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**“A Black Man’s (Out)cry in a White Man’s World”:
Articulations of Cultural Identity and Resistance in Postcolonial Jamaican Film**

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The harder they come
The harder they fall
One and all
(Jimmy Cliff)

Many rivers to cross
But I can’t seem to find my way over
Wandering I am lost
(Jimmy Cliff)

I’m like a stepping razor
Don’t you watch my size
I’m dangerous
(Peter Tosh)

In the kingdom of Jah
Man shall reign
Pass it on
(Bob Marley)

We run things
Things don’t run we
(Red Dragon)

One love! One heart
Let’s get together
And feel all right
(Bob Marley)

Setting the Scene

In this paper I attempt to trace some of the interconnecting relationships between cinematic representation, cultural identity and postcolonial struggle in contemporary Jamaican society by examining the ways in which individual Jamaican filmmakers use the cinematic medium as a site of resistance. Through a critical analysis of Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come* (1972), Ted Bafaloukos' *Rockers* (1978), Dickie Jobson's *Countryman* (1982), Chris Browne's *Third World Cop* (1998), and Don Letts and Rick Elgood's *One Love* (2003), five popular Jamaican feature films which scatteredly appeared over the last 35 years, I try to reveal the "rebellious" visual grammar that seeks to capture and resist the dislocation, oppression and marginalisation experienced by so many black Jamaicans. First I will argue that, as a result of the traumatic experience of enslavement during Jamaica's colonial history as well as the continuing marginalisation of the black majority in postcolonial Jamaican society, the nation's collective identity is to a large extent based on notions of "struggling" and "suffering", and mainly expressed through strong discourses of blackness and masculinity. Then I will anatomize contemporary Jamaican society, and in particular its popular culture, with the concept of a "culture of resistance", and connect Jamaican cinema with the colonial discourse of the "primitive black rebel". Finally, on the basis of a critical analysis of the most prominent characters in Jamaican film, which are, I argue, the Reggae Artist, the Rasta Man, the Rude Boy and the Ghetto Gangsta, I will demonstrate that contemporary Jamaican cinema is, pre-eminently, a vehicle for expressing highly individualistic, hypermasculine, black countercultures.

"If I Don't Get My Desire Then I'll Set the Plantations in Fire": A History of Resistance in Jamaica

In the past three decades the study of resistance in the Caribbean and other subaltern regions has been a popular field of inquiry within social and cultural criticism. Postcolonial scholars such as Eric Wolf, Jean Comaroff, James Scott, John Beverley and, in the specific case of Jamaica and the Caribbean, Patrick Taylor, Barbara Bush, Richard Burton, Brian Meeks and Werner Zips, have all stressed the importance of the study of anti-colonial resistance in order

to uncover the marginalised histories of “the people without history”¹, to rethink the complex “body of power, spirit of resistance”² under colonial rule, and to understand the contemporary “narratives of resistance”³ in postcolonial societies such as Jamaica.⁴ In general it could be argued that popular expressions of resistance in present-day Jamaican society have their historical roots in a long tradition of anti-colonial resistance in the Caribbean, that is, the everyday acts of opposition, rebellion and self-assertion by the enslaved African people during the era of colonialism. Therefore, in order to understand contemporary articulations of cultural identity and resistance in postcolonial Jamaican film, it is necessary to explore the nation’s colonial history of domination and conflict, and, more importantly, to analyse the collective memory and popular appropriation of this history in post-independent Jamaica.

Although Jamaica’s history of African-Caribbean resistance begins with the continuous resistance of African captives to the transatlantic slave trade in West-Africa and on the vessels which deported them from their African homelands to “Spanish Jamaica” (1494-1655), in contemporary Jamaican society the narrative of slave resistance is mainly identified with “British Jamaica” (1655-1962).⁵ Mervyn Alleyne, in his book *Roots of Jamaican Culture* (1988), describes that after the invasion of the British forces in 1655 and the official establishment of British rule in 1670, sugar plantations became “the basis of economic and social organisation” in Jamaica, which led to a “massive importation of African slaves” (p. 34). Between 1655 and 1807, the year of the British abolition of the slave trade, approximately 750,000 Africans were imported into Jamaica, and, in addition, until the official abolition of slavery by the British administration in 1838, the island served as the most important slave-trading centre of the Americas (Port Royal). Under British rule Jamaica thus developed into a “lucrative”, “profitable” and “wealthy” colony, and by the eighteenth century Jamaica’s plantation society was known as the “the jewel of the British Crown”.

Of course, the success of the British “jewel” came at great cost to the African slaves who were brutally forced to work on the plantation. Several studies have made clear that the African-Jamaican slaves had to endure one of the most harsh regimes of slavery of all the plantation societies in the New World. Sherlock and Bennet indicate that in the eighteenth

century Jamaican plantation society became an absentee society, which led to “the growth of a society that was utterly immoral, inefficient and lacking any sense of social responsibility” (1998: 94). According to Alleyne, Jamaica’s white owner absenteeism resulted in “neglect of the slaves, and to harsher treatment than was the case where the owner was resident” (2002: 202). He argues that the harshness of the British regime has possibly strengthened the resistance, opposition and rebellion of African-Jamaican slaves to their inhumane oppression: “The excessive brutality of the attorneys and overseers representing the absentee owners may have contributed to the development of a rebellious nature in the Jamaican slave, leading to many acts of resistance and flight from plantations” (*ibid.* 203). The everyday acts of African-Jamaican resistance largely consisted of individual, passive or covert forms of resistance, such as disobeying orders, refusing to eat, feigning illnesses, breaking tools when the overseer was not looking, working as slow as possible, stealing the master’s provisions, setting fire to plantations, using (African or African-sounding) nicknames within the slave community (as a means of resistance against the Eurocentric names given to the slaves by their masters), developing certain personality traits, poisoning the slave owner, committing suicide, running away, and, in the specific case of slave women, abstaining from sexual intercourse, prolonged lactation and abortion.

However, the most recollected popular Jamaican history of African-Caribbean slave resistance is undoubtedly the history of open rebellion and active revolt of African-Jamaican slaves against the European plantation owners, and in particular the “heroic history” of the Maroons. In both academic and social settings it is often proudly remembered that Jamaica experienced more collective slave uprisings than any other Caribbean island, and that the Jamaican Maroons offered the most continuous and strong resistance to slave society of all the Maroon groups in the Caribbean plantation colonies.⁶ Collective slave rebellions such as the Christmas Rebellion in 1831 and the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865 stand out in Jamaica’s national memory, and their instigators, Sam Sharpe and Paul Bogle respectively, have been designated as national heroes of Jamaica. Furthermore, in contemporary Jamaican society the historical Maroons are often considered as “freedom fighters” and “heroes of the war of resistance”, and they still function as strong symbols of black resistance, self-determination and freedom (see Zips 1999).

Jamaica's history of anti-colonial resistance is marked by a strong consciousness of "Africanness" and "blackness". Although, as Sidney Mintz and Richard Price so revolutionary articulated in their classic work *The Birth of African-American Culture* (1976), the Africans who were enslaved and shipped to the Americas did not transfer one shared African culture to the New World but developed specific African-American cultures within their new settings, it cannot be denied that in Plantation Jamaica there has always been a strong "African presence" in the cultural identities of the African-Jamaican slaves. In this way it could be stated that, as Zips argues, "virtually all African-Jamaicans clung to their essential 'Africanness'" (1999: 129). Furthermore, Alleyne, in her book *Roots of Jamaican Culture* (1988), describes that the African-Jamaican slaves were forced to "internalize a schema in which white was power, privilege and dominance, while black was poverty, slavery, subjection and submission" (1998: 84). In postcolonial Jamaican society, both whiteness and blackness are still strongly linked with these notions, which is often described as the "hierarchy of shade". For the African-Jamaican majority, their black identity refers to the economic experience of "being in the gutter of Jamaican society", thus connecting blackness to poverty ("We poor but we no poverty"). Whiteness, on the other hand, is still equated with power, prestige and wealth. In addition, it could be argued that African-Jamaican people associate their national "folk" histories of resistance with public constructions of maleness, masculinity and reputation, thereby emphasizing and celebrating traditional warrior masculinity. Although, as Barbara Bush has stressed, "women were arguably more deeply resistant (...) than men" (2001: 43), in the collective memory of Jamaicans the "heroic rebels" who instigated or participated in the "struggle for freedom" are predominantly male and/or masculine. Thus, considering the historical and contemporary oppression and resistance in Jamaica, including the cultural and racial "hierarchy of shade", the country's collective identity does not so much correspond to the ambivalent national motto "Out of Many, One People", but rather to a black masculine identity which is largely based on notions of "suffering" and "struggling".

“We are the Small Axe Ready to Cut you Down”:A (Popular) Culture of Resistance in Jamaica

The suffering and struggling black masculine national identity of Jamaica, which I call the popular discourse of the “primitive black rebel” as it has clearly derived from the colonial construction of the “black savage”⁷, is strongly reflected in contemporary Jamaican society, and in particular in its popular culture. According to Zips, the “continuity of oppression, from original enslavement to modern political and economic paternalism, has kept alive the memory of the most successful opposition in Jamaican history – the Maroon struggle for liberation” (1999: 213). Zips argues that the history of Maroon resistance “has several points in common with modern sociocritical intellectual currents and philosophical movements and cultures such as Rastafari”, and he identifies a “continuity of black, African-inspired resistance in Jamaica” (*ibid.* 205). In a similar way, Brian Meeks, in his book *Narratives of Resistance* (2000), considers Jamaican society as a rebellious traditional culture, and he sees the current discourses of oppression and resistance manifested in Jamaican society, politics, language, literature and popular culture.

Following Zips and Meeks, I would like to characterize contemporary Jamaican society as a “culture of resistance”, and argue that this black masculine counterculture is most apparent in the country’s popular culture, most notably music. Stephen A. King, in his book *Reggae, Rastafari, and the Rhetoric of Social Control* (2002), indicates that “the Jamaican masses use music to counteract oppression and degradation” and points out that popular music is “one of the few avenues for the Jamaican poor to create both a distinctly black identity and to vent years of pent-up suffering, dehumanization and frustration under the white man’s hegemony” (p. xii-xiii). In contemporary Jamaica, the discourse of the primitive black rebel has been most persistently appropriated and carried out by the musical subcultures of “roots” reggae, dancehall and (gangsta) rap. The “roots” reggae scene is often perceived as a predominantly black and male space, whereas the “modern” dancehall and (gangsta) rap/hip-hop cultures are many a time associated with (and accused of) machismo, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, aggression and violence. Together and interconnected with the popular subcultures of the

Rastafari and the Rude Boys, these music scenes constitute to a great degree the (popular) culture of resistance in Jamaica, which has originated from and is highly embedded in the historical discourse of the primitive black rebel. Especially 1970s “roots” reggae could be interpreted as a collective countercultural “expression of freedom” in which the black and masculine notions of suffering and struggling were strongly articulated.

The “counterideological energy” of reggae music as well as the worldwide popularity of the “rhythms of resistance” have also inspired the first filmmaking practices in Jamaica (Guerero 1992: 116). In 1972, the first locally produced Jamaican feature film was born with the social realist drama / “reggae musical” *The Harder They Come*, a low-budget movie which became, and still is, the most recognized and celebrated film in the history of Jamaican and (anglophone) Caribbean cinema. With the national and international success of Perry Henzell’s *The Harder They Come* (1972), hope was raised that this film could set in motion the longed-for development of an independent Jamaican cinema. And although the contemporary Jamaican film industry still severely lacks financial access, filmmaking infrastructure, government support and international attention, in the past 35 years, from 1970 to 2005, a considerable body of films has appeared in Jamaica. With “rebellious” movies such as *Rockers* (1978), *Children of Babylon* (1980), *Countryman* (1982) *Race, Rhetoric & Rastafari* (1982), *Dancehall Queen* (1997) and *Third World Cop* (1999), Jamaica has, in the course of the years, developed what Victoria Marshall has called “a rudimentary ‘likkle but tallawah’ (small and aggressive) film industry” (1992: 104). The emergence of this marginal and militant cinema seems to parallel the popular preoccupation with anti-colonial resistance in post-independent Jamaica, and appears to reflect the discourse of the primitive black rebel. I will now explore this resistance discourse in five Jamaican films: *The Harder They Come*, *Rockers*, *Countryman*, *Third World Cop* and *One Love*. I have subdivided my exploration into four themes which, I argue, correspond to the main characters in postcolonial Jamaican cinema, namely, the Reggae Artist, Rasta Man, Rude Boy and Ghetto Gangsta.

Obviously, my choice of the five selected films is a strategic one. Not only do these films represent the “mainstream” of Jamaican cinema in the decades in which they were released –

so that it may be possible to discern developments in Jamaican filmmaking – they also happen to be films that quite clearly portray the main countercultures of Jamaica. Thus, in this paper, I have deliberately excluded Jamaican feature films which possibly offer alternative, more “feminine” views of Jamaican identity and resistance, such as *Race, Rhetoric and Rastafari* (Barbara Blake-Hanna, 1982), *Dancehall Queen* (Rick Elgood and Don Letts, 1998) and *Runt* (Michael Philip Edwards, 2005). However, this does not mean that I have not taken these films into account while analysing *The Harder They Come*, *Rockers*, *Countryman*, *Third World Cop* and *One Love*. I argue that, despite films such as *Race, Rhetoric and Rastafari*, *Dancehall Queen* and *Runt*, the (interconnected) figures of the Reggae Artist, Rasta Man, Rude Boy, and, most recently, Ghetto Gangsta are still the most dominant characters in contemporary Jamaican cinema. Finally, for the purpose of this paper, I have ignored films made by the Jamaican diaspora, which Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have classified as the fourth and final circle of Third (World) Cinema (1994: 28).

“All I Ever Had is Songs of Freedom”: The Rebellious Energy of the Reggae Artist

In three of the five selected films the figure of the Reggae Artist plays a vital role in the expression of black resistance, namely, the 1970s films *The Harder They Come* and *Rockers*, and the 2004 feature *One Love*. In addition, *Countryman* uses the rhythms of roots reggae as lyrical elements of suffering and struggling, while in *Third World Cop* reactionary dancehall music complements and, arguably, commodifies the “ghetto story”, which I will explain later. In *The Harder They Come*, *Rockers* and *One Love*, the character of the black male Reggae Artist pursues a career in the Jamaican music business yet is confronted with injustice and exploitation. In all three films, the Reggae Artist is a suffering and struggling Jamaican musician who eventually, although in very different ways, becomes successful and respected in the Jamaican community (“folk heroes”), which could, following Carolyn Cooper, be interpreted as “the victory of the growling underdog that dares to bite back” and “the triumph of reggae music” (Cooper 1993: 115). The cinematic figure of the Reggae Artist thus seems to personify a rebellious energy that is closely linked to both historical and contemporary black resistance, yet the question remains to what extent the construction of

the Reggae Artist in Jamaican films, including the employment of reggae music, is not merely a commercial commodity to sell Jamaica to an international (white) audience.

It could be argued that in the 1970s films *The Harder They Come* and *Rockers* the construction of the Reggae Artist primarily acts as a “political vehicle” of protest and rebellion, while in the 2003 feature *Once Love* reggae music mainly serves as a “market vehicle” for reaching worldwide (western) audiences. Although *The Harder They Come* and *Rockers* also had a very strong focus on the international market, both films were in the first place made for the African-Jamaican moviegoing audiences, reflecting their daily struggle of survival in post-independent Jamaica. *The Harder They Come* not only gained popularity among the Jamaican (male) public for its authentic “mirror image” of Jamaican urban culture, but also for its “committed” social commentary on Kingston ghetto life and “angry” political statement on the corrupt and oppressive establishment in postcolonial Jamaican society, thereby using reggae lyrics as articulations of protest. In *Rockers*, the third feature film to come out in Jamaica, the rebellious rhythms of reggae music were almost omnipresent: the story shows the exploits of reggae drummer Leroy “Horsemouth” Wallace, who plays himself, and features a plethora of well-known Jamaican reggae performers of the 1970s. In addition, the film’s title literally means “reggae music”, and the movie itself is, as one reviewer has described it, “awash in [reggae] music, which pours out of clubs, studios, record shops, and radios” (Greene). Like *The Harder They Come*, *Rockers* employs a raw social-realist style (“ghetto aesthetics”), and contains a committed commentary on Jamaica’s urban consumer society and corrupt music industry (“capitalist maffia”).

One Love, on the other hand, offers a far more innocent, romantic and light-hearted image of contemporary Jamaica. Although the Norwegian-British-Jamaican co-production touches on the issue of the corruptions of the Jamaican music business, *One Love* is above all a commercial “family film” and “love story” aimed at the international (western) market, using the aesthetic framework of conventional (Hollywood) cinema and the cultural politics of “positive imaging”. The movie is not, as most other Jamaican films, set in the urban ghettos of Kingston, but in the rustic areas of Port Antonio and Stoney Hill, and shows the natural beauty of rural Jamaica instead of the violent chaos of urban Kingston. In addition, *One Love*

attempts to break with negative stereotypes of the Rasta Man, which brings me to the second yet interconnected “Rebel Character” in contemporary Jamaican cinema.

“Babylon your Throne Gone Down”: The Depiction of Rastafarian lifestyle in Jamaican Film

In contemporary Jamaican and global society, reggae music is almost invariably associated with Rastafarianism, the socio-religious black consciousness movement which has its roots in the Back-to-Africa movement led by Jamaican black nationalist and Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey. Neil Savishinsky, in his article “Transnational Popular Culture and the Global Spread of the Jamaican Rastafarian Movement” (1994), indicates that since the early 1970s the Rastafarian culture of resistance gained regionwide recognition and worldwide popularity through its widespread expression in reggae music: “The terms ‘reggae’ and ‘Rasta’ have become so closely linked in the minds of many that they are frequently accorded the status of synonyms. (...) Reggae has functioned, and in many instances continues to function, as the principal medium through which people all over the world have acquired their knowledge and awareness of Rastafari” (p. 260). The popular association of reggae music with Rastafarian thought has also frequently been elaborated in postcolonial Jamaican cinema. In *The Harder They Come*, *Rockers*, *Countryman* and *One Love* the lyrical and visual depiction of Rastafarian lifestyle is a recurrent theme in the film. Moreover, in *Rockers* and *One Love* the character of the Reggae Artist converges with the figure of the Rasta Man.

In general, the cinematic figure of the Rasta Man could be described as a “dreadlocked” and “ganja-smoking” black male rebel who is positive, spiritual and musical, and has a peaceful, minimalist and antimaterialist way of life that is “attuned to an ancestral sensibility in the eternal conflict between good [Jah] and evil [Babylon]” (Aylmer 1998: 292). This “primitive” depiction of Rastafarian lifestyle is probably most closely represented in the 1982 film *Countryman*, in which two Rasta presences dominate the magic tale: “One is Countryman, an adept fisherman, naturalist, cook, healer, and forager, festooned with shark’s teeth and given to aphorism and one-liners. (...) The second formidable Rastaman is called Jah Man, a saintly teacher of children (...) patiently instructing and leading by example”

(*ibid.*). However, the heroic figure of Countryman does not only embody the “primitive” Rastafarian way of life, but also strongly reminds of the historical Maroons who are often remembered as spiritual “nature specialists” and self-reliant “forrest warriors” who could blend into the jungle, survived due to their ecological knowlegde, and employed several hit-and-run strategies to challenge Plantation Jamaica (see Zips 1994).

In *The Harder They Come* and *Rockers*, the Maroon-like rural Rasta Man is present in the figures of Pedro (Ras Daniel Hartman) and Higher (Ashley Harris) respectively, yet both stories are mainly set in the Trenchtown ghetto of Kingston. While *The Harder They Come* only marginally shows some elements of the Rastafarian struggle for survival, *Rockers* manifestly portrays the Rastafarian way of life of Leroy “Horsemouth” Wallace and others in the underdeveloped “Babylonian” urban environment. *Rockers* is arguably the most overtly resistant film of the five selected ones, employing determined articulations of anti-colonial resistance such as reggae music, patois language, rebellious characters, counternarratives and ghetto aesthetics: “The point of view of the entire film is Rastafarian, with the result that there is an anti-establishment tone – anti-Babylon in Rastaspeak – that forces the viewer to sympathize with the underdog” (Warner 2000: 92). Although *Rockers* as well as *Countryman* rely on the conventions of the “heroic, male adventure film”, both films, as Guerero indicates, “offer alternative, counter-cultural expressions to what underclass Jamaicans in general and more specifically Rastafarians would perceive as a corrupt, oppressive, postcolonial social order” (1993: 108).

In *One Love*, the “anti-Babylon tone” is to a large extent established by the rebellious character of reggae drummer Bobo (Spragga Benz), a name which stands for “Black” and “Ashanti”, and alludes to the orthodox and militant Bobo Shanti Rastafari. Bobo repeatedly refers to “Babylonian injustice”, especially in relation to Jamaica’s music business and Christian religion, and seems to represent the rebellious and spirited way of thinking of the Rastafarians. Kassa (Ky-mani Marley), the main protagonist of the story, could be seen as the fusion of “rural” Countryman and “urban” Leroy Wallace in *Countryman* and *Rockers* respectively, and represents the ultimate “peaceful Rasta warrior”: he is musical, spiritual and vegetarian, lives in a peaceful and self-reliant Rasta community on the Jamaican coast, and is

portrayed as a rebellious “outlaw” in Jamaica’s Christian (Pentecostal) society. With the positive images of Jamaica in general and Rastafari in particular, *One Love* manifestly attempts to break with the negative stereotype of the Rasta “rude boy” or “ghetto gangsta”, and seeks, as Rick Elgood has indicated in an interview, to redress the imbalance of the cinematic representation of Jamaica as a criminal and violent place: “We wanted to make a movie that did not glorify drugs, guns and violence” (Caribbean Net News 2003). From the five selected films, the local figure of the Rude Boy appears in the 1970s films *The Harder They Come* and *Rockers*, and, I argue, evolves in the late 1990s into the transnational figure of the Ghetto Gangsta.

“We Come from Trench Town”: A Cinematic Tribute to the Rude Boy?

Together with the rise of reggae music and Rastafarianism, in the 1960s and 1970s the counterculture of the “rude boys” emerged in urban Jamaican society. Both Brian Meeks (2000) and Obika Gray (2003) indicate that in the early decades after Jamaica’s independence in 1962 the poor working-class neighbourhoods of Kingston were simultaneously zones of hope, possibility and empowerment, and places of shortage, violence and alienation. Meeks points out that the “tradition of resistance temporarily cohabited with the notion of revolution” (p. 156), while Gray argues that the harsh living conditions in the overpopulated Kingston ghettos resulted in the flourishing of “relatively autonomous subcultures”, of which the aggressive counterculture of the Rude Boys was one (p. 254-265). In his book *Rasta and Resistance* (1987), Horace Campell has defined rude boy culture as “a subculture of angry youths [that] developed in [Jamaican] society [between 1964 and 1967]. Answering to the name [sic] ‘Rude Boy’ and searching for avenues of self-expression and recognition, these unemployed youths were quickly integrated into the [ganja] export trade” (p. 111). In general, Jamaica’s rude boy culture could be described as a masculine (Kingston) “street culture” which is characterized by black personhood (“blackness”), heroic criminality (“badness-honour”), violent rage (“lawlessness”) and public performance (“rocksteady music”).

From the five selected films, the urban Rude Boy culture of early post-independent Jamaica is most apparently reflected in the 1972 film *The Harder They Come*. In this film the rebellious character of Ivan “Rhyging” Martin is in all aspects the “original” and “ultimate” Jamaican Rude Boy: he is masculine, black, urban, criminal, violent, self-destructive, narcissistic, and obviously raging (Rhyging is Jamaican slang for “raging”). In the 1970s, the character of the Rude Boy in *The Harder They Come* became “a symbol of the urban rudeboy subculture” and “the basis for commercially attractive, popular images of the rudeboy” (Aylmer 1998: 289). It has been argued that *The Harder They Come* has set up an antithesis between the Rude Boy and the Rasta Man (*ibid.*), however, in Jamaican popular culture both countercultures often seem to merge into the figure of the Reggae Artist. Zips demonstrates that, in the 1970s and 1980s, Rastafarian reggae artists often “presented themselves as defiant young men, toughened by the conditions and experiences of and in the ghetto” (p. 169). Undoubtedly the most famous (cultural) rude boys artists of that time were Peter Tosh, Bunny Livingston and Bob Marley, who constituted the popular reggae group *The Wailing Rudeboys*, which was later shortened to *The Wailers* (Kevin McElwee 2002). In the early stages of their careers *The Wailers* addressed and paid homage to the deprived ghetto youth with popular “rude boy songs” such as “Simmer Down”, “Rude Boy” and “Good Good Rudie”. Both Peter Tosh and Bunny Livingstone also featured in the 1978 reggae film *Rockers*. Although the main character of the film, Reggae Artist and Rasta Man Leroy Wallace, was not a political Rude Boy, with the portrayal of his daily struggle of survival in the dangerous streets of Trenchtown, *Rockers* did reflect Jamaica’s rude boy culture of the 1970s.⁸

Many a time popular images of rude boy culture have been criticised for romanticising and glorifying the rude boy lifestyle of gun violence, badmanism and lawlessness. However, the rage, alienation and aggressiveness of the rude boys was a consequence of the poverty and disenfranchisement of the Black majority in postcolonial Jamaican society: “The poor were inclined to adopt aggressive and vigilantly defensive postures partly because of the ecology of the slums” (Gray 2003: 259). Thus, for the rude boys their “battle for space” and “search for an honourable identity” in the shanty towns of Kingston was the essence of urban revolt and black resistance. Although rude boy culture is by far not as collective, committed and

resistant as Rasta culture, its rebellion is part of Jamaica's culture of anti-colonial resistance which has its genesis in historical rituals of slave rebellion and is strongly embedded in the colonial discourse of the (aggressive) primitive black rebel.

“Gangsta Been through Lot of Wars”: The Commodification of the Ghetto Gangsta

In the course of the 1990s, the figure of the Rude Boy as depicted in *The Harder They Come* and *Rockers* developed into the figure of the Ghetto Gangsta. Although both the Rude Boy and the Ghetto Gangsta are articulations of what Deborah Thomas (2002) has called “modern Blackness”⁹, I would like to make a distinction between the two figures since they seem to express a shift in Jamaican society, identity and representation from the early years of independence till now. Whereas the Rude Boy (as well as the Rasta Man and the Reggae Artist) of the 1960s and 1970s was an unorganized, locally oriented, street-cool, ganja-dealing, reggae-loving outlaw, the Ghetto Gangsta, who evolved in the 1980s and 1990s and currently obtains a strong foothold in Jamaica, is organized, transnational, ghetto-ruling, gun and cocaine-exporting, and associated with the individualist and machoistic music scenes of dancehall, hip-hop and gangsta rap (“gun lyrics”). The modern-day figure of the Ghetto Gangsta thus shows the development of the Rude Boy in postcolonial Jamaican society as a result of marginalisation, underdevelopment and globalisation. I will shortly elucidate the distinction between the popular figures of the Rude Boy and the Ghetto Gangsta on the basis of the 1998 film *Third World Cop* and several other Jamaican “gangsta movies”, arguing that black Jamaican “gangsta culture” originally represented a resistant African-American counter-tendency, yet has in recent years merely become a commercial commodity which has arguably polarised and even nullified the rebellious nature of this outlaw culture.

Third World Cop, (again) set in the ghettos of Kingston, tells the story of Capone (Paul Campbell) and Ratty (Mark Danvers), two former friends who now meet each other on the opposite sides of the law. Capone is a determined and violent police man (“cool cop”) who left the Kingston ghettos in his youth, while Ratty stayed in the lawless shanty towns and became “the lead man in a violent gunrunning scheme” and the “right hand of the notorious local don Wonie” (Palm Pictures 1998). With its ghetto aesthetics, rude boy images, gangster

themes, and reggae and dancehall soundtrack, *Third World Cop* seems to represent the transition from rude boy culture to gangsta culture in Jamaican cinema. While the character of Ratty largely resembles my description of the Rude Boy, the character of don Wonie (Carl Bradshaw) corresponds to the figure of the Ghetto Gangsta. *Third World Cop* thus shows both the “badman street culture” of the rude boys and the “organized crime culture” of the ghetto gangsters. In Jamaica, *Third World Cop* became the highest grossing film of all time. After its success, many Jamaican films appeared in which the transnational figure of the Ghetto Gangsta was at the centre of the narrative and replaced the local figure of the Rude Boy. In recent Jamaican films such as *Shottas* (Cess Silvera, 2002), *Rude Boy* (Desmond Gumbs, 2003) and *Gangsta’s Paradise* (Trenten Gumbs, 2004), the story focusses on the transnational drugs trade between Jamaica and the United States, thereby depicting organized black gangsta culture and employing Jamaican dancehall music as well as American hip-hop and gangsta rap.

Although highly ambivalent, *Third World Cop* could be read as a commentary on contemporary Jamaican society: the film shows the hopelessness of ghetto life, the alienation of the ghetto dwellers, the temptations of badmanism, the distrust for the police, the fear of the police, the corruptions of the state system, and the rebellious “slackness” of the dancehall. However, the gangsta films *Shottas*, *Rude Boy* and *Gangsta’s Paradise* appear to lack such a perspective and thus seem to uncritically glamorize Jamaican gangsta culture, thereby imitating American hip-hop gangsta films and applying American gangsta rap lyrics. Originally, American “hip-hop gangsta culture” was a culture of black resistance that reflected and projected the socio-economic disparity and cultural misrepresentation of young urban African-Americans in modern American society. However, from the 1990s hip-hop gangsta culture has been intensely glorified, commodified and commercialised, which has partly led to its assimilation into dominant culture and deprivation of rebellious power (“If you can’t beat them, join them”). Although the “lawlessness” and “slackness” of Jamaican gangsta culture could be interpreted as “a metaphorical revolt against law and order” (Cooper 1993: 141), gangsta films such as *Shottas*, *Rude Boy* and *Gangsta’s Paradise* principally seem to confirm the ongoing commodification of Jamaica’s culture of resistance, and, in a way, demonstrate the surrender of the black rebel in postcolonial Jamaican society.

“I’m like a stepping, jumping, flicking, bumping, boring”: Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have argued that narratives of resistance in popular Jamaican cinema have, simultaneously, “proudly” recollected the historical liberation struggles of the African-Jamaican slaves, and in particular the Maroons, and “ragingly” commented on the “Babylonian” (white) establishment and continuing marginalisation of the black majority in postcolonial Jamaican society. Furthermore, I have tried to demonstrate that Jamaica’s militant cinema is historically and discursively connected to the figure of the primitive black rebel. This highly individualistic and hypermasculine African-Jamaican “outlaw” is spirited, rebellious and resistant, yet seems eventually unrevolutionary, powerless and even defeated. Historian Eric Hobsbawm has argued that the “primitive” protest of what he calls the “social bandit” is “a modest and unrevolutionary protest”, “heroic” yet “helpless” and “inefficient in every way” (Duncombe 2002: 146-147). In addition, Mike Wayne, in his book *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (2001), indicates that the defensive responses of the cinematic figure of the bandit represents “the weakness and isolation of the oppressed constituencies in the face of powerful state organisations. They represent in real history the political blockage which the celluloid bandit (...) is symptomatic of: the tragic absence of a revolutionary alternative” (p. 88). The “spirited” yet “helpless” individual rebellion of the cinematic figures of the Reggae Artist, Rasta Man, Rude Boy and Ghetto Gangsta seems to be a reflection of the continuous struggle for self-determination in post-independent Jamaica, a struggle that is determined and committed, yet never-ending and sometimes already given up.

Notes

¹ Derived from the title of Eric Wolf’s famous book *Europe and the People Without History* (1982), in which Wolf rewrote world history from the perspective of non-European peoples, the victims and silent witnesses of European colonial expansion and domination (“the people without history”).

² Derived from the title of Jean Comaroff's study *Body of Power. Spirit of Resistance. The Culture and History of a South African People* (1985), in which Comaroff analyses the practices of identity construction and resistance used by Barolong boo Ratshidi, a minority group in South Africa.

³ Derived from the title of Brian Meeks' book *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad, The Caribbean* (2000), which explores the contemporary forms of social, political and intellectual resistance to hegemony as manifested in Jamaica, Trinidad and the rest of the Caribbean.

⁴ It must be said that, in recent times, the proliferation of academic literature on anti-colonial resistance has recently also faced considerable critical backlash from scholars all over the world. In her 2003 article "Beyond Resistance: Notes Toward a New Caribbean Cultural Studies" as well as in her latest book *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (2004), literary and cultural theorist Shalini Puri, for example, criticizes the privileging of resistance and transgression within contemporary (Caribbean) Cultural Studies. Using Peter Wilson's famous reputation/respectability dialectic of Afro-Caribbean social life, Puri argues that the present study of Caribbean resistance, with Carnival Studies as pre-eminent example, has developed a strong focus on "reputation" to the neglect of "respectability" (2003: 23-25). Puri questions the rhetoric emphasis on reputation ("the public", "the street") since it largely ignores the realm of respectability ("the private", "the yard"), and, consequently, fails to map the dialectical relationship between reputation and respectability (*ibid.* 24-25). In addition, Puri shows that the privileging of reputation as a form of everyday resistance establishes the field of contestation as a predominantly masculine space, thereby to a certain extent reproducing the dominant patriarchal discourse of gender (2004: 113). I fully agree with Puri's twofold critique on the contemporary study of (Caribbean) resistance, that is, being both partial and male-oriented, and, in this paper, I do not attempt to celebrate postcolonial Jamaican cinema as a prominent realm of masculine reputation, but rather to deconstruct it as one.

⁵ Actually, although often largely left out in both academic and popular narratives of Caribbean resistance, the history of anti-colonial resistance in Jamaica begins with the subjugation of the indigenous Taino Indians after the so-called "discovery" of Jamaica by Columbus in 1494, and the subsequent Spanish colonisation of its original inhabitants at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Under Spanish colonial rule the Taino population rapidly declined and within one century the native Arawaks were almost completely wiped out as a result of forced labour, murder, suicide, starvation and imported diseases. In most academic and popular histories of Jamaica the brutal exploitation and virtual extermination of the Taino people is (briefly) mentioned, yet in general there is little known (and remembered) about Taino resistance to the Spanish invasion. It is often stressed that the Tainos were entirely powerless to the European arms, brutality and diseases, however, this does not mean that they did not employ continuous resistance. Like the African slaves in later times, Tainos undoubtedly undertook innumerable attempts to withstand their Spanish oppressors. It is also assumed that, immediately after the invasion of the Spanish colonists, the Taino people attempted to put together a "resistance army", however, the Spanish forces were too strong to be seriously challenged. Consequently, many Taino people fled into the mountains, which often failed, or committed suicide to escape their bondage. Others tried to oppose the Spanish colonists from within the system of slavery and exploitation. Unfortunately, this could not prevent the almost complete wipe out of the Jamaican Tainos within a matter of decades, which was one of the reasons that the Spanish commenced to transport African slaves to Jamaica.

⁶ In his book *Black Rebels: African-Caribbean Freedom Fighters in Jamaica* (1999), Werner Zips argues that the unique record of slave rebellions in Jamaica was mainly the result of two reasons, namely, "the strong concentration of Africans who were born free in [African] societies with

prominent military traditions and the favorable ecological prerequisites for guerrilla warfare in the rain forests of the island's interior" (p. 51).⁶ I would like to add three more or less related possible explanations. First of all, the already mentioned extreme harshness of Jamaica's absentee society has probably stimulated collective slave resistance. Secondly, the large size of Jamaica's slave population compared to the white population of the island may have evoked recurring patterns of joint resistance as the African slaves continuously outnumbered their European masters ten to one. And thirdly, the continuous import of African-born slaves did not only bring African military traditions to "Plantation Jamaica", but also African cultures, religions and languages. Despite the enormous diversity of African peoples brought to the Americas, in Jamaica, as Alleyne indicates, "the persistence of (...) African forms of cultures contributed greatly to the collapse of the slave system. (...) Cultural unity and uniformity was not just an ideological construct promoted by militants: it was a product of objective conditions" (1988: 70-71).

⁷ The contemporary self-representation of African-Jamaicans seems to be influenced by racist European stereotypes of them as "black savages". During the period of colonisation the British oppressors projected their own desire, aggression and anxiety onto (enslaved) black people and constructed a notion of the "Black Other" ("Them") that was the opposite of what they thought of themselves ("Us"), thereby using corresponding concepts such as savage versus civilised, superstitious versus enlightened, black versus white, mature versus childish, advanced versus backward, culture versus nature and animal versus human being. The constitutive opposition between savagery and humanity has played an important role in the rhetoric of colonisation and christianisation of black people (see Sanborn 1998). The general notion that "the primitive black people" were captured, civilized and baptized by "the enlightened white man" is omnipresent in nearly all the colonial literature and imagery of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century. In his pioneering book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon argued that during the process of colonisation black people have been taught to see the world through European eyes, thereby appropriating racist stereotypes of themselves: "The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white. Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence" (228). In the influential work *Orientalism* (1978), literary and cultural theorist Edward Said similarly shows that many (formerly) colonised people have appropriated racist western stereotypes into their own self-representation. In his book *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Future* (2001), post-colonial scholar Bill Ashcroft argues that the "effect of imperial control over representation" is so powerful that "it can become, as Said forcefully demonstrates in *Orientalism*, that way in which the colonised [sic] see themselves, and this can effect all social and political interchange" (p. 36). The self-image of the African-Jamaicans as black male rebels appears to reflect both an articulation of black (anti-colonial) resistance and an example of white (colonial) reification of African-Jamaican identity.

⁸ In his pioneering book *Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica* (2000), Norman C. Stolzoff distinguishes two rude-boy orientations, namely the "political" rude boy (mercenaries of the two political parties People's National Party (PNP) and Jamaica Labour Party (JLP)) and the "cultural" rude boy (like *The Wailers*), and argues that "the cultural rude boys were generally the ones who adopted Rastafarian styles and religious practices and the ones who became involved in dancehall culture as performers" (p. 81). Furthermore, Stolzoff stresses that "whereas most Rastas projected the countenance of the peaceful warrior, the rudies cultivated one that was intentionally fearsome and aggressively confrontational" (*ibid.*).

⁹ Thomas, in her article "Modern Blackness: 'What We Are and What We Hope to Be'" (2002), defines modern Blackness as "urban, migratory, based in youth-oriented popular culture and

influenced by African American popular style, individualistic, radically consumerist, and ghetto feminist” (p. 38).

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