“Got to Keep on Moving”: Roots and Routes of the musical construction of the Promised Land

Negotiating narratives of Place and Identity through Reggae music

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I know someday we’ll find that piece of land,

Somewhere not nearby Babylon

The war will soon be over and Africa will unite

The children who liveth in darkness

Have seen the great light (…)

Lord, I got to keep on moving

Lord, I got to get on down

Lord, I’ve got to keep on grooving

Where I can’t be found.

Bob Marley & the Wailers, Keep On Moving

Abstract

Reggae music is essentially a travelling music and a global popular genre. It originated from the experiences of the black diaspora, travelling back to Africa and beyond across simultaneous trajectories. The imagery that roots reggae refers to is derived from the Rastafarian worldview and heritage of Ethiopianism and Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement. The corpus of diasporic narratives expressed and popularized through the vehicle of reggae music have contributed to the creation of images of Africa and Ethiopia as the “Promised Land”. This is a yearned for “elsewhere” where Rasta should return, which is in explicit opposition to Babylon, the corrupted and enslaving Western world ruled by the Capitalist system. Such a system of images acted as an engine for the movement of repatriation that Rastafarians have engaged in since the 1960’s that consequently led to their settlement in Shashamane, Ethiopia, the land granted by the Emperor Haile Selassie I as compensation for black support in the Ethio-Italian war. Through its progressive internationalization due to the global popularity of Bob Marley, roots reggae became known worldwide as a popular musical genre and culture. Rasta discourses and narratives have been circulating among the black diaspora in the West as well as among Africans who developed various local appropriations and elaborations of Rastafari/Reggae as music and culture. For the early repatriates who settled in Shashamane, the entire corpus of Ethiopianist narratives that are distributed and elaborated through reggae songs have represented the lenses through which they experienced the social and political surroundings as well as their primary tool in which to construct and “rehome” the place. In the same manner, locals employ reggae music and
culture as a medium for interpreting the presence of repatriates in their city and defining their relation with the Rastafarian community.

My research investigates how Rasta discourses around Ethiopia and Africa, including elements of universality and cultural uniformity, can be experienced as problematic by local audiences not only in terms of individual perception but also considering the hegemonic representation of Ethiopia as a “mosaic of cultures”, i.e., a federation of various peoples and nationalities introduced and promoted by the current Ethiopian Government. I contend that such contrasting narratives represent a hindrance to the social integration of the repatriate community in Shashamane. Furthermore, I speculate if Rasta’s perception of Ethiopia might function as a valid counter-narrative for those Ethiopians who do not identify with the national ethnic-based representation. I will also attempt to comprehend the repatriates’ efforts to partially adapt such narratives to the Ethiopian context as well locals’ strategies of appropriation and re-elaboration in the establishing of their identity and experiences of the place. In my MA thesis, I contend that reggae music can represent a guide for understanding the way in which both groups relate to Ethiopia as “imagined” and as an actual location, inscribing new meanings to their local experiences. Another goal of my research is to understand whether reggae music may be an instrument through which repatriates and locals can create a discursive as well as concrete space of communication, mutual exchange, and hybridization.
Introduction

It is in many ways very difficult to extricate what it is said of Africa from what Africa says of itself. Perhaps it is impossible. But if indeed “Africa” spoke, how would it speak and what would it say? What “itself” would it express, and could the sound of that voice be understood by ears still ringing with myth?

L. Chude-Sokei

This study investigates the role played by reggae music in “constructing” the black Caribbean diaspora and orienting ideas and practices of return to Africa. It focuses on the case of Rastafarians in terms of concepts, processes, and consequences of repatriation as interpreted and read through the perspective of reggae music. Numerous studies have been conducted on the role played by popular black music in creating black identity and on the “musical construction” of the black diaspora (See Gilroy, 1993 and Daynes, 2004), yet the destiny of such a construction after repatriation remains uninvestigated. On the contrary, the limited, yet recently increasing, research regarding the history of the settlement and development of the Rastafarian “repatriate” community in Shashamane and Ethiopia (See Bonacci, 2008; Soroto: 2008; Gomes, 2011) is more inclined to focus on the local socio-political reality. Although connecting it with global dimensions, research tends to disregard the implication that popular music, and primarily reggae, had and continues to have in the construction of a black repatriate’s “imagined community”. Certain ventures in this direction were taken by the eminent work of Giulia Bonacci in the first study ascertaining and reconstructing the history of the Rastafarian community in Ethiopia from a local perspective at the same time situated in multiple spaces through the routes of the black diaspora. In her analysis, Bonacci mentions reggae and Rasta musical expressions as constitutive of the Rastafarian identity and as symbolical foundations of the transnational movement of the return to Africa (Bonacci, 2008: 371-374). Although the musical aspect is, nevertheless, marginal in her reading of the development and diffusion of Ethiopianist and Rastafarian discourses, Bonacci’s intuitions inspired my own position and research approach. I aimed at bridging diasporic and localized perspectives by investigating the relationship between reggae and “return” from the perspective of:
a) reggae’s origin as an expression of the black Caribbean diaspora;

b) reggae’s progressive globalization and commodification;

c) reggae’s progressive “localization” to the Promised Land due to Rastafarian repatriation to Ethiopia.

The scope of my research is, in fact, to investigate the role of reggae music in the black diaspora’s repatriation to Ethiopia. This role is examined in relationship to the construction and diffusion of images and narratives depicting Ethiopia as the Promised Land. Another scope of the research is to enlighten the “consequences” of such musical and symbolical discourses on repatriate and local life and their reciprocal relationship in the city of Shashamane.

Background to the study

The city of Shashamane, approximately 250 km south of Addis Ababa, has become popular all over Ethiopia as well as abroad due to the presence of a relatively moderate but lively multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community of immigrants known as the Rastafarians. This branch of the black diaspora, primarily originating from the Caribbean but also from the United States and Europe, would rather be considered as and call themselves “repatriates” for they have fulfilled the dream of returning to their homeland of Ethiopia. This “Promised Land”, so strongly yearned for and sung about since the days of slavery, has been progressively identified as the corpus of symbols of black Nationalism and Ethiopianism. Approximately ten years following the end of the Ethiopian-Italian war, the black repatriation movement was eventually afforded a concrete opportunity to go “back to Africa”. They settled in what they felt was their motherland, Ethiopia, through the Emperor’s land donation in the periphery of Shashamane, the so called “land grant” or “Jamaica säfär”. Finally, the black dream of repatriation appeared fulfilled thanks to the intercession of His Majesty the Emperor Haile Selassie I, identified by the Rastafarians as Jah, Rastafari, the Black God, founder and guarantor of the “universal black nation” of Ethiopia. The early Rastafarian settlers of the land grant in Shashamane carried with them the particular corpus of images, narratives, discourses, and beliefs derived from Ethiopianism and reshaped, actualized, popularized, and disseminated throughout reggae music. Yet the first significant wave of repatriate settlers to the Shashamane occurred simultaneously with the progressive reduction of the symbolical and political authority of Haile Selassie in the Ethiopian environment. This was due to the
increase in social discontent regarding the imperial institution which eventually led to the 1974 coup and the rise of power of the Marxist revolutionary Junta of the DERG. The very first encounter of Rastafarian settlers between the symbolical/mythological and “real” Ethiopia with Ethiopia appeared problematic from the very beginning. Although the Imperial dream appeared to be fading, the Rastafarian community in Ethiopia, bearing their hope and faith in the Emperor, continued to increase steadily during the Revolutionary and Federal eras. This is the context that stimulated my interest in studying the dynamics of contact and mutual exchange between repatriates and locals as well as their problems and misunderstandings but also their strategies of negotiation of connotations and creation of a shared space of cultural communication.

Statement of the problem and significance of the study

As suggested by many scholars, “popular music is a cultural product that has crossed (and continues to cross) international boundaries and frontiers the most frequently, even as it may also be used to demarcate and consolidate local spaces” Biddle & Knights (2007:7). The relationship between music and geographical or cultural areas is multiple and complex. Music often exercises a powerful connective role by providing symbolic concepts of community and collective identity either grounded in a specific and demarcated area or crossing impalpable diasporic locations. It may either express extreme localized connotations or, transgressing place and time, create a symbolic common mecca for diasporic audiences (Whiteley, Bennet & Hawkins, 2004:3). Such dynamics can be clearly observed in the development of reggae music, a popular Caribbean genre conveying musical and symbolical African roots which, in only a few decades, achieved universal dispersion and popularity. Many scholars analyze reggae music and Rasta culture primarily as a cultural expression of the black diaspora while only minimal research has been dedicated to reggae culture beyond the diasporic context once “repatriated” to Africa. Therefore, many questions can be raised in regard to continuity and changes of meaning and functions assumed by the genre once reggae localized into new social and political environments.

The significance of my study, therefore, lies in the attempt of overcoming an essentialist diasporic perspective of the study of black popular music and cultural structures such as reggae and Rastafari by investigating the manner in which these elements are conceptualized, experienced, negotiated, and reinvented in the Ethiopian context. My interest is to examine reggae and Rasta narratives (such as the concept of repatriation, among many others) from a
local perspective, where “local” indicates the plurality of voices populating the “land grant”, repatriates, and natives. My MA thesis represents a first attempt to comprehend the role that black popular music might assume par excellence in a context where the condition of living in diaspora disappears. Investigating reggae after its repatriation to Ethiopia can provide interesting insights into the social and political roles of popular music in relationship to social change and inter-cultural communication. It also raises questions about the role/influence that diasporic images and “inventions of Africa” (as those incorporated by reggae and Rasta culture) play in shaping and interrogating Africans’ identity. It enlightens local and repatriates’ strategies of homing and re-homing the location of repatriation and Ethiopia through popular music.

Perspectives on reggae and “popular”

I examine reggae music, its diasporic origins, and its journey back to the motherland of Ethiopia from Chude-Sokei’s perspective of cross-cultural soundscape, carving out a “trans-cultural, international space of popular dialogue” (Chude-Sokei, 1997: 86). In such a space, local and global levels intertwine and overlap, and local audiences are actively involved in the process of shaping and readdressing cultural meanings as well as encoding and decoding (Hall, 1980) texts and contents. Paul Gilroy suggests considering the Atlantic “one single, complex unit of analysis” and utilize it “to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (Gilroy, 1993: 15). He also employed the metaphor of ships to describe the living, micro-cultural, micro-political systems in motion across the expanse between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean (Gilroy, 1992:4). Indeed, reggae has been one of those ships crossing the Atlantic and linking America, the Caribbean, and Europe to Africa and perceived as a physical entity and powerful symbol. Drawing on Gilroy’s suggestions, I propose a broader consideration of reggae, conceived as travelling music and culture continuously involved in a multi-dimensional migration through space and time, metaphorically as well as physically. Such a migration incessantly transforms and generates new spaces of contact between distant cultural realities and communities. The itinerary that this unique form of black musical expression comprises several trajectories: from the Caribbean, travelling back in time and space, reaching its African roots, then to the black Diaspora carrying back rhythms, instruments, and musical elements as well as the memories of slavery, exile, displacement, narratives of longing to return, and a sense of black identity. From the local and socially marginal dimension of Jamaican inner cities, reggae transgressed class-boundaries to become a national cultural product and symbol. It continued, crossing
national borders, leaving the island, and sailing off into the Atlantic to reach a global dimension, exchanging and negotiating new sounds, words, and images at each landing. Finally, on the way “back” to Africa, the long spiritual exile that inspired most early reggae’s production, disappears. Therefore, I will discuss here the more recent and less investigated components of reggae’s musical and cultural journey, its “repatriation” to the “Promised Land” and its reformulation and adaptation to the new environment. Ethiopia and Africa, therefore, are not regarded as a definitive arrival but indeed considered the very beginning of a new transnational journey which will eventually introduce the locally elaborated African reggae expressions to an international audience through the channel of what is currently an extended global Black Atlantic.

In my MA thesis, I refer to reggae as a “popular musical genre”. Very few lines are required to clarify the specific concept of popular that I am employing in this study. According to Barber, the study of popular art forms in the African context can derive interesting insights regarding the local people’s perspective since they “talk about what the people themselves think it is important, in their own vocabulary, and through the form they feel to be appropriate” (Barber, 1987: 4). In contemporary Africa where ordinary people tend to be less visible, and mass media offers a magnified mirror of the moderate élite who owns and rules them, popular arts can work as a grassroots medium of communication while simultaneously reflecting and shaping public opinion (Barber, 1987:3). According to Barber’s definition:

“...popular arts can be taken to mean the large class of unofficial arts forms which are syncretic, concerned with social change and associated with the masses. The centers of activities in this field are the cities, in their pivotal position between the rural hinterland on the one hand, and the metropolitan countries at the other” (Barber, 1987: 23).

Another peculiar feature of modern popular arts and music in Africa is their transnational dimension resulting from the syncretism and cross-influences that originated from colonial experiences and as a result of the progressive incorporation of local economies into a global market. African popular music represents a specific example of such a network of transcultural exchanges since many of the foreign musical traditions brought back to Africa by the music industry were of African origin and subsequently readapted and combined to the local genres (Barber, 1987:73). Urban technologies and infrastructures afforded wide accessibility to modern popular arts and an ability to transcend national and ethnic borders to address global audiences (Barber, 1987: 15). Interesting syncretic synthesis have been created
between indigenous cultural forms and foreign imported ones. Themes, images, and styles have been intertwined and recycled to produce new syncretic forms. The “repatriated” reggae exemplarily embodies such dynamic transatlantic syncretism as with the Caribbean musical genre brought back to the “motherland” as an imported western cultural product, however, having originated in the Afro American diaspora’s womb. Another aspect of Barber’s approach that I found particularly appropriate to my analysis is the aspect of recycling forms, themes, and ideas of different origins as fundament of popular arts’ syncretism. According to Barber: “domestication, recycling and substitution can be seen as metaphors for the whole practice of popular arts, placed as they are on the interface between two worlds” (Barber, 1987: 33). In my analysis, I preferred to employ Barber’s approach to popular arts in Africa, perceived as transnational bridges and mediators between various worlds and cultures. It reflects the flexibility, changeability, and the various ambit of cultural bricolage and cross-influences that characterize the manner in which popular culture and music is produced and read. I venture in my analysis of reggae into the Promised Land and refer to the conception of art as a space, as suggested by Barber:

“What these conceptions seem to be leading to is a conception of art as a space, a forum in which meaning is never fixed, completed or fully constituted. It is the arena in which artists and audiences together use the freedom of imaginative discourse to try out situations and responses, and to reaffirm what they discover, in the process, they have experienced in common” (Barber, 1987: 63).

Research questions and hypothesis

My research attempts to answer questions concerning the role of reggae music in the formation of the repatriate community in Shashamane. First, I question how the corpus of narratives and discourses throughout Africa and Ethiopia that are embedded into reggae songs have dispersed and popularized the identification of Ethiopia and the land grant of the Emperor Haile Selassie I to these repatriates as the biblical Promised Land, fostering the movement of repatriation to Shashamane. Secondly, I investigate the manner in which reggae and Rasta-inspired discourses, so deeply rooted in a mobile and diasporic perspective, can be read and re-interpreted by those who fulfilled the goal of repatriating and by the locals to validate their life in Shashamane and of the presence of repatriates in their city. Thirdly, I question whether the concrete experience of repatriation to Shashamane has incited certain changes in the way concepts of repatriation and the idea of “Zion” are communicated through
reggae music concerning a transformation or a shift from a strictly diasporic to a post-diasporic, “indigenized” perspective. The hypothesis of this research is that the way reggae's discourses and imaginaries are re-produced, interpreted, and re-elaborated by the people of Shashamane may represent a guide for understanding how repatriates and locals relate to each other in regard to constructing and confronting their specific concepts of Ethiopian-ness, national belonging, and identity. I contend that the apparent “clash of imaginaries” which characterizes the encounter between Rasta and locals in Ethiopia may be mediated through reggae music, providing a shared mecca for cross-cultural communication and interaction.

Methods of the study

This research formed the structure of an ethnographic study of the forms, meanings, and functions of reggae in the context of the city of Shashamane and specifically in the Jamaica säfär where the repatriate community is settled. I selected a qualitative research methodological approach. I investigated the functions that reggae music performs within the repatriate community and in the city as a whole through participant observation and attending reggae dances as well as spontaneous and organized musical performances. I conducted primarily unstructured and semi-structured interviews with members of the repatriate community, Ethiopian residents of Shashamane, repatriate reggae artists, and young aspiring artists, both locals and repatriates, to ensure a plurality of perspectives and enlighten conflicting and connective discourses. I experienced a considerable degree of reticence and resistance toward the academic purpose of my research. This was due, in the case of some repatriates, to an explicit mistrust in the academic institution which is perceived as too compromised with the Babylon system. In the case of Ethiopian residents, it was due to the fear of exposing oneself about sensitive topics such as the coexistence with the repatriates in the city as well as social and political issues. My analysis comprises informal, both individual and collective conversations, reasoning, and participant observation. In consideration of the sensibility of certain topics, I have decided to protect my informants’ privacy by avoiding specification of their full name if not explicitly authorized. I have integrated my own ascertations and textual analysis with secondary sources and literature. All of the original material to which I refer in my study has been aggregated during my fieldwork in Shashamane in February and March 2013.
MA Thesis Outline

This MA thesis is structured into four chapters. Chapter One presents a brief history of reggae music from its Jamaican and diasporic origin to its gradual affirmation as a global form of popular music and culture and its “return” to Africa. It also introduces my own perspective toward the study of reggae music considered as travelling music and culture. Chapter Two examines the historical, symbolical, and spiritual origins of the Rastafari movement and the concepts of repatriation and Zion, exploring their implications and reflection in international reggae musical production. Chapter Three introduces the context of my fieldwork and the multiple functions performed by reggae music within the säfar and the city as a whole. Chapter Four illustrates continuities and transformations in “repatriate” reggae production by incorporating two specific case studies: a Jamaican reggae artist repatriated to Shashamane and a collective, international musical project involving repatriate and local youths.

Scope for further research

A thorough study and analysis of the emerging Ethiopian reggae texts is not included since my knowledge and proficiency in Amharic was not sufficient to embark in a satisfactory textual analysis. Additional research on Ethiopian appropriation and indigenization of the genre is, therefore, auspicated. Similarly, research regarding the consumption and perception of reggae music among the Ethiopian audience can reveal interesting insights on the versatility and flexibility of the genre, on the role of popular music in Ethiopia in relationship to social change, as well as signify the socio-political implications of the meanings inscribed and connected to it.
Chapter 1- Reggae music as polyphonic discourse

_Indeed, for this generation within a Black Diaspora, sound is closer to culture than race ever was._

*— Luis Chude-Sokei*

Reggae music, and its progeny Ragga and Dancehall, are today one of the most globally spread forms of popular music and culture. Originated as local expression rooted in the urban Jamaican _ghetto_ culture, reggae gradually turned into a wider and trans-national musical phenomenon. Such process has been thus described by the Jamaican scholar Verena Reckord:

"Reggae is Jamaica's greatest cultural export, the main force that identifies the country internationally. Since the advent of Ska¹ in the late 1950s, Jamaican popular music experienced a phenomenal growth and evolution that took it from being a response to purely parochial needs to more sophisticated commercial and international acceptance. As the music becomes commercialized, accepted and performed by people of varying tastes and cultures, the tendency is to forget its origin, its deeper meaning and function.”

(Reckord, 1998: 231)

By progressively reaching a global dimension and audience, influencing and influenced by innumerable local musical styles and traditions all over the world, on the one hand Reggae might have lost its original exclusive ‘Jamaican-ness’, and perhaps its direct connection with Rastafari² philosophy and ideology, on the other hand, it has welcomed a wide range of new expressive possibilities, transformations, hybridizations, local appropriations. Reckord’s interpretation, among many others, seems to reduce the phenomenon of the global diffusion of reggae music to a process of mere progressive commercialization and consequent deviation from its original and “deeper meaning and functions”. Such a view seems to underestimate, or at least overlook, the new meanings and functions that reggae may acquire once it enters new geographical, cultural and social spaces, as well as the infinite variety of influences,

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¹ Musical genre developed in Jamaica in the late 1950s combining elements of the Jamaican _mento_ and _calypso_ with American influences from Jazz and blues.

² I use the word Rastafari to indicate the complex of philosophical and theological concepts, ideas and worldview originated and transmitted through the Rastafari Movement (see p.)
transformations and revolutions that took place throughout the development of the genre inside Jamaica and eventually back to Africa.

My attempt is therefore to propose a wider understanding of Reggae music, which aims to shed some light on the multiplicity of meanings, messages, narratives and ideas that reggae has articulated and conveyed in relation to the particular context where it has been produced, performed and listened to. Instead of evaluating various reggae expressions through their degree of authenticity, I suggest to look at the genre as a polyphonic entity, a voice made of many different voices, each carrying its set of individual, collective and sometimes contradictory meanings, yet in dialogue with one another. In this first chapter I will briefly introduce Reggae’s maturation and metamorphosis from specifically Jamaican urban music, deeply rooted in Kingston’s ghetto life, to a world-wide appreciated, performed and reinterpreted genre, and its arrival to Africa and Ethiopia. My analysis points to show that Reggae, since the origin, has been a travelling music and culture, constantly involved in a multi-dimensional migration through space and time, metaphorically as well as physically, generating new discursive and physical spaces of contact between distant cultural realities and communities. According to Hebdige reggae music,

“addresses a community in transit to a series of retrospective frames(...). It is the living record of a people’s journey –of the passage from slavery to servitude- and that journey can be mapped along the lines of reggae’s unique structure”(Hebdige, 1979:31).

Yet the slave ship, as this chapter aims to demonstrate, is not the ultimate journey in which reggae has ventured throughout history.

1.1- Polyphonic roots

In his eminent work on Rastafari, L. Barret defines reggae as “a liminal music that sings of oppression in exile, a longing for home, or for a place to feel at home”(Barret, 1977: 9). In such definition, which appeals mostly to Roots and Rastafari reggae, the dimension of movement in space and time is included in the concept of exile, as well as the dream of returning to an imagined homeland. Even though black Caribbean people’s memory of slavery, exile, physical and economic exploitation and cultural oppression, have undoubtedly shaped Reggae’s imaginary and symbolic discourse, many other cultural, social and musical elements contributed and still contribute to its formation and development as black popular music genre, offspring of Jamaican popular music which history dates back to the early days of slavery. Many Jamaican musical forms have been originated by the encounter between
American and Caribbean influences and elements of African musical traditions such as the five-notes scale and the polyrhythmic structure (Reckord, 1998: 232). Reggae is born travelling: black people’s movement between the Atlantic shores is undoubtedly the first origin of reggae music, yet a more recent journey has contributed to its development: the arrival to Jamaica of foreign records from the United States and Central America, introduced into the country by the Jamaican returnees. Black American music was then readapted and rearranged by Jamaican musicians and bands according to local taste and instruments. The first sound systems were then emerging, run by local grassroots impresarios, competing for the best records to play in the dances. The period between the 1930’s and 1960’s saw the development of hybrid genres sharing the same functions of entertainment and social commentary inherited from the previous more African influenced forms. The emergence of ska coincided with progressive affirmation of Jamaica’s political autonomy, was presented by the nationalistic political discourse as the first “modern” indigenous Jamaican music, through which nationalistic themes were fostered and promoted.

The simultaneous emergence of Rasta music has exercised an indelible influence on Reggae, so that Rasta and reggae came to be popularly employed as synonymous. Developed at the margins, in the Rasta Camps of West Kingston’s slums through the integration of burra drums and percussions into the Rasta rituals, Rasta music progressively came to reach a wider audience with the first Rasta band, “Count Ossie and the Mystic Revelation of Rastafari”.

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3 *Burru music* represents one of those early forms of Jamaican folk music, which dates back to plantations time, when the masters allowed it to be played as a work “metronome”. Once slavery was abolished, the Burru players progressively moved from the countryside to the periphery of the urban areas, where they performed a specific community function, acting as musical newspaper, reporting and commenting facts taking place in the city, as well as known personalities’ acts and conduct (Reckord, 1998:234).

4 In Jamaica ‘Sound System’ indicates a sort mobile dance space set up in the street with a generator, turntables, speakers, records, selectors and deejays. Sound system dances are a musical, cultural and social phenomenon originated in Kingston’s inner cities, which dates back to the 1940’s and has developed throughout Jamaican history until the contemporary forms of dancehall culture. In the early 1950s the sound system phenomenon came to assume such a fundamental social function in terms of shaping notions of identity and belonging, celebrating and strengthening people social bonds, to be considered as the ‘community’s heartbeat’ (Bradley, 2000:4).

5 Consisting basically in the elaboration of a mento rhythm with the addition of horns, the great innovation of ska is represented by the accent moved to the after-beat(second and the fourth beat). Since this moment the off-beat became the core element of the following Jamaican music. (Bradley, 2000: 53)

6 Edward Seaga represented the Jamaican labour Party in the Jamaican Parliament since 1962. Besides his political activity, Seaga was an anthropologist interested in Jamaican popular music and a record producer. A significant role into the development and the popularity of ska in the 1960’s was played by his project of “cultural revival” to promote cultural independence. National artistic and musical festivals were established such as the Festival Song Contest in which musicians had to portrait (read celebrate) the rich Jamaican historical heritage and cultural identity.

7 Count Ossie and The Mystic Revelation of Rastafari” was the first Rastafari band, founded by Oswald ‘Count Ossie’ Williams, Rastaman and master Rasta drummers, as result of the experience matured in Kingston’s Rasta camps, where Ossie and his group provided the music for the meetings. The basic structure of Rasta music was built on the
From this moment onward Rasta music will constantly influence Jamaican popular music and artists, acting as underlying creative force in the future development of Jamaican musical forms from rocksteady, through roots reggae, until the most recent dancehall expressions.

1.2- Reggae, Roots and Culture

The first reggae records appeared in Jamaica in the late 1968, characterized by a speeding up of the tempo, a stronger emphasis on the off-beat, and a rhythmic use of electric bass and guitar. They often included a traditional Jamaican percussions (*Burra* and *Kumina*) and Rasta drums. As happened with *ska*, the raise of reggae was partly supported and fostered by the Jamaican government as the answer to the nationalistic search for a “genuine” Jamaican sound, expressing the multiple Jamaican cultural heritage as well as blackness and people’s bond with their African roots. According to Bradley the strategy consisted in promoting a “safe” government-directed Afro-centric discourse, in order to prevent the people to adopt more radical stances such as the black nationalism coming from the Afro-American community of the USA and the local Rastafari movement (Bradley, 2000: 205-208). Yet the government’s plan of centralizing a Jamaican black heritage movement revealed to be a double-edge tool. Totally successful in introducing blackness as integral discourse of reggae, it also paved the way for the definitive entry of the Rasta discourse and imaginary within Reggae music which, combined with the social function traditionally exercised by Jamaican popular music as mirror of grassroots reality, gave birth to the Roots Reggae movement. As described by Jimmy Cliff:

“They wanted something that meant something, as they started looking towards our own culture - like the government had been encouraging people to do - that led them to look more towards Africa and some sort of black consciousness. That's what the roots movement was all about; it was people looking to find their voice and finding it in that sort of black consciousness. (...)Roots, Roots and Culture, call it whatever you like, was a necessity at that time” (Bradley, 2000: 279).

Due to its extreme flexibility, reggae took many and diversified directions, constantly assimilating and creating new styles. Although Roots Reggae represents just one example of the many reggae forms, in virtue of the international popularity that it soon reached, is still considered worldwide as the core expression of the genre. Initially pushed by the sound model of the *Burru* drums: bass, fundeh (long and narrow drum made of ram goatskin), and repeater (Reckord, 1998: 239).
systems, it developed throughout the 1970's as the voice of the popular discontent for the "missed" independence, and portrait of the ghetto reality and the everyday life of downtown sufferers. Moreover, it is Roots Reggae which has set the foundation of the universally acknowledged bond between Rastafari and reggae. Thanks to artists such as Desmond Dekker, The Abyssinians, Culture, Peter Tosh, and Bob Marley, Rastafari principles and its spiritual connection with Africa and Ethiopia conceived as motherland, and Jamaican black nationalism could reach a consistently wider portion of population within as well as outside the country and the continent. Africa and Ethiopia were by now part of reggae's imaginary as real geographical entity (to which the black man must return) as well as a state of mind (expression of blackness and displacement). Bob Marley's phenomenon would deserve a particular attention for the way he became “the” universal metaphor of reggae as well as international popular Rasta icon. Yet whilst Marley was being acclaimed internationally and Roots reggae was undertaking a new journey throughout the global mainstream music industry, Kingston's inner cities were, instead, preparing to take a different direction.

1.3- “Hol' de mic” and bring the vibes back

Notions of Africa has been the center of reggae’s narrative for decades: Africa as experience, as memory of exile and slavery, as place of return, as alternative space; An imagined, ritualized, and constantly recreated image of Africa "grounded in the authority of the most potent, dangerous and unstable metaphor known to humanity: the metaphor of roots" (Chude-Sokei, 1997:79). Yet one of the most interesting and considerable innovation in the development of reggae music is the recent and massive emergence of Jamaican dancehall reggae, that can be read as a local and marginal inner cities’ reaction to Roots reggae’s internationalization. Themes and messages addressed by dancehall seem to challenge/subvert the centrality of Africa and the myth of a black, culturally authentic elsewhere in the Jamaican musical production. As explained by Chude-Sokei, “what we have in the raggamuffin/dancehall (sub)cultural movement is a very harsh popular critique of what Africa means to us at this moment in a post-/neo-/omni-colonial world” (Chude-Sokei, 1997:8)

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8 Dread talk (Rastafarian adaptation of Jamaican patois) form for “sufferers”, those who suffer, term originated in the 1930’s indicating black and poor Jamaicans, later popularized by reggae music (Bonacci, 2008:691).

9 See Stanley Niaah (2004): “Dancehall is Jamaica’s premiere popular street theatre which first flourished around the 1950s, but with unique manifestations of sonic dominance, dance, fashion and lyrical content since 1980”(Stanley Niaah, 2004: 117).The roots of this phenomenon trace back to the 1970’s when selectors such as Big Youth, King Tubby and U-Roy started toasting (chatting, commenting, singing over a rhythm or a record) over the records they played in the dances, initiating what will soon become the central role of the deejays in the dancehall. The term “dancehall” is generally employed to refer to digital dancehall, a branch of reggae built upon completely digital rhythms. The origin of digital dancehall is generally identified with the 1985's hit "Under mi sleng teng" by Wayne Smith, the first reggae record without bass line.
The Roots’ longing for the 'elsewhere' gave way to Dancehall's cultural specificity, celebration of Jamaican-ness, community and urban life, local micro-narratives such as local politics, garrisons, crime, murder, guns, and ghetto morality. In this sense the advent of digital dancehall in Jamaica, might be regarded as directly opposing the many diasporic narratives of elsewhere spread by roots reggae with local celebration of the immediate 'here' of Kingston's streets. The “culture” versus “slackness” debate, often characterized by a generation clash between the classical roots school and the young digital dancehall scene, seems to be partly mediated and mitigated by the emergence of a “conscious dancehall” promoted by mostly Rasta singers and deejays such as Sizzla Kalonji, Mickey General and Luciano, attempting to guide reggae’s message through a sort of prophetic journey on the way back to its roots and to Africa as main, although reinterpreted, symbolic center.

1.4- “Back” to Africa

As we saw in the previous sections, Africa has definitely been the main symbolic reference and poetic metaphor throughout the entire story of reggae music. Either Regarded as place of origin or target of return and “repatriation”, the presence of Africa in most reggae production, (indissolubly related to the experience of the Atlantic slave Trade) has remained mostly confined to the realm of utopia, diasporic narratives, visions, and symbols. Yet since Marley's performance during the celebration for the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, reggae has taken his long road back to Africa, and found its place on African stages. Once returned to the original “homeland”, reggae had to face the particularity of each African realities, and artists discovered that that its baggage of pan-Africanism, narratives of exile, black radical tradition and universal images, could be very much bulky or unsuitable for the new destinations. Chude-Sokei stressed the problem of the relentless marginalization of modern and contemporary Africa by the dominant diasporic framework and discourse. How the Africans make sense of and re-elaborate roots reggae use of Africa as a symbol and how they relate that to their daily experience is still un under-theorized topic (Chude-Sokei, 1997: 80). Many popular African reggae artists such as Lucky Dube, Alpha Blondy, and Tiken Jah Fakoli, have elaborated their own forms of reggae expressions, declining reggae according to the local musical, social and political context, and engaging an interesting synthesis between reggae imaginary’s heritage and the peculiarity of their daily experience of “real” Africa. Lucky Dube (South Africa) sang against apartheid mixing traditional Zulu musical forms with reggae. Alpha Blondy (Ivory Coast) combined reggae with West African instruments and musical styles acquiring huge popularity in Africa as well as in Europe. He was also able to translate
Rasta discourse into West African languages and the Ivorian political context (Wittman, 2011: 158). Tiken Jah Fakoli’s music (Ivory Coast) has taken a strong and critical stance against the Ivorian and, more generally, West African political environment. The largest part of the African-born reggae which has gained international popularity is generally represented by West Africa artists. Although reggae music and Rastafari discourse seem to exercise a considerable influence on East-African social environment, by helping the urban youth to make sense of their life experiences\(^\text{10}\), East-African reggae artists still have not earned the same international visibility of their west-African peers. A very peculiar case is represented by Ethiopia where, although members of the international Rasta community (amongst them many musicians and artists) have been settled since the 1970’s, the international Reggae production decisively burst into the wider national attention only recently, and local born reggae is still moving its first steps. Bob Marley is still the most appreciated reggae artist and a popular icon for most of the young urban population. If in 1978 he could visit the country undisturbed and unknown, today Marley t-shirts, accessories and Jamaican flags are sold all around Addis Ababa, his music is played in coffee houses, restaurants, taxi, and sold in stands and in music shops in the streets.

A decisive input for the popularity and diffusion of reggae music in Ethiopia was represented by the celebrations for the 2005 edition of the “Africa Unite” festival, which took place in Addis Ababa and Shashamane. Promoted by the Bob Marley Foundation to support the repatriate community in Ethiopia, the one-month long celebrations played a fundamental role in bringing the Rasta settlement in Shashamane to international and pan-African attention, provided it the chance to develop local and global networks and made local people more familiar with the Rasta presence through the medium of music. The main event of the festival, a free-concert in Meskel Square, attended by more than 300.000 people, saw the participation of many international and Ethiopian artists, and fostered the development of a local reggae scene, increasing reggae’s popularity among Ethiopian listeners and its influence on other Ethiopian popular music.

According to my interviewees\(^\text{11}\) reggae music, especially Bob Marley’s, is considered a valid tool to promote social change since it conveys a wide range of positive messages such as faith and tolerance, love for Ethiopia, peace and tolerance among African and Ethiopian peoples,

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\(^{10}\) See Moyer’s work on Rastafari and Reggae among Tanzanian street-youth (Moyer, 2005).

\(^{11}\) Informations resulting from conversations and interviews with young Ethiopian reggae listeners in Shashamane, Ethiopia.
one-ness among Ethiopian different ethnic groups, harmony in diversity, importance of roots and identity, importance of history and of keeping memories of the past. Although refusing some parts of the “reggae culture” that they perceived as essentially extraneous and harmful (the consumption and celebration of ganja above all) a large part of the urban, Ethiopian reggae audience elaborates strategies of identification with the messages promoted by international and local reggae music, in particular translating reggae’s Pan-African themes in the light of their local experience, and projecting them into the Ethiopian socio-political context. Despite the presence of “negative elements” belonging to “Rasta culture”, Shashamane reggae audience seem to confer reggae a wide range of positive functions. It is said to have the power of uniting peoples and promoting peace in the community. Some among the informants consider reggae music as an effective channel for promoting inter-cultural exchange and encouraging to establish cultural and social relations between different groups. Almost all the interviewees agreed on the fact that reggae music can promote positive social change in Ethiopia through the promotion of messages of unity among African peoples and countries, and spreading a positive image of Ethiopia and Africa all over the world. Many youths as Abel, a young resident of Shashamane, wish that the love for Ethiopia expressed by reggae artists will lead Ethiopians to love and respect each other more, overcoming ethnic divisions:

“I think reggae can be a way of promoting comprehension and love among nations and people. There are so many nations and nationalities here in Ethiopia that sometimes it is difficult to get them together. But if they learn to love their Country, Ethiopian peoples’ attitude toward each other may change. They may love and respect each other more and become more tolerant”. 12

When asked to express their preference between international and Ethiopian reggae, a large part of the Ethiopian youth tend to make a distinction: they generally attribute to Jamaican and international reggae bands a higher musical quality and authenticity, while the emerging Ethiopian reggae artists are appreciated for the messages that they convey, concerning more what they feel and experience as Ethiopian citizen and reflecting “the life of the Ethiopian society”. For many young reggae listeners the Ethiopian reggae artists provide a channel for “localizing” and appropriating reggae, inscribing into the genre themes and meanings that the local audience feel more relevant for their cultural, social and political environment:

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“We Ethiopians have an excellent indigenous culture, so to appreciate the beautiful culture, beliefs and values of each nation we could possibly use reggae as medium, and we can also use it to invite people to avoid the bad parts. That’s what most of the Ethiopian reggae singers do, they focus on public issues that need to be solved and show a direction for the solution”,

1.5- Reggae for the Promised Land

Since the 2000s several Ethiopian pop artists manifested connections to reggae and Rasta imaginary in their musical production. Among many others, the Ethiopian pop star Teddy Afro (Tewodros Kassahun), generally referred to as “the Ethiopian Bob Marley” in virtue of the message of unity and change he praises in his songs. Teddy participated to the “Africa Unite Concert” with the single *Shashamane*. The clip, shot in Shashamane with the participation of members of the repatriate community, has broadly popularized the image of the Rasta living in Ethiopia, through their immediate association to reggae music. Local people became more familiar with their presence in the country. Indeed for most of the Ethiopians, especially the younger generations, Shashamane means Rasta and Rasta means reggae. The years 2011 and 2012 have been particularly fecund for the development of a new Ethiopian-born reggae. Any reggae fan in Addis Ababa is proud to affirm that finally Ethiopian reggae music is booming. Two of the currently most celebrated upcoming artists in Ethiopia, Haile Roots (Hailemichael Getnet) and Jah Lude (Jalud Awol), are reggae singers who debuted respectively with the albums *Chiggae* (2012) and *Yachin Neger* (2012). The first album, as suggested by title, is a mixture of a digitalized form of the Ethiopian traditional rhythm called *chik-chikan* enriched with reggae sound and imaginary. The latter is more faithful to roots reggae music’s musical patterns, with lyrics inspired to Ethiopian oral literature, as well to actuality and popular culture. Their dressing style directly recalls reggae artists’ look: Haile Roots has long dreadlocks, while Jah Lude wears a hat on his natural hair and has a long and untamed beard. Green outfits inspired to military uniforms with Ethiopian flags and effigies of the Lion of Juda are ubiquitous in their public appearances. Despite the “Jamaican” semblance of both the artists, the content of their songs is rather “Ethiopian”. Texts are mostly written in

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13 Interview with Zegeye, P., student, Shashamane, March 2013.
14 Teddy Afro’s Yasteseryal (2005) the album containing Shashamane, was the best-selling album ever released in Ethiopia. *Shashamane’s* official video-clip saw a contribution of Haile Roots, Ethiopian reggae artists who later debuted as solo artist with the album *Chiggae* (2011).
Amharic, enriched with inserts in other local languages such as Afaan Oromo\(^{15}\). The main contents of this new Ethiopian reggae production are love, celebration of Ethiopian natural and cultural landscape, national identity and feeling of belonging, social and political issues such as African men and women’s empowerment, Ethiopian and African Unity. A deeper study should be done on Ethiopian reggae texts. Since my knowledge of Amharic was not sufficiently deep to allow me to embark in a satisfactory textual analysis, I mostly referred to my informants’ descriptions and perception of the songs\(^{16}\). According to many listeners Haile Roots’ texts are deep and “culturally conscious”. His lyrics preach unity among ethnic groups and nationalities, optimism and solidarity among individuals as means for promoting positive change in the country. His lyrical compositions are widely appreciated since he employs wordplays and expressive forms inspired to traditional Amharic literature, such as *kené*, also known as “wax and gold”, a particular poetic composition where verses or stanzas contain simultaneously a clear literal meaning (wax) and a second, deeper and hidden one (gold). Jah Lude’s lyrical content is also centered on reviving traditional Ethiopian folklore, by transporting and translating old Amharic wordplays, songs, proverbs into roots reggae melodies. In the cover of his first album he introduces himself as “Jah Lude, Ye Geter Lej” (Jah Lude the Hillibilly) even if he grew up in Addis Ababa. Many listeners have interpreted that as a way to remind his audience that Ethiopia’s “authentic” roots lie in the ancient agricultural culture of the rural areas, and precede the recent phenomenon of urbanization, which is causing the disappearance of the traditional knowledge. As in Haile Roots’ music, the celebration of Ethiopia and the feeling of Ethiopian national belonging is ubiquitous. Ethiopia is the main source of inspiration and expression of national as well as of individual identity, as efficaciously expressed by Jah Lude himself:

“I have my own world that is called Ethiopia. When I merge my identity with my inner love for music, Ethiopia is my world. Wherever I am and wherever I go Ethiopia is always with me. Ethiopia is the country to which I give the most values in my life. I belong to Ethiopia and that is my world”\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) Afaan Oromo or *Oromiffa* is a Cushitic language. Spoken by about 30 million Oromos and neighboring groups is one of the most widely spoken Ethiopian languages.

\(^{16}\) A thorough explanation of local and international reggae reception amongst the young Ethiopian residents of Shashamane will be provided in the next chapter.

As pointed out by Barber (1987), the study of popular arts forms, conceived as expressing act, can provide interesting insights about people’s perspective, since they “undoubtedly talk about what the people themselves think it is important, in their own vocabulary, and through the form they feel to be appropriate” (Barber, 1987: 4). The raising of a local reggae scene in Ethiopia represents an example of how local artists and audiences undertake syncretic interventions on a global product of popular culture in order to translate it into something that “makes more sense” on a local level. One of the most interesting aspects of the developing Ethiopian-born reggae, is indeed represented by the attempt to indigenize a global genre such as reggae in its musical as well as textual contents, because it wants to address primarily an Ethiopian, Amharic speaking audience. It represents the first experiment of reggae born in the “Promised Land”, addressed mainly to the “Promised Land”. Although Ethiopian reggae artists have engaged in fruitful collaborations with Jamaican and international reggae artists, and creatively drawn on the Rastafarian corpus of symbols, yet they managed to re-appropriate and reformulate a local representation of Ethiopia, taking such imaginary out from the exclusive realm of symbol and myth created by black nationalism and re-iterated through reggae music. The representation of Ethiopia in local reggae music, is that of a more concrete “Promised Land”, a defined geographical, political and national entity with specific political and social needs. Among the themes, a call for more unity and cooperation among peoples and nationalities in order to better its economic and social conditions. We also find the a nation with a strength that resides in its own history, culture, institutions and traditions, which need to be preserved and revitalized in order to achieve future development. Such attempt to build, transmit, and celebrate a common national imaginary through reggae music, is of particular significance within the current political context of the country, where ethnic identities have been institutionalized as “nationalities” and placed as basis of political and administrative organization. The Ethiopian ethnic federal structure embodies an internal contradiction between an ethno-nationalist and a multiethnic perspective, both condensed into the institutional discourse (Triulzi, 2002 in Bonacci, 2008: 539). So far the Ethiopian government could not managed to provide a shared feeling of national belonging, functioning as biding agent among the many particular ethnic affiliations, and their relative cultural and political conceptions (Bonacci, 2008). The Ethiopian federal discourse is trapped into the fundamental ambiguity between the revitalization of ethnic-based cultural identities, and the rhetoric of national unity over a multi-ethnic mosaic of cultural groups. In the context of Ethiopian popular music, where a prominent model is represented by the so called “cultural music”, with the revitalization and reproduction of traditional songs and dances attributed to
specific ethnic groups, Ethiopian reggae music might be a channel for promoting a broader base of national identification. Furthermore, Ethiopian reggae artists are not experiencing the same degree of control and censorship reserved to many other famous pop singers, such as Teddy Afro, who occurred to be banned, or unofficially restricted, from the Ethiopian national television and many radio broadcasting channels, during and after 2005 elections (Skare Orgeret, 2008: 232). Quite the contrary, Haile Roots and Jah Lude's productions have been actively promoted and broadcasted through the Ethiopian official media. Jah Lude, whose song “Yergeb” has become the mascot of the Ethiopian national football team, has several times expressed explicit appreciation of Meles Zenawi’s operate and participated in a tribute song dedicated to the Prime Minister after his death in 2012. The relationship between locally produced reggae music's content and government’s political and ideological visions is multifaceted and nuanced, and would deserve deeper research. It is clear though, that the interpretation of reggae music as subculture and mere vehicle of counter-narratives of resistance to the established powers (Babylon) is too simplistic for the Ethiopian case.

1.6- Conclusion to Chapter 1

Popular music forms are significant for the debate over citizenship, national identity and belonging in today’s Ethiopia. In this chapter I tried to interpret the history of reggae through the metaphor of journey. Following the itinerary of this unique form of black musical expression has followed, on the path of the black Caribbean diaspora, across national borders, “back” to Arica and to the “Promised Land” Ethiopia. Yet, once back to its longed roots, Ethiopian reggae music finds itself captured in a problematic twine of contrasting discourses and narratives such as the the cultural/ethnic revivalism fostered by the Ethiopian political structure and the pan-Africanist, black nationalist view embedded in the Rastafarian and Jamaican reggae imaginary. The next chapters will show how such concurring narratives relate and influence each other.
Chapter 2- Making Zion: symbolic construction of the Promised Land

Whether they look for remembrance or forgetting, individuals and societies always build a continuity in which they can inscribe themselves, especially when this continuity has been rendered difficult by an historical or geographical rupture, as it has for people said to be “in diaspora”: for them, history is no longer a continuous flow expressed by an uninterrupted transmission, but it becomes a time broken into before and after; and familiar places, in which history is spontaneously rooted, are not inhabited day after day, but replaced by an imaginary ‘elsewhere’ that dwells in memory.

Sarah Daynes

Reggae music and the global development of the Rastafari movement are historically so interconnected to resemble the hairstyle that they have made popular all over the world. As Savishinsky explains, the Rastafari movement represents one of the few and perhaps the only example of contemporary socio-religious movement whose diffusion has been mostly conveyed through a medium of popular culture such as music (Savishinsky, 1994:21). Some scholars have argued that popular music, as very mobile cultural product, that is able to cross international boundaries and frontiers, can be used to demarcate and define local spaces (Biddle & Knights 2007:7). In my second chapter I try to clarify whether reggae music together with the corpus of symbols belonging to the Rastafari worldview, has actively contributed to shape and promote a peculiar image of Ethiopia. This image represented and somehow still represents a fundamentally symbolical and ideological background of the process of repatriation, being at the same time soundtrack and declaration of a collective project of return. Although the theme of return to Africa has been present in Jamaican popular music much before the development of reggae, it was through Rastafarian discourse contained in roots reggae that Ethiopia was communicated and internationally popularized as the core element of the Caribbean imaginary of return (Bonacci, 2008: 241). I argue that the whole phenomenon of Rastafarians’ repatriation to Ethiopia, and the development of the repatriated community in Ethiopia, would have never taken place in its actual proportions without the power of the narratives articulated on a global scale through roots and Rastafari
reggae. Yet before any further speculation on this point, some clarifications are needed to explain the reasons why such a deep symbolical and spiritual connection to Ethiopia was felt by large part of the black Caribbean population.

2.1 - Rastafari\textsuperscript{18} and Ethiopia

In this section I attempt to clarify the phenomenon at the very origin of my MA thesis, which is the symbolical connection between the African “diaspora” of the Caribbean and Ethiopia, which was elaborated and articulated throughout the history of Rastafari and internationally popularized by reggae music. Such connection circumscribes and defines the multiple setting where my analysis of such travelling narrative takes place: a simultaneous multiplicity of trajectories across the Atlantic and back and forth in space and time. Yet the most urgent questions we need to answer to embark in our symbolical travelling through the Atlantic are: what is Rastafari, and who are the Rastafarians, bearers of such multi-sited and mobile identity?

Many studies have been dedicated to the origins and development of the Rastafari movement, (Barret:1988, Murrel:1998, Bonacci:2008, etc.) yet such a variegated and complex phenomenon tends often to escape any clear definition, making some scholars affirm that “there are so many formulations of Rastafari as there are Rastafarians” (Farajajé-Jones, 1990: 184). Borrowing Murrel’s comprehensive definition, Rastafari is a modern Afro-Caribbean cultural phenomenon which combines ideas and concepts from American and Caribbean culture with Judeo-Christian thought, creating a new sociopolitical and religious worldview (Murrel, 1998:4). In his words: “Rastafari is more than a religion. It is a cultural movement, a system of beliefs and a state of consciousness, that advances a view of economic survival and political organization and structure that challenges the dominant cultural political narrative (ideology) in the politics of Babylon” (Murrel, 1998: 4).\textsuperscript{19} Rastafari “worldview” (terms that numerous adherents prefer to employ instead of religion) is an African-centered ideology which has as main doctrinal points: the celebration and revival of black people’s African identity and heritage, the belief that Haile Selassie I, emperor of Ethiopia is living God,\textsuperscript{18} Image adopted from Christian Scriptures, Babylon «embodies the cultural ethos of the forces that worked against the people of God »(Edmonds, 1994: 23). According to Niaah: «Babylon (…) is Rasta speak referring to the Western system of hegemony, that imprisoning nature of society through man-made laws reinforced by governments , the traditional church, and apparatuses of the state that oppress the disenfranchised» (Niaah, 2009: 117)

\textsuperscript{18} In the present work the terms Rastafari, Rastafarian and Rasta are employed as synonymous. While Rastafari can also designate the movement as a whole, Rastafarian and Rasta are more often used to indicate individual adherents. The nomenclature Rastafari derives from the combination of the Amharic title Ras (head) and Tafari Makonnen, secular name of the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I, who is generally recognized as divine by Rastas.

\textsuperscript{19} Image adopted from Christian Scriptures, Babylon «embodies the cultural ethos of the forces that worked against the people of God »(Edmonds, 1994: 23). According to Niaah: «Babylon (…) is Rasta speak referring to the Western system of hegemony, that imprisoning nature of society through man-made laws reinforced by governments , the traditional church, and apparatuses of the state that oppress the disenfranchised» (Niaah, 2009: 117)
messiah, or manifestation of Christ’s personality in a black man, the belief in Africa and Ethiopia as original homeland of black people and repatriation as central path for blacks’ spiritual and physical liberation (Murrel, 1998:5). As suggested by Leonard Barrett (1997:68) and, more recently, by Giulia Bonacci (2008:31), the entire complex of Rastafarian discourses should be regarded as reinterpreted and revitalized heritage of the ideology of Ethiopianism originated back in the 18th century, and lately converted into a lived experience by Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement. Fundamental to Ethiopianism at its origin was to legitimize and defend blacks’ dignity and civilization against the attack of whites defenders of slavery. Often the main (and sometimes only) accessible weapon in this ideological struggle was represented by the references to the black race made by the Bible, where the word Ethiopia was employed as general term to refer to the African Continent and black people. Thus In the early black tradition, directly referring to the Bible, the word Ethiopia comprehended all of Africa. Old Testament themes constituted the symbolical basis of most of the black Afro-American religious and cultural movements. It was therefore the biblical Ethiopia that black preachers and Ethiopianists recognized as their homeland, identifying their diasporic experience with that of the people of Israel in captivity in Egypt and Babylon, and regarding to the African Continent as new Zion, a promised land for the oppressed blacks (Farajajé-Jones, 1990:33). Ethiopia became a messianic vision, a place of hope for the future, as announced in Psalm 68:31: «Princes shall come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God». Later on the same psalm inspired Garvey’s political movement, where definitely Ethiopia came to signify «the glory of things to come» (Barrett, 1997:77). As Barrett explains Garvey’s knowledge of Ethiopia was fully biblically oriented, it was through his re-elaboration of the Ethiopianist thought in a black-nationalist key that the idea of repatriation was fully developed and concretely directed to modern Ethiopia. In 1930 Ras Tafari Mekonnen, grandson of the King of Showa, was crowned Negus of Ethiopia with the name of Haile Selassie I (Might of the Trinity) and the biblical titles “King of Kings”, “Elect of God” and “Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah”. The event, highly resonant in Jamaican press, was seen by many Jamaicans and Garveyites (among them also future Rastafarians) as the fulfillment of a prophecy enclosed in some verses of the Old Testament. Soon Haile Selassie acquired a divine status to the eyes of the Rastafarians for being King of the holy and promised land, and in virtue of his prophetic titles. Moreover, the Rastafarians found

20 The word “A’ithiopia” (burnt, black) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew “Cush” (black people) employed in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible. (Chisholm, 1998:167)
21 Revelation, 5: “And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the Book and to lose the seven seals thereof”; and revelation 19: 16.
confirmation to their view of Ethiopia as new Israel through the re-appropriation of the Ethiopian national saga narrated in the *Kebra Negast*. This is a thirteenth century text which traces the descent of the Ethiopian Kings from the encounter between King Salomon and the Queen of Sheba followed by transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from Israel to Ethiopia by their son Menelik I. Such mythic encounter has been employed for centuries as nationalistic narrative to legitimize Ethiopian king in the process of power centralization, state building and expansive projects over Ethiopian territory and peoples. Rastafarians’ “black” reading looked at this nationalist saga from an afro-centric and diasporic perspective, using Christian and Ethiopian sources as tools to shape their own self-definition and identity (Bonacci, 2008: 330). The transfer of the Ark, and the connection to King Solomon identified Ethiopia with the biblical trope of Zion, and positioned the Ethiopians in a direct connection with the people of Israel, as “chosen people” in which the Rastafarians identified for their long condition of material and spiritual diaspora and captivity. Such double-identification with the enslaved Israelites and the Ethiopians (conceived as new Israelites living in Zion) provided the symbolical material for the development of the Rastafarian dichotomous worldview based on the opposition between Zion and Babylon. While the new Zion is represented by Ethiopia and Africa, seen as place of origin and return, motherland and promised land, Babylon embodies the Western world and its system of administration and oppression. Such dichotomy is at the basis of the Rastafarian concept of repatriation, derived from the narratives of return to Africa, and conceived partly as reparation of the uprooting caused by the Atlantic Slave trade (although Ethiopia was a rather marginal area in the context of the Atlantic slave routes) but also as means of religious and spiritual fulfillment. Many theoretical and historical works have been written on the Rastafarian concept of repatriation and return to Zion. Here I will focus my analysis on the musical sources testifying the complex of travelling themes and narratives which, as suggested by Bonacci (2008:31) constituted the vertebral column of the history of the imaginary of return.

2.2- A Musical travel to Zion: Repatriation and Ethiopia in reggae songs

As shown in the previous sections, the longing for return to Africa has been circulating in Jamaican society and popular music long before the affirmation of reggae music as a distinct genre. Images of Africa as motherland, where the African diaspora should return to be definitely free, date back to plantation chants and work songs born within the experience of
the Atlantic slave trade. In such corpus of narratives the idea of Africa, shaped from personal experiences and memories appears as desired past, idealized elsewhere of ancestral roots, something definitely lost to be longed for (Bonacci, 2008: 39). It is only later, when the “Back to Africa” discourse was further articulated on a political level through the Black Nationalist movement and incorporated into the Ethiopianist and Pan-Africanist thought, that Ethiopia was progressively defined as symbolic and, later on, literal center of the imaginary of return. Such legacy which draws on a “black” reading of the Bible and the symbolic corpus of reference to Ethiopia, was absorbed and addressed by reggae music through the fundamental mediation of the Rastafarian movement. References to Ethiopia are presented and reproduced throughout the entire history of the genre, from its origins (ska and rocksteady) throughout the whole process of internationalization of roots reggae until the most recent expression of international conscious reggae and dancehall. Yet roots reggae, which first gained international attention, represented the main vehicle for the diffusion of Rastafarian messages worldwide and the popularization of symbols related to Ethiopia and the Ethiopianist imaginary (Bonacci, 2008: 369), and among them the conception of Ethiopia as New Zion and Promised Land. Since the early 60’s to the present times has been created a consistent, yet less known, corpus of Jamaican songs built around the theme of return to Africa and Ethiopia articulated on many levels: through the remembrance of slavery, the recurring image of trains or ships leaving to the Promised Land, and the metaphor of roots expressed through the claim of African and Ethiopian lineage (Bonacci, 2007: 374). Paradoxically the theme of return in Jamaican reggae production reaches a peak in the late ‘70s, in the years immediately after the Ethiopian Marxist revolution and His Majesty’s political downfall (Bonacci, 2008: 373). The corpus of repatriation songs in the history of reggae, as strikingly rich as interesting, would deserve deeper attention. Here I limit to illustrate the main lines of themes and images proposed. A discography and the transcription of some significant texts is integrated in the appendix of the present thesis, as basis for further research.

2.3- Thinking Ethiopia, singing utopia

The symbolism of Ethiopia as New Zion is ubiquitous in a copious corpus of popular *binghy* chants which have been readapted and popularized as reggae songs, inspired by Psalms and other sections of the Bible. The narratives expressed through such corpus, are based on the symbolical opposition between Babylon, place of oppression and Zion, the Promised Land,

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23 Chants and hymns sung during Rasta celebrations.
24 Some examples can be found in Bruno Blum’s (specialist of Jamaican music) selection of repatriation songs in Bonacci, 2008 p. 707.
although in the earliest phase an explicit reference to Ethiopia is not yet articulated. Among those texts the well-known “Rivers of Babylon”, popularized by the early reggae track recorded by the Melodians and produced by Leslie Kong in 1971, draws on the model of slave-chants, where the sufferance of captivity and longing for the lost motherland are articulated through a thick corpus of Biblical references: “By the rivers of Babylon, Where we sat down, And there we wept, When we remembered Zion. But the wicked carried us away in captivity, Required from us a song, How can we sing King Alpha song in a strange land?”. On the same track follows the famous “Satta Massagana” by the Rastafarian reggae band the Abyssinians (1969), where Zion is thus suggestively evoked:

“There is a land, far, far away, Where there’s no night, there’s only day. Look into the book of life and you will see, That there is a land, far, far away. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, Sits upon his throne and He rules us all. Look into the book of life and you will see, That He rules us all, That He rules us all”.

Here the reference to Ethiopia is made more specific by the use of the words “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”, part of Haile Selassie’s imperial title, and suggested by the band’s name itself, the Abyssinians. Yet the association Ethiopia-Zion remains confined to the realm of the Biblical metaphors and the evanescent and exotic imaginary of the “far, far away”.

Some records, especially the earliest ones (early ‘60s- late ‘70s) are more concerned with some of the classical themes of Caribbean popular music, such as the commemoration and revitalization of the experience of slavery and captivity contrasted to images of freedom in a motherland- promised land framed in Biblical terms. The image given is that of an estheticized and heavenly Zion, depicted as “holy place” (Holy Mount Zion, Culture, 1978), “dreamland” (Dreamland, The Wailers, 1964), longed slice of paradise on earth “fe go drink

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25 The single acquired wide diffusion since it was part of the soundtrack of “The Harder They Come” (1972), movie directed by Perry Henzell.

26 Psalm 137:1 “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion”.

27 Revelation 22:13 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end”. Generally Rastafarians refer to King Alpha to indicate Haile Selassie (conceived as Rastafari, the Almighty God). The title “King Alpha” is often associated to “Queen Omega” indicating the Empress Woizero Menen Asfaw.

28 Psalm 137:3-4 “For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”. A distortion-fusion between Jamaican Patwah and the Amharic form “Mis Gana”, to give Thanks.

29 Revelation 21:25 “And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there”.

30 Revelation 20:12 “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their work”.

31 Revelation 20:12 “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their work”.

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milk and honey” (Forward Unto Zion, Abyssinians, 1976) 32, where life would be “like heaven”, easy, natural and joyful.

With the progressive affirmation of roots reggae, the theme of repatriation became one of the most addressed from a plurality of perspectives. Some artists looked more pragmatically at repatriation as only response to the situation of social, economic and political downpression33 experienced by black people and the African diaspora, as Bob Andy in “I've got to go back home”(1967):

“There is no gladness, nothing but sadness, nothing like a future here. I've got to, I've got to leave this land, I've got to find myself on some other sand, I just can't stand this life I'm living. I can't get no clothes to wear, can't get no food to eat, I can't get a job to get bread, That's why I've got to go back home”.

Some other artists, following black nationalism's footsteps, invoked repatriation as black people's right, and sort of historical compensation for the captivity and the displacement they had to endure under whites' hand, as in “Forward Unto Zion” (1976) where the Abyssinians sing:

“I call upon the leaders of this time, to send the children. Now in this time, I call upon the head of society to free the children now of captivity, and send us unto Zion city. Send us unto Zion, send us, send us on, fe go drink milk and honey, send us unto Zion.”

or Bob Marley himself in Zion Train (1980):

“Two thousand years of history, black history, could not be wiped so easily. Oh children, Zion train is comin' our way; get on board now! They said the Zion train is comin' our way”.

The Congos (1977) looked at repatriation from a more doctrinal perspective expressed through the cried quest to “Open Up The Gate” 34, which echoes the Bible and the Ethiopianist heritage:

“Repatriation is at hand, I and I know where the black man stands. To the west coast of Africa, east, north and south. Repatriation is, a must of I 'n I. Repatriation is, a must». It

32 Biblical reference to Israel, in Exodus 33: 3 “Unto a land flowing with milk and honey”.
33 Ital (dreadtalk) form for “oppression”.
34 Isaiah 26:2 “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in”.
continues: “Jah said unto the south 'give up!', to the west 'keep not back!'. Send my sons from afar, and my daughters from the end of the world”. 35

More explicit references to Ethiopia as place of repatriation and to the history of the country are present in recent production, as in Addis Ababa (Culture, 1996):

“There is a land far, far away, it's called Addis Ababa. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Ruler of Creation, His name is King Selassie. Mussolini tried to invade Ethiopia, But the Conqueror, His name is King Selassie, rule. Respect!”.

Here the mention of historical events, such as the occupation of Ethiopia by Italy (1935-1941), is combined with the same exoticism and aesthetic of the “faraway” characterizing early songs. The colonial conquest is here explained in terms of evil forces (Babylon-Fascists) aiming “to take away the Ark of the Covenant from yard” endangering King of King’s rightful rule. A sort of Manichean opposition is established between the two leaders, one representing the Divinity, the other embodying the pure essence of evil at the service of Babylon. The pride for a “never colonized” Ethiopia is also celebrated as mystic proof of victory of good (Selassie’s rule) over evil (the Italian occupants) while any mention to the emperor’s overthrow by the hand of the communist military Junta, the DERG, in 1974 is avoided. Yet in the late 1970’s the dogma of Ethiopia as safe place of redemption, granted by the presences of His Majesty, (King Haile Selassie I, God incarnated into a black body) had to deal with the dramatic historical change represented by the fall of the Ethiopian empire in 1974. Few references to the emperor’s downfall are found in pieces such as “Conquering Lion” by the Ethiopians (1989):

“You nuh hear wha gwaan a Ethiopia, Them say dem overthrow the Emperor. But He's the King of Kings, and you can't conquer, the conquering Lion of Judah. He is the Elect of God, and you can't conquer, the conquering Lion of Judah. So you can talk ya talk, some a dem a propaganda; It only make I man hold on stronger. Rememberin' the days of old, a so we go. Old times something come back again”.

On the same track we find Bob Marley’s “Jah Live” (1976) representing an extreme effort of concealing history and faith interpreting through Biblical terms fallen and “death” of the Emperor by reaffirming his divinity:

35 Isaiah 43:6 «I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the world». 

“Fool say in their heart, Rasta your God is dead. But I and I know, Jah Jah! (...)Jah live! Children! Let Jah arise! Now that the enemies are scattered. Let Jah arise! The enemies, the enemies are scattered”.

Bob Marley, who visited the country in 1978 in his first travel to Africa, might be considered the first Jamaican artist which engaged with the “real” Ethiopia. He managed to obtain a visa for less than a week despite the government’s reticence. After performing in the capital he travelled southward to meet the Rastafarian repatriated community in Shashamane. Such experience is said to have represented a turning point in Marley's personhood and musical production. Since the 1978 the repatriation theme became much more present in his work, as well as the identification Zion-Ethiopia. Although repatriation songs have been present throughout the whole Marley's opera (Exodus, 1977; Rastaman Chant, 1973) with songs as Zimbabwe (1979), Africa Unite (1979), Zion Train (1980) written after his journey to Ethiopia, together with the whole corpus of symbols surrounding Marley’s music (images of Haile Selassie I, Ethiopian flags with the Lion of Judah, red, yellow and green) the real possibility of a collective “Exodus” to Ethiopia was transmitted worldwide. It was with Bob Marley, moreover, that Ethiopia was placed at the center of the international reggae audience and became a popular-global symbol, presented as idealized core element of the anti-western capitalist system critique, and iconic target of the “movement of Jah people” from all around the world.

Interesting views on repatriation and Ethiopia have been developed also in more recent reggae production. Throughout the 90’s and 2000’s many reggae artists keep on demanding the right to have access to “a slice of Mount Zion” (Culture, 1996) for their own, as if Ethiopia was a significant piece of “real estate” Zion (Chisholm, 1998: 167). Among the plurality of concurrent narratives characterizing this phase, we find an overarching tension between the attempt to depict a “realistic Ethiopia” and a more idealized one. In Burning Spears’ “Take a look at Africa” (1990), Ethiopia is presented as part of a suffering continent, deprived and oppressed by Babylon's rule, and awaiting for its own redemption. Besides this “realistic” view, some residuals of the “orientalist” gaze on Ethiopia survives even in the most recent conscious dancehall artists such as Buju Banton, who collocates (interchangeably) Ethiopia and Africa in a legendary and geographically vague “East” contrasting an equally generic “West”:
“Till I’m laid to rest, yes, always be depressed. There’s no life in the West. I know the East is the best; All the propaganda they spread, tongues will have to confess (...) What could be so bad about the East? Everybody wants a piece. Africa for Africans, Marcus Mosiah speak. Unification outnumbers defeat. What a day when we walk down Redemption Street, Banner on heads, Bible inna we hands. One and all, let’s trod the promised land, Buju go down a Congo stopped in Sashamane Land, the city of Harare where Selassie come from, in Addis Ababa, then Botswana, Left Kenya and up in Ghana. Oh, what a beauty my eyesight behold, only Ethiopia protect me from the cold”. (Buju Banton, Till I’m laid to rest, 1995).

Other interesting meanings are expressed in the recent reggae production such as the tensions between the repatriation to Zion conceived as alternative to the Western worldview and lifestyle, and the rhetoric of development sounding rather western-modeled, addressed by some conscious pieces which invite everybody to repatriate and to participate in the future African development with his own skills “Cause mount Zion ah fe build” (Sizzla, Break free, 1999). Such need of work and forces for constructing the promised land is clearly exemplified by Damian Marley’s & dancehall- hip hop fusion “Land of Promise” (2010) where the artists dream of a wealthy, modern and beautiful Africa, yet rather Western-looking and capitalist-inspired as result of the work of repatriated people:

“Imagine Ghana like California with Sunset Boulevard, Johannesburg would be Miami, Somalia like New York, with the most pretty light, the nuffest pretty cars. Ever New Year the African Times Square lock-off. Imagine Lagos like Las Vegas, the Ballers dem a Ball, Angola like Atlanta, a pure plane take off. Bush Gardens inna Mali, Chicago inna Chad, Magic Kingdom inna Egypt, Philadelphia like Sudan, The Congo like Colorado, Fort Knox inna Gabon, People living in Morocco like the state of Oregon, Algeria warmer than Arizona bring your sun lotion, Early morning class of Yoga on the beach in Senegal, Ethiopia the capital fi di Congregation, A deh so I belong a deh did the King come from, I can see us all in limos, Jaguars and BMWs, Riding on the King’s Highway to the promised land, Going to the promised land, oh gosh (...). There’s a lot of work to be done, oh gosh, in the promised land. There’s plenty of land for you and I. Lots of food to share for everyone” (Damian Marley feat Nas – Land of Promise, 2010).

Paradoxically, it seems that part of the imaginary surrounding the lifestyle of the so contested capitalist, consumerist and industrialized society has permeated even the Rasta concept of
repatriation. Here Damian Marley seems to portray a notion of repatriation which, instead of escaping from Babylon, rather reproduces the western “liberal dream” in Zion. It is interesting how discourses around social and economic development are becoming increasingly central to the imaginary of repatriation, a concept originally founded on a choice of spiritual and material independence from Babylon, the corrupt and capitalist West. I will dedicate some more line to explore thoroughly this contradiction later on in my analysis.

2.4 Conclusion to Chapter 2

Repatriation to Africa and the representation of Ethiopia as new Promised Land are as long-lasting as many-sided themes in Jamaican reggae music. The narrative of return is characterized by some general features such as a certain interchangeability between the images of Ethiopia and the whole Africa, inherited by the Pan-African and Ethiopianist discourse. Since the largest part of images associated to Ethiopia are directly drawn from the Bible, a certain degree of anachronism between the images produced and the contemporary Ethiopian History is also noticeable. There is, more generally, a considerable lack of information and reference to Ethiopia as a modern state, as well as very few references to the actual experience of repatriation which has already taken place and to the returnees’ community of Shashamane. Besides classic themes and images we find rather innovative narratives such as the need of constructing the Promised Land by promoting development on the ground. Such development-rhetoric, as we will see in the next chapters, will impact directly and materially the social environment of the repatriated community of Shashamane, and perhaps the city as a whole. The concept of repatriation is one of the core elements of the Rastafarian worldview, which derives from a corpus of concepts, symbols and practices drawn by a plurality of Afro-American historical, cultural and political experiences such as Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Ethiopianism, Garveyism and black religious movements. It is also a constantly transforming and re-defining concept, as changing are the images that constitute its nucleus. My attempt in this chapter was to look at reggae songs from different perspectives: as sources of particular representation of Ethiopia and Africa, as vehicle of internationalization of such images, as social commentary and musical documents which still tell something about the way people has conceived, and took on the project of repatriation. As I will try to illustrate in the next chapters the way Rastafarians has sung and imagined Zion still shapes the way they live, as repatriates, in Ethiopia. Moreover, since music represented
the first channel of encounter between the Rastafari movement and the largest part of African population, by the images and meanings conveyed by reggae depends also the way local people perceive and interpret the presence of repatriates in their community. In this sense reggae music can be read not only as a skeleton of the movement of repatriation, as pointed out by Bonacci (2008), but also as trans-national, turf of cross-influences thanks to its international echo.
Chapter 3- Is “home” a place or a worldview? The “land grant” seen through the lenses of reggae music

At first Ethiopia is not attractive, as the Ark of Noah. When people look at the Ark they think that the animals would eat them if they dare to step in. So Ethiopia seen from outside is like that, it’s just when you get inside that you see the prospects, you see Heaven on earth, and you see also that building an Ark needs hard work.

*Brother Desmond Martin, Shashamane*

Before proceeding with my analysis, I am taking a step back to the metaphor of multiple-journey (physical and symbolical) elaborated in the first chapter as representative of reggae’s origin and development. Reggae’s first musical journey has been identified in the migration of elements of African music into Jamaican popular music through the channel of the Atlantic Slave Trade. A second journey is represented by the process of revitalization of African cultural roots, which took place in the context of pre-independent and neo-independent Jamaica and led to the birth of reggae and its first development. I also presented black diasporic identity as conceptual engine for the early reggae music which soon became the voice of black movement of repatriation and specifically of the Rastafari movement. Eventually, through the international affirmation of roots reggae as popular music genre, we assisted to the beginning of reggae’s global peregrination, which took it back to its original homeland, as a form of popular culture and musical commodity meeting African audiences. Yet besides this musical “repatriation” of images and narratives, a more silent yet concrete Journey is taking place, the travel of many Rastafarians from Jamaica and the western world going back home to their motherland Ethiopia. In this chapter I would like to look at the concretization of the narratives of repatriation, and to the development of this first concrete encounter between the repatriates and the Promised Land, paying particular attention to the role that reggae music has played, and still plays, in orienting group’s attitude toward each other and shaping people’s perception of the place where they live and repatriated, and the specific meaning they attribute to it.
3.1 - Chanting down Babylon and building up the Promised Land

The first act of concretization of the Rastafarian project of repatriation is represented by a donation of land from the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, to the EWF (Ethiopian World Federation), about ten years after the end of the Ethiopian-Italian war (1936-1941). Through the channel of the EWF the donation was addressed to “the black people of the world” as expression of gratitude for their engagement in supporting the country during the Italian occupation (Bonacci, 2008: 196). Thus, the members of the EWF (Ethiopian World Federation) were eventually given a concrete chance to go “back to Africa” and settle in what they felt as their motherland, Ethiopia, through the donation of 5 gasha of land in the periphery of Shashamane. The land grant, as the Rastafarian still call it, will become what is popularly known as Jamaica säfäär, the Jamaican village, indicating the area bordering with the next town of Melka Oda, about one mile from the city center. I do not attempt to elaborately describe the history of the repatriate community. A thorough analysis of the development of Shashamane settlement can be found in Bonacci (2008). Nevertheless, to better understand the current situation of the city I must mention some fundamental steps in the formation of the community as it is today, and the imaginary connected to it. The settlement of the repatriate community in Shashamane must be contextualized in the political background of the Ethiopian Empire immediately after the liberation from Italian Occupation (1935-1941). Pursuing a policy of centralization of power and control of the Southern Lands, the Emperor granted many land concessions to influent and loyal local people, such as members of the royal family as well as missionaries and foreign investors (Bonacci, 2008: 428). The news about the land grant in Shashamane were received with strong enthusiasm from the Ethiopianist movement in the USA as well as in the Caribbean, and especially by the Rastafarians, who interpreted it as a clear sign from the emperor Haile Selassie I, the “central object of their cosmology” (Bonacci, 2008:243) meaning that the time has finally come for

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36 The Ethiopian World Federation (EWF) is an international organization established in New York in 1937 under the authority of Haile Selassie to promote racial solidarity and solicit aid and economic support for the Ethiopian struggle against the Italian fascist rule. According to Barrett «the aim of the EWF was to unify, solidify, liberate and free the Black people of the world in order to achieve self-determination, justice and to maintain the integrity of Ethiopia» (Barrett, 1988: 89).

37 The settlement of the repatriate community in Shashamane must be contextualized in the political background of the Ethiopian Empire immediately after the liberation from Italian Occupation (1935-1941). Pursuing a policy of centralization of power and control of the Southern Lands, the Emperor granted many land concessions to influent and loyal local people, such as members of the royal family as well as missionaries and foreign investors (Bonacci, 2008: 428).

38 Agrarian unit of measurement.
Idren and Sistren\textsuperscript{39} to repatriate. The actual movement of repatriation started from the 1960s, yet the early arrivals were not so many. Bonacci estimated that 25 Rasta repatriated between 1966 and 1974. Only 23 between 1974 and 1991, such decrease probably due to the Ethiopian Revolution and the restrictions given by the DERG which made repatriation less feasible (Bonacci, 2008:301). Gradually, the original, Pan-African “back to Ethiopia” enterprise, conceived as collective repatriation centralized and coordinated by the E.W.F, left room for individual and often self-funded returns in the 1970s, and became an almost exclusive prerogative of the repatriates. \textsuperscript{40} During the DERG rule, with the 1975 land reform,\textsuperscript{41} the land donated was reduced to one gasha (approximately forty hectares) for the entire repatriate community. The difficulties that the neo-settled community had to face during the years of the DERG led many repatriated to leave the country because of social and political turmoil. Yet, completely against the tide, Rastafarians from Jamaica and the Caribbean, as well as from the diaspora in Europe and US, kept on arriving and settling in Shashamane, persisting in their intention to “hold the land” and build the new city of Zion. The Twelve Tribes of Israel organization became the main engine of the second wave of repatriation. The association established its HQ in the house of one of their members, conceived as a collective space where brothers and sisters could gather for various activities. Members of the Jamaican organization kept on arriving to Shashamane during the whole 1970’s and the early 1980’s (Bonacci, 2008: 493). For many of them the first contacts with the daily life in Shashamane have been arduous. For a generation nourished with the image of an idyllic promised land, where milk and honey flowed around the golden palace of Salomon and The Queen of Sheba (Bonacci, 2008:493), facing the reality of the country during the DERG has often represented a cultural shock. Recurring complaints were the lack of hygiene and “development”, low level of urbanization and facilities, difficulties in understanding local languages, habits and patterns of sociability. The discourse around development became progressively more important within the repatriated community, and particularly for the activities of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, but I will come back to this point later on in my analysis. According to Bonacci, a new

\textsuperscript{39} “Italk” form for “brother” and “sister” (also plural). Italk or dreadtalk is a Rastafarian creative deformation of Jamaican patois, linguistic reflection of a subversive cultural practice.

\textsuperscript{40} The 1974 Marxist coup and the death of Haile Selassie I dramatically undermined the symbolical prestige of Ethiopia to the Pan-Africanists’ eyes. Although Ethiopia, the only African Country never really colonized, was still representing a symbol of independence and struggle for liberation, the struggles for decolonization which were taking place in the African Continent induced most of the Afro-Americans’ s attention to look at the neo-independent countries seen as new possible target for repatriation.

\textsuperscript{41} With the 1975 Reform all the land was nationalized and became Ethiopians’ collective property. The reform aimed to guarantee the loyalty of the Oromo and other peoples of the South whose land have been expropriated during Menelik II and Haile Selassie I reigns (Bonacci, 2008: 485)
economic and social impulse was transmitted to the community, at the end of the 1980’s, by the first visitors coming from abroad, bringing news and financial support (Bonacci, 2008: 517). Such phenomenon might be considered a result of the progressive internationalization of the Rastafarian movement, which covered the routes traced by the Jamaican and Caribbean diaspora in Europe and around the world, and travelled globally through the medium of roots reggae music, which at that time, through Bob Marley’s voice, reached its peak of international popularity. Many branches of the Twelve Tribes were opened in the Caribbean, North America and Europe, which activities focused on promoting and facilitating repatriation, raising funds to ensure financial support to the community in Shashamane, and encouraging economic development and small local enterprises. The twelve Tribes of Israel remained until today the core of the repatriate community in Shashamane, the most visible organization, and the one with the largest number of members. The advent of the 1990s, marked by the end of the Marxist rule and the ascent of the EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Democratic Revolutionary Front) and its leader Meles Zenawi, saw the progressive opening of the country to regular arrivals and repatriation to Shashamane (Bonacci, 2008: 540). The arrivals kept on increasing during the whole decade. It has been estimated that from 1992 to 2003 about 95 persons settled in Shashamane (Bonacci, 2008: 360). The process of internationalization of repatriation expressed through this new wave of arrivals led to the presence of the first white repatriates in the Jamaica Säfär and to a more complex differentiation of the Rastafarian community: other Rastafarian mansions, or Houses, such as the African Black International Congress (Bobo Ashanti) and the Moral Theocratical Church of Nyabingy sent their first settlers who built their headquarters during the 1990s. The number of the members of the repatriate community is not precisely defined: Gomes (2011) estimated about 200 members, Bonacci (2008) counted 169 repatriates arrived between 1950-2003, Soroto’s (2008) survey numbered 219, whilst the repatriates often estimate higher numbers, sometimes reaching 500. The calculation is indeed complicated by the fact that many repatriates are actually long-term visitors which spend part of the year abroad, and by the number of bredren and sistren living abroad, sympathizers of the movement, travelers and tourists who temporarily visit and gravitate around the säfär. All these intertwined dynamics and movements originated what is today the Jamaica säfär which includes the Rastafarian repatriate community, as well as a

42 Rastafari Church established in March 1958 in Western Kingston by Priest Emmanuel Charles Edward. The group live following strict ascetic principles and rules, cultivate and cook their food (Minda, 2004:36).

43 Theocratical, active, non-violent way of life developed in Jamaica on the heritage of the African, anti-colonialist Nyabingi cult. Since 1992, members of the Nyabingyi order embarked on their project of repatriation establishing their Tabernacle in the säfär (Minda, 2004:37).
large Ethiopian population, and the complex set of contacts and relationships taking place between them.

3.2- Clashing imaginaries: music as first space of encounter

Bonacci describes the relationships existing between local population and early repatriates in the 1970s as characterized by “spatial proximity and social distance” (Bonacci, 2008: 486). Although many changes occurred in the social milieu of the säfär, the position of the repatriate community in the local environment has remained rather fragile until present days. Although numerous Ethiopian families live and work in the säfär, together with a rather high degree of intermarriage between Rasta and locals, today the repatriate community is still characterized by spatial and social marginality from the rest of the city. A perception of the säfär as extraneous appendix of the city, emerged from interviews and informal talks with Ethiopian residents of Shashamane. It was clearly expressed by the way people name it: Rasta village, Jamaica säfär, or even just Jamaica. The imaginary built around life in the säfär is also connected to laziness, absence of law, illicit activities and drug consumption. The säfär is also generally perceived as unsafe and enclosed space, a place that escapes from Ethiopian laws and customs. Several interviewees selected among the Ethiopian residents expressed complaints about what they see as a creation of a “Jamaican ghetto” in Shashamane. Similar discourses and critiques are recurring among people living outside the säfär, who often perceive Rastas’ representation of the säfär as the core of the “promised land” as exclusive and non-reflective of Shashamane urban and social landscape as a whole. This and many other “misunderstandings” permeating the relation between local and repatriate community can be partly attributed to the absence of mutual knowledge but, in my opinion, it can rather be understood in the light of a more or less conscious “clash of imaginaries” and narratives that both groups carry and reflects on the place where they live, and from which they derive different processes of self-identification and approach to otherness. As I mentioned in the previous chapters, reggae music was the space of the first encounter between Rastafari and Ethiopia: Rasta shaped their project of return through the collective imaginary of Ethiopia as promised Land developed and spread by reggae music while similarly, Ethiopians referred to international reggae music (and its global icons such as Bob Marley) as first source of knowledge of Rastafari to understands and familiarize with the presence of the “Jamaicans” in their country. Such process of mutual familiarization took place within reggae music and
Rasta imaginary, and through the corpus of symbols and images analyzed in the previous chapter, derived from Biblical narratives, ancient historiography and geography, Afro-American religious and political movement and black nationalism. Yet, the very same corpus of symbols and images conveyed by reggae might carry different and contrasting meanings to the eyes of Ethiopian readers. I argue that such contrasting readings of the same popular medium can work both as means of constructing mutual knowing and understanding, and, at the same time, as turf of conflicting narratives of place and identity permeating the relationship between locals and repatriates.

Through my observation of the attitude of Ethiopian residents towards the repatriated community, and the conversations and interaction I had with local people during my fieldwork, I found a generalized unawareness of the reasons leading “Jamaicans” to repatriate to Ethiopia, and a prevailing over-simplified interpretation of Rastafari faith and thought, often reduced to the “worshipping of Haile Selassie”. Even the younger generations, who supposedly have more chance to achieve familiarity with the community for knowing and spending time with sons of repatriates in schools, showed a very little knowledge, when interrogated, about the origins and the content of the Rastafarian belief and about the reason leading the Rastafarian community to settle in Shashamane. Some attempts of explanation of the presence of repatriates in Shashamane reveal the importance of popularized symbols and emblems related to reggae imaginary in people’s perception of the community. Among them we find the use of ganja, which is conceived as a peculiar Jamaican cultural trait. This is testified by the pragmatic interpretation proposed by a young student who immediately associates the repatriate community with the use of cannabis sativa:

“The land was given them as a gift by the king Haile Selassie. Since then, Jamaicans found it comfortable for many reasons, for example they find it suitable to grow their cultural weed, which they call ganja, so they eventually settled here”. 44

According to Ethiopian residents ganja and reggae are emblems of the repatriates, often automatically considered as prerogatives of all Jamaicans. The consumption of cannabis sativa is one of the first elements to which people refer when asked about the Jamaica säfär with a generalized mix of fear and explicit disapproval. Many Ethiopian interviewees, affirmed to consider smoking ganja as the main obstacle to a successful integration of Jamaicans in Shashamane. I have been told countless stories about young and qualified young Ethiopians

44 Interview with M.L., student, Shashamane, March 2013.
who, “once involved into the ganja business, suddenly stopped working, lost their mind and
started living as street guys”. Particularly interesting is the perception, among the Ethiopians,
of the consumption of ganja as peculiar cultural trait of the Jamaican community, part of “their
culture” that has to be rejected for it is something completely extraneous to the Ethiopian
“culture”, and “nature”, as testified by the word of Minyahil, a young man born and grown up
in Shashamane:

“This ganja business is not good for the Ethiopians. The Ethiopians, for nature, are not
allowed to smoke ganja. The only place where you can find ganja in Ethiopia is this area.
In Ethiopia the culture is different, ganja is something that prevent local people to
interact with the Jamaicans. It’s a cultural barrier”. 45

Although the consumption of marijuana for personal and ritual purposes is indeed
generalized and widespread in repatriates’ household and ritual spaces, it is mostly limited to
family's yards46 and generally does not take place in public areas. Its visibility is indeed much
less high than its general perception. For many aspects the consumption of ganja is similar to
the local use of *khat*,47 for its combined ritual and social purposes, a very common practice
among Ethiopians in Oromia, Southern Regions and Ogaden. Whilst *khat* is generally
perceived as familiar, part of the local culture and folklore and common act of socialization,
the Rastafarian use of ganja is generally perceived as harmful, highly addicting and strongly
stigmatized. Although many of the interviewees could not express why they felt such a strong
repulsion for those who make use of marijuana, the largest part referred to the fact that it is a
practice completely extraneous to Ethiopian culture. Many young interviewees admit to avoid
to spend time in the säfär, afraid of the risk to become addicted to *ganja*, others because of a
restriction given by the family. Such strong stigma directed to the whole repatriate
community has important consequences on the everyday life of the members. The reputation
of ganja-consumers makes harder for young repatriates, and even for Ethiopian resident of
the säfär, to find a job in town or to rent a house in the city.48 Moreover, according to the
Ethiopian constitution, among the requirements needed to apply for the Ethiopian citizenship
there is an unspecified notion of “social respectability” (Bonacci, 2008). Being accused or

45 Personal communication.
46 The yard is the Jamaican unit of urban residence. In a foreign context, the term yard comes to indicate
metaphorically the homeland Jamaica(Bonacci, 2008: 692).
47 Catha Edulis, locally grown plant with stimulant effect, usually chewed during social events festivities and rituals.
48 M.K., Personal communication.
more generally suspected of marijuana possession and consumption makes this requirement very hard to meet.

Another example of conflicting narratives can be provided by Rasta’s appropriation of the Ethiopianist symbolism built around the image of Haile Selassie, so ubiquitous in reggae songs. After the 1974 Marxist revolution, the Rastafarians living in Ethiopia found themselves in the paradoxical situation of carrying symbols which in Jamaica were revolutionary means of protest, but considered extremely reactionary in Ethiopia (Bonacci, 2008: 497). The years of the DERG saw the emergence of a strongly anti-imperial historiography and extremely negative propaganda, which condemned Haile Selassie’s rule to an enduring damnatio memoriae. Moreover, the Oromo of the south have often represented an hardcore voice of criticism toward the Imperial rule, which was perceived as economically exploitative and culturally and politically repressive. Thus D. Martin, an early repatriate, evokes people’s attitude toward Haile Selassie during the DERG, and its repercussions on the local perception of the repatriate community: «At that time His Majesty was considered a leba, a thief, by the local people here. So they looked at us in the same way. All the Jamaicans were reactionaries and thief as His Majesty was»49. Although recently the image of Haile Selassie has being gradually revalued, as testified by the lively celebrations held in honor of the centenary of Haile Selassie I’s birth in 1992, in which the repatriate community played a significant role. However, many Oromo still identify the Emperor with the past political and cultural oppression, so they clearly do not welcome Rasta iconography and reggae’s copious corpus of hymns to the Emperor.

Besides, debates on authenticity and Ethiopian-ness are also taking place in the city of Zion. The repatriates tend to define themselves as “true Ethiopians” in virtue of the act of repatriation, conceived as actual rebirth, re-definition of a space of belonging, and construction of a new racial, spiritual and national identification. Yet officially the largest part of the community does not have any legal recognition of themselves as Ethiopians, and live on the land grant with temporary residence permits. Repatriates’ claim of Ethiopian-ness is founded on a spiritual conception of roots, as well on the imaginary of Ethiopia as “universal homeland”, cradle of the whole mankind, country that belongs to everyone aspiring to acquire a new spiritual and national identity. In Rasta worldview, being Ethiopian is primarily a spiritual connotation. Brother Sydney, a repatriate who defines himself “Jamaican born and Ethiopian reborn” explained to me that “the image of Ethiopia that Rasta have, and Haile

49 Interview with Brother Desmond Martin. Shashamane, March 2013.
Selassie as well had, is that of a universal Ethiopia, welcoming everybody who wants to work and contribute to its development. Ethiopia and Africa must rise, and everybody can be a part of it. Such discourses, echoing the Pan-Africanist vision of an essential cultural homogeneity of Africa and the black race, and such inclusive and monolithic vision of Ethiopia and “Ethiopian-ness” appear to be rather problematic when considered within the context of the government-driven progressive ethnicization of the Ethiopian political discourse. Since the affirmation of ethnic federalism in the 1990’s, ethnic and linguistic identifications has become the primary idiom of ruling political and social relationships. In present Ethiopia ethnic and linguistic identities have been employed as basis of the whole political and administrative organization. Administrative regions, zones and districts have been created by the present government on the basis of language (considering language as core element of ethnic identity), while more than 100 ethnically-based political organizations are estimated to be active in the country (Wondimu, 2001: 14). The image of Ethiopia promoted by the ethnic federal system, is that of a complex and rich “mosaic of cultures” in which “Ethiopian-ness” works as holder and binding agent between many coexisting, and sometimes competing, ethnic identifications and nationalisms. In this political and ideological context, Rastafarians have been often presented as new ethnic group (easily identifiable from its exterior traits: Dreadlocks and Jamaican Patois) enriching the ethnic mosaic of the State. On the contrary the sentiments of belonging manifested by the repatriates, elaborated from the model of “black nation”, founded on a trans-cultural, trans-ethnic and racial identification, express an image of Ethiopia as spiritual heart of a continent homogenized through the metaphor of roots. Moreover, the Rastafarian concept and expression of “Ethiopian-ness” does not acknowledge the multitude of ethnic and “cultural” identifications within the National compound. The patrimony of symbols and images conveyed by reggae music and exhibited by repatriates refer mainly to what Tibebu calls the Aksumite Paradigm, borrowing his own words: «the paradigm of the ruling class of the Ge’ez civilization» (Tibebu, 1995: 12). Such paradigm is funded in the myth of the Solomonic dynasty as root of Ethiopian ruling line as divine mandate, an essentialist vision of Ethiopian history as fix and unchanged from Aksum to modern Empire, and the consciousness of the cultural supremacy of Ethiopian Tabot Christianity over other forms of civilization present in the Ethiopian lands such as indigenous cultures and Islam (Tibebu, 1995: 12-13). The “Aksumite Paradigm” has been central to the monarchic project of power centralization and the formation of Ethiopia as modern state. Since its making, the Ethiopian empire has founded its root on the heritage of Ge’ez civilization and Amharic language (directly deriving from Ge’ez alphabet ) as attempt of
cultural and linguistic homogenization of its numerous and diversified peoples. On the contrary, Southern peoples, such as the Oromo, were promoters of intense political struggles for achieving cultural recognition and political autonomy within Imperial Ethiopia. Eventually, the Ethiopian revolution posed the basis for southern peoples’ acquisition of public visibility. Challenging the idea of the history of the Highlands as the only national history, marginalized regional entities (organized through criteria of ethnic-national identification) opposed the cultural hegemony of the Ge’ez civilization, and prepared the ground for current “ethnic federalism”. In the present political situation, due to their historical experiences, many peoples from various Ethiopian “nationalities” feel very deeply the contradiction with Rasta-Reggae’s narrative of one-ness and unity under the banner of an supra-ethnic Ethiopian identity, because it is declined through symbols and cultural references basically reflecting only the northern and Amharic-centered product of Ge’ez civilization. On the other hand, Rasta are appreciated by many people for the way they show and celebrate their Ethiopian-ness, as M.K. told me:

“Sometimes the repatriates have more feeling of Ethiopianism (Ethiopian-ness) than most of the Ethiopian people, so I like that, I think they value more our national culture. For instance if you enter an Ethiopian family’s house and search for the Ethiopian flag you don’t find it. But in every Rasta family you find the flag. In any public occasion or event they bring the flag. You can even see some Rasta here walking barefoot, since they believe that Ethiopia is a holy land. They even know Ethiopian history better than the Ethiopians, much better. So at this time Ethiopian peoples are very divided along ethnic lines, but when you come to Rasta, well, Ethiopia is one for them, unity is all they talk about, so I like that part. If only more Ethiopians had the same way of thinking about their country, Ethiopianism, Unity! I would like if the Ethiopians could adopt their attitude in this respect”.  

In this sense, the centrality of racial and spiritual one-ness of Africans into Rasta discourse and reggae music, may sometimes provide a valid alternative (represent a valid counter-narrative) for those Ethiopians who, especially among the youngest generation, perceive ethnic identifications as too restrictive, divisive an harmful for national unity.

Besides all this clashing imaginaries working as trigger of cultural misunderstanding, the perception of social distance between repatriates and locals decreases consistently according

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50 Interview with M.K., Shashamane, march 2013.
to the people, Ethiopian and Rasta, living within the säfär, which provides many spaces of encounter, exchange and overlap between different cultural identification. As emerged by many interviews, generally the degree of cultural exchange between Ethiopians and repatriates is higher, and the attitude of one group toward the other more positive within the Jamaica säfär than in the rest of the city:

“People who live in this area (the säfär) have a better attitude toward repatriates, they are influenced by their way of life and they accept them because they know, they meet them. Some Rasta have a real union with Ethiopians from the säfär. If somebody dies they come to our houses, and if a Rasta get married we are also invited to have lunch or dinner with them. Outside the säfär it is different, because people do not share that much of their life with Rasta, they do not understand what being Rasta means. Here (in the säfär) there is a lot of mutual cultural exchange. I see it as an exchange, something going here and there. They are taking from us, but also giving”. 51

This kind of exchange is way easier for the new generations. The young residents of the säfär share spaces and daily activities with Rasta youths and sons of repatriates. Ethiopian and repatriates children go to the same schools and spend time together within the säfär. Rasta youths are bilingual or speak Amharic as their first language and they often speak Oromo, while is not unusual to find young Ethiopian residents or attender of the Jamaica säfär who are fluent in Jamaican patois which for most of them represents the first access to English. There is even a name coined for the local slang mixing Amharic and patois, called Jamariňňa, “Jamharic”. Sons of repatriates born in Ethiopia show different perception and representations of their notion of identity and national belonging, reformulating their parents’ notion of “repatriation” in the light of their personal experience. In a couple of decades a clear distinction between “Ethiopians” and “repatriates” would be no longer possible. The säfär is a multicultural laboratory, where different and even clashing narratives of belonging and identity coexist in a context of mutual exchange and constant re-definition of meanings, spaces and social relations. In this context of cultural exchange, music has a big role to play.

3.3 - The multiple functions of music on the “land grant”

A part from some small clubs and restaurants where live music is performed on a weekly basis, social occasions and musical events are quite limited in Shashamane. For this reason

51 Interview with M.K., Shashamane, March 2013.
many Ethiopian residents are attracted to the Jamaica säfär and the Rasta community. The largest part of musical shows and events are in fact organized by the repatriate community, and take place at the Twelve Tribes or Israel Headquarter, situated in the säfär, on the main road to the city center. Weekly dances taking place every Friday night, led by the Twelve Tribes of Israel band, and concerts with the participation of Ethiopian and repatriates reggae artists work as space for cohesion for the repatriates and heart of attraction for locals and residents of the säfär. Many Ethiopian youths living outside the säfär, who usually do not spend time in the area go to the HQ for concerts and reggae events. For most of them the HQ is the first, when not only, connection to the repatriate community. While for the Twelve Tribes, the many musical events organized represent a means of self-funding and increasing the visibility of the organization, for the young Rasta and Ethiopians attending the HQ, they represents the space in which they can test and prove their skills as deejays and vocal performers, taking part to the selection and free-styling. As far as I could observe, the reggae events at the HQ cover an important social role for the whole repatriate community by increasing its visibility, attracting visitors, and giving the repatriates the chance of involving the rest of the city in their local activities and projects. Reggae concerts and dances are also an occasion for the whole repatriate community to find and celebrate cohesion. In these occasion reggae music holds together different social actors present in the city.

As I mentioned earlier, the repatriate community, and the Twelve Tribes of Israel Organization in particular, have made of music one of the main tools through which they spread their messages and philosophy. The educational and social character of reggae concerts, dances and sound systems is very visible in Shashamane. Music is often alternated with prayers and educational talks given by members of the organization about topics of local interest, Rastafari faith and principles, Ethiopian history, or the remembrance of slavery and the origin of the community. In the Twelve Tribes of Israel’s view, as for many reggae artists, from the early roots to the more recent conscious dancehall, reggae has the mission to educate the people and transmit knowledge about a wide range of historical, social, political, cultural issues which they consider hidden or manipulated by the system of oppression to hide the truth and perpetuate its power (Daynes, 2004:35). The call for repatriation is part of this educational project, addressed to local people, but also to the diaspora and the Rastafarian brothers scattered all around the world. According to brother Desmond, chairman of the Twelve Tribes of Israel branch of Shashamane, part of the process of “educating
Africans and the rest of the world” consists in reversing the image of Africa that is generally portrayed by the Western media as backward and economically under-developed:

“Music has to talk about Africa as new world. Because Ethiopia is the new world, the old world is dead. Music has to chant down the western world which is dying and perishing. So reggae musicians have an fundamental role in this process. They have to come back home and sing about the new city of Zion which is being built. By singing and calling for repatriation they promote local empowerment and development”. 52

3.4- Conclusion to Chapter 3

In this Chapter I presented an overview of the origin and development of the säfär, as well on the relationship between the local and repatriate community of Shashamane. I enlightened the clashing narratives and images of the place elaborated by both groups, and investigated the role played by reggae music in the life of the city and the säfär. According to Daynes (2004), reggae music and the sound system play a specific role within a community in diaspora “transmitting a message but also bringing people together through the event and creating a focus for networking” (Daynes, 2004: 35). I argue that the same dynamic can be retraced in the role of dances, concerts and sound systems in Shashamane, which have multiple socio-political function. Through the musical events the bond between repatriates are strengthened, the sense of community empowered, many local activities are funded and presented to the rest of the city. Moreover, the notion of community is expanded, involving local people, but also members of the Rastafarian movement abroad (from the diaspora or in Africa) represented by visitors or artists invited to perform on the Twelve Tribes of Israel’s stage. In this sense, as we will see more deeply in the next chapter, music is the channel through which a complex network is established and nourished to link, on different levels, the repatriate community to the local community, and to the many places of the diaspora in the West. The connection established among the various levels of the network is symbolical as well as practical, as demonstrated by the transnational circulation of international visitors and economic funds from the diaspora, through the repatriate community, destined to local projects and agents.

52 Interview with Desmond Martin, Shashamane, March 2013.
Chapter 4 - Reggae in Ethiopia and Shashamane: overview of some directions

In this chapter, I look at the features and the new directions taken by the repatriate reggae, enlightening changes in Reggae/Rasta narratives back in the “Promised Land” and their implications on the process of identification of first and second-generation repatriates. I also investigate how such narratives are transformed and appropriated by the Ethiopian resident of the säfär to attribute new meanings to their immediate reality.

4.1 Some perspectives

Most of the “repatriated” reggae production, which is more oriented toward roots reggae, still has repatriation as core element, yet it struggles to present it no longer only as mythological and diasporic narrative, yet as real experience and movement. In some way it is the repatriate community itself claiming a more prominent position in the narration of repatriation. In fact many among the repatriates feel very deeply about the contradiction between the strong presence of Ethiopia and Shashamane in many contemporary and international reggae artists’ production and the little number of Rasta reggae singers who repatriated or at least visited the land grant. In this regard, during a conversation, brother Desmond Martin, chairman of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, admitted to feel uncomfortable with the way the discourse around repatriation is being “exploited” for commercial purposes by “the still many reggae singers who are not participating to the development of the Promised Land”. One of the characters of the new image of repatriation introduced and spread by the “repatriated” reggae is the notion of “repatriation for development”. As pointed out by Bonacci, for today’s repatriates, living in Shashamane per se cannot represent a fulfillment of the prophecy. The presence of the community on the promised land needs to be expressed through the pursuit of objectives of local development and economic advancement (Bonacci, 2008:581). Commercial and cultural enterprises, projects targeting equal exploitation and distribution of local natural resources are being promoted by the repatriates, self-funded or supported by Rastafarian organizations in the West, often through international musical projects and events. Thus, that is again a means of expanding the influence of the community outside the Ethiopian borders, as well as an attempt to legitimize their presence on the land grant to the eye of the local population.
is represented by Sydney Salmon, a Jamaican-American, “Ethiopian reborn” reggae singer, member of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and living in Ethiopia for the last ten years. Brother Sydney sings with the Imperial Majestic Band, born in the womb of the Twelve Tribes of Israel Organization, and composed by repatriates, members of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, mostly coming from UK, US, and Africa. They define their music “orthodox”, explicitly claiming its educational and spiritual value. In Sydney’s experience reggae music, repatriation, spiritual and material development cannot be separated:

“Coming to Africa for me is a work, a work of repatriation, a work of development, because all Africa is and must be involved in development. My mission was to take part in that development so I offered the only thing I had to offer. Music and songwriting is what I do, so I decided to use my gifts, my music and my ability to compose songs that would show the beauty of Africa, the history and the connections. That required a rebirth, a change of identity, since to come here and write about Africa I had to become African. You can’t write about Africa from your apartment in New York, you have to come here, live here, and face the same challenges that the African men face every day”.53

Repatriated musicians living on the land grant conceive repatriation as fundamental condition for the fulfilment of their essence of Rasta and musicians. By repatriating to Ethiopia they want to transform Ethiopia and Africa from abstract symbol to concrete reference and lived experience, taking the call for repatriation as a mission, as the “choice to play a part in the development of Ethiopia”. The notion of “change of identity” deriving from the experience of repatriation, is also something very frequent in repatriated music and discourses, representing a significant rupture with previous Rasta notions of African-ness. The act of repatriation is conceived as essential act of transformation, the concrete journey through which one can finally rejoin and fully embrace his African identity.

4.2- Reggae, Rastafari and identity: continuities and changes in the narratives of place and personhood.

An interesting aspect of reggae music in the "Promised Land", is its relation with individual and collective processes of self-construction and identity-making. In the previous chapters we have seen how Ethiopia and Shashamane has been given the meaning of the “Promised Land”, symbolically constructed, through the means of reggae music, as mythological place of return,

53 Interview with Sydney Salmon, Adama, March 2013.
peace and liberation. The corpus of images and meanings connected to the dream of repatriation have shaped the way generations of Rastafarians and repatriates look at Shashamane and Ethiopia and relate to them. During my permanence in the säfär, I asked whether something of this representation has changed from the point of view of the youngest generations living there, and for what the repatriates call ‘the first free-born generation’, which are the sons of repatriates born and grown up in Ethiopia. I attempted to understand whether the perception of their identity related to the place where they live has changed, and whether reggae music has played some role in such evolution. In his study about the second generation of Rastafarians in Shashamane, the Ethiopian scholar Ababu Minda argues that the different socio-political context from which the free-born generation emerged has led them to a “change of identity”. Such change has been provoked by the lack of a direct experience of Babylon, that is the life in the West, which is not perceived as so morally degraded as it is by their repatriate parents (Minda, 2004: 38). According to Minda, the free-born generations do not perceive Ethiopia as Zion and a Promised Land, but rather as the “place in where they were born, as any other Ethiopian”. Being included in “Ethiopian culture and identity” they do not feel the same religious spiritual attachment to their homeland as their fathers, and do not demonize the life in the West (Minda, 2004: 38). I partly disagree with Minda since, according to my findings, many of the youths from the free-born generation, and most of the young sons of repatriates I had the chance to talk to, revealed to nourish full and deep awareness of the spiritual significance of what repatriating to Ethiopia means for Rastafarians. Although their notions of national and spiritual identity vary considerably according to personal experiences, and sometimes amalgamate or overlap, most of the young Rasta attribute a spiritual meaning to Ethiopia and awareness of the “privilege” of living in Shashamane.

Through their descriptions Ethiopia and Shashamane are depicted as “place of peace” and “spiritual recover”, a positive “state of mind”, a “land of love”, a “land of freedom”, a “gift from God”, echoing Rastafarian discourses and the epithets present in the international reggae production. Not only Rasta youths make frequent use of the categories of Zion and Babylon referred to Ethiopia and the West, but they also transmitted such interpretative paradigm to their Ethiopian peers living in the säfär who find in Rastafari a valid source of individual and collective identification. Minda calls “Rastafari sympathizers” those Ethiopian nationals who are affiliated to Rastafarian mansions or involved in the life of the Rasta community but, in his view, cannot be considered Rasta since, “although they have adopted the clothing styles,
dreadlocks and other Rastafari idiosyncrasies, they do not believe in the divinity of Haile Selassie- the basic premise of the Rastafari (EWF) philosophy” (Minda, 2004:34). In my opinion such interpretation, which moreover takes in consideration only the philosophy of the EWF, which is marginal in the composition of today’s repatriate community, does not recognize the perception of identity of many young Ethiopian resident of the säfär, who do not hesitate to qualify themselves as Rasta, and the central role exercised by Reggae music in such process of elaboration and personalization of their identity of Ethiopian Rasta. In particular Bob Marley’s songs, ubiquitous and constantly quoted in youth’s discourses, provided them of the basic notions, symbols, and concepts of the Rastafarian faith, as well as of a channel of expression of this new identity. I myself assisted to a reasoning among Rasta (Ethiopian and repatriates) youths about the divinity of Haile Selassie during a Friday night at the Twelve Tribes of Israel’s HQ. While two sons of repatriates supported the argument in favor of His Majesty’s divinity, four Ethiopian youths, self-defined Rasta yet not affiliated to any mansion, refused to consider the emperor as God. The discussion went on for almost one hour, quoting Bob Marley’s lyrics, the Bible and His Majesty’s speeches. Finally, a compromised was approached, represented by the conception of Haile Selassie as “manifestation of the personality of Jesus Christ”. Such interpretation is peculiar of the Twelve Tribes of Israel theological orientation, which progressively conformed to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church principles. When I asked the Ethiopian youths how they got to know about this particular orientation, they told me they have learnt this through “educational” music and speeches taking place on the HQ’s stage. I realized that many of the young “sympathizers” have a deep grasp on Rastafari spiritual principles with which they engage processes of cultural exchange and identification. When asked to define the religious identity they often declare to be Orthodox Christians and Rasta, since they conceive Rastafari as a worldview and not a religion. Yet they agree with their repatriate or free-born peers in considering Shashamane and Ethiopia a “spiritual place”, a “place of peace” where “God shows His love”. The characterization of Shashamane, and especially of the säfär, as space of peace and love, although not exactly realistic, is a core part of Shashamane youth subculture. Also those among the Ethiopian youths who do not explicitly identify with Rastafarianism, often refer to Rasta and reggae-inspired discourses to make sense of their living and working in the streets of Shashamane. Moreover, looking at the säfär through the lenses of reggae music charges of a symbolical value their otherwise marginal position in the urban, and social context. Their

\[55\] Personal communications and informal talks.
proud self-identification as “Youths of Shasha”, to the light of what Shashamane means for a Rasta, may also represents a way of facing and symbolically reversing their situation of frustration due to unemployment, economic difficulties, social and geographical immobility. Once I was told a proud remark by a young Ethiopian resident of the säfar: “People from all over the world had to travel thousands of miles to come to Shashamane. Well I’m so lucky that I was born here. I took a shortcut”.

Although it is indeed possible to catch sight of some changes in the direction predicted by Minda, (as progressive estrangement from the way the first generation of repatriates looked at the West) such changes cannot be considered so drastic. Part of the young repatriates, or the “free-born” generation nourishes the curiosity or the aspiration to spend some time in the West for education, or is attracted by the possibility of finding better and highly-remunerated occupations. However, they don’t consider it as a long-term migration. The idea of “coming back home” is often present. Moreover, not all the free-born youths have absolutely no experience of the West as they have peers, in some cases their own older brothers and sisters, who might have spent the first part of their life in the West with the family before repatriating. Since many of the repatriates were part of the black diaspora in Europe and the US, they might still have contacts with the family left behind, which makes the “far” West a bit more familiar. Yet, as far as I could observe, family memories and narratives of diaspora and exile, together with Rastafari-inspired reggae music have been fundamental for shaping a strong consciousness of their identity of repatriates. Although many young repatriates or free born still recognize part of their roots in the West, they manage to orchestrate all their various national identifications into Rasta identity, as Black Haze, a young man and local reggae/ hip-hop artist repatriated to Ethiopia with his family, clearly explained:

“My family come from Jamaica, both my parents come from Jamaica, I was born in England. Since I come back home to Ethiopia as a youth I consider myself Ethiopian. I’m not born in Ethiopia, but I’m learning the culture, I respect the culture here, yet sometimes I feel I cannot let go my Jamaican origins, cause I love that culture too. But I was grown as a Rasta youth, and I know my real roots are here in Shashamane, so in the end I can say I am an Ethiopian-Jamaican Rasta”.

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56 Isha, young Ethiopian resident of the säfar informal talk, March 2013.
57 Interview with Black Haze, Shashamane, February 2013.
I have met few Rasta young men who have been to Europe to study or living for a while with the family. Although many of them feel frustrated and disenfranchised comparing youth’s condition in Ethiopia to the wider chances of employment and formation in the West, they still identify Ethiopia as their homeland, and admitted to have felt “in exile” in Babylon. Contrary to Minda’s findings, the categories of Babylon and Zion, are constantly employed in this kind of discourses. Zion is often presented as the place where they get “real knowledge”, not worldly knowledge, but the deep knowledge about truth and life. Most of them indeed talk as a change of identity, but in the sense of a choice, as the know that they would be “somebody else” or a “different person” if they would live in the West, yet that difference is perceived as something pejorative.

4.3-Transcending the säfär through reggae music: from the ghetto to global networks.

As mentioned previously, the “youth of Shasha” enact several symbolical strategies to overcome the feeling of social and spatial isolation to which they are exposed. Once again reggae music represents the main channel through which repatriate and Ethiopian youth construct and perform strategies of identity-building and attribution of new meaning of the place where they live. They introduce or revitalize symbols and imaginaries. The ghetto is the most popular model of social space addressed and reproduced by black popular cultural and musical expressions such as reggae and hip-hop. As noted by Jaffe, the notion of the ghetto proved to be highly exportable and a successfully travelling imaginary since it has been appropriated by inner-city youths all across the world (as discursive space of immobility) to narrate their own local context and their experiences of actual and imagined immobility. (Jaffe, 2012: 675). Reggae music and the inner-city have been closely related since its early development. Yet, as I have shown in chapter 2 analyzing the affirmation of Jamaican roots reggae in the seventies, Rasta-inspired discourses, dreams of repatriation and evocation of Africa as symbolical and spiritual elsewhere became more central in the musical production. In the first chapter I underlined how the development of reggae music saw a turning point in the gradual affirmation and the subsequent global diffusion of Jamaican reggae-dancehall. Peculiar to the Jamaican Raggamuffin and dancehall culture, is the radical narrowing and localization of messages and images carried, as well as the marginalization of the notion of Africa in the musical imaginary (see Chude-Sokey, 1994). The increasing influence of rap and hip-hop culture led to a shift toward more consumerist and hedonist themes, while the main

58 Exception made for the more “conscious dancehall” production.
focus and setting of dancehall reggae came back to the ghetto. For a musical genre born to chant a mythical elsewhere, the progressive neglecting of diasporic narratives and notions of repatriation represented a real semantic revolution. Quoting Chude-Sokei:

“The sentiments of raggamuffin music and culture are very different from the nostalgia and longing for ‘elsewhere’ that characterizes much of the kind of reggae and cultural production that comes out of Bob Marley’s generation. The ‘Waiting in Vain’, ‘Back to Africa’, ‘Rasta Waan Go Home’ exile narratives have given way to cultural expressions from those who see the new battles as immediate and local - through gun-sights and across dirty inner-city streets. From an aesthetics of exile and absence to an aesthetics of raw, materialistic presence” (Chude-Sokei, 1994:80).

Although the fascination for roots, and for its icon Bob Marley is still very strong, dancehall is now very popular among the *Youths of Shasha*, as well as the imaginary of the ghetto. Many of the young residents of the säfär, Ethiopian and Rasta who try to make music as self-taught singers rappers and deejays, talk about themselves as “street youth”, and “ghetto youth”. Part of them is also spontaneously affiliated to “crews” that, on the Jamaican model, have a particular musical orientation, referring directly to Jamaican sound-systems and crews. While I was doing my fieldwork in Shashamane, the youth of the säfär was divided into two of the most popular crews in Kingston, Gaza and Gully, which were related also territorially to two different areas of the säfär. As explained by Daniel, a young repatriate from Tobago:

“Gaza and Gully are our crews. Gaza listen to Gaza music, and Gully listen to Gully music. But here is not like as in Jamaica, there’s peace between us. It’s just a music thing. We meet, we smoke, we listen to our music and we discuss what to do for our compounds here in the ghetto. It is something you can find only here in the säfär, it is a ghetto-thing, and a thing of the youths. We all have different aspirations, someone wants to be a musician, some other wants to play football, and everyone struggles to make it . It is a way to feel and show our brotherhood, and help each other here in the ghetto”.

59 Names of the crews supporting the Jamaican dancehall artists Vybz Kartel and Mavado who, since 2006, have engaged in a brutal lyrical warfare dividing the Jamaican and international dancehall community. Clashes and tensions has taken place between fans and supporters. Gaza and Gully are the name of the areas in Portmore and Kingston where the artists come from.

60 Informal talk, March 2013.
The image of the ghetto is shared also by the Ethiopian youths of the säfär, who appropriated the idioms and the imaginary related to it. Anecdotes and narrations of the dangerous daily life in the ghetto are indeed very recurring among the youths:

“Life is tough for the ghetto youths. Nuff youths, here in Shashamane, they are getting mad, they laugh by themselves when they walk, they talk by themselves, they act like they don’t come from this planet, you know? They rob people, they stub people. The people there in the village, do not even call the police. The police don’ event come in, they stop on the gate. Yeah, I say that what make them do things like that are the movies they watch, like some Gaza-movie they have seen, some Jamaican movies. But one thing that I like of the youths is that, even if they are drinking or smoking, they are still doing something, they are still doing music freely. Like in some bar everybody can go on the floor, you can go and freestyle. So even if they act as bad men, they are still doing music.”

To the eyes of the youths, dancehall reggae and rap represent the soundtrack of the ghetto, but also a key to self-affirmation within their social context. I would like to spend here some more lines on the function of the imaginary of the ghetto for the youths of the Safar. Since the ghetto “can belong to anyone who perceives himself or herself as suffering physical and social enclosure and isolation” (Jaffe, 2012: 675), its imaginary can function as connector to other imagined or real ghettos. One of the reasons why the imaginary of the ghetto has such a prominent cohesive value for the youth of Shasha is its way of operating on two apparently concurring levels: on the one hand, it provides a shared tool to recognize and express extremely local conditions such as the frustration of the unemployed and disenfranchised youth of Shashamane through a global medium, on the other hand, it projects the locality of Shashamane into a wider imaginary, establishing a network among the säfär and the many inner-cities in the Caribbean and the rest of the world. In short, while the ghetto allows local actors to localize and “cannibalize” a global imaginary by concretely inscribing elements of the Jamaican social reality (such as the crews) on the local “turf”, at the same time it enables them to overcome their perceived social isolation and to transcend the local through the connection to an analogous and globalized model of elsewhere. Moreover, I believe that for many young repatriates, dancehall music and the ghetto represent an expressive channel through which they can manage their problematic relation with the West, give voice to their aspirations and frustration, creating a fictional space that can connect them with that part of their identity,

61 S.B., Personal Communication, February 2014.
that is “forward looking”, western-oriented, and usually not welcome in the “Promised Land”. Although the Rastafarian conception of Ethiopia and Shashamane as the “Promised Land”, and the youth’s image of the säfär as the ghetto might seem contradictory, yet I suggest to read it as a local response from Shashamane youth (Ethiopian and repatriate) to the abstract image of “Promised Land” conveyed by Roots reggae, which is not completely rejected, but put in balance thanks to a new imaginary/style through which their local micro-reality can be reflected and celebrated.

4.4- Conclusion to Chapter 4

According to Gilroy, “in a way reggae music is a meaningful example of how the African diaspora built itself, - and is still being built - through simultaneous roots and routes” (Gilroy, 1993). In this chapter I looked at the Black diaspora who took “the way home" to see if reggae music still has a role to play, in terms of construction of identity and self-perception, once people are back in the promised land. I also tried to verify my hypothesis concerning whether reggae music can influence the way adult and young repatriates relate to their new home and its inhabitants and vice versa. True, the questions are still partly unsolved, and only time will tell the precise development of the still forming repatriate community in Shashamane and the role of music in this process. Yet, I did find some partial answers. I already pointed to roots reggae that, with its messages and narratives of exile, provided symbolical foundations to Rastafarians who embarked on their repatriation to Ethiopia. In virtue of its global diffusion and popularization has represented the first “virtual” encounter between Ethiopian and repatriates, as well as between repatriates and Africa (Ethiopia). In a way reggae music was the “lens” through which repatriates looked at Ethiopia, and Ethiopians interpreted Rastafari, as well as the presence of the Repatriates in their Country. I tried to demonstrate that such “lens” still influence and shape the way both groups interact in Shashamane and share common spaces such as the säfär. This was possible underlining the “clashing narratives” which I collocate at the basis of some of the main cultural misunderstandings between locals and repatriates, that so far did not allowed to the development of a fully peaceful and co-operative coexistence. At the same time, I tried to highlight the processes of mutual transformation and transmission of such narratives involving specifically the people living in the säfär and the younger generations of Ethiopian and repatriates. The repatriate community is, through music, trying to translate the image of Shashamane from abstract symbol to a concrete reference, talking about the experience of repatriation and promoting a model of repatriation which points to participating in the economic and social development of Ethiopia
and Shashamane. As we have seen with the Twelve Tribes of Israel Organization, reggae music can also represent a means of promoting cohesion inside the community, and expanding it through the creation of trans-national networks. My interpretation is that, reggae music exercises multiple and apparently contradictory functions among the youth of the säfär through its current manifestations of dancehall- reggae culture and imaginary. Although Rasta and Ethiopian youths demonstrated to be still conscious of the categories of Babylon and Zion, as well as they still conceive Shashamane and Ethiopia “traditionally” as “Promised Land”, dancehall’s semantic and aesthetics allow them to “localize” Zion. They see their micro-reality reflected into the global image of the ghetto, and create symbolical networks and connections to Jamaican and all the other ghettos of the world. So they make sense of their life in the “Promised Land” while, same as their fathers, they claim and propose a more “real” representation of Africa and Ethiopia. In short, to go back to the metaphor of the travel leading my analysis, once repatriated, reggae music takes new different directions and functions, shaping and expressing continuities and changes in people's narratives of identity, and mediating their perception of the place where they live. While “localizing” the notion of repatriation, and helping people to make sense of their local reality, reggae once again transcends the local place, take them back to Jamaica and all over the world through its networks of global imaginaries and sounds. In Shashamane, as in many other places in the world, reggae music represents a “medium for building connections between people and places” (Daynes, 2004: 36). It is itself a multi-dimensional place where simultaneous “routes and roots” (Gilroy, 1993) connect local and global cultural exchange.
Chapter 5- Reggae as connecting space: bridging “Zion” with the “global”

*When Shashamane is calling*

*I know the whole world will be listening.*

*Sydney Salmon*

In the previous chapter I have shown some functions of reggae music within the säfär, enlightening how reggae music, also in its more recent forms, provides the repatriate community, and Ethiopian youth inhabiting the säfär. It includes a set of images and interpretative paradigms which helps them making sense of the local (the immediate and material reality of life in the säfär) as well as constructing real and imaginary connections with the world outside, both on a national and trans-national dimension. In this chapter I present some musical expressions and initiatives developed in Shashamane by repatriate artists, and sometimes through the collaboration of international and local artists. These expressions are representative of the new and multiple directions and dimensions taken by reggae music “from the Promised Land”. In particular my analysis refers to Chude-Sokey's (1997) reading of “ragga” (dancehall) sounds as “crucial site with its own spatiality”, articulated on three levels: Ragga as inner city, national and trans-national/post-national/diasporic space and representation (Chude-Sokey, 1997). In the light of his Sokey’s analysis, I will propose my interpretation of reggae as “post-national geography” (Chude-Sokey, 1997) occupying, with its messages and channels of transmission, the connecting space between the local and the global. The new status of reggae music from Zion requires a reconceptualization of the narratives of Ethiopia and Africa going beyond the essentialist vision of the diaspora. Similarly, the experience of repatriation led to consider the categories of Babylon and Zion no longer as antithetic and dichotomous elements, but rather as concrete spaces which somehow are connected by the global modernity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the “repatriated” reggae is engaging interesting formal and semantic transformations in terms of its production as well as its reception. This partly responds to more global transformation within the genre (see the “dancehall” revolution”) but also to local exigencies,
such as the necessity of finding its place in Zion in relation to local reception and market. This new mediating position between the promised land and the rest of the world requires, once again, a redefinition of reggae meanings and messages.

5.1- Sydney Salmon and the Imperial Majestic Band: African development through the love of reggae music.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, a considerable part of the most recent international reggae-dancehall production shows an evident shift from the concept of Africa’s redemption through cultural and economic self-sufficiency toward an explicitly capitalist-inspired concept of social status expressed through possessing and exhibiting material wealth. Most of the messages conveyed through this branch of dancehall represents a deliberate deviation from the original Rastafari ethics. However, something of that vision has permeated and influenced even the production of more “conscious” artists. An eloquent case is represented by Damian Marley’s “Promised Land” (a song that I already mentioned in chapter 2) which proposes a radical re-definition of the ideal of Promised Land in terms of explicit emulation of Western lifestyle and symbols of wealth. Such vision cannot be considered as representative of the position of the repatriate community in Shashamane, and it is certainly extremely detached from the ethics of the Rastafari movement. However, the huge popularity that dancehall music has acquired worldwide, as among the young population of Shashamane living inside and outside the säfär, does play a concrete role in shaping people’s conceptualization of development and wealth, materialist dreams and expectations. The by the Marley foundation which supports the Rastafarian community and the Jamaican Rastafarian Development Community (J.R.D.C.) School, is the living evidence of a concrete stance taken by the international Rastafari movement in the direction of African and Ethiopian development and the choice of music as central instrument. It also shows that the social-economic development of the whole country is the main objective of its agenda. In a language equivalent to that of the most vanguard international NGO’s, the Marley Foundation’s report about “Africa Unite” 2005, 60th Birthday celebration of Bob Marley states:

“The vision of the Marley Foundation revolves around the concept of individualized and community-based care. As the RMF states “the aged be protected, the infants nourished and cared for”. The focus is clearly on the poor, deprived, disposed and affected. (...) Ethiopia is challenged to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, especially
that of reducing poverty to less than half of the present level and having primary and secondary education for all. Travelling to Shashamane brought the reality home to us as we saw the poverty of the rural poor echoing the poverty of the rural poor in Ghana where RMF now works” (The Bob Marley and Rita Marley Foundation. Africa Unite Ethiopia Opening Remark 2005: 2).

Africa Unite Ethiopia (2005) was a pan-African event aiming to build a connection between Rastafari, reggae music and African development. The process and the channels through which development has to be pursued, however, are not univocal and look sometimes ambiguous and contradictory. Interestingly enough the event was sponsored, through the mediation of the Marley foundation, by important Western corporations and international agencies such a Coca Cola, UNICEF, World Bank, African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa( The Bob Marley and Rita Marley Foundation. Africa Unite Ethiopia Opening Remark 2005: 4). On the mainstream and international level there seems to be a convergence of imaginaries of development, seen as target and duty, on the model of the “Western” International Cooperation, well represented by the ethics of the Rasta Marley Foundation and the JRDC organization. The “repatriated reggae” seems to go in such direction, yet attempting to remain on the “orthodox path” and combining the promotion of African social and economic development, together with a consciousness of the failure of the Western model. Such spiritual consciousness is also expressed through the attempt of offering an alternative to dancehall’s narratives and culture through the revitalization of roots reggae music. This is seen as the best channel to spread the message of Rastafari, calling for repatriation and creating a link between Shashamane and more brothers, sisters and artists from Europe, where Roots reggae is more appreciated. An interesting example of Rasta appropriation of notions of development is represented by Sydney Salmon and his band. As I have already mentioned, brother Sydney Salmon is a reggae musician and repatriate who has been living in Ethiopia for the last ten years. Born in Jamaica, migrated to the US at the age of 22. In New York Sydney studied voice and guitar, and performed as leader of the SoulJahs reggae band. He also became a member of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and converted to the Orthodox faith. After a first visit to Ethiopia in 2000, Sidney decided to repatriate. He lives in Ethiopia since ten years, and works in Shashamane and Adama. He released “Ethiopia is calling, Babylon is falling” the first album produced in Ethiopia with the Imperial Majestic Band, a band of repatriates from all over the world, members of the Twelve Tribes of Israel Organization. He explains that: “Ethiopia is calling is all about repatriation to Africa and to Ethiopia, where
Shashamane is and the land grant was given to us from His Majesty”. The message that Sydney wants to communicate through his music can be resumed by the formula “African Development through the Love of Reggae Music” which according to Sydney, means:

“to encourage and convince others who want to come that is possible to come, and those who are here to encourage them to work together for this development work and process we have to go through. We can enjoy ourselves making music and listening to it, but at the same time we know that we are building schools, supporting hospitals and the unfortunates. That makes our music and your enjoyment a bit more meaningful and conscious”.

Together with the Imperial Majestic Band and the supervision of his Manager, Leila Worku, activist and member of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Sydney works to promote reggae music on the local turf, organizing reggae dances, deejays competitions, concerts and events in Shashamane, Adama and Addis Ababa. The largest part of the revenue is employed to support the JRDC school in Shashamane as well as schools and educational centers in Adama, where the band has set its new base. The band is also trying to involve the local youth in reggae music, by instructing and supporting young Ethiopian musicians and deejays, employing them in the band, and helping them to set their sound system production. At the time of my visit to the band in Adama, three youths were being trained and prepared to be deejays and future tutors and trainers. As testified by their motto, also for Sydney and the band’s agenda, local development is the main task, and reggae music is regarded as means to promote positive values and social change. Leila and Sydney explained to me that their strong commitment in projects of development is not contrasting with Rasta philosophy for it is the way indicated by His Majesty during his life. They feel responsible of Ethiopian development because, according to the universal vision of Ethiopia that Rasta share with His Majesty, Ethiopia belongs to everybody, it is for the whole world, for anyone who feels spiritually Ethiopian. Sister Leila explained to me that the model of development they were following is not the Western-deviated one, it is a conscious development, meaning working with the people day by day, sharing the same life, the same place, the same faith: “We don’t want to impose nothing to the people here, we don’t want to act as culturally or economically superior, with a

colonialist mindset. That has been already done in Ethiopia. That is what we fought against to support His Majesty”.

Sydney and the Imperial Majestic Band attempt to translate such big importance given to the condition of equality and cooperation in the complex of relationship between repatriates and locals, also through their way of making music. Their aim is to create a “conscious music, able to talk directly to the Ethiopians, possibly in their own language, to promote a process of reciprocal knowledge between locals and repatriate through the diffusion of reggae. That means investing in the study of Amharic and local languages”.

For this reason Sydney promotes what he calls “conscious hybridization” of his music, opening reggae to local influences and elements with which Ethiopians can identify on a cultural basis. The band is currently working for incorporating the Ethiopian pentatonic scale into their songs. Also in terms of themes and messages they try to include elements of the local traditional cultures and languages, to respond to the Ethiopian strong consciousness of cultural diversity and ethnic identification. Yet such attention to cultural particularism is balanced with lyrics that foster the idea of one-ness and “universality” of Ethiopia, as brother Sydney explains:

“Personally I feel like I am in a place where God intended to bring the mankind to live together. Ethiopia is the Nation of Peoples, there is no one dominant people here, there are so many tribes, each one with its own peculiarity and rights. Ethiopia has set such system because Ethiopia believes in that. People here have a strong feeling of ethnic affiliation. We don’t want them to consider Rasta as a tribal group. We are not an ethnic group, on the contrary, we are the ones who work to spread a message of national and trans-ethnic unity. I say we can be anything we want to be, but let’s first be Ethiopians”.

For the band, reggae music must be the means through which repatriate musicians can transform the often prejudiced images that local people have about Rasta. Music has to show mutual knowledge, contacts and contaminations, has to give room for what Ethiopians and repatriates have in common, which is the Orthodox faith, the faith in Jesus Christ. Music is therefore thought by Sydney and his band as a multicultural space for dialogue, mutual

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64 Leila Worku (interview) Adama, March 2013.
knowledge and understanding. It plays an active role in the local society, promoting cohesion and social change. It is also a useful tool to balance the delicate political and social stability of Ethiopian national structure, as noted by Sydney:

“It is such a big responsibility to make music here. There are so many things to balance. When His Majesty said ‘until the color of a man’s skin has no more significance than the color of his eyes’ he was not just talking to white people, he was talking to Africans as well, to his people. Because he knew that in his country there are so many forces to balance”.

Examples of Sydney Salmon’s attempt to a “conscious translation” of reggae narratives into a local cultural idiom can be retraced in his musical production. Particularly interesting is the attempt of presenting the Rasta community in Ethiopia as one of the “nation and nationalities” which composed the Ethiopian federation. The video-clips of Sydney’s singles are locally produced, promoted through the Internet and broadcasted on the national TV. They are realized on the model of the Ethiopian so called “cultural music” clips, which propose the revitalization and re-interpretation of traditional songs and musical styles attributed to specific ethnic groups and nationalities. As in large part of such production, the clip is set in open spaces, depicting scenes from the daily life in Shashamane and the säfär, as well as celebrating the beauty of Ethiopian nature and people. Members of the repatriate community are portrayed during their daily activities and moments of collective exchange and familiarization with the locals, as well as in spiritual circumstances such as celebrations and Bible reading. Sydney and the members of the band wear traditional Ethiopian clothing, especially from Amhara and Tigray region, but also Oromo garments. The original scenes are alternated with videos and pictures of the Emperor Haile Selassie I, and Amharic and English quotes from his speeches. Besides the visual aspect, the lyrical content is also an attempt to synthetize Rasta and local elements. Through his songs, brother Sydney redefines some of the traditional repatriation reggae discourses, according to his personal experience of repatriate living in the Promised Land, as well as in the light of the local political and social environment. In the joyful “We love Shashamane” (2011) there is an attempt to “concretize” the image of Zion, which is still presented in terms of “state of mind” yet clearly localized in the city and its community. The lyrics explain the history of the donation of land to the Rasta community by His Majesty and celebrate the beauty and naturalness of life in Ethiopia:

“The whole world is talkin’ about Shashamane, inna Ethiopia in the mid of the Rift Valley. This land is a gift from Jah to show His appreciation, for our stand against Mussolini in the Italian invasion. We love Shashamane (Shashamane on my mind) Shashamane hullum gize68, Shashamane peace of mind, Shashamane all the time, Shashamane on my mind. 250 kilometers south of Addis Ababa, connected by the King’s Highway all the way down to Kenia. Abyata, Shalla, Langano are some of the places we love to go (...) Haile Selassie ameseginalew for Shashamane, we love Shashamane (Shashamane on my mind) Shashamane hullum gize, Shashamane peace of mind, Shashamane all the time, Shashemene on my mind” (Sydney Salmon, We love Shashamane, 2011).

Unity and cooperation among African people as well as between Ethiopia and repatriates is auspicated: “Come on my brother, my Ethiopian brother, together we’ll be strong. We have to try to learn to love one another, my African brother, my Jamaican brother, the Addis New Millenium!”(Sydney Salmon, We love Shashamane 2011). A call for contributing to the development of Shashamane is addressed to brothers and sisters in Rastafari of “the whole world”, aiming to create a global network of communities with Shashamane as center and the future of the Promised Land as core aim: “Ask it to the teachers, teaching little children, Jah see what you are doing for the Shashamane living. Shashamane calling, now the whole world will be listening, for the new that will be coming, for the Shashamane future” (Sydney Salmon, We love Shashamane). The video clip depicts Shashamane’s landscapes and people, stressing on the commitment of the repatriate community in supporting education and promoting social and economic development, portraying the band singing with students and teachers of the JRDC school, and entertaining good relations with locals. Members of the community are portrayed while dancing, singing and reasoning together in a peaceful atmosphere.

Another aspect of Rasta “traditional” representation of Ethiopia can be identified in the image of Ethiopia as the only African country which was never colonized by western power, as proudly shown in Sydney Salmon’s “Ethiopia Never Colonized”(2008). The reason of the Ethiopian success in its fight for independence is individuated into the cooperation of the many Ethiopian “tribes” under the guide of the Emperor: “To die for freedom is honorable, to stand for unity is honorable. And that has been our ultimate desire, never being colonized. Sing Ethiopians sing, sing mezmur69 unto their King, and this is the way they did win and

68 Amharic for “all the time”.
69 Religious chants.
never been colonized” (Sydney Salmon, Ethiopia never colonized, 2012). The remembrance of Ethiopians’ unity under the guide of the Emperor during the Ethiopian-Italian war, although highly idealized, allows the Rastafarians to be part of the foundation myth of the Ethiopian state. This approach legitimizes their presence on the land grant in virtue of their commitment for the Ethiopian cause, enumerating them in the line of the Ethiopian tribes. Brother Sydney’s music seems in fact to accept and promote the idea of Rasta as “Ethiopian tribe”, part of the union of peoples composing the Nation, in a way that is not contrasting at all with the federal vision of Ethiopia as mosaic of cultures and ethnic groups: “Inna Ethiopia we have so many different styles, inna Ethiopia we got so many different tribes: Oromo, Amhara, Wolayta, Rasta. Yes, these are the reasons why Ethiopia has never been colonized” (Sydney Salmon, Ethiopia never colonized). Yet Sydney and his band attribute a specific meaning and function to the Rasta “tribe” which, according to precept of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, is to “centralize and organize”, leading Ethiopian peoples to spiritual consciousness and unity, through concrete actions and example:

“We are trying to be visible and active in the local community with our music and activities. Because suggestions are not enough. Of course you can suggest things but unless we come together and start doing what we talk about, starting leading by example, nothing is going to change here. This people have their own state, their own cultures and economy, so for you to come and tell them ‘do this, don’t do that’ would be useless. But if you come here and do something, shine a light, they will follow you and join you. Here we have the same problem the entire world is going through, that is the negativity that Rome and Babylon have pushed. We are survivals and thanks to Rastafari we are protected and conscious, but here in Africa and especially in Ethiopia, where people were hidden from the West for a long time, anybody can come here and trick this people, cause they are naïve, there’s a lot of naivey here, so we have to protect them”. 70

The theme of unity and one-ness among African people and Ethiopian ethnic groups is ubiquitous in Sydney’s music. The call for equality, over-racial and over-ethnic cooperation is the basis of the new Pan-African and universal Ethiopian identity prophesized by Rasta:

“We are all children of one Father, Father and Mother of humanity. He made the black, He made the white, He made the brown for us to unite. Jah Jah mek de whole a we. (...) So let’s get together inna Harmony(...) So put away hypocrisy. Let’s get together inna Unity,

70 Sydney Salmon (interview) Adama, March 2013.
that’s the only way Africa will be free. *Jah Jah mek de whole a we*” (Sydney Salmon, *Jah Jah mek de whole a we*, 2008).

In fact, although rooted in a local dimension, the work of Sydney Salmon and the Imperial majestic band has not lost its Pan-African and trans-national vocation. Sydney and the Band are organizers and promoters of “Reggae in the Rift Valley” festival, currently at its fourth edition, and taking place yearly in Shashamane, Adama and Addis Ababa. One of the aims of the festival is to “bring the music home”, connecting reggae artists from the diaspora and especially African artists, and linking them with the artists in Ethiopia and the Rastafarian community in Shashamane. According to Sydney, bringing the music home is necessary to re-create a Pan-African network:

“Reggae music has gone from Jamaica to all over the world, but the biggest reggae festival today are in Babylon. Things are slowly changing and many African Countries are now developing their own festival, but for Ethiopia should be special because it is the land of His Majesty, and the whole aspect of Rastafari is behind Ethiopia. So it seems to me that should be right to have a festival here. I would like Ethiopia and Shashamane to be the center of a network of reggae music and Rastafari culture all through Africa and beyond, a global network”.71

Through the festival the repatriates aim, on the one hand, to create and consolidate a Pan-African, trans-national network of reggae musicians and Rasta with Shashamane as center, on the other hand, they act positively on the repatriate and local community which can benefit of the revenues of the concerts (which are mostly employed for supporting the JRDC school) and acquire international visibility. Through the Reggae in the Rift Valley festival, Sydney and his band aim also to promote locally a conscious and Rasta-inspired Roots Reggae, since they see the increasing diffusion of dancehall music among the local youth only as a temporarily phase which, according to Sydney, cannot fit and root into the Ethiopian cultural environment since it lacks a “cultural” basis:

“Ethiopia has more than hundred different cultures, and we, the Rastafarian, we fit in. But dancehall has no culture behind, it is just the modern city life that is coming to Ethiopia to “distract” the youth. Dancehall is fed by survivals, by the need to survive. So you can buy a machine, put two speakers on it, make a bit, sell it and make money. That’s

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71 Sydney Salmon (interview) Adama, march 2013.
cool, but the art now is suffering. So if we give more and more people the chance of appreciating music and art, dancehall will fade and people will come back to roots”.  

According to Sydney, the festival should provide young Ethiopian artists with the chances of getting to know roots reggae music, adapting it to their specific experience and sensibility, and eventually using reggae as a means of expressing what they think of the reality they live, promoting positive changes in the Ethiopian social political context moving from a spiritual basis:

“We are eager to see the fruits of what we are doing here, and the fruit is to see the young Ethiopian artists taking up reggae, and this is happening, although I wish they would take more the message instead of just the musical style, and understand that they don’t have to be scared to tell the truth. Because reggae is not a political music, it is spiritual. We don’t deal with politics. If you start with a music moving from a political basis you are not going back to a spiritual music. But a simple song from the heart, a song that your grandmother can sing, that’s a Rasta song. It’s easy, instead of cursing whom you don’t agree with, why don’t you lullaby him? If he feels loved and understood he will change his mind. Cause you don’t change people’s minds by force, you change them through love, patience and understanding. If you can change people’s mind you create a new society”.  

5.2- Youths of Shasha

A further example of the transnational orientation of reggae music and the Rastafari movement from the Promise Land is the Youths of Shasha project. Youths of Shasha is a project recently activated in the repatriate community of the säfär, promoted by the Italian-based NGO ‘Youths of the World’ (Y.O.W.) “aiming to provide the young generation with artistic and creative opportunities in disadvantaged contexts”.  

Although the association has not specific ideological, religious or political orientation, part of the associates are member of the Italian Rastafarian Community. The project was ideated by Ras Tewelde (Renato Tomei) Italian Rasta and reggae artist, who intended to address the need, for a professional musical formation expressed by the young multiethnic community of the säfär. Moreover the project offers as the technical equipment needed to develop youth’s musical talents and interest. Since his first visits to the repatriate community in Shashamane, Ras Tewelde individuated in

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72 Sydney Salmon (interview) Adama, march 2013.
73 Sydney Salmon (interview) Adama, march 2013.
the youth of the säfär an interesting artistic potential which was left undeveloped for lack of infrastructures. Many repatriate and Ethiopian youth were producing and writing their own music and songs, spacing from reggae and dancehall to hip hop and rap, yet they could not find means for improving their skills and promoting their music in Shashamane. The Youths of Shasha project includes the creation of a recording studio and a music school, in which young aspiring artists can study music theory and choose to learn Ethiopian instruments (Masinko, Kebero, Krar) or “international” instruments (drums, guitar, bass-guitare). Besides, the music school offers formation in radio programming, recording and musical production techniques, musical video-clip and graphics production, deejaying, vocal techniques and sound system. According to Y.O.W. promoting the youth’s musical skills of the youth is a way to improve the social and economic status of the whole community and city. Moreover it creates new job opportunities for the unemployed local youth. Music is in fact seen as a channel to promote local development, and to provide Shashamane and the säfär with connections and visibility on the national and international level. At the time I was conducting my fieldwork in Shashamane, the association has started musical activities with ten young residents of Shashamane who had access to a temporary recording studio within a repatriate family’s yard. The youths and Ras Tewelde were working on the production of a music album including lyrics and vocals of the “Youths” with the participation of many Jamaican and international reggae artists such as Bob Andy, Kiddus I, Tony Rebel, Sizzla, Capleton, and Morgan Heritage. The tracks included in the album combine reggae with elements of dancehall, rap and hip-hop, according to the youth’s musical inclinations. The lyrics were about their dreams and aspirations, daily experiences and life in Shashamane, as well as about repatriation and Rastafari. The ten young artists come from different social context and cultural backgrounds: they are repatriates and Ethiopians, with different degrees of schooling, musical experiences and different musical orientations. From the conversations I had with some of them it emerged that they share confidence in the project as channel for providing wider visibility to their music and to Shashamane as a whole. Black Haze, one of the “Youths” explains his hopes for the project seen as a tool to widen the audience of Ethiopian music and to establish international and global connection among reggae artist and listeners:

“It’s a great opportunity, because people have never seen something like that, especially in Shashamane, but even in Addis and Ethiopia. This is the first time and people already love it. I think is one of the greatest thing we ever did. There are a lot of international artists talking about Ethiopia and Shashamane, but they are not collaborating with
young artists here, which can reach the younger generations. But if you bring them together, if you bring international voices and ears to listen Ethiopian music and understanding about Ethiopian and Shashamane...man, that makes the difference! Imagine Ethiopian and Jamaican artists and the Youths of Shasha collaborating together. That’s a different thing, that’s a different type, that’s international music! It would be different, ears would be listening to Ethiopian music in the whole world. So, that’s what I want to see happen, that’s what I want to tell the world: Youths of Shasha are coming soon, we’re gonna be the next big thing in Ethiopia, look for us, don’t forget us, we’re coming soon!”.

Such vision in fact echoes one of the aim of the project, which is again to overcome Shashamane and the säfär’s isolation on a local level, through the creation of networks with the other areas of the city thanks to the music school as center, as well as connecting the local reality of the säfär and the repatriate community with the international Rastafari movement and the network of Rasta/reggae artists. Similarly, the “Youths of Shasha-The Movie” documentary gives voice to the Youths’s experience and aspirations toward music, their frustration for not being able to develop their musical skill, as well as their perception of Shashamane and the säfär from a spiritual and cultural point of view. The movie is also representative of reaching both local and global dimensions. The official screening of the movie, which I joined as participant observant, took place in Shashamane’s Mekerebet (Town Hall) at the presence of the city Major. It was attended by members of the repatriate community, but also by an impressive number of Ethiopian youth living outside the säfär, showing appreciation and identification with the youths’ aspirations and the image of Shashamane and the säfär as stimulating multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment. After the first official screenings at Shashamane’s Town Hall and at the Twelve Tribes of Israel HQ, (as a sort of “restitution” to the community) the documentary is now circulating through the channel of European, African and American film festivals re-reaching its Pan-African and diasporic/international dimension.

5.3- Conclusion to Chapter 5

I have chosen to represent in this last chapter two examples of what I consider the new dimension taken by reggae music after its “repatriation” to Ethiopia. Chude-Sokei (1997) identified an essential discontinuity between the diasporic Rasta-nationalist vision embedded
in roots reggae and the extremely local and materialistic aesthetics of dancehall reggae. In Chude-Sokei’s view the global, pan-African, mobile and diasporic narrative of roots has been definitely stoned by the raggamuffin (dancehall) music expression that gives centrality to local micro-realities, ghetto narratives and morality, ad all concerns “strictly reality”. In this chapter I rather tried to demonstrate that, although a sort of culture-dancehall debate is still present (as demonstrated by Sydney Salmon’s promotion of roots reggae as Ethiopian “cultural music”) such a definite distinction cannot be no longer valid for the Promised land. The repatriate music production has in fact provided a connective space for the multiplicity of geographies occupied by reggae music. Brother Sydney’s case demonstrates that through a “conscious hybridization” of music, the repatriate musicians have managed to partly localize the essentially diasporic and universal meanings of roots reggae in the specific Ethiopian context. Youths of Shasha, on the other hand, shows that within the musical expression of the new generation replaces the “strict reality” which is all the rage in Jamaica (ghetto aesthetics, badmanism, and gangsterism ) with dreams, aspirations, discourses of identity rooted in Shashamane, its concrete reality and spiritual meaning. At the same time, “Youths of Shasha” is also projected outer-nationally through connections and networks with international reggae artists and audiences. In terms of content and function, the “repatriate” reggae aims to bridge the local with the global through an international network of agents and cultural references thanks to the diaspora. The narratives of repatriation survives, yet it takes up the new clothes of repatriation for development, which sees the connection of Shashamane with the rest of the community in the diaspora (in the West) as a necessary step for local advancement. Finally, the reggae from the “Promised Land” negotiates a corpus of images and narratives of Ethiopia and Africa which can be valid for and appropriated by a plurality of perspectives: the local, the national and the global. In this sense the function of repatriate reggae (roots or dancehall-inspired) is not betraying its original function of “creating a new sense of national belonging beyond the boundaries constructed by politics and geography” (Chude-Sokei, 1997:81), yet it is using sound to bridge identities and musical expressions, “imagining” and reproducing a global community.
Conclusion

_We rejoice while singing together as we are sons of the same mother today and tomorrow._

_What could be fruitful other than unity? For whom would be useful being alone?_

_So let’s bridge our differences, and live collectively as one. We need so much love in Africa land._

_Haile Roots, Harambe._

My research has investigated development and functions of reggae music in Ethiopia and, specifically, in the city of Shashamane, moving from a plurality of perspectives and interrogatives. The constant feature of my analysis has been the metaphor of the “journey”, which I have employed to represent the physical and symbolical peregrination of musical and semantic elements from the diaspora to the “Promised Land”, back and forth. My study presented how reggae, seen as diasporic music and culture, carrying Ethiopianist and Black Nationalist narratives, has performed a core function in supporting, promoting and fostering the Rastafarian movement of repatriation to Ethiopia and Shashamane. It also showed how the diasporic “way” to look at Ethiopia as Zion, heaven on earth, “land of milk and honey” (which was depicted and popularized by roots reggae) was drastically challenged by the political and social reality at the time of the early development of the repatriate community in Shashamane. Haile Selassie I, His Majesty, was the highest symbol of cultural resistance in the Caribbean, whereas in the revolutionary Ethiopia of the 1970’s, such a symbol was considered reactionary and obsolete. I provided examples drawn from people’s experiences and narrations, concerning how Rasta-inspired narratives of place and identity clashed, and still clash with those of the locals. Repatriates’ notion (and claim) of Ethiopian-ness is founded on a spiritual conception of black roots, in virtue of which “Ethiopia” has a universal value. The concept of “Ethiopian-ness” for the Ethiopians, grounded into the cultural humus of ethnic federalism, is much less clear and defined, often seeming just a holder of many coexisting and sometimes competing ethnic identities and “nationalities”. I attempted to demonstrate that, although the presence of what I have called a “clash of imaginaries”, the generalized diffusion and gradual “indigenization” of reggae music in Ethiopia and Shashamane, can represent the arena in which such representations can be confronted and reflected upon. I like to think of reggae music in Shashamane as a space, in which both groups,
locals and repatriates, “literally” or “spiritually” Ethiopians, can move through, questioning, transforming their own narratives and strategies of self-representation, and perhaps influencing the others. Now Ethiopian artists write songs in Amharic about pan-African messages and themes, such as African unity and cooperation, and the Ethiopian reggae audience that sees in reggae’s universal image of Ethiopia a valid counter-discourse to balance (what they perceive as) an extreme and harmful ethnicization of political and social relations. Similarly, the repatriate reggae is moving paces toward a gradual localization of the genre. On one hand, it engages musical and linguistic synthesis, and revises meanings and notions to make them more easily understandable for the Ethiopian public. On the other hand, it elaborates and proposes new discourses around repatriation and Rasta identity, in the light of their specific experience of return and life as repatriates. The results can appear contradictory to their original stance, such as the centrality of discourses around development, and the representation of the repatriates as Ethiopian ethnic group. However, the specific case of Shashamane demonstrates that reggae is slowly providing a shared space for recomposing concurring narratives and reducing social distance between the repatriate community and the rest of the city, by providing both groups with many occasions of socialization and contact, as well as a wide range of possibilities of identification and sense-making of their life in Shashamane. I showed, for instance, that many young residents of Shashamane have drawn on Rasta and reggae narratives to understand their lived reality in the “promised land”, enduring and sometimes overcoming the frustration of their condition of unemployment and social isolation.

I hope that my research can contribute to the understanding of the complex relation between music, place and identity, shading some more light on how the meaning of a place can be constructed and conveyed through music (Negus, 1997: 181), and how sound is used to imagine spaces of belonging. This study could stimulate reflections on the use of “local” and “global” as fixed and essentially opposing categories. As I tried to show in my research, history, movements, and the multiple functions of reggae music seem to escape fixed categories. In the Jamaican inner cities, as in the Shashamane säfär, reggae music is extremely grounded in the local, carrying local meanings and performing precise local functions and, at the same time, transcends the place, creating transnational networks, global connections, and bridging all these dimensions together. In this sense reggae music, although back to the “motherland”, is still travelling.
For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
Isaiah Chapter 9 v 6

And the third lot came up for the children of Zebulun according to their families: and the border of their inheritance was unto Sarid:
Joshua 19 v 10

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people....
Isaiah Chapter 11 v 11

This is the significance of the blessing and the new name, Israel (one who has power with God and man, spiritual and material)

Israel as a nation, in it's highest significance symbolizes spiritual consciousness.

Let us all labour to lead our brothers and sisters to Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who only can give life in it's fullest sense.

1 Ethiopia, Africa and repatriation in Twelve Tribes of Israel's leaflets. Courtesy of Mebrat Bekele, Shashamane 2013.
Repatriation is a Must, Twelve Tribes of Israel’s leaflet. Courtesy of Mebrat Bekele, Shashamane 2013.

4 Album cover, Jah Lude, Yachin Neger, Nahom Records 2012. ©

5 Album cover, Haile Roots, Chiggae, Nahom Records 2012 ©

6 Entrance ticket and flyer promoting Reggae shows at the Twelve Tribes of Israel HQ, Shashamane, 2013
Desmond Martin performing at the Twelve Tribes of Israel’s HQ during Bob Marley’s birthday celebration, 9th February 2013, Shashamane.
8 Artists on the stage at the Twelve Tribes of Israel’s HQ, Shashamane, 2013.
9 “Youths of Shasha” recording studio, Shashamane, 2013
Young residents observing posters promoting “Youth of Shasha” before the official screening of the documentary at Shashamane’s Town Hall, Shashamane, 2013
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TITLE OF THE THESIS: “Got to Keep on Moving”: Roots and Routes of the musical construction of the Promised Land. Negotiating narratives of Place and Identity through Reggae music.

ABSTRACT:

My research investigates the relationship between Reggae music and its “motherland”, Ethiopia. Reggae is a travelling music and a global popular genre. It originated from the experiences of the black diaspora, travelling back to Africa and beyond across simultaneous trajectories. The imagery that roots reggae refers to is derived from the Rastafarian worldview and heritage of Ethiopianism and Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement. The corpus of diasporic narratives expressed and popularized through the vehicle of reggae music have contributed to the creation of images of Africa and Ethiopia as the “Promised Land”. This is a yearned for “elsewhere” where Rasta should return, which is in explicit opposition to Babylon, the corrupted and enslaving Western world ruled by the Capitalist system. Such a system of images acted as an engine for the movement of repatriation that Rastafarians have engaged in since the 1960’s that consequently led to their settlement in Shashamane, Ethiopia, the land granted by the Emperor Haile Selassie I as compensation for black support in the Ethio-Italian war. Through its progressive internationalization due to the global popularity of Bob Marley, roots reggae became known worldwide as a popular musical genre and culture. Rasta discourses and narratives have been circulating among the black diaspora in the West as well as among Africans who developed various local appropriations and elaborations of Rastafari/Reggae as music and culture. For the early repatriates who settled in Shashamane, the entire corpus of Ethiopianist narratives that are distributed and elaborated through reggae songs have represented the lenses through which they experienced the social and political surroundings as well as their primary tool in which to construct and “rehome” the place. In the same manner, locals employ reggae music and culture as a medium for interpreting the presence of repatriates in their city and defining their relation with the Rastafarian community. My research investigates how Rasta discourses around Ethiopia and Africa, including elements of universality and cultural uniformity, can be experienced as problematic by local audiences not only in terms of individual perception but also considering the hegemonic representation of Ethiopia as a “mosaic of cultures”, i.e., a federation of various peoples and nationalities introduced and promoted by the current Ethiopian Government. I contend that such contrasting narratives represent a hindrance to the social integration of the repatriate community in Shashamane. Furthermore, I speculate if Rasta’s perception of Ethiopia might function as a valid counter-narrative for those Ethiopians who do not identify with the national ethnic-based representation. I will also attempt to comprehend the repatriates’ efforts to partially adapt such narratives to the Ethiopian context as well locals’ strategies of appropriation and re-elaboration in the establishing of their identity and experiences of the place. In my MA thesis, I contend that reggae music can represent a guide for understanding the way in which both groups relate to Ethiopia as “imagined” and as an actual location, inscribing new meanings to their local experiences. Another goal of my research is to understand whether reggae music may be an instrument through which repatriates and locals can create a discursive as well as concrete space of communication, mutual exchange, and hybridization.