. This is one of exile to the hills, Rastafari as ascetics who renounce the things of the world, practice celibacy, inhabiting caves as holy places and living Ital of the land as squatters. One version being reproduced in South Africa is that of the “natural man”—which is ironically a version of Nyabinghi culture reproduced through the dissemination of Marley’s reggae. Again, curious link between rooted and popular versions of Rastafari culture. What’s of interest here is that, to my knowledge—save for the monks of Ethiopia—Africa doesn’t really have such ascetic traditions. This point actually came up in conversation with Bredda Manga while we were in Ras Mortimo Planno’s yard at UWI. Now perhaps we’re both being short-sighted—possibly such a traditions exists within the independent Ethiopian church movement which started in South Africa back in the 1890s. Barring this, the Jamaican Rastafari and Ethiopian Christian traditions would seem to be the only exceptions.

## Conclusions.

Are there some conclusions that we can draw, directions suggested, or questions that need to be asked? What does the Kingston to Cape Town connection tell us. While it has contributed enormously to the emergence of Jamaican and, it can be argued, Caribbean nationalism—Rastafari seems to have become globalized largely by operating outside the structures of the nation state. Its role in South Africa and on the continent appears uncertain at this time—although it is clear that Rastafari-inspired reggae was of major cultural significance throughout the period of African decolonization. Rastafari would appear to fit the category of what Appadurai calls “culturalist movement”—a movement which mobilizes identity at the level of the nation state (1998). And as Don Robotham (1998:308) has suggested, Rastafari is one the identities in the Caribbean “...seeking to contest the forces of globalization and transnationalization on the terrain of globalization itself, contesting modernity on the terrain of modernity.” That Rastafari would manifest the influence that it does would seem to reflect the deep roots of diasporic and pan-African sentiments as well as the diminished the salience of the nation-state as we approach the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The materials presented in this paper lead us to think more carefully about how Rastafari culture inhabits the global ethnosphere. Rastafari have a distinctive way of “sighting/siting” culture. Their culture not only encompasses distinctive symbolic practices with Afrocentric ideological and counter-hegemonic political significance—it is a culture of sounds and images that travel. Because of the ways in which the global has been collapsed into the local sphere (and vice-versa) we cannot take local cultural entities for granted. Correspondingly, because of the varied and complex ways in which Rastafari culture now “travels”, the local politics of Rastafari

engagement with the dominant society may similarly be more complex than what appears on the surface (e.g., the mirroring of Back to Wall and the Philippi camp).

Material presented in this paper suggests that the links between Kingston and Cape Town, while part of Rastafari globalization, are also enmeshed in a series of wider far-flung ties which include London, New York, and other metropolises of North America and Europe. Don Robotham has stated that “Even Rastafarianism—which, it could be argued, is a form of Caribbean fundamentalism—in its Ethiopianism and pan-Africanism reflects a very typical Caribbean orientation to a transnationalism of south to south. What we have here is a typical New World, African Caribbean form of deterritorialized transnational nationalism, open to many influences and variations, rather than a fundamentalism as such” (Robotham 1998:308-9). Rastafari suggests that this transnational is mediated by more complex ties that draw in other parts of the globe.

It appears that there is a distinctive Rastafari style or “vibe” which transcends the local and operates globally. We would argue that this “vibe” is one of the reasons for the cultural significance of reggae in Africa during the period of decolonization. It's more than simply the message; it's about ways of feeling, thinking, acting which is part of Rasta culture. It's what Bob Marley means when he implores us with the words, “...now hear this drumbeat, as it beats within. Making a rhythm, resisting against the system....” I think Paul Gilroy had something like this vibe in mind when he talked about the Black Atlantic as having created transnational “structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering” that bear commonalities throughout because they resonate with common historical experiences as well as cultural backgrounds (1991:13).

But we also think that the local politics of engagement of Rastafari in South Africa (and elsewhere) are now increasingly open to influence from and exchange with traditional versions of traveling Rastafari culture. Through the foothold which Rastafari communities have now gained on the continent, there promises to be an increasing interplay between popular and rooted forms of Rastafari culture—an interplay destined to alter the nature of both. The goal of the RNC to repatriate two Rastafari Elders to South Africa is just one such sign of this potential for change and development. For my part I'm also reminded of how "presence" and authority is being established on multiple levels.<sup>4</sup> This has taken place through the trade in vinyl and the touring of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and others via musical messages. Its happened through the international 'binghi trod by Elders like Ras Boanerges, Bongo Thyme, Mamma Beryl, and other Jamaican Elders who have traveled South Africa. And other parts of the continent. Its happened through other forms of communication; through the airwaves with Ras Planno via the "Bush Radio" from Jamaica to South Africa. And clearly there are those untrackable flows of audiotapes and videotapes that circulate throughout the entire international Rastafari and pan-African community.

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<sup>4</sup> Along these lines, we might want to look at how the globalization of Rastafari has affected the interplay between oral and textual sources/authority and how this effects both the content of Rastafari ideology as well as the authority of given participants. We know, for example, the older texts (like *The Promised Key* and *The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy*) have been reprieved and brought back into circulation and, no doubt, given new meaning by a younger generation of Rastafari. The speeches of His Majesty are another case in point. From the mid-1980s onward, the popular reggae press—especially the *African Beat*, republished many of the statements made by Emperor Selassie on apartheid. I was amazed when you told me how South African Rastafari know, from having read Mandela's biography, that one of Selassie's Oromo generals trained Mandela in guerilla warfare. In any event, it seems that as Nyabinghi biblical orality has gone out into the international sphere, there has been a corresponding emphasis placed upon Emperor Selassie's speeches and other published statements. This may have been commonplace among some groups of Rastafari in the 1960s and 1970s in Jamaica, but this appears to be a point of much broader concern among members of the international community.

Finally, the processes of globalization and re-alignment which are taking place within the Caribbean and other parts of the Diaspora during the past two decades would seem to have implications for Rastafari. To points made by Robotham (1998) would seem to be relevant—a “re-alignment” of Caribbean economies to North American power structures in the post-Socialist period (post-1980) and a re-assertion of traditional racial hierarchies. In addition, there is also now a much closer connection between African-American discourse of political protest, particularly in demands for reparations. And finally there are the much closer and ongoing links, as noted, to communities on the continent. Within the international Rastafari community, the issue of reparations has focused on the ways in which slavery, colonialism, and underdevelopment has impacted both those “at home and abroad.”

A number of scholars, including Andrew Ross (1998), have argued that the primacy of tourism within Caribbean economies this has meant the promotion by the state <sup>of</sup> traditional Rastafari “roots” culture as opposed to forms of slackness (particularly those which are homophobic) which dominated the 1980s. It has already been noted by the international Rastafari community that this use of Rastafari for promoting tourism returns little if anything to grass-roots Rastafari communities. Ironically, it is probably the same currents of investment and commerce that bring low wage jobs to the Caribbean (and perhaps South Africa), that also carry the music of reggae to a wider world audience. In light of these developments, it is hardly surprising that the Rastafari continue to engage in an international struggle and to project their culture on a wider global screen.

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From Rainbow Nation to African Renaissance, What role will Rastafari play in the South Africa of the 21st Century