

**WARRIORS AND PROPHETS OF LIVITY:
SAMSON AND MOSES AS MORAL EXEMPLARS IN RASTAFARI**

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1970's, Rastafari has enjoyed public notoriety disproportionate to the movement's size and humble origins in the slums of Kingston, Jamaica roughly forty years earlier. Yet, though numerous academics study Rastafari, a certain lacuna exists in contemporary scholarship in regards to the movement's scriptural basis. By interrogating Rastafari's recovery of the Hebrew Bible from colonial powers and Rastas' adoption of an Israelite identity, this dissertation illuminates the biblical foundation of Rastafari ethics and symbolic registry. An analysis of the body of scholarship on Rastafari, as well as of the reggae canon, reveals the centrality of an Israelite identity for Rastas and its enabling of Rastafari resistance to racial oppression. Furthermore, the Hebrew Bible is, for Rastas, key to an intimate relationship with Jah, for it reveals their chosenness and their inherent divine nature. They both textually confirm this election and enact it through ritual practice. By interrogating the methods Rastas apply to the pages of the Bible in order to ascertain their appointment and decipher proper ritual practice, this dissertation expands scholarly conversations about Rastafari biblical hermeneutics. Centering on readings of Samson and Moses, it suggests that these two biblical actors function as moral exemplars and models of livity for Rastas. Despite the transgressive nature of Samson and Moses, Rastas adopt them as co-practitioners and paradigms of Rastafari election because when Samson and Moses are Rastas, all Rastas can claim their chosenness, strength, and relationship with Jah.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
ABSTRACT.....	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION: THE GLOBAL JOURNEY OF RASTAFARI.....	2
Rasta Reasoning and the Scholarly Approach.....	8
Rastafari From a Christian Perspective.....	13
Terminological Choices.....	19
Who is a Rasta?	22
Rastafari International.....	24
Redemption Song.....	26
Reggae as Ritual and Prayer.....	31
Dissertation Structure.....	33
Endnotes.....	37
2. A LINEAR HISTORY OF RASTAFARI.....	43
Missionaries in Jamaica.....	46
Revolution in Jamaica.....	49
An “End” to Slavery.....	52
The Bible in Jamaica.....	53
Post-Emancipation Jamaica.....	56
The Formation of Rastafari.....	58

Endnotes.....	65
3. RASTAFARI AND THE BIBLE.....	69
Burn Babylon.....	73
Ethiopia as Zion.....	74
Reasoning Jah’s Blackness.....	76
Rastas as I-n-I.....	81
Chosen Israelites.....	85
Whiteness in the Hebrew Bible.....	94
Conclusion.....	97
Endnotes.....	97
4. LIVITY: TAKING THE ZIONIC PATH OF RASTAFARI.....	103
Livity.....	109
I-n-I and Ital.....	113
Locks and Livity.....	117
Bobo Shanti: A Case Study.....	125
Rastawoman and the Threat of the Female Body.....	130
Conclusion.....	135
Endnotes.....	136
5. SAMSON: PURITY, POWER, AND THE PUTRID.....	142
Samson as Chosen Nazirite.....	146
Samson as Liberator.....	150
Samson as Impure Eater.....	154
Samson as Dreadlocked Rasta.....	157

Conclusion.....	162
Endnotes.....	163
6. THE GENDERING OF LIVITY: DELILAH, SAMSON, AND DANGEROUS	
WOMEN.....	167
Shifting Gender Roles.....	176
Conclusion.....	183
Endnotes.....	185
7. MOSES, THE WORD, AND THE PROMISE OF ZION.....	189
Moses as Survivor.....	190
Moses as Rastaman.....	194
Moses as Violent Rebel.....	200
Moses' Encounters with Jah and Ganja.....	207
Moses and the Word.....	211
Moses and the Law.....	218
Conclusion.....	223
Endnotes.....	224
8. MOSES AS REDEEMER AND DIVINE DISAPPOINTMENT.....	229
I-n-I in Babylon.....	230
Moses and Miracles.....	235
Moses and the Rod.....	239
Moses approaches Zion.....	245
Moses Misbehaves.....	253
Conclusion.....	259

Endnotes.....	260
9. CONCLUSION: READING RASTAFARI IN THE 21 ST CENTURY.....	264
Endnotes.....	271
GLOSSARY.....	272
REFERENCES CITED.....	277
SONGS CITED.....	290

We (Rastafari) are the ancients here today, to continue that trod of Isaiah, Daniel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Moses, David, Solomon. . . . It is our prophets and warriors in this land who come before us and tell the people that iniquity must done, . . . that our people must be free.

-Ras IvI¹

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: THE GLOBAL JOURNEY OF RASTAFARI

Take out unno Bible
And check it out like disciple
Lord, mi God, say take out unno Bible

Hear me now
Say get inna the Bible.
-Early B, "Take Up Your Bible" (1984)

For most people who've ever heard the term, the mere mention of "Rastafari" conjures up images of Bob Marley and evokes auditory memories of the widely beloved music he produced during his brief but extraordinary career.² Though some Rastas question Marley's dedication to Rastafari, his global success carried the movement from its homeland in Jamaica across the world. His messages of freedom, his devotion to human rights, and his charisma resonated with his diverse audience, making him, according to the Public Broadcasting Service, "the most important figure in 20th century music."³ But his listeners may have overlooked his deliberate engagements with the Bible. While his dreadlocks, colorful attire, and the revolutionary sound and lyrics of his music may have captured the hearts of many, his message of Rastafari's biblical identity has largely slipped under the radar.

Nevertheless, the Bible was of central importance in Marley's life. In fact, he often carried a pocket-sized Bible with him so that he could refer to it for inspiration. One music journalist and Marley biographer described his intimacy with the Bible while on the Wailers' 1975 tour: "Bob would often consult and quote from the weathered Bible he carried with him. . . . His personal Bible was a Jamaican printing of the King James version, with a photocopied portrait of the Lion of Judah in full regalia pasted on the cover, as well as other pictures of Selassie glued on the inside cover and flyleaf."⁴ And,

Journalist Vivien Goldman, who toured with the Wailers in 1977, notes Marley's propensity for "challenging his bredren to debate it as vigorously as if they were playing soccer."⁵ He read passages from the Bible before shows as a means of preparation, notably consulting Psalm 87 before a 1979 concert in Santa Barbara, California.⁶

The Bible provided Marley with a sense of his place in the world. Within its pages, he unearthed messages of black divinity and of black royalty. Through close readings and deep analysis, he located proof within biblical passages of African worth and of an African-born divine king in Haile Selassie. Dean MacNeil recognizes that "Marley's active engagement with scripture (was) one of close reading, interpretation, and debate. . . . Marley personalized his Bible with images of Selassie suggesting a serious reading and appropriation of scripture, a reading through the lens of Selassie's role and the Pan African experience."⁷ The Bible ascertained for Marley that the colonial system of Jamaica, a system that denied black worth and proclaimed a white godhead, was wrong. Reading the Bible ensured for Marley that the messages colonial forces derived from the Bible were deceptive. He grew to know through studying its passages that in order to deduce the Bible's true message he and other Rastafari would need to read the text for themselves.

Upon doing so, the ancient, holy, and royal roots of blackness became apparent to him, despite a reality of colonial redaction. Within the pages of the Bible, Marley located messages that enabled the resistance and redemption of a once dominated people. Through his unique reading of the holy text, Marley resisted the racial schema of the colonial world and celebrated black people as worthy and divinely elect, thereby continuing "a tradition of scriptural resistance" with a rich history across the Caribbean

and the Atlantic world.⁸ The experiences of biblical actors became his experience. His experience of domination in Jamaica mirrored that of the Israelites' bondage, for example, and their quest homeward to Zion seemed consistent with Marley's own pursuit of a return to Africa. His music speaks of resistance and redemption in this time, while channeling the biblical realm as contemporarily significant. For, as MacNeil suggests, in Marley's canon, "Experience and scripture are intertwined from composition through interpretation."⁹ He envisioned himself as an Israelite meant to endure the trials of Jah's chosen people and ultimately to achieve salvation in Zion.

Marley's interest in the Bible is not unusual for Rastafari; most Rastas engage the Bible with the same reverence and intrigue as the reggae superstar, though no other practitioner is as well known. And yet, despite the prominence of the Bible in much Rasta thought, negotiations of the movement tend not to delve deeply in to Rasta reading strategies. This dissertation aims to fill that lacuna. A thorough analysis of Rastafari biblical hermeneutics can serve as a venue through which to gain new understanding of the theological roots, the ritual behavior, and the production of knowledge in Rasta communities. By examining a Rasta claiming of a biblical identity and Rasta interpretations of particular biblical themes, passages, and individuals, this work hopes to highlight the power of this assumption of Israelite identity and its ability to extract the Caribbean subject from the holds of the oppression and consequent self-dread manifested by the colonial project. Further, this project contributes to discussions of the value of "livity" for Rastafari by analyzing readings of Samson and Moses as exemplars of righteousness and purity.

Since the early 1970's, Rastafari has enjoyed public notoriety disproportionate to the movement's size and humble origins in Jamaica roughly forty years earlier. Spreading largely due to reggae's resounding rhythms, the allure of what many assume to be a laid back lifestyle and an interest in marijuana, Rastafari has travelled across the globe, attracting attention and gaining adherents from Mexico to Japan.¹⁰ Even before Marley and the Wailers launched Rastafari on its worldwide journey in the late 1960's and 1970's, the movement attracted ample interest. And, at least since the 1960 publication of the Jamaican government-sponsored document, "The Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica," popularly known as "The University Report," Rastafari has captured the interest of academics.¹¹

Yet, though numerous academics study the post-colonial movement, contemporary scholarship stands to benefit from a work such as this that focuses on its scriptural basis. While scholarly attempts often mention Rastafari's engagement with the Bible, a need exists for deeper reflection on Rasta reading and interpretive strategies as well as of the Hebrew Bible's role in Rasta practice and belief. This endeavor explores Rastafari's recovery of the Hebrew Bible and adoption of an Israelite identity through a detailed consideration of Rasta biblical hermeneutics. While scholars of Rastafari have long acknowledged the importance of the Bible in the movement, for the most part, works examining Rastafari only offer surface level investigations of Rasta reading strategies and their ramifications for practitioners. Additionally, those scholarly texts that contend with the Bible's role in Rastafari often minimize its importance in the lives of practitioners and/or offer patronizing analyses of Rasta interpretive methods. Scholarship that appreciates the production of knowledge in Rastafari communities and offers a

detailed analysis of the biblical hermeneutics of Rastafari can expand the fields of Caribbean Studies and Biblical Studies while enabling a more nuanced understanding of thought, theory, and practice of Rastafari. An investigation of the fundamental role of the Bible in shaping Rastafari practice and, in particular, Rastas engagement with biblical actors as exemplars of “livity” offers a new perspective on the diverse movement. For this reason, this endeavor interrogates the manner in which Rastafari claim the Bible as their own text, utilize the Bible to assert their chosenness and divinity, and shape a distinct virtuous path called “livity” based upon their approach to the Hebrew Bible in particular.

The Rasta practice of livity involves ascribing to ritualized practices aimed at purification and a healthful, clean life. These practices including an embrace of naturalness and Jah’s law, the cultivation of dreadlocks, the usage of ganja, and the consumption of a specialized “ital” diet.¹² Each of these elements of livity has its roots in the Hebrew Bible and relates to commandments directed to the Israelites as interpreted by Rasta readers. For example, Rasta elder Ras Sam Brown exemplifies this belief, stating: “We are those who obey strict moral and divine laws based on the Mosaic tenet.”¹³ By asserting an Israelite identity and shaping a behavioral path based upon that assumption, Rastafari extract themselves from the holds of self-dread and oppression imposed upon raced bodies by the colonial system, thereby determining themselves divinely elect. Through a consideration of the particular biblical passages, themes, and tropes engaged by Rasta interpreters and by paying particular attention to the ways in which Rastas engage Samson and Moses as exemplars of livity, this endeavor shifts the dialogue about a Rastafari biblical approach.¹⁴

Rasta engagements with particular biblical passages, broader themes derived from popular tales involving biblical actors, and interpreted retellings of the Bible including the *Kebrä Nagast*, or *The Glory of the Kings*, an Ethiopian text written in Ge'ez during the fourteenth century are central to individual and communal definitions of self. The declaration of an Israelite identity is fundamentally important for practitioners; Rastas read in the Hebrew Bible messages of their chosenness, textually confirm their election through their unique biblical hermeneutic, and enact it through ritual practice. They further confirm the fittedness of the ritual practice of livity as a biblically ordained system in large part by turning to Samson and Moses as exemplars of livity and as prototypical Rastamen. Thus, a consideration of Rasta readings of Samson and Moses as paragons of livity can provide new insight into the ritualized lifestyle of practitioners and Rasta biblical hermeneutics in general. By highlighting the essential role of the Bible and biblical motifs in Rasta practice and belief, I additionally challenge a scholarly tradition of envisioning resistance as practitioners' primary reading technique.

While scholars of Rastafari have long examined Rastafari through the lens of class and politics, and thus recognized the ability of Rastas to resist domination in part through their usage of the Bible, this project asserts that the spiritual element of the movement is just as essential to practitioners. Since most scholars of Rastafari come from a sociological background, their analyses tend to centralize on the social, political, and economic realms. These interpretations indelibly focus on Rastafari as a revolutionary movement for cultural change. While this revolutionary element of Rastafari is essential to practitioners, Rastafari also offers a spiritual path of livity through which Rastas align their lives with Jah. The revolutionary argument put forth by many scholars of Rastafari

also often overlooks Rastafari biblical hermeneutics as a venue for revolution. Through their interpretation of the Bible and engagement with biblical themes, Rastas participate in a form of revolution that has not yet been explored by the scholarly community, one that takes place by way of a personal hermeneutic with spiritual and existentially rejuvenating power.

The biblical blinders in much contemporary scholarship of Rastafari is surprising in light of the recent academic interest in minority biblical interpretation. While this dissertation benefits from those scholars who have previously addressed Rastas' relationship with the Bible, it expands upon their efforts by addressing the particular biblical themes and nuanced reading strategies that Rastafari employ when contending with what practitioners believe is a heavily redacted holy text. My work benefits from the wealth of scholarship on Rastafari as well as the copious numbers of interviews that journalists and scholars have with conducted with practitioners. Reggae lyrics, Rasta poetry, and literature also serve as rich sources for the project, as do newspaper articles. My personal encounters with practitioners contribute to my findings as well.

Rasta Reasoning and the Scholarly Approach

Elements of Rastafari thought, including a denial of death, the concept that time does not proceed chronologically, and a belief that Ganja usage leads to clarity, have long troubled scholars of Rastafari. I attempt, in this endeavor, to address those aspects of the movement as well as the scholarly tendencies that misrepresent Rastafari. For example, some scholars read Rastafari biblical hermeneutics and ontological perspective as irrational and analyze Rastafari through a Christian framework.

Journalists and influential scholars of the Caribbean have long characterized Rasta biblical hermeneutics as “creative,” or “quirky” efforts applied to an appropriated text.¹⁵ For instance, Leonard Barrett suggests that the Rasta hermeneutical approach amounts to “seeming madness” and “religious myth.”¹⁶ He does, however, acknowledge the importance of said “madness” for Rastas and he questions whether Rasta reason needs to be scientifically “right” to be useful.¹⁷ Moreover, George Eaton Simpson critiques Rasta hermeneutics as selectively attuned, claiming that Rastas “read always with a view to finding passages that validated Rastafari doctrines.”¹⁸ Joseph Owens suggests that even beyond Rasta readings of the Bible, “metaphysics, images and the non-rational figure prominently” in Rastafari.¹⁹ “The University Report” of 1960 captures a similar sentiment and yet it contends that “What people believe or assert cannot be disposed of merely by denial.”²⁰ Barrett, meanwhile, claims that Rastas “are not interested in empirical truths, but rather in the certitude of the doctrine.”²¹ Yet, Rasta beliefs are, too, logical and empirically true according to Rastafari.

As the above quotes indicate, one of the foremost scholarly issues concerning Rastafari is that of ontological sensitivity. Rastafari embodies a system of thought that is distinctive, though even some of the most lauded scholars of the movement ask it to fit in to a particular schema of thought. As Paget Henry notes, the conceptual framework imposed upon Rastafari by academia is representative of a eurocentric hegemonic grasp over philosophy as a discipline.²² This conceptual framework prizes provability, mathematics, and linear notions of time. But, in order to appropriately conceptualize Rastafari rationality, the unique reason of practitioners must be appreciated. Like Henry, Rex Nettleford suggests the need for “taking the discourse (on Rastafari) into intellectual

landscapes beyond narrow theological hermeneutics and exegesis, whose methods of arguments are considered Christian-specific and predetermined.”²³

Recently scholars have touted the genius of Rasta thought and recognized the existential importance of Rastafari hermeneutics. For example, Ennis Edmonds extols Rasta thought’s “remarkable logic” and comments on the “genius of an anti-colonial intelligence married to a strong nationalist sensibility.”²⁴ According to Edmonds, Rastafari effectively answers the psychological and societal needs of peoples grappling with the lingering effects of enslavement and colonial rule. Rasta theology is therefore intellectual, valuable, and fitting. Jack Johnson-Hill further contends that Rastafari boasts a “distinctive form of consciousness,” one that enables practitioners to achieve existential change.²⁵ Contrary to early scholarly opinion of theological irrationality, Barry Chevannes too describes Rastafari as a natural response to African enslavement and the larger colonial project, a belief system that effectively answers psychological and societal needs of those still grappling with the effects of colonial rule.²⁶

Yet, though scholars of Rastafari have increasingly come to appreciate the individuality and suitedness of a Rasta ontological approach, particular elements of Rasta thought still problematize the acceptance of Rasta rationality, in particular, Rasta notions surrounding death, time, and ganja. Rastafari is an acephalous movement; practitioners do hold differing opinions about death, especially in light of the fact that the movement’s founding generation has largely passed away. In general, however, Rastas believe that true Rastas cannot die for they house a divine spark.²⁷ Instead, a Rasta progresses into a different bodily existence, taking residence in a new fleshy home as a part of their “life everlasting.”²⁸

The biblical notion of “life everlasting” contributes to a Rasta perception of history. History, for Rasta brethren and sistren, is not chronological. Instead, history is cyclical and time is fluid. For instance, Sister Sheila writes: “IHI stand in creation and IHI AM not alone/ IHI AM a mighty nation/ In time, out of time, with time and through all time/ IHI AM timeless yet also full of time/ Here, there and everywhere/ Scattered through history and gathered through eternity/ IHI yahnh IHI AM eternal.”²⁹ As Owens acknowledges, for Rastas, “History is cumulative, in that each moment is seen as summing up the totality of the past.”³⁰ Thus, a linear, event-based historic overview of the movement does not confer with Rastafari conceptions of time, but instead with a eurocentric hegemonic approach to the past. This reality complicates a scholarly acknowledgement of Rasta rationality when the rubrics applied to gauge rationality are based upon an enlightenment-based framework.

Rasta receptions of the Bible exemplifies practitioners’ notion of time; the Bible describes the past, details the present day, and portends the future. As an unnamed Rasta told Chevannes, “They term it the ‘Holy Bible’ but is black man’s history, his present, and his future recorded in there.”³¹ The cyclical nature of time proves itself in the pages of the Bible and in the text’s resonance in this age, as does the unending nature of a righteous life. As Ras Kelly notes, “Haile Selassie, Jesus Christ, Solomon, David, Moses, and Aaron are all black and are all the same person.”³² In this sense, Moses, Jesus, and Haile Selassie are considered unified, as different spatio-temporal appearances of the same divine entity.

Popular Rasta notions of time and life/death challenge the intellectual framework of many scholars who study the movement. And yet, when scholars are able to appreciate

the particular rationality of Rastafari, they gain a deeper understanding of the Rasta sense of the fusion between the biblical realm and the contemporary world from their expanded perception of the movement's capability for logic. As Oral Thomas notes, "What we have here in biblical hermeneutical practice within the Caribbean context is a fluid reading strategy that moves from the universal (Bible as the word of God) to the particular (socioeconomic and historical realities of the context) and vice versa."³³

The Rasta celebration of ganja as a method for achieving heightened levels of consciousness puzzles scholars of Rastafari as one of the movement's most seemingly irrational outward practices. Yet, ganja serves an integral element in reasoning for practitioners; ganja serves as a pathway towards "higher and higher I-ghts" from which one can gain clarity and a divine perspective.³⁴ As one Rasta leader puts it, "Black man is basically God but this insight can come to man only with the use of the herb."³⁵ The usage of ganja also ensures purification and aids brethren and sistren as they strive for enlightenment, though it makes them seem irrational to the majority of Jamaican culture. Peter Tosh's conversation in "Nah Goa Jail," in which he says to a police officer who ostensibly approached him because of his use of ganja, "This yah spliff that you see me with, sir, I, / I just got it from a priest, sir," proves that ganja is a ritual aid for Rastafari, though its usage distances practitioners from Jamaican society.³⁶ The very concept that ganja can elevate consciousness stands counter to conceptions of scientific provability and sobriety emphasized by eurocentric philosophic endeavors.

Without a dependence on the "paradigms and methodologies of western intellectual history," the very paradigms that subject Rastafari to "mental slavery," the movement is able to stand as a holistic and essential ontological approach to life.³⁷ For

this reason, scholars should attempt to comprehend Rastafari and its complex intellectual system in terms of Rasta consciousness' cognitive framework. A self-affirming, invigorating force, Rasta consciousness serves as a powerful weapon against the white colonial enterprise as well as against the hegemonic grasp of eurocentric philosophies. For Rastas, it is the very act of "reasoning" that leads to clarity and to enlightenment. "Reasoning," an essential ritual activity for Rastafari, occurs in the form of an interactive philosophizing session fueled by ganja and the inquisitiveness of creative minds. As Nathaniel Murrell and Burchell Taylor note, "The ongoing reasoning...is in itself a form of what Paulo Friere calls 'conscientization' - arousing a people's consciousness and sense of self-redemption from the bottom up with liberating significance."³⁸

When considered through a eurocentric theoretical lens, one that prioritizes white, male, Protestant normativity, Rastafari emerges as liminal and is made "other" through ontological difference. But, Rastafari deserves to be appreciated on account of its unique ontology, not despite it. Scholars must avoid the pitfall that Adrian Anthony McFarlane claims occurs when "technical philosophical discussion imposes a western structure on Rasta."³⁹ For, As Nettleford notes, Rasta discourse must be studied outside of the assumed intellectual framework of Jamaica if its unique intellectual "genealogical pedigree" is to be recognized.⁴⁰

Rastafari From a Christian Perspective

In addition to appreciating Rasta logic and production of reason, scholars should also attempt to avoid analyzing Rastafari in terms of its similarities and differences to/from Christianity, assessing Rasta reasoning as irrational because of its differences from

Christianity, or suggesting that Rastas steal Christians' holy text, thereby disallowing practitioners from an authentic and unquestioned Rasta ownership of the Hebrew Bible. This endeavor addresses these tendencies as well as the corresponding scholarly trend to label Rastafari a millenarian-messianic movement. The scholarly application of a Christian framework to traditions influenced by but not wholly defined by Christianity and to non-Christian traditions alike is not isolated to Rastafari; it is a frequent and unfortunate practice in the study of biblical hermeneutics, religions, and cultures across the globe.

Perhaps the tendency of scholars, including Owens, Johnson-Hill, and William Lewis, each who are affiliated with a church, to evaluate Rastafari through a Christian lens lies in a desire to comprehend Rastas in relation to oneself. For instance, Johnson-Hill posits that the linguistic concept of the self as "I-n-I" is the "basic premise of missionary Christianity."⁴¹ Murrell echoes this sentiment, saying that "I-an-I is divine the same way the suffering Christ was human and divine."⁴² The concept of "I-n-I" involves a human embodiment of divinity, one that seems to correspond with Jesus' statement that "Ye are gods" (John 10:34). Each Rasta owns a spark of divinity and thus is connected to Jah and to each other as "I-n-I." Yet, the concept differs from a Christian model of humanity's inherent divinity because not all Rastas believe in Jesus as savior, or in any individual savior for that matter, and because as I-n-I, practitioners are connected with one another in a distinct way in addition to being connected to Jah. Assessing I-n-I from a Christian framework limits the concept to the precise Christian model it is asked to emulate.

Edmonds, however, challenges the sentiment expressed by Murrell, Owens, and Johnson-Hill. He envisions Rastafari as counter to Christianity, a concept that enables Rastafari to stand on its own ontological ground but which leaves little room for manifestations of the movement that embrace elements of Christianity. Barrett concurs with Edmonds, however, that Rastas generally consider Christianity a “missionary religion, which they view as the religious arm of colonial oppression.”⁴³ And, Chevannes rightly acknowledges that “Rastas’ approach to the Bible differs markedly from that of the Christian church, with which they are always in conversation.”⁴⁴

A scholarly tendency to portray all manifestations of Rastafari as Christian-like is misguided, as is one that effaces Christian influences on the movement. Indeed, many Rastas incorporate Christian beliefs and practice, the most well known being members of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Furthermore, an emphasis on Revelation as the most essential biblical text for all practitioners is misguided, though the book is certainly important for many practitioners. MacNeil supposes that “Revelation is the source of a ‘Selassian’ hermeneutic that allows (Rastas) to read Zion in the prophets as Ethiopia.”⁴⁵ As he points out, Rastas believe that Selassie fulfills the pronouncement of Revelation 5:3-5. And, according to Owens, Revelation is Rastas’ “primary scriptural inspiration,” especially regarding their conception of Babylon.⁴⁶ Revelation 5 and 6 describe the onset of the apocalypse while 18:21 details the destruction of Babylon, a message that is essential for Rasta readers who envision Babylon as the colonial complex of the West, an entity that they see themselves as removed from. Revelation 18:21 reads: “With violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

While practitioners certainly emphasize the importance of Revelation in their embrace of the Bible and reference the New Testament more largely, the New Testament play a less instructional role in determining praxis and belief than the Hebrew Bible and its Solomonic legacy. Many Rastas venerate Jesus Christ, but some do not. And, while the New Testament remains valuable to many brethren and sistren, Rastafari commonly look to the Hebrew Bible as an “original” source, one that describes their election and details the fitting system of livity and one that has been less dramatically redacted by Babylon. While they know forces of Babylon, the nefarious and corrupting white colonial project, of which Rastas believe the pope is at the helm, edited the Hebrew Bible, a majority of practitioners, with the noted exception of Twelve Tribe members, believe the New Testament was more egregiously edited and thus offers more heavily redacted truths.⁴⁷

Despite the fact that many practitioners envision the New Testament as thus less valuable than the Hebrew Bible, scholars of Rastafari often discuss the movement in Christian terms and consequently grant Christianity reign over rationality; for example, take those readings that assess Rasta biblical hermeneutics as “quirky” or as “mad”. When Christianity is assumed to be rational, a belief in Haile Selassie as Jah incarnate is inevitably irrational, a presumption that detracts from a scholarly ability to fully comprehend Rastafari. This reading strategy too grants ownership of the Bible to Christianity.

For example, Murrell and Lewin Williams suggest that “Rastas hijacked Christian theology and scripture and imbued them with new exegetical interpretation for their own self-definition and identity.”⁴⁸ While Rastas do indeed engage in a form of “hijacking,” I

caution against the popular notion of seizure that Murrell and Williams express and question their implicit presumption of Christian ownership of the Bible. Instead, I argue that Rastas reclaim the Bible, a foundational tool of the white colonialist project, and thus read from the text what they believe to be its original messages of black divinity and election. Rastas enliven that divinity through a ritualized lifestyle that proves their righteousness and thereby disassembles the racial hierarchy of the Caribbean. Rastafari interpret holy texts that they believe they rightly own and that were once used to enforce subservience in African people, in a hermeneutical move that sanctions disengagement from the psychic hold of white supremacy, what Marley famously calls “mental slavery.” Reasoning ownership of the Hebrew Bible enables Rastafari to “wrest” a powerful weapon from the hands of their oppressor, while their assertion of an Israelite identity infuses practitioners with divinity.⁴⁹

The trend to assign to Rastafari the labels of “millenarian” and “messianic” stems from the same tendency to read Rastafari through a Christian lens, though millenarianism and messianism are not solely Christian concepts. Barrett, for example, defines Rastafari as a millenarian-messianic movement in much of his work. He encouraged the adoption of this position by a generation of scholars of Caribbean religion including Murrell and Taylor.⁵⁰ However, that Rastas recognize the divine spark within each human being and often do not believe in a messiah does not neatly fit with a messianic conception of the movement.⁵¹ The perspective that Rastafari is messianic because Haile Selassie “shares bodily in shaping and leading the movement” is also problematic since not all Rastas embrace the concept of him as messiah, though some certainly do.⁵²

The idea that Rastafari is millennial in many ways corresponds with the movement's interest in ushering in a new zionic age. And, Barrett asserts that though Rastafari is a millennial movement, such a reality does not disallow the routinization of Rastafari during the 1970's because the routinization that was taking place was ambivalent. However, the idea of routinization challenges a millenarian perspective. Furthermore, Rastas believe it is their responsibility to wake people up so that they can recognize their nature as divine beings in this world. As Carole Yawney notes, "The Rastafarians are not an encapsulated religious cult, a characteristic of millennial cults! But on the contrary, they have frequent and meaningful interchanges on a daily basis with non-Rastas in the communities in which they live."⁵³ Rastas aim to create a new order in this time, not to enter in to a new era.

In his early work, Chevannes conceives of "Rastafari's millenarianism, which served to place a sense of immediacy upon the affairs of black people. There was little time to waste, before redemption would take place, and before the terrible fall of Babylon prophesied in Isaiah and previewed in the mysterious Book of Revelation would descend on oppressors."⁵⁴ He came to challenge his initial perspective and question whether it is fitting to call Rastafari messianic because, as he recognizes, Rastas have only displayed mass millenarian activity three times in six decades with the last major millenarian activity occurring in conjunction with Haile Selassie's 1966 visit to Jamaica. In revising his earlier perspective on the popular millenarian-messianic perspective, Chevannes challenges a leading scholarly paradigm, one that still holds credence for many scholars.⁵⁵ Because of millenarianism's centralization on the end-of-days, a conception that resonates with Rastas' hope to conquer Babylon and practitioner's interest in the

apocalyptic language within the Book of Revelation, scholars continue to define Rastafari in millenarian terms, even as Murrell warns that “to limit the still-evolving, Afro-Caribbean phenomenon only to Christian ideas of an apocalyptic end of the world is, therefore, nearsighted and uninformed.”⁵⁶

Terminological Choices

Though Rastafari do not refer to their movement as a religion, scholars often do so. Because Rastas do not embrace the term, scholars should avoid its usage in conversations about Rastafari. Labeling Rastafari as a religion imposes a structure upon the movement that practitioners do not acknowledge. For, as Talal Asad argues, religion is a category that emerged in the West and that is now applied as a universal concept. “From being a concrete set of practical rules attached to specific processes of power and knowledge, religion has come to be abstracted and universalized.”⁵⁷

Richard King concurs with Asad that “the modern category of ‘religion’ itself is a Western construction that owes a considerable debt to Enlightenment presuppositions.”⁵⁸

He continues:

The search for the ‘essence’ of religion . . . is misguided since it is operating under the aegis of the essentialist fallacy that the phenomena included in the category of religion (for instance) must have something universally in common to be meaningfully classified as religious.⁵⁹

If, as King suggests, “religion and culture are the field in which power relations operate,” the universalizing of the religious “essence” of the West allows the West to define what authentic religious practice looks like.⁶⁰

Asad notes that “while religion is integral to modern Western history, there are dangers in employing it as a normalizing concept” for “its conceptual geology has

profound implications for the ways in which non-Western traditions are now able to grow and change.”⁶¹ When non-western religious traditions are measured against a system that is the very basis of the definition of “religion,” such traditions can be measured as inadequate or less than. And so, “The idea of a single nature for all humans appeared to conceive that some are evidently ‘more mature’ than others.”⁶² Those traditions that developed directly out of the culture that defined the “essence” of religion inevitably become benchmarks by which to measure other traditions’ fitness.

One could easily argue that Rastafari is a western religion both because Christianity was a major influence on the movement and because it was founded in Jamaica with roots in those African nations that are part of the Western hemisphere. Yet, Rastas do not believe that they are a part of the West; they envision the West as Babylon and see themselves as wholly separate from it. Though some Rastas use the term “religion,” Rastafari also customarily deny that Rastafari is a religion. For example, Ky-Mani Marley proclaims that “Rasta is not a religion. It is a way of life. We have no rules or rituals.”⁶³ As Barrett notes though, if Rastafari is defined as a religion for some Rastas, it is because “Religion is a total involvement for (Jamaicans), not a mental exercise. Within one’s religion, one lives, moves, and has one’s being.”⁶⁴ This definition of religion might be applicable, even for those Rastas who claim that Rastafari is not a religion and is instead a way of life. Rastafari is indeed a total system of being for many practitioners, one that encompasses spirituality and one that serves as a movement for societal and personal change, a holistic way of being. But, “religion” still remains a problematic label because Rastas actively reject it.

Rastas are not alone in their rejection of the label. Jews, Muslims, and even some Christians, along with practitioners of other traditions join them in their pursuit of a more holistic way to describe their faith and way of life. According to Ras Brown, “You cannot join Rastafari. It is not something you join. That is foolishness. It is something inside of you, an inspiration that come forward.”⁶⁵ Brown avoids using the term “religion” in an attempt to circumvent the western trappings of the term that Asad recognizes. Yet, while his intentions are noble, he mistakenly employs another term laden with western implications, and, in fact, one that is distinctly Christian. The Oxford Dictionary defines “Inspiration” as “The quality of being inspired, especially when evident in something, a person or thing that inspires, a sudden brilliant, creative, or timely idea, the divine influence believed to have led to the writing of the Bible, the drawing in of breath; inhalation. Origin-Middle English (in the sense ‘divine guidance’).”⁶⁶ Both the terms “religion” and “inspiration” have Western roots, and therefore, may cause discomfort for Rasta practitioners. Furthermore, Rastas do not use the term “inspiration” in conversation, though they do use “movement.”

In addition to frequently defining Rastafari as a religion, scholars often refer to the movement as an “ism,” as in “Rastafarianism.” Barrett, for example, employs the term “Rastafarianism” in his seminal work on Rastafari, *The Rastafarians*. But, as Edmonds acknowledges, practitioners “oppose the description of Rastafari as an ideology or system of beliefs. They would declare that Rastafari is not an ‘ism’ but a way of life.”⁶⁷ In order to avoid the pitfalls involved with describing Rastafari as a religion or as an “ism,” many scholars, myself included, apply the term “movement” to Rastafari. Yet, Charles Price rightly argues that the term “movement” is limiting in that it infers that

Rastafari is inherently political in nature: “My view is that ‘movement’ describes only part of what some of the Rastafari are involved in.”⁶⁸ Indeed, the term “movement” seems to correspond with a scholarly trend to analyze Rastafari from a sociological standpoint. This perspective leads to conceptions of Rastafari that are largely based upon evaluation of the social, political, and economic spheres. In order to avoid this pitfall, Price instead employs the phrases “Rasta identity,” “Rasta people,” and “collectivity” in his attempt to sort out what terminology best suits Rastafari. Scholars should certainly attempt to promote terminology that best suits the ontology of the worldview they describe, all while acknowledging and assessing how practitioners define these worldviews. Thus, while I acknowledge Price’s critique of “movement” as valid and offer my own criticism of the term, because practitioners employ the term “movement,” I refer to Rastafari as such throughout this endeavor. I also recognize that “movement” can relate to individuals’ and communities’ spiritual development as well as to cultural change.

Who is a Rasta?

The phrase “Rasta movement” is misleading in some regards; it infers a Rasta collectivity and communal commitment. Yet, Rastafari manifests in countless ways across the world. By the 1980’s, divergences in Rastafari beliefs and practices became clear and informal groups called “houses,” “yards,” or “mansions” were clearly established in Jamaica, the United States, and England. The Twelve Tribes of Israel, founded in 1968 by Vernon Carrington, who took the name “Prophet Gad,” spread quickly in Jamaica and internationally. The Twelve Tribes of Israel believe that they are the descendants of Jacob

and advocate that Haile Selassie is Christ returned. The mansion reached middle class Jamaicans and new converts in part because it adopted some Christian elements. The mansion is known as “the reggae house of Rastafari” in part because members held frequent public performances on the last Saturday of every month during the 1970’s in order to raise funds for repatriation and also because many reggae artists emerged from the mansion.⁶⁹ Initially, members of the Twelve Tribes were expected to contribute twenty cents a week to a repatriation fund, though this is no longer their practice; members now make voluntary donations instead.⁷⁰ The mansion is also arguably the most “progressive”; it allows women to participate in reasoning ceremonies and Nyabinghi celebrations.⁷¹ This reality also contributed to the group’s growth.

Practitioners and scholars generally consider the Bobo Shanti, or the Ethiopian National Congress, to be the most “orthodox” mansion. Bobo Dreads are generally not interested in reggae music; they claim that much of it is a bastardization of Rasta ritual music, such as that created in Nyabinghi ceremonies. They strictly guard themselves from Babylonian culture and reject technology, though some have cell phones and use computers. Women are excluded from ritual activity within Bobo Shanti communities.

The House of Nyabinghi, or the Theocratic Government of Emperor Haile Selassie I, is the oldest of the Rastafari mansions. The group takes their name from East Africans who resisted domination by colonial forces during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The term “Nyabinghi,” which means “she who possesses many things,” memorializes a Ruandiasie princess who took place in resistance efforts against colonial forces in the years leading up to 1928.⁷² Nyabinghi dreads conceptualize Haile

Selassie as an ancestral leader, not as Jah incarnate, an opinion that sharply contrasts with the attitude of Bobo and Twelve Tribe members.

The three mansions described above are the most established Rasta collectives; however, some Rastas are unaffiliated or practice in smaller “houses” as well. Others consider themselves Rasta and also belong to churches or other religious orders, most frequently the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC).⁷³ As a Rasta named Ernie shares, “There are as many kinds of Rastas as the reeds that grow on the riverbank. . . . But it all stem from the same thing, and it all go through the same place, the heart.”⁷⁴

Rastafari International

On July 23, 1982, on what would have been Haile Selassie’s 90th birthday, the First International Rastafari Conference and Nyabinghi, coordinated by the house of Nyabinghi, took place in Toronto, Ontario. The event is significant because it was the first major international gathering of Rastas and thus, in a way, it marks the successful globalization of Rastafari. Indeed, Rastafari has become a global movement, one that boasts practitioners around the globe. Rasta communities exist in Japan, Mexico, Africa, Costa Rica, Spain, New Zealand, and elsewhere.

This project largely examines Rastafari as it is lived in Jamaica because of the sheer number of practitioners found there and because of the number of resources that focus on the island. However, although formed in Jamaica, “Rastafari in Jamaica do not necessarily determine the form, character or ethos of Rastafari as it is lived outside of Jamaica.”⁷⁵ Nonetheless, as Richard Salter notes, there remains a “trend for Jamaican

Rastafari to be normative for the movement as a whole, thus homogenizing what is really a diverse movement.”⁷⁶

Rastafari resonates with diverse individuals around the world because of its revolutionary message and adaptable nature. It boasts no official doctrine. It is up to individuals and communities to negotiate a relationship with the movement. In New Zealand, for example, where “the Rastafari interpretation of the Bible as a prophetic text of emancipation continues the practice of resistant Maori prophetic movements of the previous centuries,” practitioners sport tattoos on their foreheads in an attempt to assert their identity as the servants of Jah spoken about in Revelation 7:3 (“Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads”).⁷⁷ Other Rastas would reject tattooing as unnatural. And, of the Rastafari from Bahia, Brazil, “Some express a desire to be politically active, while others refuse to participate in politics but use the system when it benefits their cause. All wear dreadlocks. Most eat meat. Some smoke ganja and others do not.”⁷⁸ Rastas in Jamaica traditionally avoid any and all political involvement. As Salter notes, “An exclusive focus on one account narrows our appreciation for how the movement’s characteristic ‘symbolic ambiguity’ allows it to take on and develop new meanings.”⁷⁹

Even within Jamaica, Rastafari crosses racial and socioeconomic boundaries, resonating with people of all races and classes. There is no one “Rasta” voice. Thus, to associate Rastafari with just impoverished Afro-Jamaicans is to limit the scope of Rasta belief and practice. Constant currents tie together what are, in reality, diverse communities of Rastafari. These currents include an emphasis on freedom, an appreciation for Haile Selassie as a righteous figure, and a pursuit of naturalness and

spiritual growth. Nonetheless, Rastas and consequently Rasta readers are diverse. Rasta readers boast distinct economic, racial, and locational identities. And, these interpreters read the Bible in numerous ways. Some Rasta readers read from the pages of the Bible while others read truths from the biblical tales, motifs, and tropes with which they are familiar. Reading itself, for many of them, is not just an act of engaging with the written word but an active assessment of messages found in biblical themes, personal experiences, reggae lyrics, and popular stories. The holy text, for these diverse readers, is not limited to what is written in the Bible; it extends beyond the book's binding into the contemporary world.

Redemption Song

Rastas of diverse national origins celebrate Haile Selassie, share messages of freedom, and pursue revolution by means of reggae music. Reggae is by no means synonymous with Rastafari. Nonetheless, the genre serves as a venue through which practitioners articulate their understanding of Rastafari and by which profoundly powerful Rasta messages of black chosenness, resistance against domination, and spiritual development reach the masses. Thus, this project depends largely on reggae lyrics as its source material.⁸⁰ In particular, I primarily cite roots reggae lyrics, a subgenre of reggae that commonly contains on spiritual and revolutionary messages.⁸¹ Marley sings of the power of reggae to spread the message of Rastafari: "Me say, Music you're - music you're the key, / Talk to who? Please talk to me, / Bring the voice of - of the Rastaman, / Communicating to everyone."⁸²

By the late 1950's, "The fusion of prophetic message, African drum, and ritual worship manifested itself in a genuine Rastafari musical tradition."⁸³ Reggae music developed from a synthesis of Rasta sacred music, ska, mento, and R&B. Most directly the product of ska, a genre that originated in Jamaica in the 1950's out of mento, a style of acoustic Jamaican folk music popular during the 1930's and 40's, calypso, a genre that originated in Trinidad and Tobago and featured harmonious vocals, jazz, and R&B, ska music topped the charts in in the period leading up to 1966. At that time, rocksteady came into fashion. Rocksteady slowed the pace of ska and began experimenting with the beat. While early reggae and rocksteady are difficult to distinguish, reggae's "heavy backbeated rhythm" sets it apart.⁸⁴ Though the focus of rocksteady and reggae lyrics was also initially quite similar, with songs focusing on love, dancing, and having fun, reggae music took on a more political bent in the late 1960's.

In Marley's opinion, reggae is "a vehicle that is used to translate a message of redemption to the people upon earth today."⁸⁵ For, "We free the people with music."⁸⁶ Reggae music serves both as a means of revolution and a method of empowerment. Though, perhaps the most frequently addressed message of Reggae is its message of resistance to domination. According to Marley, "A Reggae Music, mek we chant down Babylon; / With music, mek we chant down Babylon."⁸⁷ The messages of resistance inherent in much reggae music, when joined with the rhythms and melodies of the genre, resonate in the souls of a wide audience and make reggae an effective tool to "chant down Babylon." Reggae artists then become leaders in the fight against Babylon System, the industrial, commercial system that divorces human beings from the natural world.

Marley notably proclaimed: “I see myself as a revolutionary, who don’t have no help, and I take no bribe from no one. I fight it singlehanded with music.”⁸⁸

As Diane Austin-Broos notes, “Music is the embodiment of power.”⁸⁹ This statement applies to its role in the Bible as well. Iqulah sings, “When King David plays his harp, / All the nation gather around. / Then King Saul fell to the ground, / And King David take his throne. / That’s the magic, in the music, Rasta magic, in the music.”⁹⁰

Reggae has the ability to channel that power to conquer Babylon: “Rastafari rihddihmhzhz topple racist systems! / Rastafari rihddihmhzhz PULSATING! / To emancipate children of slavery,” describes poet Durm Ihi Brooks.⁹¹ Hausman concurs with Marley and Brooks that through the power of reggae, “The old world of Babylon crumbles, beaten down by chant, rhythmic pounding, and exultation of the heart.”⁹²

It is not only the lyrics that channel power. In reggae music, the drums play an especially central role in conducting energy. For instance, Beenie Man and Determine describe the role of the kette drum in reggae’s goal of resistance: “When di kette beat/ oh when the kette beat/ di beast get defeat.”⁹³ According to John Homiak, “In the complex intertwining of religious and musical element that informs these ceremonies, the drum has retained its central and characteristically African role in spiritual communion, an instrument for summoning and controlling power.”⁹⁴

Through its dynamic lyrics and its powerful drumbeats, reggae serves as an effective venue through which to share social commentary on a grand scale. However, upbeat rhythms, methods of performance, and sometimes-indistinguishable linguistics often disguise the deeply revolutionary messages of Rastafari. For instance, in “Corner Stone,” Marley sings, “Do you hear me? Hear what I say. The stone that the builder

refused will always be the head cornerstone.”⁹⁵ He calls for listeners to acknowledge his message, one that seems to be, on the surface, about determination in the face of rejection. But, in the song, Marley directly quotes Psalm 118:22. Those who do not know the psalm or of Acts 4:11’s declaration that that very stone is Jesus himself will not comprehend that Marley is drawing a comparison between himself and the Christian savior. Such a comparison makes Marley Jah incarnate. This message might prove more challenging for certain non-Rasta audiences than a message of continued perseverance. In this song and others, reggae artists pose polyvalent messages; the messenger is not hidden while the song’s true significance may very well be. As James Scott recognizes:

Ideological insubordination of subordinate groups . . . takes a quiet public form in elements of folk or popular culture. . . its public expression typically skirts the bounds of impropriety. The condition of its public expression is that it be sufficiently indirect and garbled that it is capable of two readings, one of which is innocuous.⁹⁶

According to Scott, power relations always affect discourse. And though Rastafari has, for generations, rejected domination and attempted to resist the residual power dynamics of the colonial system, practitioners recognize that Babylon still reigns. Scott suggests that subjugated people “ordinarily dare not contest the terms of their subordination openly. Behind the scenes, though, they are likely to create and defend a social space in which offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations maybe voiced.”⁹⁷ Rastafari clearly engages in public acts of contestation. Through their physical appearance and through their reggae music, even when its audience only comprehends particular levels of meaning, Rastas publically challenge Babylon’s control. Moreover, Scott’s suggestion that “every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a “hidden transcript” that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant”

corresponds with the deeper messages sometimes shrouded in reggae music, including messages of black divinity.⁹⁸ Colonized people create both a public and a private discourse through which they communicate. The public discourse allows for some condemnation of the dominant culture where the hidden offers space for more profound critique.

The “theatrical imperatives that normally prevail in situations of domination produce a public transcript in close conformity with how the dominant group would wish to have things appear. The dominant never control the stage absolutely, but their wishes normally prevail,” suggests Scott.⁹⁹ Rastas’ public transcript centers on the bright red, gold, and green associated with the movement, the ganja smoking, the “quirky” hairstyle of Rastas, and the one love ethos most frequently associated with the movement since to late 1970’s. This almost fanciful public transcript demonstrates, in some regards, a Rasta rejection of European cultural norms but hides the ontological violence that takes place in their hidden discourse. In their hidden transcript, as coded and expressed in reggae music, in poetry, in dread talk, and through the very practice of livity, Rastafari reject not only standards of beauty and appearance of the West, but also the entire system of logic on which the western world operates as well as the racial schema upon which it is structured.

Oral culture and linguistics are one of “The manifold strategies by which subordinate groups manage to insinuate their resistance, and disguised forms, into the public transcript.”¹⁰⁰ Dread talk, the particular linguistic pattern of Rastafari, is thus especially effective at disguising ideological insubordination. For, words and euphemism have the ability to serve as “a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript.”¹⁰¹ Music increases the communicability of that “veiled discourse” by

energizing it and drawing in listeners. The ability to attract an audience is what makes music a strategic site for a hidden transcript and an “effective weapon” of resistance.¹⁰² “The whisper upon my lips is the roar of the Lion of Judah,” as Sister Sheila puts it.¹⁰³

Reggae as Ritual and Prayer

Victor Turner envisions word and sound as elements of ritual drama. He additionally recognizes “The political dimension of rituals as both tools of social control and processes of emancipation.”¹⁰⁴ Music, then, in his opinion, is a potential route through which to escape domination. Reggae, when viewed as a form of ritual also has transformative capabilities that go beyond emancipation. It is not merely a venue for messages of resistance. It is a means for personal expressions of devotion and an experience through which practitioners can reenvision themselves. Through song, Rastas activate their biblical identity, sing of chosenness, praise the divine, and celebrate the promise of Zion. Reggae can be “churchical expression.” It can be a prayer through which to communicate with Jah, as it is when artists sing, in their interpretation of Psalm 19:14, “May the words of I mouth, the meditation of I heart, be accepted in thy site, oh Fari.”¹⁰⁵

Reggae artists frequently channel the Bible as a means of confirming their biblical identity for, as Anand Prahlad notes, using the Bible in song contributes “rhetorical support, and to lend the voice of authority.”¹⁰⁶ While employing the Bible in reggae may do just that, Rastas reference the Bible in reggae music because they believe that reggae is the music of Jah and that the Bible contains his Word. For example, Ras Ivan from Bahia, Brazil states, “We play reggae because we believe reggae is the song of the

psalms, the song of the kings.”¹⁰⁷ Reading the Bible and engaging with its words through song and otherwise is thus the responsibility of Jah’s elect. Steel Pulse sings:

Chant, chant a psalm a day. / I’ve got to, chant, chant a psalm a day. . . . /
Moses he did chant, chant. / Samson he did chant, chant. / Elijah he did
chant, chant. / I want the whole a we fe chant, chant.¹⁰⁸

Ziggy Marley describes the process of composing reggae: “Jah gives the inspiration and my music is based more upon a spiritual level than a physical one. The music comes from Jah, but I use my own inner eye, my third eye, to make the music.”¹⁰⁹ Rastas, including Ziggy Marley, envision reggae as stemming directly from Jah; musicians act as the conduit for his missive. For instance, for Bunny Wailer:

The Bible says that the singers went before, and the players of
instruments followed after . . . so it’s a whole spiritual order, where
angels sing, and then we carry out that message, so its something
more than just Bob Marley . . . or the Wailers. It’s the most High,
Ras Tafari.¹¹⁰

Capleton shares a similar message about his performances: “It’s not even me. It’s Jah Himself, Jah works. . . . Sometimes people tell me I make certain moves on stage and I don’t even remember. It is just the powers of the Most High.”¹¹¹

While not all reggae music expresses Rasta sentiments, the music that does generally contains messages of resistance and of a spiritual connection with Jah. Not only is reggae a venue through which Rastas proclaim their intimacy with Jah, Jah speaks through them musically. Thus, reggae music that speaks of the Israelite identity of Rastafari is a divine assurance of Rasta election and of Rastas’ corresponding requirement of livivity.

Dissertation Structure

The Bible proves for a diversity of Rasta readers chosenness and black dominance, for Rastafari flip the Manichean racial divide of colonial oppressors. It is a venue for personal and communal disengagement from the psychic hold of white superiority and a means for the reclamation of a positive sense of self. The Bible validates Rastas' relationship with Jah and allows individuals to define themselves as valuable, as pure, and as holy. In the Hebrew Bible in particular, Rastas find proof of Jah's blackness, of the value of Ethiopia, and of their own Israelite identity. There is tremendous power inherent in claiming divine election. Yet, there too lies tremendous responsibility, a responsibility to live according to Jah's order. The following chapters explore a Rasta acceptance of an Israelite identity and their consequent responsibility to uphold a divinely ordained path of livity through an examination of practitioners' engagement with Samson, Delilah, and Moses, each a transgressive and liminal character. Samson and Moses in particular function, for Rasta readers, as exemplars of livity despite their indiscretions against Jah's order. Moses disobeys and questions Jah's orders in his biblical narrative. And, Samson disregards his Nazirite vow. The transgressions of Moses and Samson stand in opposition to Israelite Rasta behavioral codes and yet these biblical actors retain their roles as exemplars of livity in a Rasta hermeneutical approach because of the effects such a reading of them has for Rastafari notions of selfhood. Highlighting the Rasta reception of these specific transgressive biblical actors as well as of Delilah opens up conversations about Rastafari biblical hermeneutics and the value of livity as a fundamental component of Rasta belief.

My first body chapter, “Chapter 2: A Linear History of Rastafari,” examines the history of Rastafari and of Jamaica more largely, reaching back to Africa and telling the story of a people displaced, of missionary efforts to draw them in to Christianity, of their interactions with the Bible, and of the profound Jamaican tradition of rebellion. Chapter 3, “Rastafari and the Bible,” gives an introduction to the ways in which Rastas read the Hebrew Bible. In this section, I explore a Rasta reasoning of Jah’s blackness by examining the particular passages Rastas read as proof of Jah’s racial identity. I also consider a Rasta centralization on Ethiopia as Zion and definition of the western world as Babylon. Lastly, this chapter describes the biblical passages that Rastas identify as proving whiteness to be a curse and those that confirm that Rastas and all African people are Jah’s chosen people.

In Chapter 4, “Livity: Taking the Zionite Path of Rastafari,” I describe the Rasta system of livity and explore the ways in which a diversity of practitioners enact livity. Livity is the Rasta path of righteousness. Rastas envision livity as a pure, natural, and original method to elevate oneself to divine status. It allows those who pursue it to eradicate the evils and unnaturalness associated with Babylon through, for example, the cultivation of dreadlocks, the consumption of a particular diet, the usage of ganja, an avoidance of dead bodies, and the removal of impure individuals from the community. The proscriptions of livity that allow such transcendence are largely derived from priestly, Nazirite, and Israelite proscriptions of the Hebrew Bible, and this chapter analyzes the particular passages that contribute to the system.

In Chapter 5, “Samson: Purity, Power, and the Putrid,” I discuss Samson’s reception by Rasta readers. As a dreadlocked Rastaman and Nazirite, Samson

compellingly embodies the value of livivity for Rastas and stands as a paradigm of resistance. He offers much as a liberator-strongman and exemplar of livivity. By applying their unique hermeneutic to his biblical narrative and to popular tales surrounding his life, practitioners embrace Samson as a symbol of black strength, Rasta purity and election by Jah in spite of his defiling actions. Judges 13:24 proclaims Samson a Nazirite from birth, and, according to Rasta readers, he succeeds against Babylon in Judges 16:30. Yet, much of his behavior in Judges challenges notions of Samson as an unsullied Nazirite, Israelite, and Rastaman. I contend that because of his hair, notorious strength, actions against the Philistines, and Nazirite identity, Rastas obfuscate Samson's textual episodes of disregard for livivity. With "I-n-I" as their goal, Rastafari read Samson as clean, both spiritually and physically, in an exegetical move that allows the male Rasta body to remain untainted and divinely elect.

Chapter 6, "The Gendering of Livivity: Delilah, Samson, and Dangerous Women," carefully considers the biblical orientation of Rasta gender roles and how they manifest in gendered paths of livivity through an analysis of Rasta readings of Delilah. Delilah's relationship with Samson proves, for male Rasta reader, that women are inherently simple and generally malicious. Males, on the other hand, are read as divine-like. However, the tale of Samson and Delilah warns brethren of the threat they face from persuasive and intriguing women. This chapter examines the gender-specific requirements of the behavioral system of livivity and interrogates what such extrapolations mean in terms of the potential of male and female Rastas to actualize livivity in their own lives.

Chapter 7, “Moses, The Word, and the Promise of Zion,” centers on readings of Moses as a paradigm of livity, ultimate prophet, and prototypical Rastaman. As Rastaman, Moses inspires practitioners to seek justice and liberation and he substantiates the chosenness of practitioners, as well as the righteousness of livity. Moses, too, proves for practitioners that they, like the biblical leader, can communicate with Jah and speak on Jah’s behalf. By reading Moses not only as a revolutionary and a prophetic leader but also as a Rastaman, practitioners define themselves as prophets, radicals, and guides, a strategy with significant existential ramifications.

In Chapter 8, “Moses as Redeemer and Divine Disappointment,” I consider Moses’ leadership of the Israelites from enslavement to redemption, as well as Moses’ faults in the eyes of Jah, as detailed in his biblical narrative, as well as his death on the outskirts of the Promised Land. When Moses is a Rastaman, Zion becomes almost a guarantee for Rastas. As Marley sings in “Exodus,” “We know where we’re going, uh! We know where we’re from. We’re leaving Babylon, we’re going to our Father land.”¹¹² Yet, Moses’ punishment in Numbers 20:12 complicates his relationship with Jah and thus his role as ideal Rastaman. In this chapter, I examine why, in a Rasta hermeneutical approach, Moses’ inability to enter the Promised Land does not take on profound meaning for a people who hope to repatriate to Ethiopia, a place Rastas conceive of as Zion, suggesting that Rastafari minimize Moses’ punishment in Numbers 20:12 in a hermeneutic move that evades what contending with his exile-status would mean in terms of the potential for repatriation to Ethiopia and additionally allows him to remain an exemplar of livity.

Brethren Miakael Kezehemohonenow notes, “The people of Jah spoken of in the bible are Africans and black people everywhere.”¹¹³ This dissertation reflects on how Rastas read this truth and how practitioners enact an Israelite identity by way of their unique biblical hermeneutic. A text that was used by colonial forces to declare Africans justly enslaved, the appropriated, reclaimed Bible proved to be a source of hope for African and African diasporic people, one that details the presence of a black Jah and of Ethiopians, and thus one that confirms Rastas as Israelites. Instead of rejecting the Bible as the text of the colonizer, Rastas reassume its power, thereby denying colonial forces the ability to employ the Bible as a means of social control. The Bible is more than a tool used to resist domination, however. It is an instrument of empowerment and spiritual enlightenment, one that contains messages of black chosenness and divinity.

As the elect Israelites spoken of in the Bible, Rastas must uphold the responsibilities detailed within their system of livity. For Rasta readers, Moses and Samson serve as ideals of livity through their righteous behavior, thereby proving Rastas to be a chosen people, despite the transgressive nature of these biblical actors. By examining the manner in which Rastas interpret the Hebrew Bible, and in particular, the way in which they contend with Samson, Delilah, and Moses, this work offers new insight into the path of livity, enriches conversations about Rastafari biblical hermeneutics, and emphasizes the fundamental role of the Hebrew Bible in the movement.

¹ Ras IvI, quoted in Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 3.

² Born Nesta Robert Marley, February 6, 1945.

² Born Nesta Robert Marley, February 6, 1945.

³ Roger Steffens, "About Bob Marley," American Masters: PBS, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/bob-marley-about-bob-marley/656/>.

⁴ Stephen Davis, *Bob Marley: The Biography* (Worthing: Littlehampton Book Services Ltd., 1983), 144-145.

⁵ Vivien Goldman, *The Book of Exodus: The Making and Meaning of Bob Marley and the Wailers' Album of the Century*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 13-14.

⁶ "His foundation is in the holy mountains. The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah. As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee."

Bob Marley and the Wailers Music Video: Live at Santa Barbara County Bowl, directed by Don Gazzaniga (Avalon Attractions Incorporated Media Aids Limited, 1981, VHS).

⁷ Dean MacNeil, *The Bible and Bob Marley: Half the Story Has Never Been Told* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰ Throughout my dissertation, I refer to Rastafari as a movement, not as a religion. This semantic choice is based on feedback I received from practitioners after presenting a paper entitled "Moses and Rastafari Biblical Hermeneutics: Reading Revolution, Repatriation, and Righteousness" at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica on August 14, 2010.

¹¹ Written by a delegation of University of the West Indies faculty members. Rex Nettleford, Roy Augier and M. G. Smith, *Report on The Rastafari Movement in Kingston Jamaica*, (Kingston: University College of the West Indies, 1960).

¹² See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹³ Ras Sam Brown, quoted in Leonard E. Barrett, *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 111.

¹⁴ Rasta readings of the Bible take many forms, some of which are based on biblical text and others that are readings of cultural interpretations of biblical tropes, themes, and characters.

¹⁵ Leonard E. Barrett and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell are examples of scholars that determine Rasta readings to be "creative."

Sarah Bentley, "Boboshanti: 21st Century Rastas," *Huck Magazine*, August 2008, accessed April 28, 2016, <http://www.huckmagazine.com/perspectives/reportage-2/boboshanti/>.

¹⁶ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 103.

¹⁷ Leonard E. Barrett, quoted in Jack A. Johnson-Hill, *I Sight: The Word of the Rastafari: An Interpretive Sociological Account of Rastafarian Ethics* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1995), 3.

¹⁸ George Eaton Simpson, "Personal Reflections on Rastafari in West Kingston in the Early 1950's," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm,

Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 225.

¹⁹ Joseph Owens, quoted in William F. Lewis, *Soul Rebels: The Rastafari* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1993), 1x.

²⁰ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 103.

²¹ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 84.

²² Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 67.

²³ Rex Nettleford, "Discourse on Rastafarian Reality," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 311.

²⁴ Ennis Barrington Edmonds, *Rastafari: From Outcast to Culture Bearers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), ix.

²⁵ Johnson-Hill, *I Sight*, xi.

²⁶ Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), xi.

²⁷ This view was dominant through the late 1970's.

²⁸ The New Testament associates "everlasting life" with Jesus Christ and with righteous people. See John 3:16, 6:40, Romans 6:23, Matthew 25:46, John 5:24, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

²⁹ Sister Sheila, "The Covenant," in *Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari: The Second Itation, The Revelation*, ed. Mihlawhdh Faristzaddi (San Francisco: Judah Anbesa, 1997), NP.

³⁰ Joseph Owens, *Dread: the Rastafarians of Jamaica* (Kingston: Sangster, 1976), 143.

³¹ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 116

³² Kelly, quoted in Owens, *Dread*, 141.

³³ Oral A. W. Thomas, *Biblical Resistance Hermeneutics within a Caribbean Context* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 59.

³⁴ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 75.

³⁵ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 241.

³⁶ Peter Tosh, "Nah Goa Jail," *No Nuclear War*, EMI (1987).

³⁷ Adrian Anthony McFarlane, "The Epistemological Significance of 'I-N-I' as a Response to Quashie and Anancyism in Jamaican Culture," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 119.

³⁸ Nathaniel Samuel Murrell and Burchell K. Taylor, "Rastafari's Messianic Ideology and Caribbean Theology of Liberation" in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 399.

³⁹ McFarlane, "The Epistemological Significance of 'I-N-I' as a Response to Quashie and Anancyism in Jamaican Culture," 119.

⁴⁰ Nettleford, "Discourse on Rastafarian Reality", 312.

⁴¹ Johnson-Hill, *I Sight*, 23.

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- ⁴² Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 296.
- ⁴³ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 28.
- ⁴⁴ Barry Chevannes, quoted in Noel Leo Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 67.
- ⁴⁵ MacNeil, *The Bible and Bob Marley*, 149.
- ⁴⁶ Owens, *Dread*, 69.
- ⁴⁷ Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: New York University: 2009), 164.
- ⁴⁸ Nathaniel Samuel Murrell and Lewin Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 329.
- ⁴⁹ The phrase "Wresting the message from the messenger" was first used by Jean Comaroff in *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
- ⁵⁰ Murrell and Taylor, "Rastafari's Messianic Ideology and Caribbean Theology of Liberation," 390.
- ⁵¹ Some practitioners do believe in a messiah.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 109.
- ⁵³ Carole D. Yawney, "Remnants of All Nations: Rastafarian Attitudes to Race and Nationality," in *Ethnicity in the Americas*, ed. Frances Henry (Chicago: Mouton Publishers, 1976), 232.
- ⁵⁴ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 118.
- ⁵⁵ Edmonds also critiques the millenarian-messianic perspective. Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 118.
- ⁵⁶ Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Introduction: The Rastafari Phenomenon," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 4.
- ⁵⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 42.
- ⁵⁸ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India, and "The Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999), 11.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁶¹ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 1.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 21.
- ⁶³ Ky-Mani Marley, interviewed by Synapse for *Frank151 Magazine: Tuff Gong/Jamaica*, Chapter 30, 2008, 145.
- ⁶⁴ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 26.
- ⁶⁵ Ras Sam Brown, quoted in Price, *Becoming Rasta*, 6.
- ⁶⁶ "Inspiration," Oxford Dictionary, accessed April 28, 2016, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/inspiration.

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- ⁶⁷ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 72.
- ⁶⁸ Price, *Becoming Rasta*, 6.
- ⁶⁹ Barry Chevannes, "Rastafari," in *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions Volume 1*, ed. Patrick Taylor and Frederick I. Case (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 764.
- ⁷⁰ Frank Jan Van Dijk, "The Twelve Tribes of Israel: Rasta and the Middle Class," *New West Indian Guide* 62 (1988), 14.
- ⁷¹ Nyabinghi ceremonies are Rasta rituals that involve drumming, chanting, and reasoning.
- ⁷² Obiagele Lake, *Rastafari Women: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1998), 64.
- ⁷³ Though many practitioners would challenge whether such individuals are indeed Rasta, this project assumes self-identification as the requirement for belonging.
- ⁷⁴ Ernie, quoted in Gerald Hausman, ed., *The Kebrá Nagast: The Lost Bible of Rastafarian Wisdom and Faith from Ethiopia and Jamaica* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 156-157.
- ⁷⁵ Richard Salter, "Rastafari in a Global Context: An Introduction," *IDEAZ* 7 (2008): 6.
- ⁷⁶ Richard C. Salter, "Sources and Chronology in Rastafari Origins," in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 9:1 (August 2005): 5.
- ⁷⁷ Edward Te Kohu Douglas and Ian Boxhill, "The Lantern and the Light: Rastafari in Aotearoa (New Zealand)," in *Rastafari in the New Millennium: A Rastafari Reader*, ed. Michael Barnett (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 40.
- ⁷⁸ Janet L. Decosmo, "'A New Christianity for the Modern World': Rastafari Fundamentalism in Bahia, Brazil," in *Rastafari in the New Millennium: A Rastafari Reader*, ed. Michael Barnett (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 104.
- ⁷⁹ Salter, "Rastafari in a Global Context," 6.
- ⁸⁰ Each reggae artists cited in this dissertation claims an affiliation with Rastafari unless otherwise noted.
- ⁸¹ Many roots reggae artists are affiliated with the Twelve Tribes of Israel and the Nyabinghi Order.
- ⁸² Bob Marley, "Chant Down Babylon," *Confrontation*, Island Records (1983).
- ⁸³ John Paul Homiak, "Churchical Chants of the Nyabinghi," review of *Churchical Chants of the Nyabinghi*, production arranged by Elliot Leib, *Anthropologist* 86:4 (1984): 85.
- ⁸⁴ "History of Reggae," The Reggaskas, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://thereggaskas.com/useful-information/history-of-reggae/>.
- ⁸⁵ MacNeil, *The Bible and Bob Marley*, 2.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.
- ⁸⁷ Bob Marley, "Chant Down Babylon," *Confrontation*, Island Records (1983).
- ⁸⁸ Keisha Lindsay and Louis Lindsay, "Bob Marley and the Politics of Subversion" in *Bob Marley: The Man and His Music*, ed. Eleanor Wint and Carolyn Cooper (Kingston: Arawak, 2003), 77.
- ⁸⁹ Diane Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 125.
- ⁹⁰ Iqulah, "Rasta Magic," *Rasta Philosophy Vol. 1*, Rasta International (1985).

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- ⁹¹ Durm I Brooks, "Rastafari Rihddihmhzhhs," in *Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari: The Second Itation, The Revelation*, ed. Mihlawhdh Faristzaddi (San Francisco: Judah Anbesa, 1997), NP.
- ⁹² Hausman, *The Kebra Nagast*, 151
- ⁹³ Beenie Man and Determine, "Kette Drum," Digital B. (2011).
- ⁹⁴ Homiak, "Churchical Chants of the Nyabinghi," 86.
- ⁹⁵ Bob Marley, "Corner Stone," *Soul Rebels*, Maroon (1970).
- ⁹⁶ James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990), 157.
- ⁹⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance*, xi.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, xii.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 137.
- ¹⁰² Frank E. Manning, "The Performance of Politics: Caribbean Music and the Anthropology of Victor Turner," *Anthropologica 27: Victor Turner: Un Hommage Canadien / A Canadian Tribute* (1985): 41.
- ¹⁰³ Sister Sheila, "The Covenant," in *Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari: The Second Itation, The Revelation*, ed. Mihlawhdh Faristzaddi (San Francisco: Judah Anbesa, 1997), NP.
- ¹⁰⁴ Manning, "The Performance of Politics," 39.
- ¹⁰⁵ Psalm 19:14 reads: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."
Hausman, *The Kebra Nagast*, 150.
- ¹⁰⁶ Anand Prahald, *Reggae Wisdom: Proverbs in Jamaican Music* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 174.
- ¹⁰⁷ Decosmo, "'A New Christianity for the Modern World'," 117.
- ¹⁰⁸ Steel Pulse, "Chant a Psalm a Day," *True Democracy*, Elektra (1982).
- ¹⁰⁹ Hausman, *The Kebra Nagast*, 9.
- ¹¹⁰ Steffens, "Bob Marley," 253.
- ¹¹¹ Patricia Meschino, "Capleton- The Prophet 'Pon Tour,'" *Reggae Report* 13:1 (1995): 32.
- ¹¹² Bob Marley, "Exodus," *Exodus*, Island Records (1977).
- ¹¹³ Murrell and Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," 333.

CHAPTER 2: A LINEAR HISTORY OF RASTAFARI

Well, Africa must wake up, the sleeping sons of Jacob
For what tomorrow may bring, may a better day come
Yesterday we were kings, can you tell me young ones
Who are we today? Yeah, now

The black oasis, ancient Africa the sacred
Awaking, the sleeping giant, science, art is your creation
I dreamed that we could visit old Kemet
Your history is too complex and rigid, for some western critics
They want the whole subject diminished
But Africa's the origin of all the world's religions
-Damian Marley featuring Nas, "Africa Must Wake Up," (2010)¹¹⁴

Rastafari developed in slums of Kingston, Jamaica during the early 1930's in the wake of Haile Selassie's coronation as emperor of Ethiopia. Yet, Rasta roots reach back to West Africa and tell the story of people displaced, stripped of cultural identity, and forced into enslavement by the European colonial endeavor. Though slavery existed in Jamaica as early as 1494, the year of the Spanish conquest of the island, when the British Empire took control in 1655 the number of enslaved Africans dramatically increased. In 1662 there were less than 500 African slaves on the island; that number grew to almost 10,000 by 1673.¹¹⁵

The island of Jamaica was named "Xaymaca," or "land of wood and water" by Taino Arawaks, the indigenous inhabitants. By 1655, however, the Taino were all but wiped out by diseases brought over from Europe and the hardships of slavery. In the years to follow, the importation of slaves grew into a thriving industry. Under Spanish control, the Taino were enslaved alongside Africans, as were Spanish criminals; the British focused on the importation of enslaved Africans once they took control. Of the African people brought to the island, most were of Ashanti-Fanti heritage. British

colonists also enslaved Yoruba-Ibo peoples, the Akan people of Ghana, Akomfo, Ewe, and Kongolese peoples, among others, bringing them across the Atlantic to the “land of wood and water.”

According to colonial powers, as Dennis Forsythe notes, “Africa, in terms of this white-constructed, symbolic imagery, was the Dark Continent inhabited by ape men.”¹¹⁶ African slaves were thus imagined as uncultured blank slates. For, as Frantz Fanon recognizes, “It is the colonist who fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject.”¹¹⁷ Melville Herskovits corroborates that “Eurocentric rationalists claim that (blacks throughout the Americas) were a people without history and therefore a people without a culture.”¹¹⁸ As individuals imagined as devoid of culture, enslaved Africans were thought of as ideal tools for the plantation system. Thus, thrust upon displaced, enslaved Africans was the imposing ideology of white supremacy, and they survived “by either appearing to, or actually internalizing these stereotypes.”¹¹⁹

However, the African peoples forced to make the journey across the Atlantic brought their knowledge, cultures, and religions with them, passing them down from generation to generation, despite slavemasters’ efforts to distance the enslaved from kin and community. The interaction of distinct West African identities and practices in the New World led to the creation of a unique Caribbean culture, one firmly entrenched in African heritages and influenced by the experience of slavery in Jamaica. As Jeanne Christensen notes:

The religious amalgamation between 1655 and the early 1800s occurred among various West African religious traditions, not between African spirituality and Western Christianity. Diverse ethnic groups with distinct spiritual practices commingled on Jamaican plantations, but they shared broad patterns of belief and practice that allowed them to draw from all traditions in creating a Pan African spiritual practice in the new world.¹²⁰

These “shared broad patterns of belief and practice” were based upon the idea that:

Everything has essence – a force or energy which permeates the world – and all essence is sacred. Infused into creation from God on High, Spirit creates a fundamentally harmonious universe, and human beings have the responsibility to remain in right relation to this creator. Human beings can access spirits and ancestors.¹²¹

Moreover, in this shared “African worldview” the spirit is experienced “through rhythmic dancing, drumming, and singing. Revitalization rather than salvation is the goal.”¹²²

Though Rastafari do not believe in spirits (with the exception of a popular and yet often denied belief in duppies, malevolent spirits), their sense of the fluidity of time puts them in constant contact with ancestors, their conception of the power of the natural world accords with the above statement, and they believe that by upholding the requirements of lividity, the world will fall in to harmonious order. Drumming, song, and rhythmic dance are also essential forms of Rasta spirituality.

West African practice and belief contribute greatly to Rastafari, as they did to the religious and cultural expressions of the slave community in colonial Jamaica. But, enslaved people were also highly influenced by the Christian missionaries who came to Jamaica in the 18th and early 19th century. Over the course of the first century of British rule of Jamaica, the British did not teach Christianity to their slaves for they reasoned that they had “amusements of their own.”¹²³ Despite the fact that the Anglican Church did not minister to the enslaved population until 1825, the religious landscape of colonial Jamaica was infused with Christian elements. This mixture of African religious practice and belief with Christianity manifested in uniquely “African-derived spiritual expression in the Caribbean.”¹²⁴

Missionaries in Jamaica

Notwithstanding an Anglican disinterest in ministering to the enslaved community, other religious orders thought it imperative to offer some form of salvation to the victimized masses. German Moravians were the first non-Anglican Protestant missionaries to arrive in Jamaica in 1754.¹²⁵ Methodists followed in 1789, Baptists in 1814, and Presbyterians in 1823. Exposing enslaved people to biblical passages, including Genesis 9:18-27 and Leviticus 25:44 (“Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids.”), Moravians and other early missionaries to Jamaica rationalized slavery by declaring black inferiority, encouraging meekness and obedience from slaves, and presenting messages of a white Jah and a white Jesus.¹²⁶ Thus, colonists and missionaries extracted a political message of control and ownership from a politically ambiguous book.¹²⁷

A white Godhead authenticated by means of biblical sanction the right of white jurisdiction over blacks. If Jah was white, then whites were inherently divine and made in the image of Jah. As Fredrick Douglass states, “Fear, awe, and obedience became interwoven into the very nature of the slaves.”¹²⁸ Black submission to white slavemasters seemed only natural. According to Forsythe, enslaved Jamaicans became “cocained” by the colonialist interpretations, which left them “subservient to ancient superstition that rendered them unable to deal with present realities. . . . That was the point for the introduction of the Bible to slaves in the first place.”¹²⁹ Furthermore, as Leonard Barrett recognizes, missionaries and colonists denied black dignity by “daily presenting to them (Afro-Jamaicans) a god who expects one to be humble and to bear suffering and shame in this life for an imaginary heaven somewhere in the sky after death.”¹³⁰

As the Moravian missionaries encouraged adherence to Christianity, they attempted to strip away the African practices of enslaved people by declaring them evil. Not surprisingly, their efforts did not resonate with many in the slave community. Though the Moravians did not effectively engage enslaved people, American Baptist missionaries, including George Gibbs, Moses Baker, George Lewis, and George Liele, enjoyed success in their mission with the forms of Africanized Baptist Christianity that they preached.¹³¹ Liele, an African-American who fled America to come to Jamaica because he feared re-enslavement, established the first Baptist church on the island, the Ethiopian Baptist Church, in 1784. The congregations started by him and the other Baptist men mentioned above became known as “Native Baptist” or “Ethiopian” churches. Within these congregations, elements of an African worldview that were stifled by other missionary efforts were embraced, like an emphasis on the value of dreams and visions.¹³² These groups also showed an interest in the bodily wellbeing of enslaved African people.¹³³

Despite the Africanized forms of Christianity manifesting in Jamaica in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the colonial system’s employment of biblical symbolism to ensure black meekness continued well into the 1800’s, as demonstrated by the hymns taught to Afro-Jamaicans. Afro-Jamaicans sang in churches of various denominations: “My heart was black with sin until the savior came in,” “Christ cleansed my heart from sin and made me white within,” and “Whiter than snow, yes whiter than snow; Lord wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”¹³⁴ Perhaps without a conscious awareness of the racializing resonance of familiar hymnals, black Jamaicans participated in the inculcation of black inferiority in the Jamaican habitus as they sung.

The racial stratification system that took shape in Jamaica in large part because of a colonial reading of the Bible as a text that sanctions white superiority became inculcated into the habitus of island; it remained prominent in Jamaica after the emancipation of slaves in 1834 and even through independence from British colonial rule in 1962. Jamaican society, even today, prioritizes whiteness over blackness, Europeanness over Africanity. Rex Nettleford opines that:

Although the Jamaican populace is mostly of African descent and tends to act according to the rhythms (modes of being and acting) of their African heritage, the people find themselves in a situation where African cultural mores and expressions are defined as crude and uncultured.¹³⁵

For that reason, individuals attempt to become increasingly white-like. An examination of Jamaican linguistic patterns offers examples of speakers' desires to achieve a European, white ideal. Jamaicans often use a British accent in a quest for a white aesthetic.¹³⁶ For, "to copy England (in speech) is good; to speak Jamaican is bad."¹³⁷ The common Jamaican saying, "Nothin' black evah good" is also expressive of this cultural prioritization of whiteness.¹³⁸

The desire to become white-like is not isolated to speech, however. The popularity of hair straightening and skin lightening procedures in contemporary Jamaica, two beauty treatments meant to achieve a European aesthetic, is demonstrative of a predilection towards a European physical appearance, as is the persistent practice among Jamaican mothers of pinching a child's nose so that it will become narrow like an idealized European nose.¹³⁹ As Nettleford notes, there remains a continued Jamaican societal dependence on:

Persistent elements of race, color, and class designations as effective determinants of ranking and status in a social structure akin to that of the Middle Ages. Such a structure has given to the dynamics of social change a

vaulting ascent of the entire Jamaican complex, leaving those at the base to stagnate there.¹⁴⁰

Revolution in Jamaica

The infiltration of the psychologically damaging ideas of black inferiority posed during the colonial period and continues to pose today an existential dilemma for black men and women. For, retaining a positive sense of self as a black person living in a society that declares blackness worthless is a lofty goal. Paget Henry underscores how “the colonial situation created an ‘existential deviation’ in the psyche of the Afro-Caribbean” living in “an anti-black world from which he or she must be extricated.”¹⁴¹ According to Bob Marley, it is the responsibility of each Afro-Caribbean person to free his or herself from this anti-black mentality. Marley advises his people: “Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, / None but our self can free our minds.”¹⁴² Frantz Fanon suggests that in order for a controlled, beset upon people to reclaim a sense of worth and escape the grasp of “commanding bodies,” the controlled population must assert their humanity and freedom by means of political revolution. In order to free themselves from colonial society’s power structure then, Afro-Caribbean people must actively reshape culture through insurgency. Like Marley, Fanon argues that, “Liberation does not come as a gift from anybody; it is seized by the masses with their own hands.”¹⁴³

Fanon theorizes that in every scenario in which one culture dominates another, colonized subjects are pushed to violence. “To blow the colonial world to smithereens is henceforth a clear image within the grasp and imagination of every colonized subject. Dislocate the colonial world... to destroy the colonists sector.”¹⁴⁴ As Fanon argues, the use of violence enables colonized subjects to recover an ontological claim to humanity.

This desire for destruction took several forms as Afro-Jamaicans attempted to overthrow colonial powers. Colonized people in Jamaica rejected white domination through acts of physical violence and by actively restructuring their mental perspective. Though these physical and mental efforts occurred from the very moment the first people were enslaved in Africa and forced to make the tortuous journey across the Atlantic to Jamaica, during the later part of the colonial period the island was a hotbed for physical and mental revolutionary behavior.

Fanon claims that:

In order to assimilate the culture of the oppressor and venture into his fold, the colonized subject has had to pawn some of his own intellectual possessions. For instance, one of the things he has had to assimilate is the way the colonialist bourgeoisie thinks.¹⁴⁵

But, as human beings engage in revolution, they reject the colonial framework of thought, thereby restructuring their very culture and renegotiating notions of self-worth. Fanon deems this process of the reclamation of agency the “reconversion of man.”¹⁴⁶ He continues, at “the same time that the colonized man braces himself to reject oppression, a radical transformation takes place within him.”¹⁴⁷ The colonized subject undergoes a radical transformation when he or she rejects the determination of worth assigned to his or her self by the colonizer and thus radically recovers the ability to determine his or her own future.

For generations, enslaved people of African descent and freed blacks rebelled against slavemasters through personal and collective physical violence and other forms of resistance to colonial ideology. It was those people who banded together, however, that arguably encouraged the most dramatic shifts in Jamaican society. Many enslaved people revolted by escaping their masters’ grasps and fleeing into Jamaica’s lush hillsides. For

example, at the time the British took control of the island in 1655, those who had been enslaved by the Spanish were “freed” and made to fight. As the Spanish began to depart for Cuba, at least 1,500 of these Afro-Jamaicans, Taino, and Spanish prisoners took the opportunity to pursue their freedom and fled into the hills to join established Maroon communities or create their own.¹⁴⁸ That these Maroon communities existed outside of the control of British forces was not lost on colonists in Jamaica, especially when Maroons began raiding plantations, stealing cattle, freeing slaves, and slaughtering whites.¹⁴⁹ When the British authorities responded to the threat posed by Maroons in 1739, initiating the First Maroon War, they met a fairly organized Maroon counter-offensive. The skirmish ended with the creation of a treaty that granted semi-autonomy to the Leeward and Windward Maroons, yet the treaty asked these communities to return any future runaways to their masters and for military assistance in times of need.¹⁵⁰

In 1760, Jamaica was the site of another major revolt, Tacky’s Rebellion, which began in the northern Windward parish of St. Mary’s but which spread to inspire an island-wide rebellion. The British called upon their agreement with the Maroons during the uprising, and thus Maroons were instrumental in stifling the violence during both Tacky’s rebellion and the Sam Sharpe Rebellion of 1831, which affected the western half of the island. The Sam Sharpe Rebellion is widely considered one of the most violent and bloody rebellions in the history of the Caribbean. Led by Baptist preacher Sam Sharpe and thus also known as the Baptist war, the uprising helped accelerate the official end of slavery in Jamaica in 1834.¹⁵¹

An “End” to Slavery

In 1807, the British officially prohibited slave trading in their colonies and on August 1, 1833, the Parliament of the United Kingdom issued the Slavery Abolition Act declaring the emancipation of all enslaved people in the British West Indies. The Act did not take effect in Jamaica until 1834, however, and when it finally did, slave owners were compensated for their loss of property. Formerly enslaved individuals were afforded no compensation for their suffering and were denied access to land or job prospects. Instead, colonial forces offered freed blacks a six-year internship wherein they would continue, essentially, to work the plantation system performing the same tasks asked of them during the years of enslavement while receiving little to no recompense. The six-year internship program made indentured servants of newly freed slaves who had little other opportunity. All the while, British colonial powers alleviated the financial loss of white slaveholders, offering land parcels and monetary sums for the loss of their valuable commodity.

This reality left Afro-Caribbean Jamaicans poor, homeless, and powerless to make changes in their lives. Even after emancipation, the Jamaican tradition of violent rebellion continued with the Morant Rebellion of 1865, led by Baptist Deacon Paul Bogle. According to Barry Chevannes, “The Morant Bay Rebellion was a sign of a more general political failure by the ruling class to effect an assimilation” of newly freed people into Jamaican society.¹⁵² Even in a post-slavery Jamaica, freed Afro-Jamaicans had to negotiate their place in a society with little space or respect for them. Physical violence was just one strategy by which this this segment of the population called attention to the issues plaguing the nation and attempted to carve out space for

themselves. An intellectual rejection and the reevaluation of the ontological framework of the island was another.

The Bible in Jamaica

The Bible served as a major source of this ontological rebellion and renegotiation. Afro-Jamaicans and African diasporic people across the Atlantic world revolted against the colonial project and answered colonizers' usage of the Bible to declare black inferiority and meekness by rereading the Bible as a text that described their inherent capabilities and even greatness. It also described their struggles. In particular, the Hebrew Bible's message of redemption and the exodus from slavery to freedom led by Moses resonated with enslaved Africans and their descendants.

As Nettleford explains, "Wresting the Christian message from the Messenger as a strategy of demarginalization helped bring slaves and the freed peasantry nearer a perceived mainstream as 'children of God.'"¹⁵³ African diasporic people rejected not only the biblical interpretation of colonial masters but also their ownership of the Bible itself and of the very logic necessary to read the text, a refutation with a profoundly revolutionary impact. As Joseph Owens states, "The orthodoxy of the Christian faith was to be fought by weapons out of its own armory- the Old Testament."¹⁵⁴ Rasta poet Mutabaruka's words similarly exemplify the power of the rejection of colonial ownership of the Bible and of Jah: "De Almighty Creator belongs to no religion/ Ideologies won't bring about a solution/ Now turn to yuh PSALMS in de Bible/ And show me your A.K. 47."¹⁵⁵

The interpretation of the Bible by Afro-Caribbeans dissolved the colonial project's ownership of the holy text and also liberated once enslaved people to think creatively and to assign themselves divine favor. As Dean MacNeil astutely recognizes, "It is not simply wresting the message, but posing a counter-message, a counter-interpretation that may very well be more accurate than the message as interpreted by the colonial authorities and their modern successors."¹⁵⁶ Afro-Jamaicans carved out new identities for themselves through a textual and intellectual form of revolution.

Afro-Jamaican reading strategies were inherently infused with African ideals and indigenous Jamaican thought, and shaped by the endurance of the brutal chattel slavery system; the experiences of African diasporic interpreters molded their relationship to the highly charged text. Both after and "During the slave period Africans viewed Christianity as an additional tool, and they appropriated the symbols and story in ways and to the extent that served their survival and enrichment."¹⁵⁷ The Native Baptist church served as one space wherein an Africanized approach to the Bible and to Christianity manifested. According to Charles Price, the Native Baptist church "became an exemplar of black radicalism" based upon its "moral economy of Blackness."¹⁵⁸ Within this church and in other spaces wherein black people interpreted the Bible, readers began to question the justness of slavery itself.

A growing emphasis on the Bible in newly emancipated communities is demonstrative of the importance of the text in Jamaica since colonial times. The Bible was of principal importance in missionary efforts and in the spirituality of Afro-Jamaicans, both in its written form and in the stories told throughout Jamaica that engaged biblical characters, themes, and tropes. While the churches of Jamaica were and

continue to be biblically oriented, the Bible also holds a position of importance as a guidebook and talisman in Myal, Revivalism, Obeah, and Pukumina. The Warner of the Revivalist tradition can be seen even today on the streets Jamaica preaching publically about society's ills, often holding a Bible.¹⁵⁹ The centrality of the Bible in these diverse traditions in their current manifestations is evidentiary of the continued prominence of the text across the island.

As Edmonds recognizes, during the colonial period, Afro-Jamaican's "education was rooted in the Bible, so much so that it was the only book with which the masses of Jamaicans were acquainted. This resulted in a kind of "Biblicism in which the Bible became the source of authority in all discussions and disputations."¹⁶⁰ For this reason, Afro-Jamaicans demonstrated a fervent need to reclaim the Bible and to read the text for themselves. As Baptist Missionary James Phillippo describes, in the early 1800's, Afro-Jamaicans had "an anxious, earnest desire ... everywhere expressed for the possession of religious books and tracts, but especially to read, understand and possess the Book Of God."¹⁶¹ Many pursued literacy, generally with the assistance of a church, in their efforts to read the holy text for themselves. Others benefitted from the oral tradition of Jamaica through the spoken transmission of biblical stories.

While the ability to read and to interpret the Bible had revolutionary effects on Afro-Caribbeans' sense of self-worth, the ability to access the Bible did not rectify the grim social scenario that they contended with. For decades, Afro-Jamaicans lacked a public political voice and struggled against the societal constraints put in place by the colonial system. Through the end of the nineteenth century into the early twentieth

century, most Jamaicans endured poverty, faced a lack of opportunity, and dealt with a continued sense of powerlessness in a nation that prioritized whiteness over blackness.

Post-Emancipation Jamaica

For generations after emancipation, the Jamaican peasantry squatted on government land, unable to purchase land for their own usage, as the economic system of the Crown colony became increasingly dire. The price of the sugar beet, a major export of the island, dropped dramatically in the years following emancipation because of European competition. And, poverty spread in Jamaica due to this price drop and years of poor banana crops. The resulting urbanization of the early 20th century brought about by falling prices of agricultural goods and the industrialization of the western world further acerbated the fiscal future of Jamaica.

Until the 1920's, the Jamaican economy was structured in large part around small-scale agriculture. The 1930's ushered in a capitalist infrastructure that island residents did not seem prepared for. Jamaican peasants moved in large numbers to urban centers, leading to the creation of slums in Kingston. Increased taxation and an immigration standstill in the United States enforced in light of the Great Depression furthered the island's financial crisis. Rastafari would eventually offer Jamaicans facing such hardship a venue for self-affirmation and empowerment, a way to reclaim self-worth, and a means to define oneself as holy.

Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, while Jamaicans and other African diasporic people struggled financially and held little political voice, Black Nationalist sentiments percolated throughout the Americas. As part of the larger black consciousness movement

active in the late 1920's and early 1930's, Marcus Garvey promulgated value in blackness, articulated a Pan-Africanness that unites all people of African descent, and called for repatriation for all blacks. Born in Saint Ann's Bay, Jamaica, on August 17, 1887, Garvey left his homeland for America in 1916, only to return in 1927 after being deported for mail fraud. While in America, he chartered the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League in his efforts to radically change the experience of black people everywhere.

Garvey was by no means alone in his efforts to empower African diasporic people. Alexander Bedward, for example, a successful Revivalist preacher who founded the Bedwardite movement, otherwise known as the Jamaican Native Baptist Free Church, was incredibly influential for Jamaican people, whom he encouraged with his messages of black nobility. Nonetheless, Garvey holds a position of honor in the eyes of Rastas and other Jamaicans because of his international success as a spokesperson and advocate for the Black Nationalist movement. His centralization on the value of Africa in particular resonates with Rastafari and was a fundamental reason Proto-Rastas emphasized his message; Ethiopia was for Garvey, as it is for Rastafari, the rightful home of black men and women.¹⁶² His command to black people to read the Bible for themselves and his celebration of the presence of Ethiopians in the Bible was also of tremendous significance for the founders of the Rasta movement. Garvey notably instructed his followers:

Since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only now started out (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles. The God of Isaac and of Jacob let him exist for the race that believe in the God of Ethiopia. . . . We shall worship him through the spectacles of Ethiopia.¹⁶³

Proto-Rastas, many of whom were Garveyites, admired Garvey's centralization on Ethiopia as Zion, his message of Pan-Africanism, and his hope for a black repatriation to Africa. However, the election of Haile Selassie as Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930 proved to be a crucible that engendered a general Rasta divergence from the Garveyite message. For Garvey, Haile Selassie was king, while for Rastas, he was Jah.

On October 3, 1935 Benito Mussolini led an Italian invasion into Ethiopia. At the behest of his advisors, Haile Selassie fled his country for England. For this reason, Garvey decried Selassie for abandoning Ethiopia during the country's time of need. This public defaming of Selassie served as another major fissure between Garveyites and early Rastafari. Intriguingly, Rastafari do not often discuss whether Selassie's choice to leave Ethiopia was a just one. Instead, they critique Mussolini and denounce his evils. Practitioners also infrequently discuss that on September 12, 1974, the Coordinating Committee of the Ethiopian Armed Forces deposed Selassie and executed many in his government.¹⁶⁴

The Formation of Rastafari

By the time that Garvey died, on June 10, 1940, in London, The Rastafari movement was rapidly taking shape. This reality did not escape the Jamaican populace. By 1951, the "Rasta squatter problem" was the focus of a government study, and in the same year longshoremen working on the Kingston waterfront refused to work with "Rasta."¹⁶⁵ In 1940, Rasta leader Leonard Howell formed the Pinnacle community, a commune-like establishment located on an abandoned colonial estate in Sligoville, St. Catherine, Jamaica. Howell, who accepted the title "Gangunguru Maragh," a combination of three

Hindi words, “gyan” (wisdom), “gun” (virtue), and “guru” (teacher), which he shortened to “Gong,” whose name evidences the Indian influence on the Rasta movement, was the first individual to publically declare Haile Selassie’s divinity.¹⁶⁶ He also wrote the influential Rasta text *The Promised Key*, before he was arrested for sedition in 1933 and imprisoned for two years. His community housed between six hundred to two thousand people between 1940 and 1954, when Jamaican authorities destroyed Pinnacle.

Though Pinnacle had been demolished, other Rasta groups were crystallizing, including the Youth Black Faith Organization (YBF), founded in 1949 by Ras Boanerges, Bredda Arthur, Philip Panhandle, Kurukong, and others in the Trenchtown neighborhood of West Kingston.¹⁶⁷ The Members of YBF were young and enthusiastic. Furthermore, they actively strove to eradicate Revivalist practices and Obeah, a West African tradition Rastas envision as sorcery and folk magic, from Rastafari. From 1954 through 1956, Ras Boanerges and Prince Emmanuel Edwards, who founded the Bobo Shanti Order in 1958, held annual conventions at Back-o-Wall, a Rasta settlement in the West Kingston neighborhood of Tivoli Gardens.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, the “Rastafarian ‘Universal Convention’” which took place on March 27, 1958 and was described by a reporter for *The Star* as a “gathering of the ‘bearded brethren’,” marked publically the commencement of the Nyabinghi tradition.¹⁶⁹

By 1961, when Norman Manley, Jamaican President and founder of the People’s National Party (PNP) sent a Rasta delegation to Addis Ababa, the movement had solidified its presence across the island. The mission sent nine people to Africa to explore the possibility of Rasta immigration to Africa; the delegation considered Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia as potential places for resettlement. Three of the

individuals selected for the mission, Mortimo Planno, Douglas Mack, and Samuel Clayton, were self-proclaimed Rastas.¹⁷⁰ While in Ethiopia, Haile Selassie attended a private meeting with the delegation. That Manley included Rastas on the mission speaks to the inroads practitioners made in the movement's short history.

As the Rastafari movement grew and as Jamaica attempted to eradicate evidence of its colonial past, larger Jamaican culture comprehended the movement's beliefs as "lunacy" and viewed Rastas as violent, unruly "bearded hoodlums."¹⁷¹ Most Jamaicans considered Rastas maladjusted youths, as lawless escapists whose rejection of Jamaican society rested on a laziness and a lack of patriotism. Jamaican society in effect characterized Rastafari as a dangerous criminal subculture. Rastas faced significant repercussions for the criminal label attributed to them.

Despite Manley's apparent interest in the movement, police brutality against Rastas frequently occurred, beginning in the 1940's through the 1970's. The police, envisioned by practitioners as Babylon's agents, frequently destroyed their settlements and cut many Rastas' dreadlocks, striking against a key source of their power and marker of their commitment to livity. On May 7, 1959, for instance, the police clashed with Rastas during the Coronation Market Riot, an event that led to the destruction of Back-o-Wall.¹⁷² The 1962 raid on the Nyabinghi camp at Wareika Hills similarly led to the community's obliteration, while the massacre at Coral Gardens, which took place on April 11, 1963, led to the death of eight brethren and two police officers.

Violence perpetrated by and against Rastas ebbed and flowed over time.¹⁷³ Yet, after examining "more than 100 pages of confidential police and U.S. Customs Service intelligence files," Dale Van Atta recognized a continued predilection to deem Rastas as

violent as late as 1987.¹⁷⁴ An article in *The Dispatch* analyzes the report and comes to the conclusion that:

While many religious Rastafarians are peaceful citizens who do not believe in the use of violence . . . the distinct subculture and use of illegal drugs has enabled criminals, the mentally deranged and revolutionaries to penetrate the sect. . . . These factors make explosions of Rastafarian violence not only possible, but probable.¹⁷⁵

Rastas fostered anxiety, anger and apprehension in the hearts of many Jamaicans. In deeming them crazy, violent, and escapist, Jamaicans attacked Rastas with “classic weapons in the arsenal of social control: labeling.”¹⁷⁶

The Jamaican government acknowledged that Rastafari was problematic, and deemed Rastas to be a threat to society. “Rastafari was something to be repressed, rehabilitated, or contained so that it would not disturb or corrupt the ‘civilized’ society.”¹⁷⁷ A reporter for *The Daily Gleaner*, Kingston’s leading newspaper, wrote, “If the problem of Rastas is not faced now, it is liable to get so big that no one can deal with it.”¹⁷⁸

In response to the “Rastafari problem,” the University College of the West Indies and the National Institute of Social and Economic Research conducted a three-week long “public policy” study in Kingston in 1960, the results of which comprised “The University Report.”¹⁷⁹ A Jamaican government-sponsored investigation, the work examines Rastafari as an urban phenomenon and analyzes Rastafari theology, as well as its lack of institutionalism. The main thrust of this text examines the socio-economic conditions out of which Rastafari developed and within which it flourished. The study reasons that Rastafari thrived due to poverty and rampant unemployment in Jamaica. Authors Roy Augier, M. G. Smith, and Nettleford note that “in the dense slum areas the

prevailing doctrine and ideology is now Ras Tafari; in the equally dense and better built lower-income residential areas . . . the doctrine is well represented.”¹⁸⁰ In one sense a work of “public policy,” the text strategizes how best to remedy the deplorable situation of many Jamaicans.

Also implicit in the report is a desire to resolve a “Rastafari problem.” For, when understood as a direct result of abhorrent social conditions, Rastafari can be interpreted as a psychological coping mechanism, one that channels the aggression and angst of a downtrodden people, and one that is inherently dangerous. This perspective is not limited to “The University Report” though. Jack Johnson-Hill deems Rastafari, for instance, to be caused by “a collective pathology arising out of a psychological inability to cope with oppression.”¹⁸¹ Furthermore, as Barrett notes, “The rage of a deep psychic revenge may surface with unpredictable consequences.”¹⁸² Rastafari violence, Barrett admonishes, is mostly of a verbal variety. However, he recognizes Rastafari’s “dysfunctional” realities and suggests that Rastafari verbal violence has the propensity to bubble over into physical violence. To classify a movement predicated upon the reclamation of a positive sense of self as pathology or as wholly violent is to ignore the system of violence that Rastafari hopes to eradicate, however.

Rastafari threatens a conception of European superiority by claiming black worth and even black holiness.¹⁸³ As such, the movement was received in its infancy with hesitancy and fear by most of Jamaican society. Jamaican culture reacted negatively to Rastas’ appearance and behavior. Many lower class Jamaicans joined the middle and upper class in recoiling from Rastas out of fear and discomfort based upon practitioners’ rejection of European cultural mores. In order to curb the threat the government identified

as posed by the movement, after “The University Report” was published the Jamaican government pursued a policy of “rehabilitation/accommodation” for early practitioners.¹⁸⁴ Manley’s mission to Africa to find a new home for Rastafari takes on another level of meaning in light of this element of the report.

The Jamaican government saw the benefit of relocating Rastas, but practitioners themselves also saw their potential move to Africa as an ideal prospect, one clearly initiated by Jah. Furthermore, Rastas saw their mission as holy, even if it inspired distress in non-practitioners. Rastafari embrace the dread their visible and auditory rejection of cultural norms inspires in Babylon’s society, and they hope that by unsettling peoples’ perspective they can enlighten Jah’s chosen people who have not yet recognized their true nature as I-n-I.

While the dreadlocks and anti-establishment attitude of Rastas raised concerns for non-practitioners during the early stages of the movement’s development, it was the anti-white stance of early Rastafari that seemed to pose the greatest threat. As Howell traveled across Jamaica between 1933 and 1940 attempting to recruit new members to Rastafari, he advocated six principles:

(1) Hatred for the white race; (2) the complete superiority of the Black race; (3) revenge on whites for their wickedness; (4) the negation, persecution, and humiliation of the government and legal bodies of Jamaica; (5) preparation to go back top Africa; and (6) acknowledging Emperor Haile Selassie as the Supreme Being and only ruler of Black people.¹⁸⁵

Howell’s tenets are demonstrative of an overtly anti-white and anti-Jamaica rhetoric employed by Rastas in the movement’s formative years between the mid 1930’s through the 1950’s. Practitioners looked to the Bible to prove the justness of Howell’s principles, finding within its pages proof of white evils and ineptitude. For example, Daniel 2:31-42

proved that blacks were destined to rule the world and that whites, as a “kingdom inferior to thee,” would destroy themselves because of their folly (2:39). Whiteness itself became, for Rasta interpreters, the result of Jah’s castigation, as proven by Genesis 3, 9, and Numbers 12. The anti-white sentiment of early practitioners that manifested in interpretations of Genesis 3, 9, and Numbers 12, still is apparent today in some manifestations of Rastafari, though the racial consciousness of Rastas has diversified significantly since the movement’s origins.

Jamaican independence from England in 1962 corresponded with a growing identification of Jamaicans with the United States on account of the Civil Rights Movement. The spread of Black Nationalism and black consciousness in the 1960’s resonated with practitioners, as did the “Peace and Love ethics” of the time.¹⁸⁶ Consequently, in the 1960’s and 1970’s, Rastafari sentiments regarding whiteness shifted dramatically, while a belief in respect across color lines came to the forefront of scholarly and non-scholarly conceptions of the movement, pushing to the wayside the reality of racially charged, violent initial messages. The shift in the definition of “Nyabinghi,” a term used to refer to a holy Rasta I-ssemy, from “Death to white oppressors” to “Death to black and white oppressors” is a clear exemplar of how the growing acceptance of white allies and even white Rastafari impacted the movement. According to Ras Marques Benjamin:

There are no WHITE Rastas. There are none. Period. There are Rastas whose ancestors have been away from Africa longer than others. Therefore they have different skin complexions. A ‘white person’ is someone who has an imperialistic, domineering ‘European’ perspective. You cannot be Rasta and be ‘white.’ Every Rasta has a black African soul, no matter their complexion.¹⁸⁷

Through the very declaration that one must have a black soul to be a Rasta, more than a trace of anti-white racism presents. Nonetheless, Ras Benjamin's words allow space for Rastas of a light complexion. Not all Rastas accept the message of racial inclusivity, meanwhile, though many do.

The 1970's was an active decade of engagement for Rastafari; due to tourism in Jamaica, the emigration of many Jamaicans, and the popularization of reggae music, Rastafari assumed a public presence it had yet to experience, especially in America and England. Haile Selassie's visit to Jamaica in 1966 also contributed to Rastafari's validation. As a result, Rastas were accepted in an increasingly positive vein. "Designer dreads," or "cultural dreads," emerged during this period, as individuals without ritual or theological roots in Rastafari consumed the symbolic markers of the movement, namely dreadlocks and reggae music.

In Jamaica, the intelligencia and the middle class also became interested in the movement.¹⁸⁸ As Rastafari increasingly resonated with the Jamaican populace, it took on a new identity, one of an established religious path. Though the 1960's were a decade filled with violence between Rastas and police, the "Rastafarianization" of Jamaica became clear.¹⁸⁹ Rastafari became, in a sense, indelibly tied to Jamaicanness. And, Jamaicanness became synonymous with Rastafari in the eyes of a global audience.

¹¹⁴ Nas is not affiliated with Rastafari.

¹¹⁵ "Slaves and Slavery in Jamaica," Jamaican Family Search Genealogy Research Library, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com/Samples2/slavery.htm>.

¹¹⁶ Dennis Forsythe, "West Indian Culture through the Prism of Rastafari," in *Caribbean Quarterly Monograph: Rastafari*, ed. Rex Nettleford (Kingston: Caribbean Quarterly, University of the West Indies, 1985), 64.

¹¹⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 2.

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- ¹¹⁸ Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 1941), 111.
- ¹¹⁹ Barry Chevannes, "Rastafari and the Exorcism of the Ideology of Racism and Classism in Jamaica," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 57.
- ¹²⁰ Jeanne Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning and the RastaWoman: Gender Constructions in the Shaping of Rastafari Livivity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 13.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*, 2.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ¹²⁵ Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning and the RastaWoman*, 15.
- ¹²⁶ Jamaican Slaveholders did not introduce African slaves to Christianity until relatively late, although scholars debate the year, offering a range from the mid-eighteenth century, through the end of the century.
- ¹²⁷ Roland Boer, *Rescuing the Bible* (Blackwell Publishing: Malden, 2007), 4.
- ¹²⁸ Frederick Douglas, quoted in Jack A. Johnson-Hill, *I Sight: The Word of the Rastafari: An Interpretive Sociological Account of Rastafarian Ethics* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1995), 137.
- ¹²⁹ Forsythe, "West Indian Culture through the Prism of Rastafari," 77.
- ¹³⁰ Leonard E. Barrett, *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 108.
- ¹³¹ Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning and the RastaWoman*, 15.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, 16.
- ¹³³ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ¹³⁴ For more on the history of the Christian denominations of Jamaica, see Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994). Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Rastas' psychology of Blackness, Resistance, and Somebodiness," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 48.
- ¹³⁵ Rex Nettleford, "Discourse on Rastafarian Reality," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 115.
- ¹³⁶ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 175.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.
- ¹³⁸ Ennis Barrington Edmonds, *Rastafari: From Outcast to Culture Bearers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 65.
- ¹³⁹ Chevannes, "Rastafari and the Exorcism of the Ideology of Racism and Classism in Jamaica," 57.
- ¹⁴⁰ Nettleford, "Discourse on Rastafarian Reality," 315.
- ¹⁴¹ Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.
- ¹⁴² Bob Marley, "Redemption Song," *Uprising*, Island Records (1980).

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- ¹⁴³ Henry, *Caliban's Reason*, 2.
- ¹⁴⁴ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 6.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ¹⁴⁶ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 179.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.
- ¹⁴⁸ Nicholas J. Saunders, *The Peoples of the Caribbean: An Encyclopedia of Archeology and Traditional Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 175.
- ¹⁴⁹ Saunders, *The Peoples of the Caribbean*, 175.
- ¹⁵⁰ In 1795's Second Maroon War, the Maroons of Trelawny Parish fought with the British.
- ¹⁵¹ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 12.
- ¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.
- ¹⁵³ Nettleford, "Discourse on Rastafarian Reality," 315.
- ¹⁵⁴ Rex Nettleford, "Introduction," in Owens, *Dread*, xii.
- ¹⁵⁵ Mutabaruka, "Any Which Way/Freedom," in *Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari: The Second Itation, The Revelation*, ed. Mihlawhdh Faristzaddi (San Francisco: Judah Anbesa, 1997), NP.
- ¹⁵⁶ Dean MacNeil, *The Bible and Bob Marley: Half the Story Has Never Been Told* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 97.
- ¹⁵⁷ Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning and the Rastawoman*, 17.
- ¹⁵⁸ Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: New York University: 2009), 33-34.
- ¹⁵⁹ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 83.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ennis Edmonds, quoted in Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Dangerous Memories, Underdevelopment, and the Bible in Colonial Caribbean Experience," in *Religion, Culture, and Tradition in the Caribbean*, ed. Hemchand Gossai and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 10.
- ¹⁶¹ James Phillippo, quoted in Diane Austin-Broos, *Jamaica Genesis: Religion and the Politics of Moral Orders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 59.
- ¹⁶² The very anthem of the Garveyite movement, "The Universal Ethiopian Anthem," includes the lyrics: "Ethiopia, thou land of our fathers, / Thou land where the Gods loved to be, / As the storm cloud at night suddenly gathers Our armies come rushing to thee. / We must in the fight be victorious/ When swords are thrust outward to gleam; For us will the victory be glorious."
- ¹⁶³ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 77
- ¹⁶⁴ Joseph Owens, *Dread: the Rastafarians of Jamaica* (Kingston: Sangster, 1976), 253.
- ¹⁶⁵ "A Rastafari Chronology," Rasta Ites, accessed May 17, 2016, <http://rastaites.com/news/hearticals/RasFlako/ChronologyofRasTafari.pdf>.
- ¹⁶⁶ Robert A. Hill, "Dread History: Leonard P. Howell and Millenarian Visions in Early Rastafari Religions in Jamaica," *Epoche* (1981): 31.
- ¹⁶⁷ "A Rastafari Chronology."
- ¹⁶⁸ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 93
- ¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.
- ¹⁷⁰ "A Rastafari Chronology."

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- ¹⁷¹ George Eaton Simpson, "The Ras Tafari Movement in Jamaica: A Study of Race and Class Conflict," *Social Forces* 34, no. 2 (December 1955): 167.
- ¹⁷² "A Rastafari Chronology."
- ¹⁷³ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 137.
- ¹⁷⁴ Jack Anderson, "Rastafarian Element Worries Law Enforcers," *The Dispatch*, June 19, 1983, 5.
- ¹⁷⁵ Anderson, "Rastafarian Element Worries Law Enforcers," 5.
- ¹⁷⁶ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 81.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.
- ¹⁷⁸ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 94.
- ¹⁷⁹ Rex Nettleford, Roy Augier and M. G. Smith, *Report on The Rastafari Movement in Kingston Jamaica*, (Kingston: University College of the West Indies, 1960), 3.
- ¹⁸⁰ Augier, Smith, and Nettleford, *Report on The Rastafari Movement in Kingston Jamaica*, 33.
- ¹⁸¹ Johnson-Hill, *I Sight*, 41.
- ¹⁸² Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 29.
- ¹⁸³ Not all those who identify themselves as Rastafari identify as black, however.
- ¹⁸⁴ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 119.
- ¹⁸⁵ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 85.
- ¹⁸⁶ Johnson-Hill, *I Sight*, 30.
- ¹⁸⁷ Ras Marques Benjamin, October 26, 2006, comment on Radiant Light, "White Rastas," *Religious Forums: Rasta Movement DIR*, <http://www.religiousforums.com/threads/white-rastas.40606/>.
- ¹⁸⁸ For more on the diffusion of Rastafari into the middle class, see Edmonds, *Rastafari*.
- ¹⁸⁹ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 92.

CHAPTER 3: RASTAFARI AND THE BIBLE

Hallelujah, hallelujah
929 chapters in the Old Testament
260 in the New, making it a total of 1189 chapters
In the entire constitutional document
Hey, hey, hey no give me no argument
Stitchie deh 'pon assignment. . . .

Hey Genesis well a it fuss me bus
Dem tek off like Bolt when me pop out Exodus
Is like them hear news when me touch Leviticus
Number, Deuteronomy and Joshua
Give them Judges when them cuss.
-Stitchie, "Assignment," (2010)

While Rastafari is an acephalous movement, the Hebrew Bible holds great significance for many practitioners, some who read the text closely and others who benefit from a distant familiarity with particular biblical stories and themes. The Bible became a central facet of Rasta thought and practice in large part due to Emperor Haile Selassie's advocacy. Selassie spoke of the importance of the holy text in 1957: "It (the Bible) transcends all boundaries of Empire and all conceptions of race, it is eternal."¹⁹⁰ Encouraged too by Marcus Garvey's proclamation that each African person read a chapter of the Bible each day, early Rastafari engaged the text as they laid a foundation for their movement. The practice of reading a chapter a day remains popular today. Some Rastas also carry pocket-sized Bibles at all times, which they refer to when "citing up" particular passages throughout their daily life. Many read its pages alongside the newspaper, for they envision the biblical and contemporary realm as fused; the Bible thus helps Rastas make sense of current events. Particular Rastas envision the Bible as talisman and/or refer to it as a source of judgment from which practitioners accused of wrongdoing pick a psalm to determine their guilt or innocence.¹⁹¹ Others, even some who

carry the Bible at all times, depend on biblical motifs and tropes as their source material for their readings.

Though the Bible is an essential guidebook and more for many practitioners, others reject it in its totality, reasoning that it is a relic from the colonial past. For instance, as Maureen Rowe told Jeanne Christensen:

Personally I felt long time ago that the Bible done, was done in terms of its relevance in predicting. You would have people who would argue that at the point that his Majesty came, the Bible ended and we are now living in another dispensation.¹⁹²

And, an unnamed sistren echoes Rowe's statement: "My personal opinion is that the Bible done – it's just done."¹⁹³

While some practitioners reject its relevance, most Rastafari believe the Bible was written specifically for them but that colonial forces strategically withheld the holy text from their ancestors. As Bob Marley notes:

There was a time in Jamaica when you couldn't have the Bible. I didn't know that time. Yeah, but them tell me that there was a time in Jamaica when they see you with a Bible you go to jail. Because you know the Bible, it got too much truth. And people read and people clean. A man read some and whole heap of things happen right way.¹⁹⁴

Brethren and sistren find in scripture realities that diverge from those truths taught by colonial powers as inherent to the Bible, discovering in its pages messages of a black Jah and of black Israelites, messages of deliverance, and messages of their own divinity.

While practitioners cannot ignore the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, their ownership of the Hebrew Bible confirms that beyond a painful episode in history lies an original status of chosenness.

Malicious redactors of Babylon have historically shrouded African election. But Rastas attempt to derive true messages from a holy text laden with fallacies in order to

arrive at an untainted version. We see this sentiment expressed in Max Romeo's song "Maccabee Version": "Bring back the Maccabee version that God gave to the black man, Take back the King James version, it belong to the white man."¹⁹⁵ And, an unnamed Rasta quoted in the seminal "University Report" states that "the Bible contains the Word of God, but scripture shows that half of this has not been written, save in your hearts."¹⁹⁶ This dissertation contends with how practitioners arrive at truth and how they reason the "Word of God."

Musa Dube and Gerald West recognize that "Extreme mistrust that has become a regular reading strategy for many African readers."¹⁹⁷ This mistrust resonates for Rastafari as African diasporic readers. Practitioners conceive of the Bible as a sacred text that contains much inaccuracy for Rastas maintain that Babylon obfuscated the Bible's truths through "misphilosophy" and "politricks." As Marley told Gil Noble in September of 1980, when Marley and The Wailers were in New York City to play Madison Square Garden with The Commodores, Babylon's extensive redactions are costly for black people:

The Bible, them say that King James edit the Bible. Now my understanding is that if King James edit the Bible, I don't think him edited for the benefit of black people. . . . We know inna dis world here when white man edited. . . when he edited in our behalf yah know, (he) edited it to make it look like England wan' be the big big thing.¹⁹⁸

When read correctly, however, the Bible offers guidance, confirmation of self-worth, and a life path for Rastas that is befitting their station as Jah's chosen people.

Practitioners must only know how to read it. As Ras Bassa Rajah from Namibia notes:

The Gospels as it stands reflects the philosophy of the slave master. It becomes a 'magazine of falsehoods' if accepted in the 'dead' letter interpretation. It has served as a means of securing power and of supporting the ambitious policy of an unscrupulous priesthood who are

more interested in promoting superstition, making of God a bloodthirsty and damning fiend to be feared. . . . The text themselves are however minefields of Universal truths, they just need to read Daniel and overstand them.¹⁹⁹

In order to deduce the Hebrew Bible's original message, Rastafari seek knowledge beyond Babylon's redactions. As Barry Chevannes notes, "false passages put in by the white man for his own purposes are easily detected."²⁰⁰ Yet, Babylon's agents also removed essential parts of the text. Charles Price reasons that white translators of the Bible could not read Amharic, so they deleted pieces of text they could not understand.²⁰¹ It is up to Rastafari to reestablish their presence. Steel Pulse highlights the movement's method of biblical interpretation, singing in "Chant A Psalm": "In your hands lie your destination. The book of true life you hold the key. Mystical powers to you unfold. Seek ye the half that has never been told."²⁰²

Each individual practitioner interprets the Bible differently. Yet while Rastas have many ways of understanding the Bible, Nathaniel Murrell and Lewin Williams "outlined several common characteristics of what they call Rastafari's "black biblical hermeneutic," "1. An emphasis on experience, 2. The emphasis of Garvey, 3. The importance of Selassie, 4. An aspect of apocalypticism, and 5. A Zion versus Babylon duality."²⁰³ While their analysis is quite thorough, it would benefit from two additional points: 1. A Rasta claiming of an Israelite identity, and 2. The significance of livity. This chapter discusses common beliefs in Selassie as Jah, Jah's blackness, a "Zion versus Babylon duality," and the importance of an Israelite identity for Rastafari.

Burn Babylon

Babylon is a site of confusion in the Hebrew Bible. It is a place where in Genesis 11 human beings tried to reach divine heights by building the Tower of Babel. Their misguided efforts to reach divine heights and thus become Jah-like angered Jah and he consequently punished them in 11:7.²⁰⁴ From that point on in the Hebrew Bible, Babylon serves as a trope of wickedness and rebellion. For Rastafari, the term “Babylon” came to represent by the 1940’s not just the biblical land of Jah’s punishment and the site of the exile and domination of the Israelites, but also the contemporary land of exile from Africa as well as all systems and structures of white, colonialist hegemony.²⁰⁵ Rastas believe that the world lives in corruption, in the very clutches of Babylon as a societal structure divorced from the rhythms of the natural world. Conceptions of Babylon depend less on its role in the Bible and more on the motif of Babylon’s wickedness.

According to John Homiak, Babylon is contemporarily defined by Rastas as:

The entire post-colonial western power structure and its supporting ideology and political apparatus; the oppressive condition of ‘exile’ in the Black diaspora; the cosmic domain presided over by the pope of Rome . . . the source of death-dealing and destructive spiritual powers.²⁰⁶

Rastas decry Babylon’s tendency towards building massive structures, towards capitalist society, and towards sterility as being destructive and unhealthy. For, “If man allows the natural powers to be corrupted, then he himself will suffer as well.”²⁰⁷

In order to escape Babylon, one needs to detach oneself from the culture of Babylon and reject the ills of colonialist culture. Thus, Rastas actively “chant down” the “crucible of oppression that started in plantation slavery and that has persisted in post-emancipation and postcolonial Jamaica” by opting out of Jamaican society, claiming Africanness and black holiness, and through the implementation of a new cultural

system.²⁰⁸ It is in the Bible and in their hearts that practitioners find the path that will set them free from Babylon. As Marcus Jahn writes in his poem, “Ashanti,” “My forefathers were Kings/ They once ruled the world/ Now look at me/ I am a prisoner/ Because our history/ The half has never been told.”²⁰⁹ That half is available though to those who know how to find it. As pioneering Rasta leader Leonard Howell states, in order to escape Babylon and make strides towards Zion, “All that Ethiopians have to do now is build anew. Get out a new dictionary and a new Bible.”²¹⁰

Ethiopia as Zion

As Howell’s above statement indicates, Ethiopia is Zion for Rastas. Proto-Rastas were fundamentally inspired by the Ethiopianism of the late 18th century, from which they borrowed the belief in Ethiopia as homeland. Joseph Owens astutely notes that due to the Ethiopianist movement, “Africa, in a white racist colonial era, became...the possibility of black manhood.”²¹¹ In particular, the tradition’s reclamation of a worthy history for African people and its emphasis on a return to Africa resonated with the founders of Rastafari as they shaped the movement. Ethiopia came to represent, for Proto-Rastas and other African diasporic people, all of Africa; it stood as an ideological African homeland and represented a pan-African ideal, one that belonged to all African people who had been displaced during the transatlantic slave trade. According to Marley, “One of the main thing is that . . . when you accept Rasta, you become an Ethiopian which is Africa.”²¹²

The Bible also offered proof of the historic and religious value of Ethiopia; Ethiopians appear throughout the Bible, including notably in Psalms 68:31, Numbers

12:1, Jeremiah 13:23, Jeremiah 38:4-14, and Acts 8:26-40.²¹³ This reality proved for Proto-Rastas who envisioned themselves as the owners of the Bible that Ethiopia was their true home. Catman announces, for example, “So let us love our continent, Africa, for there is where nature loves more than any other dwelling for our forefathers. It belongs to us all – we are all the sons of Jacob.”²¹⁴ For practitioners like Catman, Ethiopia is a place synonymous with Israel and Jerusalem. Each name is a representation of the Promised Land of Zion. Marley too proclaims, “Someday gone be in Africa. Maybe Ethiopia or Jerusalem, yah know what I mean? Them ‘Bible Land(s).’²¹⁵ As Leonard Barrett notes, “to them Israelite and ‘Ethiopian’ are one and the same name— simply referring to a holy people.”²¹⁶ This fusion enables Rastas not only to claim the identity of those Ethiopians mentioned as such in the Bible but of all Israelites and to assume the promise of Zion as their own.

As Marley told Noble, reggae music is a vehicle for a Rasta message that encourages a sense of ownership of Africa and empowers Caribbean people to try to attempt repatriation to Ethiopia: “People never wasn’t so conscious about Africa and where them roots come from. Since reggae come now, people start talk about Africa, blackness . . . in a militant way.”²¹⁷ Influenced by the Ethiopianism of the movement’s founders, Rastas have been moving to Ethiopia for over sixty years, settling on and around the land in Shashamane, which Haile Selassie granted to the pan-African community in 1948. However, their presence has not translated in to citizenship nor has their dedication to Ethiopia guaranteed their acceptance in the country. As Erin Macleod contends, “For Rastafari, Ethiopia is the utopian Promised Land. Rastafari consider themselves Ethiopians. This singular self-definition is challenged by the reality of

Ethiopia as an incredibly diverse and contested nation-state.”²¹⁸ Despite this reality, Rastafari still strive to enter Ethiopia.

Like the Israelites spoken of in the Hebrew Bible, Rastafari believe they must endure for generations before reaching the Promised Land. Yet, Marley’s lyrics resonate with practitioners who look toward Zion, understood as simultaneously Jerusalem and Ethiopia, as he urges Rastas to pursue entry in to “Bible lands”:

Come we go up a Jerusalem one more time/ Come we go up a Jerusalem
one more time/ We have go pray/ Yes, we have a pray, / We have fe’ pray
for the judgment day/ So, come we go up a Jerusalem one more time. /
Them see their dreams and ispirations crumble in front of their face/ And
all of their wicked intention to downstroy the human race.²¹⁹

When they do finally enter Zion, Rastas believe that Babylon’s reign will ultimately come to an end.

Reasoning Jah’s Blackness

In its biblical approach and prioritization of African traditions, Rastafari serves as an “ideological assault on the culture and institutions that have dominated the people of the African diaspora since the Middle Passage.”²²⁰ In crafting an elect biblical identity for African people, Rastas invert conceptions of white/European superiority. A self-affirming, invigorating force, Rasta consciousness thus serves as a powerful weapon against the colonial enterprise as well as against the hegemonic grasp of eurocentric philosophies. In large part through their biblical approach, Rastas reclaim blackness as worthy, and furthermore holy, through what Rex Nettleford deems a “major strategy of demarginalization: religion.”²²¹

Rastafari recognize a story of their own chosenness, enslavement, and redemption in the pages of the heavily redacted Bible. They know that the biblical journey of the Israelites is their own journey because the text confirms that Jah is black, and thus that black people are Jah-like. If Jah is black, Rastas reason, the people spoken about in the Bible are black and thus black people are the true inheritors of the venerable lineage of the Israelites. Further, Rasta readers determine that if Jah is black, that Africa, blackness, and Africanness are divine.

In the quest to refurbish, or “build anew” the Bible, Rastas invalidate a colonial sanction of whiteness by imputing a black Jah. For, a black Jah means black holiness, black godliness. Their frequent usage of the popular phrase “God come Black” emphasizes the importance of this belief for Rastas. To decipher Jah’s color, all Rastas must do is examine biblical passages and recognize the truths in their hearts. In particular, practitioners look to Jeremiah 8:21, 14:2, Psalms 119:83, Daniel 7:9, Job 30:30, Lamentations 4:8, and 5:10 as proof of Jah’s skin tone. According to Owens, Joel 2:10 is also central to Rasta proclamations of the blackness of Jah.²²² The passage reads: “The earth shall quake before them: the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.” Whereas biblical scholars like John D. Holder contend that this passage depicts a plague of locusts in Judah, Rasta interpreters argue that it speaks of Jah’s blackness. Ras Sam Brown reasons for example that in this passage, “The scriptures declare God hangs in motionless space surrounded by thick darkness; hence a black man.”²²³

Brethren also depend on Daniel 7:9 to prove the true nature of Jah. Daniel 7:9 reads:

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit,
whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure
wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, his wheels as burning fire.

In this passage, Rasta readers envision a black Jah enthroned. Brown interprets Daniel 7:9 to read: “I behold until all the thrones of Babylon were cast down and the ancient whose head was like unto wool, whose feet were like unto burning brass, and he treadeth the fierceness of the winepress of his wrath, to execute judgment on the Gentiles.”²²⁴ And, Sizzla channels this passage in song: “Did behold/ Until the proud was casted down yah / ‘Ave di ancient of days is/ King Haile Selassie I Jah! / You know, with his garments as white as snow/ His hair as pure as wool.”²²⁵ Because his head is likened to wool, Rastas know Jah has the hair of a black man, and thus that Jah is black.²²⁶ Moreover, scholars of Rastafari also note that Rastas read Psalm 119:83 as proof of Jah’s skin tone.²²⁷ In the passage, a psalmist speaks, “For I am become like a bottle in the smoke: yet do I not forget thy statutes.” Thus, Rasta readers know that in this text, the psalmist becomes like a “bottle in the smoke,” and draws closer to Jah because of his darkening.

Owens and Erskine note that Rasta interpreters also cite Lamentations 5:10, in which a reader encounters the anguish of Jerusalemites after the Babylonian conquest, as further proof of Jah’s blackness and the blackness of biblical actors. Lamentations 5:10 reads, “Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.” Rastas read Job 30:30 similarly: “My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat.” Here, Job speaks of suffering at the hands of Jah. But, according to Owens and Erskine, the burnt imagery and blackness described in the passage relates, for Rasta readers, to Jah’s skin color.²²⁸ Here and in Lamentations 5:10, Rastas assume a relationship between suffering, blackness, chosenness, and Jah’s racial identity.

According to Owens, Barrett, and Noel Erskine, Rastas also cite Jeremiah 8:21 as proving Jah's blackness.²²⁹ Jeremiah 8:21 states, "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me." Rastas know that Jah is the speaker in this passage and that he announces his skin tone. Because Jah, the speaker of this passage, mentions blackness in conjunction with an expression of grief, Owens and Erskine assert that Jeremiah 8:21 calls into question a connection between sorrow and blackness. The same notion of the connection between blackness and the suffering of Jah's chosen people is evident in Jeremiah 14:2, which Rastas also assess as describing Jah's blackness. 14:2 reads, "Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish: they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up."

Lamentations 4:8, which portrays people mourning the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, functions similarly for Rasta readers. The passage reads, "Their visage is blacker than coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick." Rastas cite this passage as proof of Jah's blackness, even whilst the passage seems to relate to the blackness of mourning people who are "blacker than coal."²³⁰ Again, burnt imagery and messages of suffering feature in a passage that Rastas read as proving Jah's racial identity. In the above passages, fire and burnt imagery not only relate to the suffering of Jah's chosen people but also to judgment and rebirth. Ras Chin notes that "Fire, we know, is judgment."²³¹ And, as Gerald Hausman recognizes, "Blood is the sacred element of life, and fire is the cleanser of blood."²³² He continues by suggesting that he who thus tames fire "has joined in judgment; and has anointed himself, as in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel."²³³ In the above passages, then, the blackness and burnt imagery both associated with Jah and those

speakers who appeal to Jah can be read as indicating the fittedness of black people to serve as the anointed. For this reason, Rastas adopt suffering as an essential component of black chosenness and accept the role of divinely ordained sufferer. We see this reality expressed by IJahman Levi, who sings, “This heavy load that I carry personally/ It is for Jah Jah and I.”²³⁴ The very name of the band comprised of Marley, Peter Tosh, and Bunny Wailer (Livingston), the Wailers, likewise exemplifies practitioners’ embrace of the role of divinely ordained sufferer. For, though the promise of Zion looms for Jah’s chosen people, the Hebrew Bible describes their struggles. The Wailers sing of their own “weeping and wailing” as they continue to endure on the path to Zion.²³⁵ As Ras Benji recognizes, however, “Is the suffers find God.”²³⁶

For Rastas, as Jah’s chosen people, suffering is an inevitable part of being black and thus elect. Their own suffering mirrors that of the Israelites as detailed in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, building an argument that proclaims the blackness of Jah by employing biblical passages that describe bodily suffering allows Rastas to thus emphasize black chosenness by way of black suffering while simultaneously asking white people to serve as those besetting the chosen “sufferahs.”

Jah Bones reports that “God the Father decided to populate the earth mankind; his sons and every son must be of the likeness and image of his Father King Alpha and his Mother Queen Omega.”²³⁷ Rastas employ a racialized notion of Jah as verification of black worth. For, since Jah is black, blacks are “God’s chosen race.”²³⁸ Thus, black men and women carry the holy ancestral line of Israel as actors made in Jah’s image and are, as Ennis Edmonds states, “vehicular unit(s) for the carriage of God.”²³⁹ The popular passage Psalm 82:6 reads: “I have said, Ye *are* gods; and all of you *are* children of the

most High.”²⁴⁰ By asserting that the above biblical passages prove Jah’s race, Rastas ensure that they are the “gods” spoken of in Psalm 82:6 who are each “children of the most high.”

Rastas as I-n-I

According to Ras J, “Every black man is a Rasta! That Rastafari is in every black man and all that man has to do is recognize it” is a profound reality.²⁴¹ Practitioners believe that a divine presence abides in all black people based upon the truth that Jah is black.²⁴² As an individual acknowledges this, he or she appreciates an intrinsic relationship with Jah and with other Rastas as “I-n-I.” “I-n-I” consciousness involves awareness of these connections. Rastas refer to the self as I-n-I in a linguistic move that iterates each practitioner’s connectedness with Jah and inherent divinity. As I-n-I, Rastas are indelibly connected to the source of their own chosenness as “pieces of God.”²⁴³ Instead of the isolated “I,” Rastas are “I-n-I,” human beings fundamentally connected to Jah and thus never alone. Benji describes what his I-n-I nature means to him: “Man and Jah, together, in this flesh, in this moment. The only angel we’ll ever need.”²⁴⁴ Furthermore, Rastafari writer Dennis Forsythe states:

The little I or me refers to the lower self of man, to his body and its ego, that part of him which is born and will die...the Big I is the everlasting, immortal or “true” self that was never born and can never die. It is the spirit of divinity and holiness residing in the depth of each.²⁴⁵

Rastas express their unique positionality as Jah embodied through the notion of the self as “I-n-I.” By asserting the relationship between the self and Jah, or, as Jah, through referring to the self as “I-n-I,” Rastas make a linguistic statement of self-righteousness. For, each Rasta serves as an earthly manifestation of Jah. As

manifestations of Jah, each Rasta owns reason and can decipher a fitting path of livity. Marley notably united himself with Jah as I-n-I when he proclaimed, “I own the earth, you know, all things belong to I.”²⁴⁶ Moreover, when Rastas are I-n-I, each practitioner is holy and their bodies become temples to Jah. “We burn our herbs in our temple, and our structure, for our structure is our church,” describes Daniel.²⁴⁷ Iverton echoes this sentiment as he says, “I-N-I who know the king from long time doesn’t need to join the church. For yet I-n-I art the spiritual church in I-n-I own self.”²⁴⁸

Not only are Rastas the elect spoken of in the Bible. As I-n-I, they are Jah incarnate. Lansana Oronde Ketema of the Central African Republic speaks of his chosenness: “I AM he who is full of favour and a blessed one of Israel/ I AM set free as the winds that blow.”²⁴⁹ And, Marley further explains: “Rasta mean head. Fari mean creator. Rastafari is head creator. Head creator is God.”²⁵⁰ One black man in particular, though, serves for Rastafari as the ultimate manifestation of Jah. Rastas believe that Haile Selassie, born Tafari Makonnen on July 23, 1892, was the absolute embodiment of Jah on earth. Upon his coronation as Emperor of Ethiopia in St. George’s Cathedral, Addis Ababa, on November 2, 1930, he accepted the title “Haile Selassie,” an Amharic designation that translates as “Hail the Trinity,” and the additional title of “King of Kings, Elect of God, and Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”²⁵¹ Haile Selassie’s new titles in and of themselves indicated his holiness to proto-Rastas. His coronation signified the revelation of a prophecy for Proto-Rastas, Garveyites, and others in Jamaica, one that foresaw the crowning of an African King.

Psalm 68:31 reads: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hand unto God.” Proto-Rastas believed that Haile Selassie fulfilled the prophecy

of Psalm 68:31 as well as Garvey's 1927 pronouncement to "Look to Africa where a divine black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near."²⁵² His emperorship and acceptance of the name "Haile Selassie" confirmed for proto-Rastas that he was the black king they had been awaiting. But he was no ordinary king. According to a member of the Rastafarian Repatriation Association, "We know before that when a King should be crowned in the land of David's throne, that individual would be Shiloh, the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ returned in the personification of Rastafari."²⁵³ A small cohort, many of whom were disillusioned ex-Garveyites, began claiming Haile Selassie was Jah incarnate as soon as two years after his coronation as Emperor.²⁵⁴ Selassie was, for these individuals, "the black Messiah who appeared in the flesh for the redemption of all blacks exiled in the world of the white oppressor."²⁵⁵ He proved the truth in the Prophecy of Daniel 2:31-42, as read by Proto-Rastas, that one day black people would rule the world.

Many practitioners conceptualize Haile Selassie as the final manifestation of Jesus Christ. After seventy-one generations, Haile Selassie, crowned Negus Negast, or "King of Kings," was the returned messiah of King David's lineage who would loose the seven seals of the book referenced in Revelation 5:5. In his "Treatise on the Rastafarian Movement," Ras Brown expresses such a belief: "We who are Rastafarians are the disciples who have walked with god since the time when the foundation of creation was laid, through 71 bodies, to behold the 72nd house of power which shall reign forever."²⁵⁶

According to brethren and sistren, the Bible proved Haile Selassie's true nature. As Ras Daniel proclaims, "The Bible itself shows in many different parts that Rastafari is the Almighty God."²⁵⁷ And, in his notable interview with Noble, Marley shared:

See, Christ promised that he will return within 2000 years, yah know? And him say when him come, he will be the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the conquering Lion of Judah, true lineage of King Solomon and King David. Now, my life have great meaning to me. So, I really search a find out if God is here. And I search, I look . . . lookin' at Ethiopia. I look all about. I looking at Germany yah now because me not prejudice. Me look for God. Me looking at Ethiopia and me see one man, stand up with these name: Emperor Haile-I Selassie, name King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, conquering Lion of Judah, true lineage of King Solomon and King David, written in the Bible.²⁵⁸

Upon Haile Selassie's coronation, the Duke of Gloucester, son of King George V, presented the Emperor with a twenty-seven inch solid-gold scepter on which was inscribed "Ethiopia shall make her hands reach unto God" and "King of Kings of Ethiopia."²⁵⁹ According to Ras Joel Lawson of the Comoro Islands, proto-Rastas envisioned the gift as a "Septre of righteousness" and as the very "iron scepter" mentioned in Revelation 2:27 that many believed had been stolen from Ethiopia.²⁶⁰ As the owner of the scepter, Lawson argues that Haile Selassie "fulfilled HEBREWS Chapter 1, Verse 8, and manifested himself as SHILOH (the genuine LION OF JUDAH) in GENESIS Chapter 49, Verse 2."²⁶¹

Though the Bible proves Haile Selassie's divinity, an unnamed brethren suggests that, "We don't have to read the Bible to know that he is God. We read our Bible carefully, but I true inspiration we know that he is God. We know he is God through inborn conception."²⁶² It is the unity envisioned between Haile Selassie as Jah embodied and Rastas as lesser incarnations of Jah that enables this insight. Ras Jubie elaborates on this conception of self in relation to the Emperor: "I an I extend tolerance and let the people know that I an I King and Jah, Haile Selassie I, Jah Rastafari."²⁶³

Chosen Israelites

On March 24th, 1958, *The Star* reported on the first twenty-one day Nyabinghi I-ssembly, convened by Prince Emmanuel Edwards and Ras Boanerges, which took place at Back-O-Wall.²⁶⁴ Though John Homiak and Verena Reckford allude to large Rastafari gatherings as early as 1949 in relative seclusion in Wareika Hills, the 1958 I-ssembly is significant because of its public nature and its large turnout.²⁶⁵ As the police advanced on the I-ssembly in an effort to subdue the group, a leader declared, “Touch not the Lord’s anointed.”²⁶⁶ In his words to the Jamaican authorities, this unnamed leader claimed for himself and for his people a biblical title and an identity as Jah’s elect.²⁶⁷ Similarly, Wallace proclaims proudly:

We are the base things of the earth, that Christ speak of in the Bible. We shall confound the wise and prudent and shall set up a new world through the power of His Majesty. For no one didn’t know him but those who were called by his dreadful and terrible name, Rastafari.²⁶⁸

Because of their unique biblical hermeneutic, Rasta readers came to the realization that they were those biblical actors described in the Bible. Thus, as Price recounts, “Ordinary Black men and women were calling themselves Ethiopians, modern Israelites, and contemporary manifestations of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (biblical figures who survived being cast into a burning fire by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar).”²⁶⁹ In strategically locating themselves in the pages of the Bible, Rastafari “tap the wellspring of religious mythology in the process of resurrecting pride and purpose in the formation of ‘black’ identity.”²⁷⁰

As C. Eric Lincoln recognizes, “The black nationalist revives history (or corrects it, as he would say) to establish that today’s black men are descended from glorious ancestors, from powerful and enlightened rulers and conquerors.”²⁷¹ Indeed, Rastas

understand themselves to be the offspring of righteous kings, prophets, and priests, and they thereby disavow the biblical teachings of the colonial project, teachings that promoted meekness and subservience among African people. According to J. Richard Middleton:

It is by the conscious ‘indwelling’ of a larger story of meaning, a story larger than the individual self, and beyond the confines of the dehumanizing present, that we find meaning for our lives and come to a sense of identity, in a manner that enables us to resist the dehumanization of a world system undergirded by its own large story of meta-narrative.²⁷²

Practitioners channel the power of holy ancestors by emulating and embodying biblical forefathers as contemporary versions of these holy biblical individuals in name, dress, and behavior. In particular, Rastas look to Samson, Moses, David, and Solomon as exemplars of lividity and as ideal, prototypical Rasta brethren. From Bobo Shanti, whose ritual robes, head wraps, and detailed grooming practices evoke biblical times, to sympathizers who wear a Lion of Judah logo emblazoned on their t-shirts, Rastas employ biblical symbols and modes of behavior as means of self-definition.

While Rastas know their inherent relationship to Jah, Babylon’s deceit seeks to separate them from their election and I-n-I nature. One method of Babylon’s trickery involved whitening biblical actors and Jah, thereby shrouding their original blackness. Such a redactive injustice denies Africans a noble past. Rastas know though, as Rod Taylor sings in “Ethiopian Kings,” “King David, he was a black man/King Solomon, he was a black man/King Moses, he was a black man/From Africa, yeah!”²⁷³ As Murrell and Williams note, furthermore, “Rastas found defending this thesis both psychologically and theologically necessary.”²⁷⁴

Rasta reading strategies prove Jah's blackness and that all African people share an Israelite heritage; Rasta brethren stand as the elect of the elect, the priests, prophets and kings spoken of in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. In assigning themselves these biblical identities, Rastas resist domination and designate worth to a once societally denigrated self, thereby casting off the ideological framework of colonial thought. Early leader Samuel Brown wrote, "We the Rastafarians who are the true prophets of this age, the reincarnated Moseses, Joshuas, Isaiahs, Jeremiahs who are the battle-axes and weapons of war (a jihad), we are those who are determined to be free."²⁷⁵ As Samson, Moses, David, and Solomon, Rastas are Jah's chosen, the elect of the elect, while the evil Pharisees and Sadducees are white men of Babylon.

Rastas believe that Haile Selassie is a direct descendant of biblical kings, a notion that they adopt from Ethiopian lore as detailed in the *Kebra Nagast*, a text that follows the Solomonic line and traces it to Africa. They read an uninterrupted line from Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia and Jah incarnate, all the way back to the union between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba mentioned in 1Kings 10 and detailed in the *Kebra Nagast*. Marley explains his own quest to locate Jah:

Me look for God. Me looking at Ethiopia and me see one man, stand up with these name: Emperor Haile-I Selassie, name King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, conquering Lion of Judah, true lineage of King Solomon and King David, written in the Bible.²⁷⁶

Haile Selassie proves, for Rasta interpreters who envision him as their king and Jah manifested in human form, that Rastas are divinely elect. For, Solomon and his grandfather David are both Rastas and Haile Selassie is their direct descendant. In "Fallen Soldiers," Midnite confirms Selassie's direct connection to the biblical kings: "Coronate 1930 ina Addis Abeba/ David descent ina linear root ya."²⁷⁷ Solomon proves Rastas'

inherent rationality and wisdom, while David proves their rightful kingship as confirmed by Selassie.²⁷⁸

According to Owens, the first chapter of Song of Songs proves that Solomon is black and thus Jesse and David before him were black.²⁷⁹ And, Tribal Seeds, a reggae band from California, recognizes that Solomon is a dreadlocked Rasta: “You know say knotty dreads, / Them grown on the top of (Solomon’s) head, head, his head!”²⁸⁰ The royal lineage of David, Solomon, and Haile Selassie proves to Rastas that they are royal themselves. For instance, Damien Marley asserts the strength inherent in his pedigree: “Solomonic lineage whe dem still can’t defeat/ And them coulda never clone/ My spiritual DNA that print in my soul/ And I will forever own, Lord.”²⁸¹ Acknowledging this regal and noble lineage provides Rastas with confirmation of their inherent worth. Sizzla recognizes, “I and I and I are the Royal son of King David, / So Babylon, why you try to deny, / The ghetto youths loyal knowledge?”²⁸²

By accepting not only the Solomonic line but also the lineage of Moses and Aaron as their own, Rastas emphasize their election as Jah’s priests and prophets. As I-n-I, Rastas trust that they embody not only the royal lineage of David and Solomon, but also Jah’s divine spark, a spark that manifests, as in Haile Selassie, in prophetic and priestly capabilities. Thus, can Rastafari speak for Jah and maintain individual and communal ritual purity. Midnite sings of these many responsibilities of Rastafari, crooning, “Royal habits/ Manifest your priestly/ Your kingly/ Your soldierly/ Your royal habits/ Your royal habits/ Soldierly/ Defender of perceptual faith.”²⁸³

Because Rastas believe that Moses and Aaron were brethren and exemplars of lividity, all practitioners are able to accept their gifts as his prophets and priests. In Exodus

19:6, Jah states to Moses, “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Rasta practitioners explain that this passage assigns Rastas the responsibility of sharing Jah’s path of livity with non-practitioners.²⁸⁴ Reggae artist Stitchie, for example, takes this role seriously. He proclaims that:

I am a royal priesthood/ I’m a holy nation/ I’m a peculiar person/ A
chosen generation/ I am created here on earth to have dominion/ I am
fashioned in His likeness and His image says God/ I’m made a little lower/
Than the angels/ I am a king and a priest.²⁸⁵

Rasta priests hold a responsibility to adhere to the rules of the Hebrew Bible as interpreted by the system of livity. Furthermore, Rasta priests assume leadership roles in communal ceremony and worship; prophecy associated with their stature. In the Nyabinghi Order in particular, in which seven priests including a high priest administer to the community:

A Priest . . . is ordained by JAH RAS TAFARI. . . . He must be a man of -
Ivine livity with the prophecy as a guideline. The Priests administrate
around the altar of the Tabernacle and leads the congregation in prayer. . .
. The Nyahbinghi Priest . . . must be one of Ivine qualities, abiding by JAR
laws. The Nyahbinghi Priest must be one of justice who carries out his
works without partiality. He must maintain an ‘Ital Livity’ making sure he
does not defile the temple of the living JAR with abominable flesh.²⁸⁶

In the Twelve Tribes of Israel, priests must be similarly pure within the mansion. Those members of the house of Levi assume the role and minister over ritual and communal meetings.²⁸⁷ In the Bobo Shanti mansion, also known as the “priestical” mansion because of the intense purity-based regulations adhered to by all members, most every male adult is considered a priest or a prophet. Prophets are responsible for reasoning while priests conduct ritual services and maintain personal and communal purity.²⁸⁸ Interestingly, female Bobo Shanti cannot cook for Bobo priests but may cook for prophets when they are ritually pure, a state that is determined by a woman’s menstrual cycle. Within these

three mansions and for those practitioners who do not belong to the aforementioned groups, priests must adhere to the strictures of livity as defined communally and personally.

Rasta interpreters find proof throughout the Hebrew Bible and by examining their history that they, as Jah's elect, can serve not only as kings but also as priests and prophets. Sometimes these roles are envisioned as distinct but they are often merged. Sizzla acknowledges Rastafari's many roles, singing, "Umm, bless the prophet, bless the King, bless the priest/And bless up all the strifing youths inna the street/ Oh Rastafari love we show, yes Rastafari words we know."²⁸⁹ Moreover, Bongo J, a Jamaican Rastaman said to Charles Price, "Me is a king, a priest, a prophet...me no come in with no frauding, no bowing, no begging. My word...is merciful and true to the man who can keep this covenant and Testament!"²⁹⁰ German reggae artist Gentleman further echoes this notion in "Evolution": "Prophet, priests and kings, same song dem a sing."²⁹¹ Israel Vibration's "Prophet Has Arise" also exemplifies such a merger of these roles:

See Jah prophet has arise (prophet has arise)/ He's got a dreadlock in his eye (for them to centralize)/ Dreadlock in his eye (for them to organize)/ One has arise to judge and execute (Jah youth) . . . / Moses was a seer (prophet)/ King David was a seer (prophet)/ So the people shall never run short/ Of a King or a prophet.²⁹²

Since all male Rastafari are considered kings, prophets and/or priests, each has a responsibility to live a life of livity and to enlighten others, thereby ushering in a new age in this world. Each Rastaman has a role to play in conquering Babylon, whether through denouncing the ills of Babylon System, advocating a life of livity, or acting as a ritual guide. But it is Nyabinghi drummers and Rasta reggae artists that arguably prophesize most effectively to those peoples who have not yet recognized themselves as Jah's elect

who are trapped in Babylon System. As Barrett notes, reggae artists are “prophets of a new day of Jamaican creativity.”²⁹³ Using their rhythmic beats and poetic lyrics to inspire listeners, reggae artists have the ability to initiate real cultural change. Barrett further recognizes that:

The Rastafarians, who are living examples of Jamaican social and cultural deprivation, are now the prophets preaching to the elite about the conditions of squalor. Their songs carry the message to the living rooms of the rich; they are the social catalysts of the island; and no one can escape this message.²⁹⁴

Iya Karna sings a similar missive:

The prophets, Rastafari prophets/ Prophets from an ancient time/ Hear they are crying out from the mountain tops/ Revealing the truth loud and clear/ Many are called and a few are chosen/ So give thanks and praise when you hear/ The prophets, prophets of an ancient time/ They live fulfilling Jah creation.²⁹⁵

Both Rastas and biblical scholars recognize ties between impassioned music and prophetic communication in the Hebrew Bible.²⁹⁶ For instance, biblical scholar J. Gerald Janzen notes that the relationship between prophecy, song, and Jah in the Hebrew Bible is profound: “The song that arises in the throat is experienced by the singer as part of the very energy of deliverance that is the action of Jah.”²⁹⁷ As inarguably the world’s most familiar Rastafari and reggae artist, practitioners frequently describe Bob Marley as a prophet, both before his death and after his passing. Mr. Kelly, the accountant for the Marley Museum in Kingston, explains that “We as Rasta see him as a prophet. As an angel the almighty Jah use him to put forth his word and sing praises to him.”²⁹⁸ His son Ziggy Marley confirms this perspective, noting that “What my father said, though, is prophecy.”²⁹⁹ The tendency to describe Marley as a prophet is not limited to Rastas,

however. Janet DeCosmo “positions him in a tradition of biblical and modern day prophets.”³⁰⁰ She does so not “to mystify Bob Marley, but to demystify religion.”³⁰¹

Because Marley’s voice carries Jah’s message around the world, Rastafari envision him as a modern-day Moses. Ras Adam explains:

The biggest of all prophets - speaking directly with G-d instead of later prophets, who got their messages and prophecies through difficultly overstood parables in sights. I&I law, the Iriginal law, contains over 600 laws, and they were all given to Moses by the Almighty I JAH. Therefore, for I&I, Moshe is the greatest prophet.³⁰²

Marley carries Moses’ profound abilities. Massive Dread explains, “Bob Marley is the spiritual chapter of this time, like Moses. He lived amongst the people, helped the people, and told the story of the people like Moses.”³⁰³ Ranford Willoughby, one of Marley’s mother’s cousins, spoke of Marley’s grandfather to Timothy White. He compared Marley to Moses based on his life-story, not only on his ownership of the Word of Jah:

When Omeriah see Nesta, him see a son who carry four strong winds in him chest. Nesta come from de white man, from de black man, from bondage, an’ from de banks of de Nile, where de Word shone down upon de Great Pyramid.³⁰⁴

While Marley, who himself asked Jah to send his people “another Moses from across the dead sea” is compared to the elect liberator, fans and Rastafari too attribute him with the identities of Jesus Christ and John the Baptist because of the same prophetic gift. As Trinidadian R&B artist Billy Ocean explains, “Bob Marley for me, he came like John the Baptist, before Jesus Christ. John the Baptist came to warn us of the coming of the Lord, basically of who Jesus Christ was.”³⁰⁵ Moreover, both Spreeboy and Rita Marley describe Marley as having two scars on his palms.³⁰⁶ That people compared him Jesus and John, however, does not mean that those that drew the comparisons did not simultaneously read him as an embodied Moses. According to R. Matthew Charet, “many other figures

recorded in the Bible are believed to have been the embodiment of God in the flesh, including many of the Hebrew prophets.”³⁰⁷ And, as an unnamed Rasta told Joseph Owens, “Haile Selassie, Jesus Christ, Solomon, David, Moses and Aaron are all black and are all the same person.”³⁰⁸ Thus, Marley is just one manifestation of this everlasting prophetic entity. Countless other Rastafari too envision themselves as fulfilling the role of divine deliverer and prophet of Jah. The very name of Peter Tosh’s best of album, “Scrolls of the Prophet,” confirms his belief in his holy role.

The musical message of the reggae prophet can encourage in listeners a reevaluation of self-worth and it can incite real social change. For this reason, according to Anand Prahlaḍ, reggae musicians, including Marley, take on a “warrior/priest” role in addition to that of prophet.³⁰⁹ The warrior-priest role Prahlaḍ assigns to Rasta musicians encompasses prophetic voice. He contends that:

The role of messenger was taken to another level . . . by . . . artists who, in keeping with Rastafari philosophy, viewed themselves as prophets and priests. With the combined influences of liberation movements at home and abroad the priest became merged with the ‘warrior,’ resulting in a warrior/priest persona that dominates roots reggae.³¹⁰

Furthermore, the role of priest and prophet merge in song, though sometimes a priestly emphasis on healing and the spiritual realm take precedence, while other times a prophetic interest in foreseeing the future or analyzing the past is more prominent. Nonetheless, these roles are generally fused and often indistinguishable. Perhaps this is because, as Prahlaḍ notes, wisdom is one of the prominent elements of prophecy and also “is one of the most essential characteristics of the warrior/priest, who embodies Rastafari worldview and accepts the role of contemporary social/spiritual guide.”³¹¹

Moses and Samson prove for practitioners, including reggae artists, that they are the prophets and priests described in the Bible and that they are Jah's warriors. Moses speaks for and with Jah and outlines the requirements of livity in his biblical narrative, thereby determining the fitting path for Rastas. And, Samson's dreadlocks and Nazirite identity prove that he is an ultimate Rastaman warrior. He is an exemplar of livity despite the defiling behavior that he engages in that is detailed in his biblical narrative. Moses also disappoints Jah by contradicting his law and failing to mention his greatness. Solomon and David likewise err in the eyes of Jah, Solomon by marrying foreign woman and by being swayed to worship idols, and David through his lustful and murderous behavior. In their claim to these biblical actors, Rastas celebrate and embody problematic and extremely powerful men. Though their biblical narratives describe transgressive behavior, the Rasta embrace of them enables practitioners to claim the identity of chosen Israelites, a determination with profound psychological and practical effects.

Whiteness in the Hebrew Bible

While Rastas identify themselves as the warriors, prophets, priests, and kings of the Bible, they assign biblical identities to white people as well. In his introduction to Robert Mais' novel *Brother Man*, Edward Brathwaite astutely recognizes that:

The very idea that these "sufferahs" equated themselves with the children of Israel amounted to an audacious poetic act of rebellion but introduced a troubling consequence for the morality of slavery. It made the white people the demons, the Pharisees, the Philistines, the Pharaoh people.³¹²

Rasta readers also locate the origins of whiteness itself in the Bible, a strategy that makes whiteness the consequence of punishments doled out by Jah. The Curse of Ham in Genesis 9:18-27 is one of the loci for whiteness recognized by Rasta readers. Genesis

9:22 reports that Ham, “the father of Canaan,” witnessed his father, Noah, naked and drunk. He then reported his father’s condition to his brothers Shem and Japheth, who responded by covering their father without looking upon him in his shameful state (9:23). Because of his disrespect and his mockery of his father, Noah cursed Ham’s lineage: “And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren” (9:25). The *Kebra Nagast* also reports that Noah spoke to Ham, “Be servant to thy Brother (Shem).”³¹³ Rastas interpret the vignette, one deciphered frequently as proof of blacks’ natural servitude to whites by anti-black racists, as ascertaining the opposite racial dynamic.³¹⁴ Leonard Howell suggests that in this episode Ham is cursed with whiteness: “Blacks who were cursed in the Noah-Ham story were afflicted with a disease that turned them white, thus giving birth to the white race.”³¹⁵

However, Rastas cannot fully disclaim the heritage of Ham for the story of his grandson Nimrod, to whom Genesis 10:8 assigns the descriptor of “mighty,” is important to Rasta claims of black superiority.³¹⁶ Nimrod, the son of Cush and grandson of Ham, has become a sex symbol in Jamaica over the last thirty years. He is attributed with large genitals and an active libido.³¹⁷ And, though not all Rastas prize him on account of his “skillful wantonness,” “they are impressed with the power that Nimrod adds to the argument for black superiority.”³¹⁸ That Nimrod was king of Babel, as detailed in Genesis 10:10, complicates a Rasta appreciation for him since Nimrod is thus the ruler of an immoral civilization. An examination of Rasta readings of Ham and Nimrod illustrates a unique Rastafari hermeneutic at play, one that allows them to assess particular elements of the family’s narrative as essential truths and others as redacted falsities. This strategy ensures that while Ham is cursed by whiteness, his progeny retains his original blackness,

a reality that allows practitioners to claim Nimrod's might and sexual prowess, even whilst his rule over of Babylon would seemingly confirm his whiteness in a schema without Babylonian redactors who may have wanted to claim him for themselves.

Another Rasta theory attributes whiteness to Miriam's questioning of Moses in regards to his having married a Cushite wife in Numbers 12. Jah struck Miriam with a skin disease on account of her actions, Rastas reason, thereby, turning her skin white.³¹⁹ Another popular perspective views Eve not as the mother of humanity, but as the mother of all whites, thereby of evil. Whiteness then becomes the original curse. By eating of the forbidden tree in Eden, Eve cursed herself and her descendants, thereby birthing the white race. Howell addresses the sin of Eve in Eden:

The Adamic tree of knowledge and Eve the mother of Evil . . . The Adamic apple tree, my dear leper your name is Adam-Abraham Anglo Saxon tree, that looks pretty and respectable to your eyes don't it? Yes indeed gross beauty is the Queen in hell, and Royal leper Adam and Eve and Abraham and Anglo Saxon are all white people if you please. . . . King Alpha and Queen Omega said that they are our parents, and the keeper of the Tree of Life. He and his wife are not any family at all to Adam and Eve and Abraham and Isaac and the Anglo Saxon Slave Owners; for that is exactly how His Majesty King Noah the Black Monarch was drowned at Antediluvia by Adam Abraham the Anarchy.³²⁰

As Murrell and Williams recognize, many Rastas assess:

Whiteness (as) a European curse that dates back to creation and the eating of forbidden fruit. According to this hermeneutic, Adam, Abraham, and Moses, from whom the Europeans allegedly descended, are all cursed whites. But in another breath, Abraham and Moses are black and fathers of the black race. So although Blacks are the true Israelite descendants of Abraham, they are not inheritors of the 'white Abrahamic curse.' What a hermeneutical scandal!³²¹

In Rastas' determination of whiteness as a punishment and in their assumption of the Israelite identity of biblical actors, including Samson, Moses, David, and Solomon, we see a distinctive and effective Rasta biblical hermeneutic at play.

Conclusion

In their assumption of an Israelite identity, Rastas claim the election of Jah's chosen people but they also accept the legacy of hardship and alienation from Jah, a story that resonates profoundly with a once enslaved people who still must contend with the ramifications of their burden of servitude. Though they know that the Bible is a highly redacted text, Rastas read in its pages of Jah's blackness, of Haile Selassie's identity as Jah incarnate, and of their true noble heritage. These truths present themselves as practitioners apply their unique hermeneutical approach, one that springs from their intimate relationship with Jah, to the text, leading to the empowerment and spiritual confirmation of Rastafari. This hermeneutic strategy also enables Rasta interpreters to recognize Moses and Samson as brethren despite Babylon's redactions to their biblical narratives.

¹⁹⁰ Leonard E. Barrett, *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 127.

¹⁹¹ Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 238.

¹⁹² Jeanne Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning and the Rastawoman: Gender Constructions in the Shaping of Rastafari Livivity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), 119.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁹⁴ Bob Marley, interviewed by Anita Waters, September 18, 1980, BobMarley.com, accessed May 30, 2016, <http://www.bobmarley.com/interview-anita-waters-09-18-1980/>.

¹⁹⁵ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 117.

Despite their belief that Babylon's redactors have edited the pages of the King James version of the Bible, it remains the version most frequently used by Rastas.

¹⁹⁶ Nathaniel Samuel Murrell and Lewin Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 328.

¹⁹⁷ Musa A. Dube and Gerald O. West, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 4.

¹⁹⁸ Bob Marley, interviewed by Gil Noble for *Like It Is*, WABC-TV, September 19, 1980.

¹⁹⁹ Ras Bassa Rajah, quoted in *Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari: The Second Itation, The Revelation*, ed. Mhlahwdh Faristzaddi (San Francisco: Judah Anbesa, 1997), NP.

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- ²⁰⁰ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 327.
- ²⁰¹ Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: New York University: 2009), 170.
- ²⁰² Steel Pulse, "Chant a Psalm," *True Democracy*. Elektra Records (1982).
- ²⁰³ Murrell and Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," 329.
- ²⁰⁴ Rasta readers generally envision Jah as male.
- ²⁰⁵ William F. Lewis, *Soul Rebels: The Rastafari* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1993), 112.
- ²⁰⁶ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 44.
- ²⁰⁷ Joseph Owens, *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica* (Kingston: Sangster, 1976), 144.
- ²⁰⁸ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 42.
- ²⁰⁹ Marcus Jahn, "Ashanti," in *Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari: The Second Itation, The Revelation*, ed. Mihlawhdh Faristzaddi (San Francisco: Judah Anbesa, 1997), NP.
- ²¹⁰ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 327.
- ²¹¹ Owens, *Dread*, 6.
- ²¹² Marley, interviewed by Noble.
- ²¹³ Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, "Rastas' psychology of Blackness, Resistance, and Somebodiness," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, eds. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane, 36-54, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 40.
- ²¹⁴ Catman, quoted in Owens, *Dread*, 228.
- ²¹⁵ Marley, interviewed by Noble.
- ²¹⁶ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 109.
- ²¹⁷ Marley, interviewed by Noble.
- ²¹⁸ Erin Macleod, *Visions of Zion: Ethiopians & Rastafari in the Search for the Promised Land* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 23.
- ²¹⁹ Bob Marley, "Come We Go Up a Jerusalem," *Uprising* demo, Island Records (1980).
- ²²⁰ Edmonds, *Rastafari*, 41.
- ²²¹ Rex Nettleford, "Discourse on Rastafarian Reality," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 315.
- ²²² Owens, *Dread*, 39.
- ²²³ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 105.
- ²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.
- ²²⁵ Sizzla, "Praise Ye Jah," *Praise Ye Jah*, XTerminator Records (1997).
- ²²⁶ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 103.
- ²²⁷ Anand Prahlad, *Reggae Wisdom: Proverbs in Jamaican Music* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 14.
- ²²⁸ Owens, *Dread*, 39.
- Noel Leo Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari Theology* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 166.
- ²²⁹ Owens, *Dread* 16.
- Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 166.
- Erskine, *From Garvey to Marley: Rastafari*, 334.

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- ²³⁰ Owens, *Dread*, 39.
- Murrell and Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," 333.
- ²³¹ Chin, quoted in Gerald Hausman, ed., *The Kebra Nagast: The Lost Bible of Rastafarian Wisdom and Faith from Ethiopia and Jamaica* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 87.
- ²³² *Ibid.*, 85.
- ²³³ *Ibid.*, 153.
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- ²⁴⁵ Dennis Forsythe, *Rastafari: For the Healing of the Nation* (Kingston: Zaika Publications, 1983), 5.
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- ²⁶⁶ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 93
- ²⁶⁷ The term "anointed" is frequently used in the Hebrew Bible and is assigned to biblical actors including David.
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- ²⁷⁰ Aminah Beverly McCloud, "Blackness in the Nation of Islam," in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Craig R. Prentiss (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 142.
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- ²⁷³ Rod Taylor, "Ethiopian Kings," Freedom Sounds (1975).
- ²⁷⁴ Murrell and Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," 329.
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- ²⁷⁶ Marley, interviewed by Noble.
- ²⁷⁷ Midnite, "Fallen Soldiers," *In Awe*, I Fifth Son Records (2012).
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- ²⁸² Sizzla, "As in the Beginning," *Royal Sons of Ethiopia*, Greensleeves Records (1999).
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- ²⁹⁸ Mr. Kelly, “Mr. Kelly,” *Frank151 Magazine: Tuff Gong/ Jamaica*, Chapter 30, 2008, 40.
- ²⁹⁹ Hausman, *The Kebra Nagast*, 8.
- ³⁰⁰ Dean MacNeil, *The Bible and Bob Marley: Half the Story Has Never Been Told* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 23.
- ³⁰¹ Janet L. DeCosmo, “Bob Marley: Religious Prophet?” in *Bob Marley: The Man and His Music*, ed. Eleanor Wint and Carolyn Cooper (Kingston: Arawak, 2003), 71.
- ³⁰² Ras Adam, June 15, 2008 (4:34 p.m.), comment on John, “Moses,” *Rasta Nick’s Forum*, June 14, 2008, <http://forums.rasta-man.co.uk/smf/index.php?topic=5187.0>.
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- ³⁰⁸ Joseph Owens, *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica* (Kingston: Sangster, 1976), 141.
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- ³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

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³¹² Kwame Dawes, "Foreword" in Robert Mais, *Brother Man* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1985), 7.

³¹³ Hausman, *The Kebra Nagast*, 29

³¹⁴ For specific examples of the dependence on the Curse of Ham to justify slavery, see David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³¹⁵ Murrell and Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," 331.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 331.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 331.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 331.

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³²⁰ G.G. Maragh, *The Promised Key*, reproduced in William David Spencer, "The First Chant: Leonard Howell's *The Promised Key*," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 379.

³²¹ Murrell and Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," 332.

CHAPTER 4: LIVITY: TAKING THE ZIONIC PATH OF RASTAFARI

Oh, it's a life of a livity,
Lived by the fathers of our history,
Uphold the anciency and prophecy,
Trust in the power of the Trinity, yeah,
Got to believe in His Majesty,
Oh yes, his lineage an divinity,
The first step is serenity,
Knowing one self's true royalty, yeah.
-Morgan Heritage, "Don't Haffi Dread," (1999)

As Diane Austin-Broos contends, Jamaicans often conflate the contemporary world with the biblical in a “symbolic mediation of Jamaica through the Bible. . . . The representation of Jamaica through a biblical landscape and narrative becomes even more powerful with the intersection of biblical and Jamaican myth.”³²² In order to negotiate their world, Jamaicans use a “dialectic of scripture and experience.”³²³ Furthermore, Rastafari readers in Jamaica envision the island as a biblical land and themselves as a biblical people. In their biblical conception of the world, Rastas serve as the true Israelites while Jamaica and all other societies of the West are wicked lands that exemplify the nefarious biblical trope of Babylon. Rastafari living outside of Ethiopia then live in lands reigned by Babylon. Babylon, in this schema, is an immoral and corrupting society that alienates Rastas, as true Israelites, from their divine nature, thereby distancing them from Jah. It is through the rejection of Babylonian culture and through the pursuit of a pure and divinely determined lifestyle called livity that Rastas draw ever closer to Zion. This chapter examines a Rastafari conception of purity, negotiating how a desire for purity factors into practitioners’ pursuance of livity. Moreover, this chapter interrogates practitioners’ adoption of what Rasta interpreters

decipher as a priestly identity and consequent attempts to live according to the guidelines of “livity.”

While shaped by African practices, indigenous Caribbean traditions, and by colonial culture, Rastafari conceptions of proper conduct and virtue are derived largely from the Hebrew Bible. Rastafari adopt priestly codes and Nazirite requirements from biblical sources and incorporate them in a lifeway that enables them to achieve purification and simultaneously defines them as divinely elect. Surprisingly, scholars of Rastafari, including Barry Chevannes, often minimize the essential role of the Hebrew Bible in shaping livity. For instance, Chevannes contends that the Bible offered a convenient source of validation for Youth Black Faith members that began wearing dreadlocks, but he does not examine the biblical roots of the hairstyle.³²⁴ Similarly, he admits that he does not know why Rastas avoid eating pork, though he acknowledges that a Jewish avoidance bolsters this choice.³²⁵ An examination of the dietary laws and hair-based proscriptions of the Hebrew Bible could have provided Chevannes with answers. Though some practitioners reject purity-based dictates derived from the Hebrew Bible, in differing ways and to varying degrees, Rastafari accept their responsibility as Jah’s elect priests and Nazirites by pursuing purity befitting the chosen people as interpreted from the Hebrew Bible.

For Rastafari, purity relates to a state of naturalness. Rastas believe that Babylon System has alienated humanity from its natural state. In order to reclaim their original standing, they reject the artificial, and with it, Babylon’s commercialism and technology. As Toots and the Maytals sing in “Living in the Ghetto” “Know that it’s love and purity, that set us free/ that set us free from all this misery.”³²⁶ Turning away from the material

culture of Babylon, Rastas decontaminate their bodies of Babylon's ills through an active pursuit of the natural path of "livity."

Rastas know that "nature is not essentially a force external to man; it works within his innermost being," as Joseph Owens explains.³²⁷ "If man allows the natural powers to be corrupted, then he himself will suffer as well."³²⁸ This sense of fluidity between individuals, divinity, and the natural world has roots in Asante cosmology.³²⁹ As an unnatural force, Babylon poses a threat not only to the individual but also to the natural world; both human beings and the environment are manifestations of Jah's greatness and thus stand in opposition to Babylon's goal of domination and familial estrangement. Ras Daniel argues that "God is in man, and God is man, because things are natural. We are a people that deal with naturality. We don't deal with superstition about 'God in sky' and duppy and such thing."³³⁰ In this scenario, the earth itself is Jah. A Jamaican Rastaman named Jimmy confirms that "God is nature."³³¹ As such, Rastafari do not see the dust of the earth as dirty or defiling, for "they are not afraid of dirt and grime; they call others to 'sit in the dust with them,' in a reference to Isaiah 47:1."³³² Purity and cleanliness corresponds to an organic level of existence for practitioners, one in accordance with the workings of the natural world. It is the industrial and commercial artificiality that corrupts, not the organic realm.

According to Mary Douglas, what societies demarcate as dirty or taboo is culturally specific. Douglas argues that "dirt" should be defined "as matter out of place." For Rastafari, dirt relates to the artificiality of Babylon, not the soil of the earth, for that which is artificial is that which is "out of place." Reggae artist Capleton decries "anything at all that try to defile the forces of nature (God)," for instance.³³³ That which

Jamaican society, and more generally, the West believe is organized and culturally advanced; i.e., technology, commercialism, political structures, and science, are for Rastas out of place as dirt, elements that besmirch the divine natural plan.

Furthermore, Douglas suggests that all societies identify dirt and demonstrate structures of taboo surrounding the management of said dirt, implying “two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system.”³³⁴ The presence of dirt reflects the existence of an organizational structure that determines what is sanctioned and what is unclean or “taboo.” Douglas further explains that “taboo is a spontaneous coding practice which sets up a vocabulary of spatial limits and physical and verbal signs to hedge around vulnerable relations.”³³⁵

In order to serve Jah, Rastafari decontaminate their bodies and lives of that which they consider taboo, including the technology, political system, economic system, and chemical dependency of Babylon.³³⁶ This is done through physical removal and/or spiritual/mental removal from that which is wicked and dirty. Rejecting Babylon, seeking nature, returning to their roots as “rootsmen,” and harnessing the power inherent in the organic realm animates Rastafari in the struggle against foreign forces. As “a Rastaman” told Owens, “Lightening and thunder going to kill all the downpressors.”³³⁷ Ritual chants are often punctuated with spontaneous outcries of “fire,” “lightening,” or “earthquake,” for each outcry is a natural occurrence that harnesses divine energy to conquer Babylon. A chant of the Nyabinghi Order, for instance, exemplifies this belief: “What a woe pahnh Babylon, what a woe, what a woe/ Jah Lightning and thunder/ Jah Jah brimstone and fire/ Earthquake, hot lava!”³³⁸

Gerald Hausman suggests that “the natural man, rootsman, rastamon, unchained by technological civilization, is the ideal role of all Rastas.”³³⁹ Rastas believe that biblical actors like Samson, Joshua, and Daniel fulfill that role; they stand apart from Babylonian society and thus can channel the power of nature. Seefari confirms the importance of this removal from Babylon, as exemplified by biblical actors including Samson, in his track entitled “Rootsman”: “Rootsman don’t give up! Gotta Live up! Chant down Babylon in this dreadful time. Rootsman can do the heavy lifting. Rasta strong like Samson.”³⁴⁰ As with most elements of Rasta thought and custom, though, there is considerable diversity as to how practitioners define, engage with, and remove themselves from Babylon System. Some Rastafari move out of cities and seek respite in the wilderness. As Ras Teddy warns, “The power of man is most unsafe. Man doeth nothing by himself, but the power of Selassie-I works miracles.”³⁴¹ Ras Teddy left behind Babylonian cities for this reason. Ras Carlos from Brazil speaks of a similar path: “To maintain this hair, I cannot invest in the system. Not a cent. I live from the powers, like Daniel, like Joshua. I live like Jesus Christ. I live spirit because I am spirit.”³⁴²

Many Nyabinghi and Bobo Rastas avoid using electricity, while others do not use televisions or radios. Some “rootical” Rastas will not use utensils made of any “metals of Babylon.”³⁴³ Other practitioners live in urban areas, engage in commerce, and embrace the most contemporary technology, while living in accordance with other Rasta principles in personal interpretations of “livity.” Many of those Rastas who embrace technology understand it as a vehicle for spreading the message of the sovereignty of Haile Selassie and the benefits of a “rootical” lifestyle. In his 1980 interview with Bob Marley, for

example, Dermot Hussey asked the star if technology was among the “fruits of Babylon.”

Marley replied:

Babylon no have no fruits. . . . Jah fit to give de wisdom of technology, seen? And so right now, technology, we need technology now since really deal with what we got deal with, yah know? There is no way you can walk this earth. This earth here is not like when it was the beginning. It was once a trod all the earth. Now we have a really cross a vast amount of water. I mean, no one can stop the development. The development is not the problem. It's the flesh.³⁴⁴

However, some traditional members of the Bobo Shanti community, or the Ethiopian International Congress at Bobo Hill, widely considered by scholars and Rasta practitioners to be the most “orthodox” group of Rastas, would disagree with Marley’s conception of the value of technology. In their rural community outside of Kingston, the Bobo Shanti renounce technological advancements. Because many Bobo Shanti see the outside world as polluting, they live a communal life as removed from the material world as possible. As Chevannes notes of those Bobo who live at Bobo Hill, “As Bobo, they retreated further away from the world of the profane, cutting themselves off and maintaining the separation by a ritual distance.”³⁴⁵ Other Bobo Dreads who do not live in the movement’s central community at Bobo Hill are recording artists, a creative path that requires the inevitable usage of technology, and some Bobo use phones, computers, stereos, and more.

This diversity is manifest in each “mansion,” or Rasta “sect.” In unique ways, however, as sociologist Randal Hepner notes, all “Rastas attempt to create ‘Zionic’ conditions within their respective ‘exodus’ communities.”³⁴⁶ Instead of waiting for an afterlife to find fulfillment, practitioners pursue satisfaction in the earthen realm. As Bob Marley reasons, “Most people think, / Great God will come from the skies, / Take away

everything/ and make everybody feel high.”³⁴⁷ He continues, “But if you know what life is worth, / you will look for yours on earth.” While the manner in which Rastas avoid defilement and attempt to create “Zionic” communities differs, livity offers a noble path to all practitioners.

Livity

As an acephalous movement, Rastafari manifests in countless ways. But, practitioners attempt to draw closer to Jah and to achieve access to Zion by following the path of livity. Livity is the system of right living in accordance with one’s essential divine state. A life of livity in tune with the natural world is, for them, an ancient practice. “As the almighty say: I shall rise up a nation within this dispensation that will come and will do the ancient living and will not do anything out of the ancient living,” shared Leon, a Rasta interviewed at length by Owens.³⁴⁸ Livity stands as a marker of the covenant Rastafari share with Jah as his chosen people. The system of livity modifies and amalgamates Israelite, Nazirite, and priestly codes of conduct, as interpreted by Rasta readers, into a methodical path for Rasta behavior that delineates proper hairstyle, consumption, dress, and general comportment. According to another of Owens’ contacts, Teddy, “the scriptures is the oldest influence, and one must live by the scriptures.”³⁴⁹ Livity draws upon ancient Israelite societal proscriptions described in the Hebrew Bible in an attempt to restore their original form, even though redactors of Babylon System have altered the Bible.

A commitment to livity bonds Rastafari to Jah in a contemporary iteration of a Nazirite vow, one infused with priestly requirements of the Hebrew Bible. In

“Rastaman,” Bunny Wailer exclaims, “That’s the strangest man I’ve seen/ (That’s because he’s a Rasta Man)/ Having the mark of a Nazarine/ (That’s because he’s a Rasta Man).”³⁵⁰ In their Nazirite vows, Rastas generally adhere to a specific diet that excludes alcohol and meat, avoid contact with death, and grow out their hair. Their assumption of a Nazirite vow requires Rastas to follow Israelite guidelines and priestly purity requirements over and above the Nazirite proscriptions of Numbers 6. This amalgamated construal of a Nazirite and priestly Rasta path draws from specific biblical passages regarding priests, such as those describing the priestly vestments (Exodus 28, 39, 40), and passages, including Leviticus 21:5, which address priests’ behavior during mourning and detail fitting hairstyles. Leviticus 21:5, for instance, is used by Rastas as proof that because they are priestly they should never cut their hair.³⁵¹ Rastas accept a priestly identity by interpreting biblical priesthood strategically and by merging facets of priestly behavior with Nazirite requirements and Israelite codes of conduct as well as with African and Caribbean practices. The rites of livity determined by this fusion aim to secure the original status of Jah’s chosen Israelites. Through a life of livity, nature is “ritualized.”³⁵²

Ninja Ras writes, “Rastafari livity is a natural livity, so it really had to be here before any book was written . . . books are great to disseminate the ancient livity, yet Man also used them to defile people.”³⁵³ Livity enables Rastafari to cultivate and restore what the colonial system stripped away. This process requires adherence to behavioral guidelines that foster a healthful and clean life that is oriented by scripture and derived from African practice. Rastas engage in the continual purification of the self through livity. By consuming a particular diet, through the usage of ganja, through the cultivation

of dreadlocks, and by avoiding death, Rastafari ensure their worthiness and thus their divine capacity. Healthfulness, as manifest by a life of livity, allows Rasta bodies to channel holiness and ensures that Jah's vessels are strong.

Consciousness of election bestows Rastafari with the obligations of God's chosen people. When Rastas are the chosen people who are spoken of in the Hebrew Bible, then the observance of rituals of purification becomes the responsibility of individual practitioners. Though being tasked with the responsibilities of the elect is a privilege, taking on such a commitment can be a burden. Living up to divine standards of thoroughness and dedication is a lofty goal.

The task of satisfying a divinely ordained responsibility for purity inevitably inspires a certain dread of inadequacy and fear surrounding the loss of Jah's favor. And, this dread mingles with another form of dread, one that stems from the colonial project's effort to diminish black people's sense of worth. As Frantz Fanon notes, "There is, in the *Weltanschauung* of a colonized people, an impurity, a defect that forbids any ontological explanation."³⁵⁴ Dread is furthermore "an experience: it is the awesome, fearful confrontation of a people with a primordial but historically denied racial selfhood," as Owens explains.³⁵⁵ For Rastafari, the resulting sense of ineptness mingles with the dread associated with the alarm dreadlocked crowns inspire in others due to the racial determinations of the colonial project. Rastafari thus use the term "Dread" to describe both their subjective and objective condition.³⁵⁶

Dread stems from a sense of unworthiness, a conception of the self as base and inherently flawed. And while Rastafari engage in a radical and empowering inversion of the colonial project's schema of racial worth, that project's theories inevitably have

lingering effects on Afro-Caribbean people. The colonial project defined black bodies as valuable commodities but as fundamentally unworthy; however, in defining blackness as Jah-like, Rastafari resist the dread such a determination of worth entails for black people. Practitioners' proclamation of black worth and adoption of the biblical motif of chosenness disrupts the reign of Babylon System. Rastafari embrace the dread their visible and auditory revolutionary rejection of cultural norms inspires in Babylon's society. Neither the definition of blackness as divine nor the removal from Babylon's clutches, whether mental or physical, definitively makes individual bodies pure though.

Rastafari's quest for purity by way of livity is aimed at fulfilling the goal of Jah-like perfection. This perfection is multivocal; as I-n-I, each Rasta has the ability to determine what perfection entails. Because Rastas envision themselves as Israel, or as inheritors of Jah's divine spark, Rasta bodies are potentially purified bodies. Their I-n-I nature proves their likeness to Jah. In order to realize their Jah-like essence, Rastafari continuously ensure their purity and assert their dedication to Jah through ritualized practice. Yet the body's very functions provoke a sense of dread. Menses, excreta, blood, and semen are amongst those bodily secretions considered to be potential contaminants by Rastafari, who turn to the Bible and Ashanti-Fanti beliefs for verification thereof.³⁵⁷ Practitioners identify that which the body produces as dirty and polluting; a body can never be permanently purified when the source of impurity is internal. If what stems from the body is vile and base then the body is perpetually defiled and must be consistently purified. Empress Yuajah contends that "The purpose of Rastafari is to guide one to live clean and pure that a person may be deemed 'fit' (by Jah) to Enter Holy Mount Zion."³⁵⁸ She reminds readers though that "it is easy for one to defile his Temple."³⁵⁹

In spite of the fact that even Rasta bodies perpetually produce that which is unclean, Rastas' divine connection is affirmed by practitioners' responsibility to live according to the guidelines of livity. These guidelines emphasize the importance of heeding Jah's commandments. Practitioners' desire for divinely bestowed responsibility manifests in an obligation that confirms their election. Ritualized practice makes Rasta election a consistently demonstrable reality. In their quest to build a spotless society and self, Rastas engage in a continual process of self-definition, a process in which the committed, dreadlocked warrior, priest, and prophet resists Babylon System. By locking their hair, eating a biblically ordained diet, smoking ganja, refraining from contact with death, and avoiding entanglement with Babylon, Rastafari ensure their capability to serve as Jah's elect people, as Jah's priests, prophets, and Nazirites. Dreadlocked hair demarcates a Rasta as a chosen Nazirite priest and bespeaks a rejection of Babylon System. Proper eating and drinking make a Rastafari a fitting vessel and again marks the ingestor as an elect individual who is not polluted by Babylon. Avoiding death confirms with Nazirite and priestly biblical restrictions, while the usage of ganja enables Rastafari to reach higher levels of consciousness. Through the system of livity, Rastas rid their bodies of defilement and ready themselves for revolution. And by committing to livity, Rastas manifest proof of their election.

I-n-I and Ital

Because Rastafari are elect as I-n-I, they cannot die, for each Rasta contains a divine spark that gives them eternal life. But, it is the responsibility of practitioners to avoid death on account of their Nazirite vow (Numbers 6 forbids Nazirites to come into contact

with death). In addition to evading contact with death, Rastas prevent their own death by eating “Ital” in their quest for perpetual wellbeing and purity. By eating “Ital,” Rastas take an active role in staving off death and confirm their I-n-I status.

The term “Ital” derives from “vital.” Rastas believe that Ital food increases vitality. Given that practitioners eat to generate wellness, they reject the term “diet” on the basis that it includes “die” and instead employ the term “livit,” which is rooted in “live.”³⁶⁰ A proper “livit” consists of foods that promote spiritual and physical wellbeing. Rastafari consider Ital the ancient dietary way of Jah’s elect people, the natural “livit” of their ancestors. Consuming a “livit” defined by African dietary practices, Caribbean growing conditions and agricultural practices, and passages from the Hebrew Bible, including Genesis 1:29 (“Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which *is* upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which *is* the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat”), Exodus 10:12 (“Eat every herb of the land, *even* all that the hail hath left”), and Leviticus 11 (a chapter that details proper consumption for Israelites) assures Rastas a body capable of functioning as a deific vessel.³⁶¹ Sistren Angela Gunn explains that an “Ital diet is based on the spiritual belief and interpretation from biblical references in Genesis, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, that the body is a temple and must be kept clean and pure.”³⁶²

An Ital livit is generally vegetarian and consists largely of fruits and vegetables. Rastas eschew processed, canned, and unnatural foods in favor of that which comes directly from the earth. Common ingredients include callaloo, coconut, tofu, breadfruit, and tamarind. Coconut oil, herbs, spices, and hot peppers flavor popular dishes such as Ital stew, tofu curry, and peas and rice. Rastas eschew white flour, dairy, eggs, and most

oils because they believe these ingredients prohibit wellness and hinder spiritual progress. Practitioners associate salt with exile and a loss of spirit, and they reason a livit with no salt will lead to eminent repatriation.³⁶³ Maureen Warner-Lewis describes the belief of enslaved Africans during the colonial period “that slaves who had not eaten salt were able to fly back to Guinea.”³⁶⁴ The popular Jamaican colloquialism “Yu salt” or “im salt,” used in cases of bad luck or misfortune, links salt to loss of spirit, a distinctly African and African diasporic concept.³⁶⁵ African and African diasporic notions of salt vary, however, and the concept that salt depletes individual’s spirit is particular to Rastafari, its Revivalist roots, and Kumina within Jamaica, though similar concerns endure throughout the Caribbean, Europe and Africa.³⁶⁶

The Rasta prohibition against alcohol is also noteworthy, since rum is a major export of Jamaica. Rastas believe alcohol dilutes a true sense of self, though some Nyabinghi and Twelve Tribe members drink wine. As Susan Niditch notes, “to abstain from wine is to be removed from the social and the cultural.”³⁶⁷ Though not specifically addressing Rastafari in this statement, her theory resonates with Rasta conceptions of alcohol, as a feature of Babylonian culture, and Rastas’ removal from that culture, as well as their notion of themselves as Nazirites, who are set apart from general Israelite society in part because of their avoidance of alcoholic beverages. Most Rastas avoid consuming alcohol because they read Numbers 6:3-4 as prohibiting its ingestion:

He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.

Ila Addis interrogates the passages and explains one Rasta interpretation of this passage:

One of the biggest taboos that causes debate is not eating anything from the vine - not just grapes, but all other foods as well. When I was introduced to this ideal I stopped eating vine, but it was after my research into Scripture and Israelite tradition that I realized that not eating anything from the vine at all, was not an ideal based on Biblical reasoning - only the grapevine is tabooed for the Nazirite.³⁶⁸

Most Rastas consume food that grows on vines, and, moreover, most also extend the prohibition of Numbers 6 to alcoholic beverages not derived from the grapevine.

Rastas believe that Ital food is pure food. It makes the consuming body clean. Ingesting dead flesh conversely pollutes the body; the animals Leviticus prohibits are particularly offensive. Lee Scratch Perry, a Jamaican music producer and lyricist famous for working with Bob Marley and the Wailers, shared in an interview with *The Guardian*:

When I was a man, I was a cannibal. I decide not to be a man, I want to be an angel, so I don't eat what the man eat. . . . I stop eating what the man eat. I stop eat fish, I stop eat meat. I stop eat like an animal.³⁶⁹

And Macka B details his livit in "Wha Me Eat":

Well me nu eat no meat no fish no cheese nor no egg/ Nothing with no foot no eye no wing nor no head/ Nothing with no lip no ears no toe nor no leg/ Prefer fruit and vegetables instead/ Me careful and me choosy about what I'm eating/ My medicines my food my food is my medicine.³⁷⁰

Some Rastas do eat meat however. Members of the Twelve Tribes of Israel most frequently indulge. Some practitioners outside of the Twelve Tribes eat fish smaller than twelve inches in length (anything longer represents the cannibalistic forces of Babylon). Most who do eat fish nevertheless avoid shellfish, bottom feeders, and predators forbidden by Leviticus 11. However, it is not unheard of for self-proclaimed Rastafari to eat meat prohibited by Leviticus. For instance, Dain Saint, a Jamaican artist living in Philadelphia, recalls witnessing a local Rastaman order a "pound of the regular" every Friday at a local butcher shop back home in his Kingston neighborhood.³⁷¹ Though he

purchased pork in each instance, this individual carefully avoided referring to the meat by its name. Thus not all Rastas follow a strict Ital livit. However, most practitioners at least selectively follow Ital guidelines. Jamaican dancehall artist Konshens critiques practitioners who do not strictly follow an Ital livit, meanwhile, singing, “Seh dem a Rasta but Rasta livity dem nah heist up/ wah kind food dat dem a bite up.”³⁷²

Locks and Livity

Douglas’ holiness-wholeness paradigm suggests that the Hebrew Bible articulates a dependency of holiness upon wholeness. She applies her theory to Israelite dietary law and argues that what was fitting for consumption was determined on the basis of the ease of categorization of animals based upon their traits. Those animals that did not wholly fit in to a category became taboo, as did those animals with physical imperfections. Rastas, however, generally do not find any animals suitable for consumption. In her later work, Douglas acknowledges the problematic nature of her claim, noting that she had not considered why this model of dietary differentiation would benefit Israelites. Douglas also does not comprehensively articulate what biblical wholeness entails, though she describes wholeness as requiring the physical completeness of the human body or animal body and disallowing blemishes. She explains that “to be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind.”³⁷³

Niditch extends Douglas’ holiness-wholeness paradigm to a negotiation of hair, at once an element a part of the body and superfluous to its functioning. She describes the symbolic meaning of hair in society: “Hair plays an integral and intricate role in the way human beings represent themselves. It is related to natural and cultural identity, to

personal and group anxiety, and to private and public aspirations, aesthetics, and passages.”³⁷⁴ Hair holds significance on the individual, communal, and political level. It “takes on meaning within cultural settings and within the framework of individual experience.”³⁷⁵ For ancient Israelites, hair and hairstyle defined social standing, demonstrated societal gender roles, and evidenced holiness. As Israelites pursuing the path of the ancients, hair has similar meaning for Rastafari.

According to Niditch, ancient Israelite culture valued hair and saw “it in context of male leadership, as a declaration of status and the source and symbol of power.”³⁷⁶ She explores a nexus of hairiness, maleness, unusual birth, warrior status, and divine favor and explains that long hair sometimes signaled power and leadership in Israelite culture. Longer hair often represented a removal from lay society. Where long hair signaled distinctly Israelite manliness, growing hair even longer allowed Nazirites to sacrifice or bind themselves to God. In Rasta communities, long locks signal both this manliness when worn by male practitioners and the commitment of a consecrated Nazirite to Jah. Rastas look to biblical passages that describe both the hairiness of Nazirites and priests to prove the value in growing locks and to define themselves as owners of these righteous roles. For Rastas, a priestly identity merges with their conception of a Nazirite vow on account of passages describing the hairiness of priests and those detailing the hairiness of Nazirites. Thus, they accept both identities as their own. Dreadlocks are biblically mandated in popular Rasta opinion, furthermore. Rasta readers engage the biblical theme of hairiness while others turn to the pages of the Bible for proof of the value of long hair, citing Leviticus 19:27-28, 21:5, and Numbers 6:5 as textual proof of the importance of growing out their hair and leaving it untreated and uncombed.³⁷⁷

In Leviticus 21:5 and 19:27-28, Moses instructs priests not to shave parts of their beards as one would do in mourning; ancient Israelites shaved during a period of mourning as a means of setting oneself apart, yet Israelite priests were not to do as such.³⁷⁸ In ancient Israel, priests avoided cutting their hair; to do so was to mirror mourners and to sever a part of the self, albeit an extra-somatic part, as Niditch would argue, making the body less-than-whole. In Leviticus 21:5, Jah instructed Moses: “They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.” Though these passages are not about long hair, but rather about shaving parts of one’s beard, Rasta readers use them as proof that they should allow their hair to grow. Rastas use hair-related biblical dictates to affirm that as longhaired individuals, they are priestly Nazirites, and to associate shaving with mourning as well as with a loss of personal power.³⁷⁹ As Nazirites and as priests, Rastafari are bound to these dictates as well as those of Numbers 6, and as dreadlocked social dissidents, they embrace them.

The Hebrew Bible requires the hairiness of Nazirites because hair is a “way in which the Nazir offers himself or herself to the deity. The offered item is a substitute for the most valuable sacrifice of all, one’s own person.”³⁸⁰ Allowing one’s hair to grow demarcated for biblical Nazirites a new social role as a “consecrated one,” as it does for Rastafari. Just as hair in the Hebrew Bible can indicate cultural participation or estrangement, the removal of hair could reference a disengagement from or reentry into Israelite society. Biblical Nazirites shaved their consecrated hair at the end of a temporary Nazirite vow and presented their hair as a burnt offering at the tabernacle as a means of

rejoining society (Numbers 6:18). Rastas, however, do not cut their locks unless their hair has become impure, perhaps through contact with a dangerous woman.³⁸¹

According to Niditch, since “woolly hair cannot remain on earth once the period of sacred status has passed, nor can it remain attached the now ordinary, wine-drinking person.”³⁸² By removing hair and by growing hair longer than is socially acceptable, Nazirites in ancient Israel disturbed the status quo and renegotiated their space in society. When their hair grew past normative length, Nazirites of ancient Israel entered a period of liminality in “a culture in which hair marks normalcy and the loss of hair a potentially special or symbolically loaded situation.”³⁸³ When contemporary Rastas grow their locks, they too enter a liminal space as actors on the edge of society, a society that they envision as an artificial and alienating Babylon. Their role then is a biblical one, a role of priestly Nazirite destined to achieve purity and therefore closeness with Jah in spite of the ills of society.

For Rastafari, hairiness enables a shift in awareness towards I-n-I consciousness. Dreadlocks, otherwise referred to by practitioners as “precepts,” “Zion wires,”³⁸⁴ or “knotty covenant(s)”³⁸⁵ unite a Rasta with his or her original nature. They serve as a consecration to Jah and proof of a covenant with Jah. Hairiness marks a commitment to their Nazirite path and their priestly capabilities. As a Jamaican Rastaman named Daniel told Owens, “The locks and the beard is the fullness of our precepts, and keeping the covenant of God within ourselves. We are an ancient people, we are a nature people.”³⁸⁶ Though not all Rastafari wear locks, those that do view them as an instrumental part of livity.

Cultivating dreadlocks is a crucial element of the Nazirite vow of most Rastafari. Massai confirms the centrality of dreadlocks to the Nazirite vow of Rastafari in “Grow Congo Dread”: “Grow your head locks, some say dread locks/ Come on y’all Congo Natty/ You are the Nazirite. Grow your head lock/ you know you know you the Rastaman I say/ Congo dread locks, you are the Igher One.”³⁸⁷ And, Culture instructs practitioners, meanwhile, to “Shake your natty locks and bow to be a Nazirite. As a Nazirite you just can’t be wrong.”³⁸⁸ The undertaking of a Nazirite vow as interpreted in Rasta communities ensures a connection to Jah and the strength to conquer Babylon System. Dreads channel that force.

The Ethiopian National Congress’ ten-point moral code, written by notorious Rasta elder and political activist Ras Sam Brown, echoes Leviticus 19:27-28 by forbidding “the desecration of the Figure of Man; e.g., trimming and shaving, tattooing of the skin, and cutting of the flesh.”³⁸⁹ Though it is difficult to definitively identify the root of a Rastafari adoption of dreadlocks, by the 1930’s proto-Rastas wore beards and justified their facial hair by citing Leviticus 19:27-28, 21:5, Numbers 6:5, and Samson’s Nazirite vow.³⁹⁰ Scholars generally attribute the popularization of dreadlocks in Jamaica to the group of ascetics known as Higes Knots, who notoriously dressed in the “sackcloth tradition” or the Youth Black Faith (YBF), founded in 1949. Higes Knots alienated many Rastas, who found their practices extreme or unbecoming of Jah’s elect. As I-yawney recalls, “Nuff bredrin fight de sackcloth-and-ashes tradition. Dem seh we bring stigma ‘pon Rasta. But I-n-I come wid de Higes Knots to purge out dis ‘big suit’ ting what some man wear.”³⁹¹ The “matted locks” of “Jamaican Hindu holy men, East African Galla, Somali or Masai tribesmen, and the Mau Mau of Kenya” inspired the styles adoption as

well; pictures of Ethiopian monks on the cover of the a 1970 issue of National Geographic garnered particular intrigue among proto-Rastas.³⁹²

While both Higes Knots and YBF played an instrumental role in propagating the style, YBF's influence was especially contributory. But not all members of the YBF initially embraced the natural style. After significant debate within the YBF, a group that would become the Nyabinghi Order, it was decided that combing one's hair was unnecessary and, in fact, undesirable. On the occasion of the group's decision, a representative of "the Dreadful, the Warriors, the Bonogees" noted that dreadlocks differentiate a practitioner:

It appears to I many a times that things that the man comb would go out and do, the man with the locks wouldn't think of doing. The appearance to the people when you step out of the form is a outcast. When you are Dreadlocks you come out like a outcast.³⁹³

For YBF and Higes Knots, that outcast role signaled a necessary rejection of Babylon.

From the movement's inception, dreadlocks marked Rastafari as distinct from other Jamaicans, and that difference did not escape Jamaican elites. The island's government, both before and after independence from British colonial powers in 1962, viewed Rastafari as problematic and deemed Rastas a threat to society. As Leonard Barrett notes, "Rastafari was something to be repressed, rehabilitated, or contained so that it would not disturb or corrupt the 'civilized' society."³⁹⁴ Dreadlocks, more so than other outward signifiers of Rastafari, pose a physical challenge to the aesthetics of the Caribbean and specifically to accepted modes of conduct in Jamaica. As recently as the 1960's, locks generated fear, "hence dreadlocks."³⁹⁵ As Jamaican Rastaman Teddy notes, "They that don't like the hair, its because they are afraid of nature themselves. Hair play a very important part upon man.... Anyone who fight against the hair fight against the

self.”³⁹⁶ The Jamaican government’s answer to the problem caused by seemingly unruly religious fanatics was to physically remove the dread-producing element. An unnamed brethren spoke to Hausman of the climate in Jamaica in the 1960’s and 70’s: “Babylon put up roadblocks and trim up a man’s locks.”³⁹⁷

By wearing socially accepted hairstyles, men and women actively cement their participation in culture. But, when an individual’s hair is styled differently or is unkempt, his or her place in society comes in to question. Through the cultivation of locks, Rastafari dispose of the concern for a European aesthetic, and with it, hegemonic culture, and call for a return to Africanity as original. As *The Daily Gleaner* reported on June 29, 1969, “The Jamaicans who reacted against European aesthetics and grew their hair to resemble the jungles of their lost heritage rather than the straightened smooth gloss of England’s green fields, instinctively sought for a symbol of black pride.”³⁹⁸

For early Rastas and for contemporary practitioners, wearing locks signals removal from the ills of Babylon while additionally cementing a covenant with Jah. Dreadlocks disrupt Babylon’s ability to dictate proper conduct. By growing dreadlocks, Rastas physically dispel Babylon’s control over their bodies and define blackness and naturalness as worthy. Paulo, a Rasta from Cuba, states, “I wear my dreads so that I can be an example to others, to motivate people to think differently about what is right and wrong and beautiful and ugly, you know, because all of these things are relative.”³⁹⁹ “Rastaman Live Up,” by Bob Marley, encourages listeners to “Keep your culture/ don’t be afraid of no vulture/ Grow your dreadlocks/ don’t be afraid of the wolf pack.”⁴⁰⁰

For Owens, locks are representative of “man’s yearning to return to the unsophisticated ways of “creation living.”⁴⁰¹ Ras Leon confirms that, “The significance

of the locks is from I-cient living, creation-living- before the Romans inhabited and used the scissor and razor.”⁴⁰² Thus, according to most practitioners, sharp instruments should never cut a Rasta’s hair. Blackheart notes “My Father, Rastafari, Selassie-I. He will not let man who use razor scissor and comb to represent I-n-I that take up the covenant of his.”⁴⁰³ To cut one’s hair is to accept the reign of Babylon and to become ineligible for Jah’s election. The Nazirite commitment of Rastafari is never-ending: there is never a juncture at which hair should be removed. Tony Rebel’s “Nazerite Vow” evinces the profound importance Rastafari assign to their locks and expresses the real threat envisioned as posed by scissors:

But when me see the scissors and me see the razor, / me always think the man going to commit murder. / Why me never stop until me get me heart desire, / see de now me grow me dread as a real Rasta.⁴⁰⁴

Rastas conceive of scissors as an effective weapon of Babylon System, one that has been historically brandished against dreadlocked brethren and sistren by police throughout Jamaica from the 1940’s through the 1960’s. Anthony B chants “Fire ‘pon Rome, / fi Pope Paul an’ him scissors an’ comb, / black people waan go home, / A Mt. Zion a di righteous throne.”⁴⁰⁵ For Anthony B, dreadlocks make possible a return to Zion. Scissors threaten the possibility of repatriation.

Rastas know that Babylon actively attempts to distance humanity from its true I-n-I nature. Because of the potentiality of each dreadlock, shaven agents of Babylon, or “Baldheads,” try to indoctrinate others with messages of Babylon’s supremacy. Consider Marley’s warning in “Crazy Baldheads”: “Brainwash education to make us the fools. / Hate is your reward for our love, / Telling us of your God above.”⁴⁰⁶ He continues: “Here comes the conman/ coming with his con plan. / We won’t take no bribe; / We’ve got to

stay alive/ We gonna chase those crazy/ Chase those crazy baldheads / Chase those crazy baldheads out of the yown.” Baldheads threaten the dreadlocked, not the other way around. Dreadlocks instigate violence from baldheads because they invite baldheads to recognize the power of the natural world and of livity. As such, Babylon promotes a shorthaired clean-cut image as normative, in spite of the fact that Samson, Jesus, and other holy figures reportedly wore long hair and beards as markers of their elect status. Rastas believe that dreads enable individuals to the channel Jah’s power for revolution. Though “combsome” practitioners, often members of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, do wear their hair short or combed, a stigma generally persists in Rastafari against the exercise of that option.

Bobo Shanti: A Case Study

Though some Rastafari wear their hair short, for Bobo Shanti, that option is forbidden. Bobo dreads take great care in cultivating long locks, which they wrap in cloth and wear high upon their heads. The Bobo Shanti name reflects the Asante-Akan roots of Jamaicans and the African pride of the community. “Bobo” translates from Ashanti to mean “Black,” while “Shanti” references the Asante people of Ghana. The central Bobo Shanti community, Bobo Hill, lies nine miles from Kingston at Bull Bay and sits on government land, where the Bobo remain squatters in the eyes of the Jamaican state, despite their claim that the land is their own. A large metal fence surrounds the compound. The fence is draped with flags in red, gold and green, the colors of the Ethiopian flag, which demarcate the space as a unique cultural ground outside of the jurisdiction of Jamaica.⁴⁰⁷

Bobo Dreads, like other Rastafari, read themselves into the pages of the Bible, transforming their contemporary environment into a biblical world. For instance, Bobo consider the places they lived before settling at Bull Bay as stops on the biblical journey to Zion. Their first settlement at Ackee Walk gained the moniker “Nazareth,” their community at Harris Street became known as “Galilee,” and their Ninth Street residence became “Bethlehem.”⁴⁰⁸ Bobo refer to Bobo Hill, their final destination in Jamaica, as “the City on a Hill,” as “Mount Zion,” or “Mount Temon,” the place Habakkuk the prophet claimed that “God came from” (Habakkuk 3:3).⁴⁰⁹

A guard stands at the gate of the community called “Mount Zion.” He maintains the ritual purity of the community by ensuring that visitors, who are generally welcome, are uncontaminated when they enter the compound. One should enter Mount Zion with “clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:4). Visitors must leave all “pollutants” at the entrance to the community.⁴¹⁰ Ras Rupert notes, “When one comes to Zion, one must first put off the outside ways, or else it can create disruption.”⁴¹¹ Women are unwelcome if dressed improperly or if menstruating. Permitted guests enter through an archway, beneath which residents utter a prayer to consecrate themselves. Once passing through, one enters what is for Bobo Shanti an ancient, natural, and thus holy, zone.

For Bobo Dreads, more so than other Rastas, ordered cleanliness is an essential vehicle through which to define the body as god-like. Bobo males, who either serve as prophets or priests, all pursue priestly virtue as interpreted in the system of livity as their model of ideal conduct.⁴¹² While other Rasta practitioners accept priestly roles and responsibilities as determined by a selective and interpretive reading of the Hebrew Bible, a Bobo emphasis on priestly purity is unique.

As Niditch reports:

Priests in ancient Israel developed quite sophisticated notions of and rules pertaining to cleanness and uncleanness, purity and impurity, related ultimately to ritual roles in which the mediator between God and human had to be pure, approaching the Purist of Pure, which is the deity himself.⁴¹³

Bobo Shanti embrace the ancient Israelite conception of purity and impurity as a measure of an individual's ability to communicate with and draw close to Jah. They carefully craft regulations based upon an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible that ensure their divine-like purity. Through their avoidance of Babylonian goods and through a dedication to personal hygiene, cleanliness and naturalness, Bobo Shanti cultivate spotlessness as a means of attaining and expressing righteousness. As Prophet Abraham writes, "I&I are the spotless children of the father," referencing the blemishes mentioned in Leviticus 21-22 that render a priest unfit to make an offering to Jah.⁴¹⁴ While other Rastas' behaviors certainly echo this effort, the Bobo emphasis on cleanliness and concern for a well-groomed appearance is distinct.

Bobo Shanti dress in a way that anoints their bodies as consecrated vessels and that in turn effectively sanctifies them. Male Bobo wear long robes, often decorated with biblical symbolism like a Star of David or a Lion of Judah, along with tightly wrapped turbans that cover their dreadlocks. Bobo Dreads adopt their robes and turbans from descriptions of priestly garb in Exodus 28, 29, and 39. Ras Nicro writes, "The turban and robe come from Exodus where the priests would wear a robe and turban. Read Exodus 28 and 29 for this."⁴¹⁵ Bobos also look to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's interpretation of these passages for inspiration. By opting for natural fibers, by covering their hair, and by choosing clothing that mirrors what practitioners imagine as the garb of priestly

ancestors, male Bobo claim the roles of priest, prophet, and Israelite. Women wear long skirts and sleeves in order to honor the biblical dictate of female modesty.⁴¹⁶ Proverbs 31:30 instructs that, “Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.” In a direct response to this passage, Bongani Benson Dlepu writes, “Let your beauty not be outward by painting YRSELF and showing of flesh coz this is an abomination.”⁴¹⁷

Bobos’ often brightly colored robes are inspired by assumptions about Israelite fashion and descriptions of the priestly vestments, as are their ceremonial robes worn on Saturdays and for special ritual occasions. On Saturdays from noon to 6:00 p.m., a service is held in the Temple. The whole community, excluding individuals deemed to be impure, is required to attend. Practitioners dress in white for the service to demarcate their purity and their readiness to enter the Tabernacle. The white color of practitioners’ dress for this sacred occasion is inspired not only by the Hebrew Bible but also by Akan culture, wherein white is associated with purification, innocence, and sanctification.⁴¹⁸ Both the often-colorful robes of Bobo Dreads and their Saturday dress sanctify and consecrate Bobo bodies as pure and divine.

The tightly wrapped turban of the Bobo Shanti contrasts with the wild locks publically associated with Rastafari. When asked why Bobo Shanti wrap their locks, a Bobo responded, “It is a form of anciency today. Them says it’s a form of anciency.”⁴¹⁹ Bobos’ groomed appearance extends past their wrapped locks to their general comportment and grooming practices. Chevannes notes that non-Rasta Jamaicans acknowledge “Bobo meticulousness in appearing neat and clean at all times with shirts tucked in, feet washed, sandals wiped or polished, and hair concealed beneath a tightly

wrapped turban.”⁴²⁰ As a female bus driver told Barrett, meanwhile, “I always find it a pleasure to pick them up at the bus stop where they congregate. They are so well-groomed and pleasant. . . . They are not like the rest of those rowdies who call themselves Rastafarians.”⁴²¹

As Chevannes writes, Bobos’ “observance of the norms of ‘decency’ and ‘good manners,’ which by and large referred to the neatness in appearance and gentleness and affability in speech was in direct contrast to the Dreadlocks’ display of their hair,” which, from the movement’s inception, Caribbean society has associated with aggression and violence.⁴²² Mento music of the 1970’s, for instance, often referenced the fear and resulting hostility dreadlocks inspired in many Jamaicans. Mento artists Slim and Sam warn listeners, for instance, “Run, man-without-beard/ Beard man back o’ you.”⁴²³ Bobo Shanti avoid causing the discomfort that untamed dreadlocks inspire in Caribbean people by refining those elements associated with Rastafari that produce dread. But, Bobo practitioners do not wrap their locks and engage in particular grooming methods in order to avoid agitating Babylon’s citizens. In fact, many speak out against the evils of Babylon on a global scale: reggae artists including Capleton, Anthony B., and Sizzla are affiliated with the mansion and they frequently rail against Babylon. By growing their locks, Bobo, like other Rastafari, define themselves as elect and as free of colonial control. In wrapping their locks, Bobo consecrate themselves as priests.

Bobos cultivate a “kempt” priestly identity by engaging in detailed grooming practices. A Bobo Shanti interest in cleanliness as it relates to immaculateness is exceptional, yet their pursuit of cleanliness as it pertains to spotlessness does not displace an interest in an organic existence as expressed by “rootical” Rastas outside of the

mansion. Ordered cleanliness is another venue through which they achieve original, natural purity. As one believer puts it, “The earthly here (is) going to be restored to a state of one order: straight, divine, clean.”⁴²⁴ Bobo Shanti ensure their priesthood through personal and communal efforts of purification and the simultaneous rejection of Babylon System, both practices being essential to their cultivation of livity.

Rastawoman and the Threat of the Female Body

In Rasta thought, women are believed to pose an unintentional monthly threat of contamination to brethren; Rastafari commonly view menstruation as polluting. Other mansions also police women’s menstruating bodies, for womanhood itself “is regarded as contaminating.”⁴²⁵ In order to monitor potential contamination and thus ensure the livity of the community, women are set apart on a monthly basis in Bobo communities. Ennis Edmonds explains the history of this practice:

The patriarchy that now characterizes Rastafari can be traced to the House of Youth Black Faith and other radical Rastas of the late 1940s and 1950s. These Rastas developed a doctrine of female impurity around the menstrual cycle and emphasized the threat of feminine seduction to a man’s piety and moral rectitude.⁴²⁶

In the YBF, as in later Rasta mansions, the biblical ideology of female impurity and corresponding ritual practices define and reflect the movement’s dialogue about gender. As a fabricator of dirt, the human body becomes the site of social discourse on purity and impurity. As Douglas argues:

We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva, and the rest until we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.⁴²⁷

Many practitioners believe that women pose a continual threat of contamination to those they come into contact with because women are not aligned directly with Jah, except through their allegiance with a male, and because they, like Eve, deter males from the path of livity. Mannabis recounts: “When this strange woman touched my locs I became depressed and very different and ‘impure.’ That is why I cut them to start anew. The feeling would not leave me.”⁴²⁸ The threat of female contamination is greater on a monthly basis because of the natural menstrual cycle of a woman. Rastas confirm the hazard of womanhood by accepting the biblical motif of female pollution and/or by looking to the Hebrew Bible, in which they read in Leviticus 12 and Numbers 5:2-3 of a recommended period of separation to ensure community wellbeing.⁴²⁹ Asante taboos surrounding menstrual blood corroborate the Bible’s for Rastas in the Caribbean, furthermore. Historically, when Asante women menstruated they were excluded from entering sacred spaces including the room of the ancestral stools, marching on the battlefield, or engaging with the general population.⁴³⁰ But they were not separated because they were considered dirty. They were separated, according to Lawrence Mbogoni, in order to “avoid ‘interfering powers.’”⁴³¹

In Asante religious culture, menstrual blood poses a pollutant threat to ancestral altars and makes men vulnerable to dangerous spiritual forces. Blood has the ability to disable the mystical protection from *nsuman* (charm, amulet, or talisman).⁴³² But it can offer protection too. Priests apply menstrual blood to brooms to make *kunkuma* (particularly potent *nsuman*) for protection.⁴³³ According to Robert Sutherland Rattray, moreover, Asante consider menstrual blood polluting, as subject to “one of the greatest and deadliest taboos in Ashanti.”⁴³⁴ But, as Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb

recognize, “they also celebrate menarche” and channel the power of menstrual blood.⁴³⁵ Douglas recognizes that “ambiguous things can seem very threatening. Taboo confronts the ambiguous and shunts it into the category of the secret.”⁴³⁶ That which is taboo holds a symbolic, dangerous power, though, one that Asante priests harnessed in making *kunkuma*. Together, biblical and Asante approaches to the ambiguity of menstruation contribute to a Rasta conception of this natural occurrence.

Rastafari interpret Leviticus 15:19 as confirming woman’s polluted and polluting nature: “And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even.” For this reason, members of mansions, including Bobo Shanti, set women apart from the community during her menses. A similar injunction to that of Leviticus 15:19 applies to men. In Leviticus 15:2, Jah instructed Moses and Aaron: “When any man hath a running issue out of his flesh, because of his issue he is unclean.” Bobo Shanti readers that accept that men are subject to this dictate as well as that of Deuteronomy 23:10 (“If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp, he shall not come within the camp.”) contend that men are unable to enter the tabernacle or cook for seven days if they have a bruise or if they have experienced nocturnal emissions.⁴³⁷ Blood and semen, in these scenarios, are envisioned as materials that are out of place, and thus as dirt.

However, male Rasta readers approach the emission of bodily fluids from a cultural perspective in which women are understood as inherently contaminated. For this reason, a taboo on menstrual blood is more severe than those regarding other bodily emissions. Correspondingly, the period of separation for men and women who emit

particular fluids differs drastically. In Jamaica, “Bumbaclot” is popular derogatory slang meaning “butt cloth,” or “toilet paper.” “Bloodclot” is a considerably more offensive phrase though. This exceptionally offensive curse word refers to a menstrual pad or tampon. According to Elizabeth Faithorn, “(Pollution) is used in the context of sex and gender and refers to the capacity that women have to endanger men through their bodily substances and through their overall femaleness.”⁴³⁸ That women bleed on a monthly basis is culturally more problematic than any leakage issuing from the male body. Because she bleeds monthly and is a perpetual threat, traditional brethren reason she cannot enter ritual spaces, nor lead the community in a ceremonial or pragmatic sense. As Obiagele Lake concludes, “To deem women as polluted based on regularly occurring biological functions is to insult their very existence.”⁴³⁹

According to Jeanne Christensen, the YBF were the first Rasta group to adopt the Levitical proscription of “ritual avoidance of women” during their menses, a practice that was previously characteristic of Protestant Revivalism in Jamaica.⁴⁴⁰ But, the Bobo Shanti take the regulation of the female body to the extreme. As C.A. Newland, a Bobo Shanti empress, acknowledges that:

Perhaps one of the most controversial of all the principles of livity of the Bobo Shanti is the operationalization of the ancient Judaic principle governing the separation of man from woman (or, more accurately, woman from the rest of the congregation) at the time of their menstrual flow.⁴⁴¹

Women of the Bobo Shanti spend up to twenty-one days a month in a “sick bay,” a house set apart from other structures to prevent the contamination of the community by its menstruating residents.⁴⁴² At least twelve days are added to the time of a woman’s menses, a schema that has women spending up to three weeks out of a month in

seclusion. During this period, a woman is considered “free” from her communal and marital duties. Sizzla addresses this period of separation in “Princess Black”: “By reason of the truth just let her free/ 21 days fi you purity.”⁴⁴³

On the first day of a woman’s menses, she raises a red flag at the gate of the “sick bay.” All windows to the structure must be closed.⁴⁴⁴ While in seclusion, women must not touch food, clothing, or other possessions of men or “free women.” During her sequestered time, a woman’s “Kingman” might pass food to her through a small opening in the “sick house” structure.⁴⁴⁵ After giving birth, meanwhile, a Bobo Empress remains isolated for three months. Even when “free,” women generally do not cook or serve food at Mount Zion, a measure taken to avoid potential contamination.⁴⁴⁶ During menstruation and after giving birth, women are kept at even greater lengths from ritual spaces and the food supply of the community.

This alienating and dread-producing exercise, called a “monthly vacation,” or the “twenty one-day purification principle,” presumes women to be impure on the basis of that which naturally occurs.⁴⁴⁷ Bobo Shanti males pronounce women of their community as tainted on a monthly basis and thus place restrictions not only on the time they are able to participate in public life, but also, because of menstruation, on their access to ritual leadership, to food preparation, and to cleanliness. Practitioners contend that this period of separation is a desirable respite and a meditative period. As Rastafari prophet Fisher told the *Jamaica Observer*, “During that time, she is on a journey. It’s a purification.”⁴⁴⁸ Arthur Newland, a lecturer at the University of the West Indies, Kingston and Bobo practitioner, recognizes why outsiders would observe the practice as an instance of male dominance of women, but he claims that the period of separation actually empowers

women.⁴⁴⁹ Many Bobo women embrace this monthly period of seclusion. For instance, Empress Sharon, who lives at Bobo Hill, advocates that the limitations placed on contact with men elevate a male-female relationship to a spiritual plane: “She only sees her ‘Kingman’ for seven days - the number of God.”⁴⁵⁰ Empresses must also come to terms with their periodic separation from male children as young as three years of age.⁴⁵¹

Empress Sharon describes women’s monthly offering: “The (menstrual) blood is a holy sacrifice which goes back to the earth.”⁴⁵² Furthermore, Barrett suggests that over and above the sacrifice of menstrual blood which returns to the earth, Bobo Shanti perform communal ritual sacrifice of women by confining their sistren for lengthy periods of up to three weeks a month.⁴⁵³ Though perhaps their practices are not as restrictive as those of the Bobo Shanti, other Rasta communities that require monthly separation for women also engage in ritual sacrifice. In this act of sacrifice, women, as sacrifice, are designated dirty and destined for death, thereby absolving the defilement of all practitioners. As Richard Fenn argues, “Scapegoating mobilized the public desire for a purified body politic and satisfied it with the obligatory death of some victim chosen for his or her specific characteristics, imperfections, stigmas, or particular offense.”⁴⁵⁴ At Mount Zion and in other zionic communities, “women become scapegoats,” insuring through their sacrifice the sustained virtue of their communities.⁴⁵⁵

Conclusion

Rasta mansions and individual practitioners enact livity in distinct ways. But all Rastas attempt to create zionic communities or conditions in which to thrive. Fostering Zion requires the rejection of Babylon System, spiritually, mentally, and/or physically and the

pursuit of purity. Adoption of Nazirite, priestly, and Israelite practices, as detailed in the Hebrew Bible and interpreted by Rasta readers, enables Rastafari to define and thus pursue a fitting path of livity. Through ritualized acts of purification derived from an interrogation of the Hebrew Bible, male Rastas proclaim themselves priests and Nazirites, thereby defining themselves elect by Jah, even when particular elements of their reading strategy disable Rastawomen from full election and priestly responsibility. Livity offers all Rastafari a natural path for purification and a means of achieving intimacy with Jah achieved through the cultivation of dreadlocks, the consumption of an Ital livity, the avoidance of death, the usage of ganja, and taking precautions surrounding menstruating women. However, the majority of Rasta readers, or at least outspoken male Rasta readers, interpret certain natural bodily functions of women to be corrupting, especially menstruation. While livity enables Rastafari to enact zionic practices and thereby escape Babylon's clutches, the unique reading strategy of the majority of Rastafari enables only a portion of practitioners to enjoy the fullness of Jah's election.

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³²³ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 103.

³²⁴ Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 157-158.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

³²⁶ Toots and the Maytals, "Living in the Ghetto," *Reggae Got Soul*, Island Records (1976).

³²⁷ Joseph Owens, *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica* (Kingston: Sangster, 1976), 144.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

³²⁹ See Peter K. Sarpong, "Asante Religion (Ghana)" in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, Vol. 1, ed. Bron Taylor et al. (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005).

³³⁰ Ras Daniel, quoted in Owens, *Dread*, 148.

³³¹ Jimmy, quoted in *Ibid.*, 146.

³³² *Ibid.*, 145.

³³³ Seon Lewis, *From Mythology to Reality: Moving Beyond Rastafari* (Raleigh, Lulu Enterprises, 2012) 150.

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- ³³⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002), 44.
- ³³⁵ *Ibid.*, Xiii.
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- ³³⁷ An unnamed Rastaman, quoted by Owens, *Dread*, 145.
- ³³⁸ “Nyabinghi Chants” Rasta Ites, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://rastaites.com/livity/chants.htm>.
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- ³⁴⁴ Bob Marley, interviewed by Dermot Hussey, *Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation Radio Network*, JBC, 1979.
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- ³⁴⁷ Bob Marley, “Get Up, Stand Up,” *Burnin’*, Island Records (1973).
- ³⁴⁸ Leon, quoted in Owens, *Dread*, 151.
- ³⁴⁹ Teddy, quoted in *Ibid.*, 152.
- ³⁵⁰ Bunny Wailer, “Rastaman,” *Blackheart Man*, Island Records (1976).
- ³⁵¹ Robert Roskind, *Rasta Heart: A Journey into One Love* (Blowing Rock: One Love Press, 2001), 38.
- ³⁵² *Ibid.*, 154.
- ³⁵³ Ninja Ras, December 15, 2004 (9:18 p.m.), comment on Selassielive, “Question,” *Rastafari Speaks*, December 8, 2004, <http://www.rastafarispeaks.com/cgi-bin/forum/archive1/config.pl?md=read;id=48144>.
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- ³⁵⁵ Owens, *Dread*, 3.
- ³⁵⁶ Paget Henry, “Rastafarianism and the Reality of Dread” in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, ed. Lewis Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1997), 157.
- ³⁵⁷ For more on Ashanti-Fanti beliefs regarding excreta and menses, see Melissa Meyer, *Thicker Than Water: Origins of Blood as Symbol and Ritual* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- ³⁵⁸ Empress Yuajah, *Rasta Way of Life: Rastafari Livity Book* (USA: Empress Yuajah Books, 2014), 3.
- ³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

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- ³⁶⁵ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 35.
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- ³⁶⁸ Ila Addis, February 11, 2013, "On Eating Grapes and Foods from the Vine," *Rastawifeline*, <http://rastawifeline.blogspot.com/2013/02/on-eating-grapes-and-foods-from-vine.html>.
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- ³⁷⁷ Leonard E. Barrett, *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 135.
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- ³⁷⁸ Roskind, *Rasta Heart*, 38.
- ³⁷⁹ As well as Ezekiel 44:20, Isaiah 15:2 22:12, Amos 8:10, Job 1:20, Jeremiah 16:6, 41:5, and 48:57.
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- ³⁸⁶ Daniel, quoted in Owens, *Dread*, 151.
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- ³⁹² Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 307.
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- ⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 182.
- ⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 185.
- ⁴¹² Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 174.
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- ⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 155.
- ⁴²⁴ Eccleston, quoted in Owens, *Dread*, 147.
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- ⁴²⁶ Ennis Barrington Edmonds, *Rastafari: A Very Short Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012), 95.
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CHAPTER 5: SAMSON: PURITY, POWER, AND THE PUTRID

Give I the old time religion.
Give I the old time religion.
'Cause it is good enough for I.
If it was good for Moses and Aaron.
If it was good for David and Solomon,
Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
Then it is good enough for I.

Hey! Study Numbers chapter six and tell I what you've seen.
'Cause it was written in the Bible of the dreadlock Nazarene.
Now don't you put away the old for the new,
'Cause if you do Jah will turn his back on you.
-Bunny Wailer, "Bald Head Jesus" (1989)

Scholarly analyses of Samson's saga include interpretations of him as hero, as instrument of Jah, as a model of Israelite chosenness, and as an embodiment of Israel's shortcomings.⁴⁵⁶ Popular readings focus on his notorious strength and hair, but often also bestow upon him attributes and experiences divorced from his textual representations, deeming him to be, for example, part of one of the greatest love affairs of all time or a Black Power activist.⁴⁵⁷ The relationship between what is written in the Hebrew Bible and Samson's interpretive legacy is dynamic and culturally dependent; comprehensions evidence the desires, needs, and societal scenario of readers. For Rastafari interpreters who carefully analyze his biblical narrative and for those who know his extra-biblical cultural identity, Samson is an exemplary Rastaman who proves Rasta election and the value of livity.

Because of his relationship with Jah and his physical attributes, especially his hair and successes against the Philistines, Rastafari readings construe Samson as an unsullied individual living in a corrupt world. Samson is a model of strength against oppressors; his election by Jah confirms Rastafari's election and revolutionary power.⁴⁵⁸ He is a divinely

ordained warrior-liberator who wears his hair in locks. Yet, throughout his biblical narrative Samson violates purity regulations of the Israelite people and of Rastafari. That Samson overlooks dietary and death-based dictates of Nazirites and Israelites does not diminish his importance for Rasta readers even as the directives Samson breaks are essential to the movement. Though in his biblical narrative he disregards elements of his Israelite and Nazirite identity, by employing a unique hermeneutic that proves his untainted virtue, Rasta interpreters contend that Samson remains pure until death. This chapter considers Samson's notorious strength, remarkable locks, and Nazirite identity, arguing that despite his violent behavior and impure conduct, Rasta analyses of Samson represent him as a Rastaman and an exemplar of livity because he thus confirms Rasta righteousness.

Through a reading of Judges 13-16 that acknowledges Samson's physical attributes, chosenness, and violence against the Philistines, while sanctioning his actions as Jah's work, or by minimizing or rationalizing his defiling behavior as indicative of Babylonian redaction, Rastas employ Samson as liberator and dreadlocked Rastaman in order to affirm the worth of the Afro-Caribbean or otherwise-dominated self. Rastafari interpret Samson as clean, both spiritually and physically, in a hermeneutic move that defines the male Rasta body as untainted and divinely elect. A Rasta concern for ritual purity necessitates a reading of Samson that obviates his disregard for his Israelite identity and Nazirite vow. Though Samson is a transgressive biblical actor, Rasta readers claim him because when Samson is a Rastaman, all Rastafari are elect warrior-Nazirites.

Practitioners acknowledge Samson as an original Rasta. For example, Rastafari Israelite author Rabbi Simon Altaf refers to him as "the First Rastafarian." He writes

“Samson was black with dreadlocks just like Rastafarians today.”⁴⁵⁹ Rastas envision themselves to be like Samson, as embodied Samsons, and thus as consecrated Nazirite warriors fighting against Babylon System. But, such a designation by Jah comes with a price. Election by Jah requires a commitment to codes of conduct befitting the chosen. Samson’s Nazirite vow sets such restrictions on his actions, as does his Israelite identity. However, in Judges, Samson continually disregards the requirements of his Nazirite vow and the traditions of his people, an element of his biblical journey that is not essential to a Rasta hermeneutical approach, even for those readers who know Judges 13 through 16 intimately and for whom his Nazirite status and corresponding purity requirements are essential. Though in his biblical narrative Samson’s questionable behavior and eventual death can be read as signaling a shift in Israelite leadership away from a pre-monarchic warrior-Judge model, his divine appointment is of central interest for Rastafari, for his election mirrors their own.

Samson’s story situates his life during the period of the judges. In the forty years leading up to Samson’s birth, the Israelites lived under Philistine rule, for “the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines forty years” (Judges 13:1). As Rasta author Malahkee Jeanba writes, “The Israelites were subdued and faced tribulation by the philistines; for disobeying the teachings of the most high lord of all host, creator and worshipping idols and giving their children to baal da shaton (satan).”⁴⁶⁰

Samson’s birth portends the end of Philistine dominance. Jeanba interprets the words of “the angel of the Lord” who spoke to Samson’s mother in Judges 13:3:

The cries of the Israelites have reached the heavens and has been heard in zion. Behold the most high, lord of all host creator shall bring salvation

through your son, for though you bare no child. You shall conceive a son and the strength of the most high, lord of all host, creator shall be in him.⁴⁶¹

In his biblical narrative and in Rasta negotiations thereof, Jah sanctified Samson as unique before his birth, doubly elect as a Nazirite and as a vessel through which Jah would conquer the Philistines. The “angel of the Lord” who appeared to Samson’s unnamed mother in Judges 13:5 further informed her:

Thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come to his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines.

Jeanba embellishes this passage, translating it to read:

No razor or comb shall come on his head, his locks is his crown, for overstand (comprehend) the child shall be a Nazarite unto the most high, lord of all host, king creator from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver the sons and daughters of Jacob, the Israelites out of the hand of the philistines.⁴⁶²

Samson is one of the last judges and his reign as warrior-Judge paved the way for the Israelite monarchy. Susan Niditch describes the judges of the pre-monarchic period as military leaders who were touched by Jah and unique, marginal figures. For instance, Deborah was marginal because she was a woman, Jephthah was an exiled legitimate son, Ehud was left-handed, and Samson was a Nazirite-warrior, each one of them being thus marginal on their own account. Eric Hobsbawm describes the judges as “social bandits” meanwhile, and Gregory Mobley underscores the judges’ solitude.⁴⁶³ Like Niditch, Mobley determines that Samson was a liminal character who existed on the border between nature and culture. The readings of these biblical scholars illuminate what makes Samson such a viable cultural model for anti-Babylonian actors: Samson is a social dissident and a champion of the downtrodden who is set apart by his Nazirite identity,

hence an ideal role model for Rastafari. He is a leader and Nazirite warrior who eschews the culture of the dominator along with the rules of his people.⁴⁶⁴ Samson is the ultimate transgressive character, and yet he is Jah's elect weapon.

Samson as Chosen Nazirite

Samson's Nazirite status frames his biblical narrative; it is paramount in Rastas' adoption of him and assumption of his character, though his textual behavior often does not adhere to his Nazirite commitment. The Hebrew "Nazir" translates as "separated one," or "consecrated one."⁴⁶⁵ Central to Rasta readings of Samson is that Jah sets him apart from the very moment of his conception.⁴⁶⁶ Born "a Nazirite to God from birth," Jah chose Samson as a divine vessel capable of persisting in his service (13:5).⁴⁶⁷ Samson shares a unique relationship with Jah, one that conforms for Rastafari to a notion of self as "I-n-I." As "I-n-I," Rastafari are never alone, for they are ultimately united with Jah and other practitioners. Their positionality as I-n-I unites Rastas with Jah while simultaneously establishing the requirement of submission to Jah. That the dreadlocked Samson is a Nazirite from birth is evidentiary of his I-n-I status and confirms that Rastafari are similarly anointed. Richard Runyararo Mahomva writes that:

The Nazarene is not only confined to growing locks, separation from dead bodies and other demands of his vow. The Rasta is to be devoted to a life of submission to Jah. This is through prayer (Matt6v6), Keeping Jah's laws (2Tim3v16). Today's Rastas are inspired by early Nazarites like Samson (Judges13v1-5). This vow states that the Rasta must separate himself unto the LORD; in simple terms he must live in a way that does not please world standards. Most people wonder what Rasta devouts mean when they talk about RASTAFARI.⁴⁶⁸

Rasta readers like Mahomva understand Samson to be an exemplar of the Nazirite vow required of Rastafari. Furthermore, White Dread writes that "Samson the

only person in the bible, which perfectly fit the definition of a rasta. His faith is strong. He has locks. Judges 9:13. And he is Ital.”⁴⁶⁹ Both Mahomva and White Dread thus see Samson as fulfilling the requirements of Jah’s elect Rastafari on account of his Nazirite identity.

Like Samson’s, the Nazirite oath of Rastafari is life-long. In his biblical narrative though, Samson disregards his Nazirite vow and Israelite identity, thus his responsibility as I-n-I. However, Rastafari reason as redaction and/or minimize his breaches in a reading strategy that answers their need for a dreadlocked Nazirite exemplar. Though Judges 13 only requires that Samson not cut his hair, Rasta readers ask Samson to honor the elements of the later iteration of the Nazirite vow described in Numbers 6, additionally assigning to him requirements of livity as befits a Rasta-Nazirite. Jeanba describes these requirements:

Only the herb no meat, the crown of lox no razor, fruits and the water of life no strong drink, living in the light of the Almighty creator H.I.M. no other! That is the vow of the Nazarite Rasta. From then to now for i-ver n i-ver selah.⁴⁷⁰

Because practitioners assume Samson’s responsibility for elements of the commitment described in Numbers 6, his vow entails two additional elements, a proscription against “wine and strong drink,” “vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink,” “liquor of grapes” and “grapes” (6:3), and a proscription against contact with dead bodies (6:6).⁴⁷¹ Rastas accept these prohibitions as foundations of livity in their personal enactments of a Nazirite vow.

Though the Nazirite prohibitions of Numbers 6 prove difficult for Samson as an adult, he had begun his life in Jah’s favor. Judges 13:24 instructs that “the boy grew, and the Lord blessed him”(13:24). Jeanba informs readers that as a young boy, he fulfilled

these requirements as well as those of livity derived from Israelite proscriptions and thus essential to a Rasta Nazirite vow:

Samson's mother never stopped observing what was commanded her by the cherub, concerning her son. For she gave him no wine, no strong drink, neither did she give him any flesh with blood as it's life source, nor did she let any razor or comb come upon his head. For this was the vow of the nazirite of the most high.⁴⁷²

Jeanba continues, "And the boy grew and his hair grew in such a way that there were seven sealed locks as the crown of his head."⁴⁷³ Rasta interpreters including Jeanba believe that because Samson was raised according to the strictures of livity, he grew strong and ever closer to Jah.

In his interpretation of Judges 13:25, Jeanba writes "The i-rite (spirit) of the most high, lord of all host, king creator began to move Samson at times in the camp of dan between zorah and eshtaol."⁴⁷⁴ Jah remained with Samson when he met a young lion on his way to Timnath. "The spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and he tore the lion apart barehanded as one might tear apart a kid." (14:6) Jeanba interprets the passage and expounds upon it:

And behold, a young lion met him in the vine yard, with paws and teeth thirsty for blood. And the strength and glory of the most high, lord of all host, king creator filled Samson and soon as the lion was about to pounce Samson, he grabbed hold of it's head and with the might of the most high, lord of all host, king creator he split the lion's jaw ear to ear, with his bare hands, rending it to pieces, as he would a kid goat.⁴⁷⁵

Samson thus killed a lion with his hands, decimating the symbol of the House of David and Haile Selassie, the Conquering Lion of Judah. Rasta readers do not actively address this messy aspect of Samson's narrative or negotiate its ramifications for a movement that envisions the lion as its predominant symbol. To do so would raise questions about

his suitability as a Rasta patriarch. Thus, a Rastafari hermeneutical approach does not require such a negotiation.

Jah also remained with Samson after he consumed honey from a questionable source on a subsequent trip to Timnath to “take” his Philistine bride.” Samson used the dead lion as a literal honey pot in 14:8, eating the spoils of his act of rage against the symbol of the Solomonic line. Bunny Wailer proclaims “Rasta Man a Lion.”⁴⁷⁶ But, in spite of the significance of the lion in Rastafari, this element of Samson’s narrative does not problematize Rasta readers’ adoption of him as a prototypical Rasta warrior-Nazirite, nor does that he comes into contact with a lion’s carcass.

As he killed one thousand Philistines with a jawbone of a donkey, a task that obviously entailed contact with dead bodies, “the spirit of the Lord rushed on him” (15:15). Jah stayed with Samson through deadly rampages and defiling moments. Jah remained with Samson as he broke elements of a Nazirite vow as interpreted by Rasta readers, and though his familiarity with corpses should nullify his anointed status according to the requirements of livity, Rasta assessments of his biblical narrative are not troubled by these instances.⁴⁷⁷ His choices to eat honey out of an animal distinguished by Leviticus 11:27 and Numbers 9:10 (and by the system of Ital) as unclean, potentially drink and probably serve alcoholic beverages, further compromise his Nazirite status. Moreover, Samson’s engagements with three dangerous women raise questions about his participation among the Israelite people as a layman and as a Nazirite. Nevertheless, Samson stands as a pillar of livity and resistance to Babylon for Rastafari who embrace him and embody him.

Samson as Liberator

Because Samson slaughtered Philistines and tore down their temple, Rastas read him as a strongman, a liberator who saved the chosen people from domination. Judges 13 finds the Israelites under the control of the Philistines after “the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord” (Judges 13:1). Yet, an angel of Jah spoke to Samson’s mother before his birth in 13:5 to inform her: “It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines”(13:5). Jah bestowed upon Samson the ability to vanquish the Philistines, thus his attempts against Philistine culture are fundamental to his Nazirite status and his Rasta identity. Though later iterations of the Nazirite vow prohibit contact with death, Samson’s divinely inspired violence is of central importance to his oath.⁴⁷⁸ For Rasta readers, though, his allowance for contact with death is based not upon such dealings being sanctioned for early Nazirites, but instead is an exception because he is a warrior. Ras Saadon writes:

According to the vow you are not allowed to be near the dead, but Samson was a warrior and had to fight and kill other in order to protect his people, so warriors are allowed to be near the dead... thats the only exception InI know of in the Nazarite vow.⁴⁷⁹

As a holy man elect by Jah, Samson’s violent behavior is nonetheless transgressive and complicates his Nazirite identity.

As Gregory Mobley notes, the early Iron Age Israelite warrior held a position of extreme importance in ancient Israel, as did the biblical “motif of the satiation of a bloodthirsty, flesh – hungry divine warrior.”⁴⁸⁰ Samson fulfills that role. He massacred Philistines in Judges 14:19, 15:8, 15:15, and 16:32. In 15:11 he spoke of retribution: “as they did to me, so I have done to them.” Even when blinded and bound by Philistines in Judges 16:21, Samson focused on killing his enemy. While assigning Samson the label

“bloodthirsty” would not be unreasonable, Mobley calls for “a temporary suspension of the moralistic voices at the boundaries of the stories and in the religious imagination of the readers.”⁴⁸¹ Moreover, “the oldest literary stratum of Judges . . . celebrates, for the most part, Iron Age martial heroism.”⁴⁸² Samson accomplishes his life’s purpose through his heroic, often gory violence that is inspired by Jah.

Samson’s name translates as “Sunny” or “Man of great strength;” beyond that, as Ras Ekowa writes, “The name Sampson is very interesting and I believe it relates to Anu/ON or the Greek Heliopolis. Derived probably from shemesh, ‘sun’ with the diminutive ending -on, meaning ‘little sun’ or ‘sunny,’ or perhaps ‘sun-man.’”⁴⁸³ As a man of the sun, Samson is a vessel of nature and thus of Jah’s power. His physical strength is notorious, but his real power comes from his ability to house Jah and to carry out Jah’s will.

Samson’s forceful revolutionary behavior resonates with Rasta readers’ conception of a Nazirite vow as well. As Nazirites, Rastas have both a responsibility to pursue livity and to strive for freedom from Babylon System. Brother Woks declares that “We are warriors . . . we take on the vow of the Nazirites. . . . When people them look on I n I, them see I n I art dreadful and awesome, and them tremble in them boots,” a quote that inarguably references Samson’s biblical station as the only Nazirite warrior in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁸⁴ For Brother Woks, a Nazirite identity involves not only closeness with Jah but also an embrace of the warrior-status demonstrated by Samson. Personal purity as ensured through livity enables effective efforts against Babylon.

Rastas read Samson’s violence as holy aggression channeled against oppressors, as acts of resistance against Babylon manifest as the Philistines. Because Babylon System

is the embodiment of evil and corruption, practitioners reason that in order to defeat it, the righteous will need to channel the power of Jah, or the “Spirit of the Lord,” just as Samson did in his biblical narrative. According to Frantz Fanon, “Colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence.”⁴⁸⁵ Rastafari generally relegate their violence against Babylon to the ideological realm. But, Rasta readers can rationalize Samson’s acts of physical violence as being necessary in order to stop the oppression of the Israelites. Practitioners confirm the righteousness of their revolutionary behavior through their affiliation with Samson and their dreadlocks, which mirror Samson’s pleated hair. Nonetheless, identifying Samson as a warrior remains problematic for certain Rasta readers, including Jeanba. The author refers to Samson as a “warrior” instead of as a “warrior” in his book’s title in a hermeneutic move that enables Jeanba to acknowledge Samson’s aggressive feats while avoiding the violent connotations of the term “warrior.”

Jeanba notes that:

Even as a young boy, Samson was seen to be destined for greatness, and his strength like the relentless flowing of the Nile. . . . He could plow twice as fast as an ox, and carry double the load of a mule.⁴⁸⁶

Samson was a strongman, a deliverer who fought for freedom. Not surprisingly, therefore, his strength against Babylon is a familiar theme in “roots and culture” reggae. Bob Marley embraces Samson as a paradigm of resistance in “Rastaman Live Up,” singing “David slew Goliath/ With a sling and a stone/ Samson slew the Philistines with a donkey jawbone. / Iyaman, live up! / Rastaman, don’t give up!”⁴⁸⁷ Samson’s might is admirable and worthy of emulation, and because Samson was a robust liberator, Rastafari

are encouraged to be the same. As Peter Tosh notes in “Creation,” Jah will guide these efforts toward freedom. He sings, “Jah is my guide when Philistines come down upon me, / So whom shall I fear? / He’s my guide when my enemies come before I.”⁴⁸⁸

Because Samson’s strength enabled him to make strides against the Philistines as Babylon, Rastas have that same potential. Reggae artist Black-am-I envisions his capabilities as even greater than Samson’s in “Samson Strength” in which he claims, “Samson Strength, me double dat.”⁴⁸⁹ Samson also makes cameos as a tough, sexually potent man in dancehall music; a genre popular in nightclubs that evolved from reggae roots.⁴⁹⁰ Vybz Kartel brags in “A.K.A.” for example, “Mi badda dan Joshua, Samson & di Philistine” after stating “We don’t play/ Fuck all night/ Smoke all day/ Claat ak/ Still DJ/ We play music we don’t play.”⁴⁹¹

When Samson is a Rastaman, practitioners can adopt his potency and thereby empower African diasporic people. Furthermore, he offers practitioners the role of a dreadlocked liberator who retains purity on account of his Nazirite status. Marley’s son Ziggy epitomizes a Rasta adoption of Samson’s characteristics in his lyrics: “Like the Nazarene Samson we have a lot of strength. Bigging up Jah Jah, blowing breath like a vent.”⁴⁹² But Samson kills Philistines. In slaughtering Philistines, three hundred foxes and a young lion, the very symbol of Haile Selassie and the Solomonic line, Samson breaks his Nazirite vow and challenges Rasta proscriptions against contact with death, even though much of his contact with corpses occurred under of “the Spirit of the Lord.” In spite of his killings, “he judged Israel twenty years” (Judges 15:20, 16:31). Because the biblical text notes that he ruled over Jah’s chosen people for a period of time, because Rasta interpreters understand the current version of the Bible to be redacted, and because

they know Samson's true nature in their hearts, Rastas read him as unsullied and as the ultimate warrior (or worrior) against Babylon. Rasta readers know, however, that his reign as judge extends beyond the twenty years the Bible allots him since true Rastafari cannot die.

In Rasta opinion, as Jah's elect, Nazirite Samson should avoid touching, let alone eating from, corpses. Rastafari consider association with death highly defiling because of biblical injunctions against Nazirite and priestly contact with corpses (Numbers 6:6, Leviticus 21:1).⁴⁹³ To deal with the reality of death, even if no physical contact is made, is to sully oneself with the reality of humanness, an awareness that challenges conceptions of I-n-I's permanence in the current plane. Practitioners have gone so far as to move when a close relative dies so as to avoid contact with the dead body. Yet, though Samson inevitably touches dead bodies, Rastas celebrate him, reasoning that Samson's violence is justified and his contact with death pardonable. A Rasta hermeneutical approach ensures that his handling of dying and decaying flesh, in particular in his encounter with the young lion, does not affect Samson's eligibility as the prototypical Rastaman.

Samson as Impure Eater

For Rasta readers, eating and drinking are essential mediums for the expression of faith. In his biblical narrative, though, Samson egregiously disregards the consumption-based prohibitions of an Ital livit, of Nazirites, and of Israelites. When on his way to Timnath, Samson finds the carcass of the lion he killed on a previous trip, and:

Behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion.
And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his

father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion” (Judges 14:8-9).

His biblical narrative makes clear that Samson was cognizant of his breach, as 14:9 specifies that Samson withheld the honey’s origin from his parents even as he shared the dubious treat with them because ostensibly they would disapprove. Jeanba echoes 14:9’s message in noting that “Samson did give them honey which they did eat, but he never told them of its origins.”⁴⁹⁴ Though Israelites are prohibited to consume lion, both by the Hebrew Bible and according to *livity*, Samson ate of it and gave the fetid honey to his parents in an act of deception.

According to Mervin Stoddart, Bob Marley channels Samson’s sweet snack in “Easy Skanking” in which he sings “Herb for my wine/ Honey for my strong drink.”⁴⁹⁵ In these lyrics, herb and honey act as substitutes for wine and liquor, both which are prohibited by Numbers 6. The question thus arises as to whether honey derived from a rotting and unkosher corpse is a fitting replacement for Samson. Niditch argues that “without searching beyond Judges 13-16 it is not certain that the food and uncleanness rules apply to him.”⁴⁹⁶ Though Judges 13 through 16 does not assume for Samson any dietary, and additionally, death-based guidelines, he is an Israelite. Thus, he is held to Israelite cultural and religious proscriptions. That his mother’s Nazirite vow involved an avoidance of alcoholic beverages and grape-derived beverages contributes to a Rasta reading of Samson that bestows him with the same set of vow-based guidelines. And, because he did not tell his parents about the origin of the honey, Judges 14:8-9 seems to confirm that he was indeed bound to dietary restrictions of the Israelite people. Here he also betrayed his parents by lying to them, breaking Exodus 20:12’s commandment to

“honor thy father and thy mother.” Over and above any of these reasons to bestow Samson with the dietary restrictions of Israelites and Nazirites is that Rasta readers view him as a Rasta. Rastas assume that Samson is compelled to practice livity, to keep Nazirite dietary restrictions, to adhere to Nazirite death-based restrictions, and to grow his hair, because he is a brethren. Mahomva acknowledges that “the bible gives an account of prominent Nazarites like Samson.”⁴⁹⁷ However, though Rasta readers assume that he is bound to the laws pertaining to Nazirites and the guidelines of livity, Jah remains with Samson after he eats honey tainted by its encasement in a putrid carcass.

His desecration is self-inflicted in this instance, yet Rasta readers who engage the biblical text directly conceive of Samson as remaining pure and eligible for election by applying their unique biblical hermeneutic. When the Philistines lop off Samson’s locks in 16:19, he is not responsible for the breach of his Nazirite vow. However, in 14:8 Samson chooses to ignore the death-based restrictions of Numbers 6 and livity, as well as dietary limitations required of his Israelite-Rasta identity. Samson’s non-kosher, non-Ital snack in 14:8 has little impact on practitioners’ evaluation of his character, though if Babylonian redaction were not a factor, the incident might problematize claims of Samson as a prototypical Rastafari, as might the fact that he likely served and potentially consumed alcohol at his feast in 14:10.

When Samson eats questionable honey and hosts a feast, potentially consuming fermented beverages, he defiles his body according to Israelite, Nazirite, and Rasta standards, thereby challenging his capability for connection with Jah according to livity. Rastas obfuscate the need for consideration of these acts of questionable consumption because Jah does not abandon Samson at these junctures and/or they attribute difficult

episodes to grotesque editors of Babylon. Because for Rastafari “livitary” proscription is a venue for purification, that readings do not contend with Samson’s sugary snack and boozy bash points towards a reading strategy with a prerogative of existential reification.

Samson as Dreadlocked Rasta

In Samson’s narrative, hair communicates information about the world he lived in and his place in it. Samson’s hair indicates his closeness with Jah when it is long and worn in seven locks. When he is shaven, his loss of hair demarcates a loss of the “Spirit of the Lord.” Samson’s hair, or lack thereof, indicates when he is holy in the eyes of Israelites and when he is not. In Judges 13 through 16 and in Rasta vernacular readings of Samson, his locks distinguish him as unique, just as the circumstance surrounding his birth does.

While Samson was in utero, his previously barren mother took on a Nazirite vow of her own. Jeanba notes that the angel that appeared to Samson’s mother said to Manoah that “she should drink no strong drink, or fruit of the vine, neither let her eat any flesh with blood as it’s life source.”⁴⁹⁸ So, Jeanba continues, she “ate only fruits and vegetables and drunk only water and juices.”⁴⁹⁹ Assuming that Samson’s mother followed each element of her Nazirite vow, Samson grew from conception in a consecrated hairy vessel. Though, as Niditch recognizes, Judges 13 does not require Samson to fulfill dietary or death-based Nazirite requirements, the text does specify that that Samson is not to cut his hair. His biblical narrative does not detail much about Samson’s appearance, but the text references his hair five times, in Judges 13:5, 16:13, 16:17, 16:19, and 16:22. Samson’s uncut hair, styled in seven locks, signals his election, his strength, and his role within (or removed from) Israelite society as warrior-Nazirite-judge. For Rasta readers, Samson’s

hair is the element that allows him to channel Jah's strength. Because "His countenance was good to look upon and the crown of his head was very hairy; and the child grew and the most high, lord of all host blessed him," his chronicle resonates with Rasta conceptions of locks as markers of divinity and as conduits for Jah's greatness.⁵⁰⁰

In a 1913 essay entitled "Simson," Hermann Gunkel describes Samson as a natural man.⁵⁰¹ Moreover, according to David E. Bynum and Niditch, Samson adheres to elements of a wild man archetype. Mobley embraces this idea and expands upon it, arguing that Samson, as a liminal character, is an ancient near Eastern, hairy, wild man on the border of nature and culture.⁵⁰² Niditch also contends that "Samson is indeed a mediator between the 'raw and cooked'" and that his hair verifies his liminal status "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."⁵⁰³ As a hairy Nazirite warrior and liberator, Samson is of culture and yet removed from culture, a positionality that resonates with Rasta readers who envision themselves as removed from the world in which they live, a world dominated by Babylon System, from which Rastafari must extricate themselves through acts of purification, including the practice of growing locks.

Judges 16:4 details that Samson's notoriously long hair was styled in seven locks. Biblical scholars, including Niditch, argue that his pleated locks demarcate his participation in culture; she reads those pleats as braids and envisions the style as the result of artificial modification.⁵⁰⁴ But Rastas interpret his hair as naturally dreadlocked. Because of the potency of his seven pleated locks, envisioned as dreadlocks, Rastas employ Samson to prove the power of naturalness inherent to letting one's hair dread. In this vein, reggae artist Tony Rebel looks to biblical actors as exemplars of hairy purity:

The first time me know say Rastafari legit, is when me tek a little prip in a number chapter six. . . . Me check Samson and John the Baptist, / Them grow them natty dread, mek it long like wiffs. / Who, me start fi grow fi me dread some more.⁵⁰⁵

Because he is infamous for his locks, markers both of his chosenness and of his warrior status, Rastafari celebrate Samson as an exemplary Rastaman. They acknowledge in Samson and themselves the virility, potency and election that accompany hairiness. Reading Samson as a Rasta allows practitioners to own his characteristics, including those attributed to his mane. They celebrate him and his highly charged locks, reasoning that if Samson's hair illustrates his strength and relationship with Jah, their own locks furnish them with similar attributes. The members of the reggae group Culture celebrate the power inherent in their locks, a power that allows them to resist domination by Babylon:

Like Samson to Delilah and the Philistines/ They wan' take over but dread, dread take over in this hear time/ Long along along along along/ To Zion on Trod on I say/ Jah know is true/ Babylon a burn up him back so? / Fe Keep a hope on I natty dread.⁵⁰⁶

The members of Culture acknowledge that since they "bowed" to Jah, they gained the strength of a warrior-liberator. Their strength comes from the marker of their fittedness to serve as instruments of Jah, their locks.

The role of hair in Samson's narrative confirms its potency for Rastafari. Though unspoken of from Judges 13:5 to 16:17, his hair remained a marker of strength until the dramatic denouement of Samson's tale. In 16:17, Samson admitted to Delilah, a woman that he "loved," that his power was linked to his hair. He informed her, "If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me." When Samson revealed the value of his hair, "Delilah and the Philistines attempt(ed) to devalue it and yet (were) afraid of it."⁵⁰⁷

The “Spirit of the Lord” remained with Samson through problematic episodes and sticky situations, until the Philistines sheared him. At that juncture, “his strength went from him” (16:19) and “the Lord was departed from him” (16:20). He was subsequently imprisoned, blinded, and brought by Philistines to the Temple of Dagon, where he was made to entertain his captors. His loss of power at this moment affirms for Rasta readers the essentiality of growing locks and more largely of livity. As Hausman explains, “For many Rastafarians, the lesson here is that a man must remain true to his roots- hair and spirit entwined- and watch out for the wicked.”⁵⁰⁸ Rastas understand from Samson’s biblical narrative and from the motifs derived from his biblical presence that the wicked aim to cut the hair of the righteous as a method of separating them from Jah and their divinely bestowed power. In Samson’s narrative, that threat of the wicked manifests in the form of dangerous women and unnamed Philistine men.

Though maintaining dreads is of utmost concern for many brethren and sistren, the cutting of Samson’s locks does not compromise his stature in Rasta mythology and symbolism. Rasta interpretations of Samson’s shearing in 16:19 focus on his betrayal by Delilah and secondarily by male Philistines, not on his loss of Jah’s “Spirit,” nor on his unsavory behaviors. Samson’s haircut at the hands of the Philistines did not deter his efforts against them. Like those Rastas who have been shorn by Jamaican authorities who still strive for freedom from Babylon, Samson remained focused on conquering the Philistines after his shave.

Jah abandoned Samson when the Philistines sheared his hair, though. However, Samson’s violations of his Nazirite identity and his temporary alienation from Jah are not central to Rasta dialogue because, when Samson is not a dutiful Nazirite with a close

relationship to Jah, Rastas' role as contemporary Samsons elect by Jah comes into question. Those Rasta readers who do contend with his shearing and subsequent distance from Jah reason that when the Philistines cut Samson's hair in 16:19, he lost his relationship with Jah due to the editing hand of Babylon. As VoodooRuutz recognizes, "Bible washing is real."⁵⁰⁹ Other Rasta readers claim that though Jah left him in 16:20, Jah did not abandon Samson permanently since the Philistines were responsible for his shearing and his hair did regrow. Jeanba stresses that Samson's hair sprouted again and that Jah too filled him with "Spirit" for his final act against the Philistines.⁵¹⁰ In each case, Rasta readers minimize or do not acknowledge Jah's departure from Samson, a hermeneutic move that ensures his Rastaman status.

The outward signifier of his relationship with Jah, his hair, "began to grow again after it had been shaved"(16:22), a reality that suggests that Jah returned to Samson after his defamation. His shearing also led directly to his greatest blow to Babylon: the Philistines were able to capture Samson and bring him to the Temple of Dagon, in 16:25, because they removed his locks and, thus, his strength, in 16:19, but because he regained his strength inside of the temple, he was able to kill three thousand of the enemy. He channeled Jah's strength to topple the Temple of Dagon in 16:30, an architectural destruction that grievously damages Philistine culture. "So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life" (16:32).

Niditch proposes that when hair is the source of divine favor, maleness, and virility, and when that hair is removed, the shorn becomes emasculated and divine favor is lost. In Samson's case however, divine favor returned and allowed the committed warrior of Jah to execute a final revolutionary act. His resilience and divine favor urge

Rastafari to fight Babylon's reign in the face of adversity. As Mark Mohr recognizes in song, "Samson was a man on a mission / A purpose driven dread / A warrior with seven natty (kinky) locks upon his head."⁵¹¹ Because Jah returns to him for his final act, because of his seven locks, and because Samson commits violent revolutionary acts against Babylon System, he remains an exemplary Rastaman for Rasta readers despite his shortcomings.

Conclusion

For Rastafari, Samson stands as a brethren and as a moral exemplar, a patriarch of livity. Practitioners employ Samson to articulate their strength and election while sharing concerns over the threats that faced Samson and celebrations of his triumphs over Babylon through poetry and song. Rastas perceive of Samson as an elect Rastaman whose dreadlocks and violence against the Philistines bespeak Rastafari's righteousness. He is a complex figure to claim as prototypical Rastaman, however. Reading Samson as uncompromised allows Rastas to adopt his election and strength against oppressors. Thus, Rasta readers approach Samson's unsavory behaviors with a hermeneutical approach that proves conceptions of him as an unsullied Rastaman.

Rasta readers' engagements with Samson center on his strength, election, hair, and relationships with dangerous women. However, Samson violates several purity regulations of the Hebrew Bible and of livity. In his brief textual appearances, Samson eats honey out of the carcass of a lion (14:8-9), hosts a feast (14:10), touches dead bodies, (14:6, 14:19, 15:8, 15:15), and gets a haircut (16:19). A diversity of Rasta readers overlook or rationalize as redaction Samson's disregard for Israelite and Nazirite codes of

conduct. And one could argue that Samson frequently engaged in offensive behaviors because the “Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him.” Rasta readings of Samson that hedge consideration of his desecration and of Jah’s potential role in his questionable behavior allow for an empowering existential shift, in a way that readings that take into account his missteps cannot. As Rastaman, Samson offers Rasta readers the space to assert themselves as dreadlocked Nazirite-warriors. He promises practitioners the resiliency to keep striving against Babylon’s reign. Thus, Samson’s hairstyle, election, and successful rebellion against the Philistines override the need to assess his questionable behavior, for Jah inspired it.

⁴⁵⁶ Gregory Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero in the Ancient Near East* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 1-5.

Susan Niditch, “Historiography, ‘Hazards’ and the Study of Ancient Israel,” *Interpretation* 57 (2003): 138-50.

James A. Wharton, “The Secrets of Yahweh: Story and Affirmation in Judges 13-16,” *Interpretation* 27 (1973): 48-66.

Cheryl Exum, “The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga,” *Vetus Testamentum* 33 (1983): 30-45.

⁴⁵⁷ See David L. Cook, *The Greatest Love Poems Ever Written* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2013).

See Elijah Muhammad, *The God-Science of Black Power* (Phoenix: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 2002).

⁴⁵⁸ Long before the Rastafari movement emerged, Samson served as a model of power against oppressors for African diasporic people throughout the Americas. “Black Samson” freed enslaved Africans in numerous folktales of the colonial era. Samson was also a frequent metaphor during the Great Migration through the Harlem Renaissance and even through the Black Power Movement. Marcus Garvey notably embraced Samson as a vehicle through which to inspire hope and strength, as did Elijah Muhammad, who wrote of Samson: “They have a parable there in the Bible of us under the name Samson. This is all referring to you and me. Samson was the strongest man. The Black man is the strongest man.”

Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 50, 159.

Elijah Muhammad, *The God-Science of Black Power* (Phoenix: Secretarius MEMPS Publications, 2002), 71.

⁴⁵⁹ Rabbi Simon Altuf, *Yahushua: The Black Messiah* (London: African-Israel International Union of Qahalim, 2010), 115.

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- ⁴⁶⁰ Malahkee Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson: A Rasta Story* (Xlibris: Bloomington, 2012), 4.
- ⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁴⁶³ Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).
- ⁴⁶⁴ Anand Prahlad interrogates a similar concept in *Reggae Wisdom: Proverbs in Jamaican Music* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 73.
- ⁴⁶⁵ Niditch, "My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man," 70.
- ⁴⁶⁶ I recognize the historic shifts in the Nazirite vow as it is described in the Hebrew Bible. Yet, this dissertation does not contend with these changes because Rasta readers do not distinguish between the vows of Samson, Samuel, Absalom, and the vow of Numbers 6.
- ⁴⁶⁷ Scholar Marc Zvi Brettler discounts that the Nazirite vow serves as a unifying theme for the Samson cycle. This chapter proves the centrality of the vow in Rastafari readings of Samson.
- Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (London: Routledge, 2002), 40-60.
- ⁴⁶⁸ Richard Runyararo Mahomva, March 25, 2013, "Rastalk: Separation of the Dread Man from the Rasta Man," *Voice of the Ras*, <http://voiceoftheras.blogspot.com/2013/03/separation-of-dread-man-from-rasta-man.html>.
- ⁴⁶⁹ White Dread, January 25, 2006 (6:36 p.m.), *Jah-rastafari.com*, http://www.jah-rastafari.com/forum/message-view.asp?message_group=1268&word_search=samson&SearchType=Phrase&SearchWh at=Messages&search_user=white%20dread.
- ⁴⁷⁰ Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson*, 52.
- ⁴⁷¹ Scholars debate whether or not Samson imbibes wine or fermented liquor. Because Judges does not specify, this chapter will not make a claim either way. For more on this debate, see Gregory Mobley's *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 180.
- ⁴⁷² Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson*, 16.
- ⁴⁷³ A reference to the Seven Seals of the Book of Revelation.
- Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 16.
- ⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ⁴⁷⁶ Bunny Wailer, "Rastaman," *Blackheart Man*, Island Records (1976).
- ⁴⁷⁷ Unless he shaved seven days after he came into contact with death (Numbers 6:9).
- ⁴⁷⁸ Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 172-173.
- ⁴⁷⁹ Ras Saadon, July 10, 2005 (9:55 a.m.), comment on Nazirite Vow, "New Rasta," July 10, 2005, *Rasta Nick's Forum*, <http://forums.rastaman.co.uk/smf/index.php?topic=1816.0>.
- ⁴⁸⁰ Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 26.
- ⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 8.

- ⁴⁸³ Ekowa, 2006, "Locking, Plaiting and Braiding: Symbols of an Ancient Rulership and Priesthood," *Essays by Ekowa*, <http://www.essaysbyekowa.com/Locks%20and%20the%20Priesthood.htm>.
- ⁴⁸⁴ Brother Woks, quoted in Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta: Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 66.
- ⁴⁸⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 23.
- ⁴⁸⁶ Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson*, 14.
- ⁴⁸⁷ Bob Marley, "Rastaman Live Up," *Confrontation*, Island Records (1993).
- ⁴⁸⁸ Peter Tosh, "Creation," *Bush Doctor*, Rolling Stones Records (1978).
- ⁴⁸⁹ Black-am-I, "Samson Strength," *Ghetto Youths International Presents: Set Up Shop Volume 1* (Anthology), Ghetto Youths International (2013).
- ⁴⁹⁰ A genre of music derived from reggae but with a faster tempo and a focus on partying, ego and sexuality.
- ⁴⁹¹ Vybz Kartel, "A.K.A.," *Up 2 Di Time*, Greensleeves Records (2003).
- ⁴⁹² Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers, "Day By Day," *Fallen is Babylon*, Elektra Records (1997).
- ⁴⁹³ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 290.
- ⁴⁹⁴ Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson*, 21.
- ⁴⁹⁵ Mervin Stoddart, "Bob Marley's Lyrics: Understanding and Explaining their Pedagogical Value" (PhD diss., Capella University, 2007).
- ⁴⁹⁶ Niditch, "My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man," 64.
- ⁴⁹⁷ Richard Runyararo Mahomva, March 25, 2013, "Separation of the Dread Man from the Rasta Man," "Separation of the Dread Man from the Rasta Man," *Rastalk*, <http://voiceoftheras.blogspot.com/2013/03/separation-of-dread-man-from-rasta-man.html>.
- ⁴⁹⁸ Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson*, 12.
- ⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁵⁰¹ Hermann Gunkel, "Simson" in *Reden und Aussätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 39.
- ⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 16.
- ⁵⁰³ Susan Niditch, "Samson as Cultural Hero, Trickster, and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 613.
- Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: AldineTransaction, 1969), 95.
- ⁵⁰⁴ See Niditch, "My Brother Esau is a Hairy Man" for more on the significance of his pleats.
- ⁵⁰⁵ Tony Rebel, "Nazerite Vow," *Vibes of the Times*, Columbia Records (1993).
- ⁵⁰⁶ Culture, "Tro'd On," *Tro'd On*, Heartbeat Records (1993).
- ⁵⁰⁷ Niditch, "My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man," 70.
- ⁵⁰⁸ Gerald Hausman, ed., *The Kebrá Nagast: The Lost Bible of Rastafarian Wisdom and Faith from Ethiopia and Jamaica* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 49.
- ⁵⁰⁹ Voodooorutz, October 28, 2015 (4:15 p.m.), comment on John Israel, "Murder in the Bible," *Jah-rastafari.com*, October 28, 2015, [jah-rastafari.com, http://jah-rastafari.com/forum/message-](http://jah-rastafari.com/forum/message-)

view.asp?message_group=6235&start_row=1&word_search=bible%20washing&Search
Type=Phrase&search_user=voodooorutz.

⁵¹⁰ Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson*, 42, 46.

⁵¹¹ Christafari, "Dreadlocked Samson," *Reggae Sunday School*, Lion of Zion
Entertainment (2005).

CHAPTER 6: THE GENDERING OF LIVITY: DELILAH, SAMSON, AND DANGEROUS WOMEN

Every time me sight you, your presence is a delight too
A nuh Delilah inside ah you
Despite them other guys weh a try with you
Hold your space beside me, I invite you to . . .
Woman tek care of di family
Provide an' cook di rice an' chicken fi di pickney
Me work every day fi get money to support dem
Give dem education, strength an' school dem
Woman give me life, so please accept my seed
We affi stick together, we nah go loose just succeed
Unity an' love in da name of di Most High Jah.
-Protoje, "Come My Way," (2013)

Samson's narrative confirms for Rasta readers the inherent strength of the Rastaman, the value of cultivating dreadlocks, and the election of Rastas by Jah, crucial foundations of livity. But Judges 13-16 contains another valuable lesson. The chapters warn Rastafari males of the threat of dangerous women. In particular, Samson's dalliance with Delilah affirms the male body as being untainted while demonstrating the threat of women to the true Rastaman. This chapter explores the ways in which male Rasta readers interpret Delilah's character and her interactions with Samson. Delilah's relationship with Samson exemplifies for male Rasta interpreters both male potentiality and female baseness. Rasta readers envision Samson as the ultimate strongman-Rasta and Delilah as a prototypical woman: a deceitful and self-centered being who has the ability to beguile even Jah's most elect Nazirite warrior, a reading that has profound negative repercussions for Rasta women and Rastafari as a whole.

Before he encountered Delilah in Judges 16:4, Samson engaged with at least three other women, his unnamed mother, his wife from Timnath, and a harlot in Gaza. The second and third women he encounters are, like Delilah, potential sexual partners for him.

In Judges 14, Samson “saw” a woman from Timnath that intrigued him, a woman who would become his wife, though their union would be brief. His parents replied to his announcement of intent to marry her in 14:3 as follows: “Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all of my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?” Rasta author Malakhee Jeanba refers to the Philistines as “wicked” instead of uncircumcised in his interpretation of the passage.⁵¹² Both Jeanba’s account and the biblical text infer that their union is disagreeable to his parents. The *Kebra Nagast* also denounces Samson’s marriage to this foreign woman: “And how God gave him strength ye have heard in the Book of Judges. But he transgressed the commandment of God, and came and married a daughter of the uncircumcised Philistines.”⁵¹³ However, Judges 14:4 explicates: “But his father and mother knew not that it was of the Lord, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines; for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.” 14:4 makes clear that Samson’s interest in the woman from Timnath is of Jah’s design; their union gave Samson the opportunity to slaughter Philistines. Nonetheless, his marriage to his foreign bride was not without its problems.

In Judges 14:14, Samson posed a riddle to thirty of the woman’s father’s “companions;” Samson taunted: “Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.” The answer to his riddle is esoteric. He had not shared information about the lion he killed (14:6) and later found filled with honey (14:8) with any of these “companions.” The Philistines, stumped by Samson’s riddle, threatened his wife by stating their plans to burn down her father’s house if she did not oblige them by “entic(ing) thy husband” to share the riddle’s answer (14:15). Samson initially ignored

his wife's inquiries about the riddle, until she persuaded him after weeping for seven days. She then betrayed Samson by sharing the unknowable answer to his riddle with those who threatened her in an act that foreshadowed Samson's great betrayal by Delilah. Samson became enraged after she gave the answer to her countrymen. "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil" (14:19). Jeanba reinterprets the wording of this passage, offering this reiteration:

That night the i-rite of the most high, lord of all host, king creator came upon him and he left for Ashkelon, a Philistine village nearby; and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil and paid his debt with the blood of the philistines for their treachery.⁵¹⁴

As Jeanba's interpretation demonstrates, Rasta readers must recognize her treason and learn a lesson from it that advises against trusting foreign women.

After this episode, Samson's father-in-law gave his wife to his "companion" in 14:20; he discovers this development when he returns to Timnath, in 15:1. His father-in-law would not allow him to visit his wife's chamber, which angered Samson. Jeanba explains that "Samson's anger was kindled against the Philistines once more."⁵¹⁵ In an act of vengeance, Samson caught three hundred "foxes," tied them together by the tail, ignited them, and used them to burn Philistine fields (15:5). According to Jeanba, as a result, "The Philistines with their cold and barbaric heart, came up and burnt her and her father with fire."⁵¹⁶ Samson then "smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter" (15:8). Afterward, according to Jeanba, "he then said a prayer for his wife and father-in-law and buried what was left of their remains."⁵¹⁷ Regardless of her treachery, according to Jeanba, Samson honors his late wife's life in prayer. His union with the woman from Timnath upset his parents and ended in death and destruction that was not inspired by the

“Spirit of the Lord.” Nonetheless, Samson’s union with the women from Timnath concluded in the demise of numerous Philistines. Even though the Bible does not attribute Samson with Jah’s strength at these junctures, Jeanba notes that “The Philistines could not over power him, for the strength of the most high, lord of all host, king creator rests on his shoulders.”⁵¹⁸ The first time that a woman betrayed Samson, he prevailed over his enemy and she ended up dead.

The next woman Samson encountered was a harlot in Gaza. His meeting with her in Judges 16 ended with Samson leaving Gaza, stalked by murderous locals, with the doors and posts of the gate to the city upon his shoulders in the dark of night (16:3). But it was Delilah, a woman of the valley of Sorek whom he “loved,” that would ultimately lead to Samson’s disgrace and death. In Judges 16:5:

Lords of the Philistines came up to her and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lies, and by what means we may prevail against him and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver.

Jeanba recounts, “With the thought of all the money Delilah said, ‘pay half now!’ and so they did.”⁵¹⁹ After her several attempts to sway Samson to share his secret:

His soul was vexed unto death; That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother’s womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me (16:16-17).

Jeanba retells this biblical scene to read: “Now I speak truths to you, I was to be clean shaven like the baldheads do, then my strength will leave me and I shall become weak as another man.”⁵²⁰ According to the author, upon learning his truth, Delilah then requested the rest of her silver and later “that night she made love to him as she had never done

before and put him to sleep on her knees.”⁵²¹ She then coaxed him to sleep before calling in a “man” to shave him.

Ostensibly, the Philistine lords that contracted Delilah to help tame Samson’s strength were male, as was the “man” who cut his hair. But, Rasta readings of Samson’s shearing center on Delilah’s actions as representative of the moral failing and treachery of women. As Gerald Hausman notes:

Some Rastas refer to the myth of Samson, blind, baldheaded, and chained to the pillars of the Philistine palace as an example of what can happen when one loses the locks under the hand of artifice; when one trusts a wicked woman; and when one refuses to honor the will of Jah.⁵²²

While Hausman is correct in recognizing that Rastas read Samson’s tale as an admonishment of artifice and a disclaimer against the threat of women, he misses that Jah remains with Samson, except for a momentary departure when the Philistines cut the outward signifier of Jah’s presence. This is essential to many Rasta readings of his tale. Samson does lose his locks, but they regrow, in 16:22. And though Samson does succumb to Delilah, his binding leads to his opportunity to orchestrate a crushing blow to the Philistines. As an unnamed Rasta comments, “Even after his head had been shaved by his deceitful wife Delilah and had only a small amount of hair, he was able to topple the two pillars of the house and destroy the Philistines.”⁵²³ This reality does not diminish the importance of the lesson that Samson’s tale offers Rasta males regarding dangerous women.

Jeanba confirms Hausman’s Rasta interpretation of the biblical tale’s warning against wicked women, noting that while a blinded Samson was imprisoned, Delilah visited him to taunt him. Jeanba writes of the scene:

‘You witch you shall die today,’ said Samson and reached for her in the direction of her voice, for he could not see, but was held back by the chains which bond him. . . . She laughed and said, ‘you fool, look at you now Samson, no longer mighty but a sport unto your enemy. Know now that I have not come here for forgiveness or cause of pity, nor because of love but to see you suffer for the wrongs you have done to my people; oh and thank you for the wealth you have given to me for my families house.’⁵²⁴

Even while Samson “loved” Delilah, she stood with the Philistines as representatives of Babylon and pursued financial gains over gains of the spirit, a truth that instructs Rastamen about the nature of women.

Some of the women Samson encounters are dangerous because they manipulate him, because they betray him, and because they are foreign, sexual, and assertive.⁵²⁵ His engagements with dangerous women move Samson along his predestined path of retribution against the Philistines, yet Rasta readers still envision these dangerous women as being primarily threatening to Samson’s spiritual growth and incurring his downfall. Samson’s engagements with these dangerous women, especially Delilah, sanction Rasta misogyny as rational for male practitioners.

Samson engaged with three sexually active, and thus and consequently potentially dangerous, women in his narrative. While Samson retained his hair and thus his virility throughout his engagement with the first two dangerous women, the third woman, who was the true object of his “love,” led to his conquer. As Hausman writes, “Once Delilah was done with him, Samson suffered the fate of the archetypal man whose weakness is women. This is a paradigm all Rastas understand.”⁵²⁶ For Rasta readers, Samson’s tale is a warning of the threat of female sexuality and a word of caution about the dangers of trusting women. His narrative clarifies that lust can cloud the judgment of even Jah’s mightiest warrior. By taking advantage of the intimacy that accompanies lovemaking,

women like Delilah can ensnare the holiest of Rastamen. Pato Banton sings of this risk in “Settle Satan”: “Samson was the strongest ever pon’ the land/ Delilah took his hair because of temptation.”⁵²⁷

Samson faced the risk of the loss of his manhood at the hands of dangerous women with whom he was intimate, not only during coitus, but in the aftermath of the act. However, the resulting relationships with Delilah and with his wife from Timnath threatened him further. Rasta readers believe that after engaging with Samson sexually, two of the three dangerous women he encountered make demands of him that disturb the expected male-dominated gender dynamic of pre-monarchic Israel and of Rastafari. By overtly employing their sexuality, all three women shift the power scenario of their relationship with Samson. Delilah and Samson’s wife from Timnath then convey the resulting transfer of power into verbal demands. Delilah and his wife use their intimacy with the Nazirite-warrior to gain his trust and then use the information they acquire from a “conquered” Samson to empower the Philistines as Babylon. This deception and the corresponding reversal of an expected gendered power dynamic is a frequent theme in Roots reggae. For instance, the Jolly Brothers, reminds listeners that:

Samson was strong and deceived, oh yes/ By a woman, oh yes can’t you see/ Look into yourself my friend, try to get wise/ Don’t let a woman, get you down/ Just be a conscious man, when you fall in love.⁵²⁸

Samson’s tale reminds Rastamen that because they amalgamate the roles of priests and Nazirites, and accept both elect positions as their own, “they shall not take a wife that is a whore, or profane” (Leviticus 21:7).⁵²⁹ The ability to channel a man’s lust affords such women the opportunity to beguile and derail brethren from Jah’s path. Steel Pulse describes what lies beyond a veil of sexuality:

Leggo beast lips of flattery eyes of lust/ Leggo beast she says carnal love is a must/ Leggo beast feet abide not a home/ Leggo beast loves to play while her husband gone/ I know a lady lady of easy virtue/ I know a lady lady of easy virtue/ Uptown living living is all she knew/ And at her door step door step/ Traps she would lay for you/ To lead men lead men astray.⁵³⁰

Taking cues from Samson and his missteps with Delilah, brethren must tread carefully to avoid being snared by a dangerous woman.

Though opinions about women's nature vary within and between mansions, Rastafari is inherently patriarchal. Males are thus generally referred to as "Kingman" or "Godman" and women are respectively referred to as "Daughter," "Sister," or "Empress." Rasta interpreters look to biblical passages including Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 to describe the proper relationship between Rastaman, Rastawoman, and Jah: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."⁵³¹ In addition to assigning sistren a subservient role to Rastamen, most Rastafari texts and teachings depict women as simple in nature, unable to grasp the true nature of I-n-I without guidance from men: women "could only see Fari through men."⁵³² The Bobo Shanti phrase "to grow a dawta" echoes this popular sentiment.⁵³³ As Gregory Isaacs instructs in "Not the Way," "The dawtas always take a little longer/ To sight up the Father/ 'Cause the dawtas always take a little longer/ Never let her go astray/ Try to show her the right way."⁵³⁴ Similarly, Ras Fitz Elliot explains to Darren Middleton that "whereas men have 'overstanding,' women have understanding only; the insights and ideologies associated with Rasta women are inferior. All women are evil."⁵³⁵

The conception that good women, if they do indeed exist, await indoctrination by a Rastaman and are only sexually active within the bonds of marriage, while dangerous women live autonomously and are promiscuous, still prevails in many rootical

communities. Since good women do not innately “sight I-n-I,” they need the guidance of a man. In general, male practitioners set guidelines for female Rastas and assure those guidelines are adhered to. Maureen Rowe notes that “women who ‘sight Rastafari,’ have ... an attraction for this structured and disciplined way of life.”⁵³⁶ Mansions offer particular guidelines pertaining to female presentation, behavior, and community participation. Even the Twelve Tribes of Israel, the most flexible mansion in terms of their proscriptions regarding dress, diet, and hairstyle, asks women to attire themselves modestly and cover their hair.

Practitioners utilize the Bible to authorize women’s subordination, citing passages and emphasizing biblical tropes that they believe prove women’s vapidness, moral failings, and pollution. As Leonard Barrett writes, “Rastafarian biblical doctrine does not provide comfort for woman; her knowledge of the scripture is a direct copy of man’s.”⁵³⁷ Furthermore, as Obiagele Lake observes, “Rastafarian women in Jamaica have internalized their own oppression” and accepted naturalized gender-relations that involve women’s submissiveness.⁵³⁸ Rasta readers often turn to the Bible for proof that a woman should be subservient, just as the colonial project employed the Bible to sanction the enslavement of African peoples. Rastafari’s misogynist ideology, a philosophy that presents to varying degrees throughout Rasta communities, allows males to take center stage and contributes to Rasta sistrens’ silencing in the ritual and public spheres.

The Bobo Shanti are especially misogynist. To become Bobo is “to bow” to Jah and to the moral authority of a male leader elected by Jah.⁵³⁹ The most notable of these exclusively male leaders, Prince Emmanuel of the order of Melchizedek, the same order as Jesus Christ, whose nickname, “Dada,” is demonstrative of the paternalistic nature of

Bobo culture, led the Bobo Shanti community from 1953 through 1994, when he “transcended” this plane.⁵⁴⁰ Since then, most Rasta communities have continued a tradition of male leadership in the ritual and communal realms.

Shifting Gender Roles

Repatriation and women’s participation were primary focuses of the inaugural and second Rastafari Studies Conference and General Assembly, held by the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica. The 2010 and 2013 conferences featured panel discussions addressing woman’s role in Rastafari. In those conference sessions, the generational divide was distinct. Certain younger brethren and many sistren of all ages spoke in support of women’s ritual and political leadership. However, numerous authoritative, older Rastamen still touted the meekness and modesty of proper womanhood, citing the Bible as proof. Those in the “traditional” camp also cited custom and the requirements of livity as the primary reasons women must remain excluded from ceremonial and communal leadership. Empowered sistren challenged this notion, suggesting the need for dramatic change and negotiating the transformations that had already occurred in various mansions. At the second Conference and General Assembly, women played a more public role and less “traditional” voices contributed to discussions of women’s place in Rastafari. Women served as conference facilitators, moderators, clergy members, and speakers in significantly higher numbers: Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller even delivered the keynote speech to a room filled with practitioners and academics. Queen Mother Moses and Sister Mitzie Williams welcomed her to the stage along with Ras IvI. During her talk, several Rastafari addressed her as

“Empress,” though one male Rasta asked her why she straightened her hair. She quickly dismissed his suggestion that she cultivate natural locks with a brief laugh. Women’s increased presence and leadership at the conference from 2010 to 2013 is demonstrative of gender-based shifts within Rastafari.

Women have thus taken on increasingly visible leadership roles not only at the Rastafari Studies Conference and General Assembly; over the past ten years in particular, Rasta sistren have also progressively become communal leaders. Though the ritual realm is still male dominated, as are many rootical communities, Rastawomen are more frequently asserting themselves as capable leaders. The Twelve Tribes of Israel is arguably the most egalitarian mansion of Rastafari, due in part to the efforts of middle class women who joined the group in the 1980’s at the same time the Rastafari movement began to face feminist critique.⁵⁴¹ Queen Mother Moses, for instance, a member of the Twelve Tribes, founded Empress of Zion, an organization dedicated to giving Sistren a voice, in 2001. At their inaugural conference, held in Washington D.C. in 2003, Sister Carol explained the organization’s purpose as:

Emphasizing the reality of our feministic side and how important it is in terms of the whole creation of civilization and motherhood and all that comes with it ... again asking for that respect, or to rectify or remind or reeducate the society that all man came through the womb.⁵⁴²

Sister Makeda Hannah, a longtime Rasta and activist claims that “Rasta woman is the other half of the Creation union that is God Jah. Jah is both male and female, two halves united in one whole as Creation and Creator.”⁵⁴³ The concept that Haile Selassie’s wife, Empress Mennen, completes him as the Omega to his Alpha, an idea that stems from Revelation 1:8, is prevalent in Rasta thought.⁵⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the concept that Jah is both male and female is highly controversial in Rasta theology. Sistren Ila Addis refers to

Empress Mennen in a more traditional light as “the Goddess of the God-Head Jah Rastafari,” illuminating the difference in status between the “Goddess of the God-Head” and the “God-Head” himself.⁵⁴⁵ Nonetheless, though this perspective is more prevalent than Sister Hannah’s, Rastawomen are increasingly rejecting a subservient role and affirming their individual power. For example, Sista Faybiene Miranda, poet and wife of Steel Pulse’s Cliff “Moonie” Pusey, writes:

My name is not Eve. I offer you no temptation
I am not your concubine by night
Transformed to memory by day
I am not the milk you thirst for
Now dry in your mother’s breast
Nor could you call me queen
For I have no dominion over beast, earth, or man
I am not a receptacle for the seed
You indiscriminately cast in the wind
I ask no sacrifice of Lamb’s blood for the stain would be mine
Do not toss gold trinkets at my feet
They do not shine for me
I am no slave to a promise written in ink
Where there is no master there are no chains to be broken
Bondage is no glory
I am woman.⁵⁴⁶

Some sistren and brethren are thus actively pursuing congregational and liturgical change. Warrior King sings of his ideal Rastawoman in “Virtuous Woman”: “Woman could never cause sin, so listen as I sing. / Mother woman of the earth, them ah joy bell ring ring ring/ Equality inna Zion, by nature’s law, that’s where we should go.”⁵⁴⁷ But, the change and eventual equality Warrior King envisions can only be achieved slowly. While women’s ceremonial and communal control remains limited in most mansions, the gendered dynamic of particular communities are shifting as a new generation of practitioners assumes authority.

Sizzla describes his perfect woman in “Princess Black,” meanwhile:

She’s a precious, precious, precious woman/ Princess Black/ She always,
always, always say no/ She tougher than an rut/ She don’t like to stay at
home, living on dependency/ She say she have to strive out dey yah, just
like a man you see/ Anything that is progressive, she always inna that.⁵⁴⁸

He follows up his powerful declaration of support for “progressive” women with a statement that portrays women as infantile, however: “Me love them as how black woman them love them little child.” Like Sizzla, many practitioners still accept the notion that women are childlike and in need of male guidance in order to “sight ‘Fari” and grasp the value of livivity. In this schema, when women claim power, either in a communal setting or in personal relationships, they are potential threats. Women can deter a Rastaman or a whole community from the righteous path of livivity not only because they are malicious but also because they are simple.

For Rastafari interpreters, Samson’s story counsels that women are dangerous, even to Jah’s elect. They are likely morally weak and liars or manipulators. The story of Adam and Eve is frequently called upon to support this premise. Bob Marley, for instance, emphasizes Eve’s faults in “Adam and Eve,” singing:

The lord named Adam and Eve, / to live a happy life. / In the garden of
Eden, / but they disobeyed. / I wanna know, / why they sin, / in the garden
of Eden. / It’s a devilman’s affair, / in the shake of a surfband. / And they
broke the fruit of life/ and every one of us is living in sin. / Any anywhere
you go, / woman is the root of all evil.⁵⁴⁹

Furthermore, Leonard Howell wrote in *The Promised Key*, a Rastafari tract published under his chosen name, G.G. Maragh, of “Eve the mother of Evil.”⁵⁵⁰ Eve and Delilah are two manifestations of dangerous women who did not accept woman’s rightful subservient role. And Eve is the original woman, a truth that proves women’s inherent nature, for brethren, as being evil.

These misogynistic notions are also on parade in the blogosphere. Rubadubstyle, for instance, opines:

Adam and Eve's experience is in the Garden of Eden where she gets him to eat the apple. This story is used as an example of what is in store for men when they allow the woman to take charge. Samson and Delilah's story is another example of why women should not be trusted. Delilah marries Samson, gets him to tell her the secret of his strength, then she uses the secret against him.⁵⁵¹

Furthermore, Seshatasefekht writes in a similar vein that "the Samson and Delilah syndrome is just too obvious. Delilah never severed her ties with the enemies of Samson. She only severed the locks from his head."⁵⁵² Because of their sinful and deceitful nature, Rastas believe women remain aligned with and embroiled in Babylon System, despite occasional dedication from those chosen as fitting partners by Jah's elect Nazirite warriors.⁵⁵³

Only women who defer to a Rastaman and embrace the expected role of wife and mother transcend their inherent baseness, though not completely. Even as he sings of the value of pursuing equality in "Virtuous Woman," in the very same track, Warrior King praises women who embrace a supportive and subsidiary role, chanting:

Now a real man cant live without a woman/ like night and day, is a woman to her man. / She's essential to his purpose and his mission/ a good woman is a glory to her man/ she never take the power, she just make him a better man.⁵⁵⁴

In popular Rasta opinion, a righteous woman must accept an Israelite-inspired model of proper femininity as defined by the system of livity. Women who do not fulfill this model align with Babylon. This schema problematically asks women to either be a submissive wife who fulfills her African-Israelite role or a manipulative whore.

William David Spencer reads racial commentary into Delilah's domination of Samson. He argues "that the Samson story is used to indicate Blacks (male) emasculated by white (female) culture is clear enough"⁵⁵⁵ Unfortunately Spencer does not expand on his comparison of whiteness to the female and blackness to the male, though he fittingly recognizes that for Rastafari the greatest threat in Samson's tale is that of emasculation at the hands of women. Such emasculating women, like those who engaged in carnal contact with Samson (with the exception of the harlot in Gaza), are perhaps Babylon's most effective weapons.

In the *Kebra Nagast*, for instance, Delilah is with child when Samson dies. She named their son "Menahem," or "seed of the strong man." After he killed his cousin, the King of the Philistines, his aunt Maksaba tells Delilah "this youth has sprung from a bad root which cannot bear good fruit."⁵⁵⁶ Menahem then took his cousin's throne. While the text seemingly infers that Samson is that "bad root," it is Delilah who cursed Menahem with immorality, a trait that manifests in his murder of his own cousin and his rule over Babylon. The *Kebra Nagast* recounts that he served as King of the Philistines for fifteen years.⁵⁵⁷

In Rasta interpretations, Delilah and other deceitful, dangerous women are believed to be the embodiment of Babylon and thus can birth Babylonians like Menahem. Correspondingly, Babylon frequently takes the female form of a whore in poetry, song, and literature, a form derived from Revelation 17. Kunnguh Pihdowh depicts Babylon as the "Mother of Harlots" in his track by that name, for instance, as he sings:

All through the years you case Ihi yahn Ihi to trod/
Through blood, sweat and tears/
Babylon you hang us in your prisons/
You slave us on the streets/
Ihi yahn Ihi had to walk barefoot. /
Now look, your face is like a

ripe apple/ Your mind is like a sore/ Mother of Harlots you dress so pretty
and yet you are just a whore.⁵⁵⁸

The feminization of a total system of evil and alienation in and of itself prohibits
Rastawomen from positions of authority or respect.

When male Rastafari are modern-day Samsons, women who threaten their
spiritual progression as I-n-I are Delilahs. According to Facebook user House of David,
for example:

Women is Delilah, and the first Delilah that I know, was my mother, cause
she was the first women to cut my hair. The Queen of England are the
same as Delilah, that you read about in the Bible. And Samson was the
head Rasta Man, in Africa. Samson Kingdom was overthrow by Delilah,
AKA Queen of England. Samson was the strongest man, and the strongest
man was Rasta Man, but because Delilah know that Samson hair was his
strength, and if she cut his dreadlocks, his kingdom will fall, and when
Delilah cut Samson hair, the Black Kingdom fall, and Babylon carry us
into slavery.⁵⁵⁹

Few women are like Samson's unnamed mother, who sacrificed herself to Jah to ensure
Samson's chosenness. Even those that seem innocuous can pose a risk. Ras Brenton
recounts to Charles Price an experience with his friend's mother, who he "love(d)":

The woman pressure me to comb out the locks . . . me have to stop her
part of the way you know, and see how me a give this woman her heart's
desire. . . . When she done comb it out Rasta, the whole of my scalp in a
fire. So, me take an oath and say, me would never make a woman do that
again because she come like Delilah upon me.⁵⁶⁰

Delilah's untrustworthiness, as representative of the unreliable nature of most
women, is a constant theme in reggae music. Tyrone Taylor's track "Delilah" hit the
airwaves in Jamaica in 1968, for instance. In the track, Taylor croons, " Delilah is her
name/ no no girl, no more of your lying/ My girl is driving me mad/ because I love
her."⁵⁶¹ Decades later in 2010, Wyclef Jean and Barrington Levy's "Delilah" gained
praise from critics. Jean cautions, "Never trust a girl named Delilah/ She made me cut my

dreadlocks.”⁵⁶² Jean warns listeners that she will “do whatever it takes to get you in the bed, then cut off your dreads and leave you a bald head.” Here, Delilah uses her sexuality and powers of persuasion to lead to the heroic Nazirite’s downfall.

In May of 2011, dancehall artist Mavado performed at Rebel Salute 2011, at Port Kaiser Sports Club in Saint Elizabeth, Jamaica, under his birth name, David Brooks, a choice he made to indicate the “spiritual” nature of the concert. That evening, he premiered his new track, “Delilah,” in which he admits his passion for a dangerous and deceitful woman: “Love you to my heart, love you to my soul (Delilah)/ I thought you were for real but you playin’ a role (Delilah)/ Lying to me, dat is all yuh do.”⁵⁶³ The song continues: “She seh man a wicked but woman a Delilah (Oh oh oh)/ She seh you nuh trust mi but mi nuh trust you neither.” Mavado’s “Caribbean Girls” shares a similar message about females: “Jamaican gal take all a mi money/ yet still leave me lonely.”⁵⁶⁴ Mavado is another example of a Rastaman in search of love who is taken advantage of by a serpentine woman.

Conclusion

In songs like “Is This Love” and “Waiting in Vain,” Marley pines for women, while cautioning in “Adam and Eve” that “woman is the root of all evil.”⁵⁶⁵ Rastafari reggae artists like Marley employ Eve and Delilah as tropes that exemplify this truth; women are manipulative liars and threats to holy men. The centralization of reggae artists and Rasta thinkers on Delilah’s betrayal of Samson speaks both to the patriarchal nature of the movement and to the biblical orientation of gender roles. Rastas read of treacherous females in the Hebrew Bible and the *Kebra Nagast*; Eve led to human beings’ expulsion

from the Garden of Eden, Miriam questioned Moses' marriage to his Cushite wife in Numbers 12, and Delilah attempted to conquer Jah's elect Nazirite. The consequent assignment of moral vapidness to women and the projection of impurity onto menstruation contribute to the current patriarchal culture of Rastafari as a whole. Because of this general conception of women as a threat to a Rastaman's livity on account of women's biological functions and because of the treachery of particular biblical women, including Delilah, Rastawomen contend with a societal assumption of their impurity. It is as helpmate, mother, and monthly communal sacrifice that women fulfill their requirements of livity. Livity is thus gendered; the system ensures females fulfill a particular submissive and often set apart role and thus protects males from female corruption.

When Rasta reggae artists sing of Samson, they sing of his dreadlocks, devotion, and strength against Babylon or they portray him as betrayed by Delilah. Samson is a role model for Rastafari in much reggae music, while Delilah is the antithesis of that. She deceived Samson in order to get eleven hundred pieces of silver promised to her from each Philistine lord. But Samson was determined to conquer the Philistines, in spite of his anguish after being shorn, blinded, and imprisoned. Samson's perseverance matched Delilah's superficiality, in spite of the hardships he encountered as a Philistine prisoner.

Conquering Babylon System is not an easy task. As Jah's elect warrior-Nazirites, Rastafari must be ready for an arduous journey on the long road to freedom. The ownership of biblical text, biblical tropes, characters, and themes, and the ability to express that ownership through song, enable that difficult journey, even while women, as Delilah incarnate, try to reroute it. Jean and Levy share Samson's struggle in "Delilah":

And if the enemy was to take my eyesight and my vision was gone/ As long as I had voice, I would sing one last song/ Pick up the guitar and

strum one last time/ Tell the children the tale of the dread that fell under
Delilah's spell.⁵⁶⁶

Levy follows up this verse with the exclamation, "Ancestor!" The struggle against Babylon, especially in its most treacherous form, the feminine, is not a new one, but Rastas, as biblical actors and as warriors against Babylon, must tread on. Music is the venue through which Rastafari can do the work of the divinely elect liberator. Brethren can overthrow Babylon and claim the power of ancestors (including Samson) through song when their music is divinely inspired. Though Jean and Levy's Samson is injured and broken, he sings to conquer Babylon.

For Rasta readers, Samson's tale teaches that dangerous women should be avoided, despite that his engagement with women in fact ultimately led to victories over Babylon. Though dangerous women threaten Samson's spiritual progression in his biblical narrative, he achieves his purpose as a warrior and Nazirite. The risk of contamination, domination, and confusion from engagements with them is great. Yet, disloyalties of foreign and sexual and thus dangerous women incur Samson's wrath against the Philistines, helping to achieve Jah's purpose for him. Nonetheless, because Samson falters in Delilah's hands, Rastas should avoid dangerous women. Samson's relationship with Delilah cautions Rastamen about the dangers of trusting women who are assigned an inherent morally vapid character, a reading strategy that emphasizes male spirituality and reinforces the misogynistic gender dynamics of Rastafari.

⁵¹² Malahkee Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson: A Rasta Story* (Xlibris: Bloomington, 2012), 18.

⁵¹³ E. A. Wallis Budge, *Kebra Nagast: The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek* (Loschberg: Jazzybee Verlag, 2014), 80.

⁵¹⁴ Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson*, 25.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

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- ⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 25
- ⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 29.
- ⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 29.
- ⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 36.
- ⁵²⁰ Ibid., 40.
- ⁵²¹ Ibid., 42.
- ⁵²² Gerald Hausman, ed., *The Kebra Nagast: The Lost Bible of Rastafarian Wisdom and Faith from Ethiopia and Jamaica* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 48.
- ⁵²³ "Dreadlocks," James Madison University, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://educ.jmu.edu/~klemmjd/rastafari/dreadlocks.htm>
- ⁵²⁴ Jeanba, *Rastafari Nazarite Warrior Samson*, 46.
- ⁵²⁵ Whiles Delilah's ethnicity is not clear in the biblical text, since Sorek was located on the border of Philistine and Israelite territory, Rastas read her as non-Rasta and thus non-Israelite.
- ⁵²⁶ Hausman, *The Kebra Nagast*, 49.
- ⁵²⁷ Pato Banton, "Settle Satan," *Never Give In*, Greensleeves Records (1987).
- ⁵²⁸ The Jolly Brothers, "Conscious Man," *Conscious Man*, Roots Records (1993).
- ⁵²⁹ Ila Addis, October 25, 2012, "Scripture on What Defiles a Man?," *Rastawifeline*, http://rastawifeline.blogspot.com/2012_10_01_archive.html.
- ⁵³⁰ Steel Pulse, "Leggo Beast," *True Democracy*, Elecktra Records (1982).
- ⁵³¹ Ephesians 5:22-24, cited by Ark I, April 19, 2009 (10:54 p.m.), comment on Ras I-Tom, "Man and Woman," *Jah-rastafari.com*, April 19, 2009, http://jah-rastafari.com/forum/message-view.asp?message_group=3007&start_row=11.
Seon M. Lewis, *From Mythology to Reality: Moving Beyond Rastafari* (Raleigh: Lulu Enterprises, Inc., 2012), 243.
- ⁵³² Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1987), 8.
- ⁵³³ Obiagele Lake, *Rastafari Women: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1998), 59.
- ⁵³⁴ Gregory Isaacs, "Not the Way," *Night Nurse*, Island Records (1982).
- ⁵³⁵ Darren J. N. Middleton, *Rastafari and the Arts: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 160.
- ⁵³⁶ Maureen Rowe, "The Woman in Rastafari," in *Rastafari in the New Millennium: A Rastafari Reader*, ed. Michael Barnett (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 181.
- ⁵³⁷ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 269.
- ⁵³⁸ Lake, *Rastafari Women*, 7.
- ⁵³⁹ Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 179.
- ⁵⁴⁰ Bobo Dreads view Prince Emmanuel as an incarnation of Jesus. As Jesus, Dada fulfilled a Bobo conception of the Trinity wherein Marcus Garvey was prophet, Prince Emmanuel priest, and Haile Selassie Jah incarnate.
Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 172.
- ⁵⁴¹ Barry Chevannes, "Rastafari" in *Encyclopedia of Caribbean Religions Volume 1 A-L*, ed. Patrick Taylor and Frederick I. Case (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 764.

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- ⁵⁴² Basil Walters, "Empress of Zion Giving Voice to Rastafarian Women Launches an Anthology of the Sisters in the Faith," *Jamaica Observer*, April 16, 2007.
- ⁵⁴³ Lisa-Anne Julien, "Great Black Warrior Queens: An Examination of the Gender Currents within Rastafari Thought and the Adoption of a Feminist Agenda in the Rasta Women's Movement," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 57 (2003): 78 accessed December 3, 2015, doi: 10.1080/10130950.2003.9674461.
- ⁵⁴⁴ "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."
- ⁵⁴⁵ Ila Addis, "Queen Omega Livivity Principles of the RasTa Empress," *Rastawifeline*, accessed November 4, 2015.
- ⁵⁴⁶ Sista Faybiene Miranda, "I Am That I Am," in *Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari*, ed. Mhlahwdh Faristzaddi (San Francisco: Judah Anbesa, 1987), NP.
- ⁵⁴⁷ Warrior King, "Virtuous Woman," *Virtuous Woman*, VP Records (2002).
- ⁵⁴⁸ Sizzla, "Princess Black," (1997).
- ⁵⁴⁹ Bob Marley, "Adam and Eve," *The Essential Bob Marley and the Wailers*, Sanctuary Records (1970).
- ⁵⁵⁰ G.G. Maragh, *The Promised Key*, reproduced in William David Spencer, "The First Chant: Leonard Howell's *The Promised Key*," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 379.
- ⁵⁵¹ Rubadubstyle, February 1, 2007, "Rasta Lionesses," *Knowledge Overthrow Them! The Real Thing About Rasta Culture and Conscious Reggae and Dancehall*, <http://knowearth.blogspot.com/2007/02/rasta-lionesses.html>.
- ⁵⁵² Seshatasefekht, August 10, 2005 (3:36 p.m.), "Removed the Locks from His Head, Delilah," comment on Rasi, August 3, 2005, "Ras Marcus- Is Bob Marley Racist?," *Rastafari Speaks*, <http://www.rastafarispeaks.com/cgi-bin/forum/archive1/config.pl?md=read;id=58393>.
- ⁵⁵³ Maureen Rowe, "The Woman in Rastafari," in *Caribbean Quarterly Monograph: Rastafari*, ed. Rex Nettleford (Kingston: Caribbean Quarterly, University of the West Indies, 1985), 15.
- ⁵⁵⁴ Warrior King, "Virtuous Woman," *Virtuous Woman*, VP Records (2002).
- ⁵⁵⁵ Spencer, "The First Chant: Leonard Howell's Promised Key," 380.
- ⁵⁵⁶ Hausman, *The Kebra Nagast*, 46.
- ⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.
- ⁵⁵⁸ Kunnguh Pihdowh, "Mother of Harlots," in *Itations of Jamaica and I Rastafari: The Second Itation, The Revelation*, ed. Mhlahwdh Faristzaddi (San Francisco: Judah Anbesa, 1997), NP.
- ⁵⁵⁹ House of David's Facebook page, accessed March 11, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=547107342005326&id=330479600334769.
- ⁵⁶⁰ Charles Price, *Becoming Rasta; Origins of Rastafari Identity in Jamaica* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 178.
- ⁵⁶¹ Tyrone Taylor, "Delilah," Blue Cat Skin Reggae (1968).
- ⁵⁶² Wyclef Jean and Barrington Levy, "Delilah," *If I Were President: My Haitian Experience*, Columbia Records (2010). Wyclef is not a Rasta, nor is he Jamaican.

However, he performs the reggae song “Delilah” with Barrington Levy, a well-known practitioner.

⁵⁶³ David Brooks, “Delilah,” Mansion Records (2011).

⁵⁶⁴ Mavado, “Caribbean Girls,” *Overtime Riddim* (Anthology), JA Productions (2012).

⁵⁶⁵ Bob Marley, “Adam and Eve,” *The Essential Bob Marley and the Wailers*, Sanctuary Records (1970).

⁵⁶⁶ Jean and Levy, “Delilah.”

CHAPTER 7: MOSES, THE WORD, AND THE PROMISE OF ZION

He carries a prophetic message
(That's because he's a Rastaman)
Borning out of time and out of age
(That's because he's a Rastaman)

The Rasta come from Zion, Rastaman a Lion!
Dread dread (the Rastaman)
The Rasta come from Zion, Rastaman a Lion!
Him irie (the Rastaman).
-Bunny Wailer, "Rastaman," (1976)

Because the Israelites' exodus from Egypt resonates for many Rasta readers with personal experiences of domination and hopes for emancipation, vernacular readings of Moses often center on his liberation of the Israelites and leadership of the chosen people to Zion. Moses offers such readers hope and the promise of freedom. For Rastafari who are familiar with Moses' biblical narrative and for those who employ his culturally defined character without a profound knowledge of biblical text alike, Moses provides the possibility of redemption; the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt and their journey toward Zion is for them a personal and endured experience. Rasta practitioners read in the Hebrew Bible of their own domination by Pharaoh and in the story of the Exodus they recognize their own quest from enslavement toward deliverance in Zion. Moses enables that journey. In addition to praising Moses because he delivers the Israelites out of the hands of the oppressors, Rastas hone in on Moses' ability to speak with Jah and on Jah's behalf as Jah's greatest prophet. Moses speaks for and with Jah because, Rasta interpreters reason, he exemplifies livity as a righteous man who rejects Babylon system.

Rastafari with a thorough familiarity with biblical text and those who know Moses' extrabiblical character celebrate him as savior and prototypical Rastaman because

of his rebellion against Babylon in the guise of the Egyptians, his direct communication with Jah, and his liberation of the Israelites from slavery. As Rastaman and exemplar of livity, Moses inspires practitioners to seek justice and proves Rastafari to be righteous. Furthermore, because Moses lives according to the righteous path of livity, he enjoys a uniquely intimate relationship with Jah. Perhaps most importantly, when Moses is a Rastaman, Zion becomes a possibility within reach for African diasporic people and others who suffer from cultural domination.

Rastafari adopt his name and wear Israelite-inspired garments in their embrace of Moses. His election proves their own. As Moseses, Rasta practitioners become agents of freedom from Babylon. And as incarnations of Moses, Rastas are Jah's conversation partners and ordained liberators for whom Zion lies almost within grasp. This chapter investigates the value Rastas assign to Moses' livity, his words, experiences of Jah, and redemption of the Israelites despite his shortcomings as detailed in his biblical narrative. By deeming Moses a Rasta who lives a life of livity, by emphasizing Moses' election as Jah's mouthpiece and conversation partner, and by celebrating his guidance of the Israelites toward Zion, Rasta readers empower the Rasta body, define it as divine, and reinforce the promise of repatriation to Ethiopia as Zion.

Moses as Survivor

Moses's biblical narrative details his lengthy and impressive life and implies that he died at one hundred and twenty years of age, though Rasta readers believe that he lives on for he is a true Rastaman. Peter Tosh asks, for instance:

Do you remember Moses? / Him no dead, him no dead, / I say him no dead. / The man ‘dep on earth still. / The man a trod earth still. / The man ‘dep on earth still. / Watch it now, / The wicked them a gwan.⁵⁶⁷

In Egypt, before his birth, “The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them”

(Exodus 1:7). When a new pharaoh took power over Egypt, he determined that the Israelites were a threat:

And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land (Exodus 1:9-10).

Moses was born at a time when the descendants of Jacob had been forced in to slavery at the hand of this new pharaoh who “set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses” (Exodus 1:11). Reggae artist Anthony B. equates this scenario with his experience living in Jamaica, conflating in song a contemporary and historical pharaoh’s interest in keeping Rastafari Israelites “downpressed”: “Working for the pharaoh doing overtime for his pleasure/ Want the Ras to be a victim/ Want the Ras to face the boys of the system.”⁵⁶⁸ In Anthony B’s track, the correctional system of Jamaica is associated with the enslavement that is an essential part of Pharaoh’s rule in Exodus 1. Exodus 1:12 continues: “But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.” Hence, when his attempts to subdue the Israelites did not have the desired effect, Pharaoh issued an edict to kill every male child born to an Israelite (Exodus 1:22). Exodus 2:1-2 further informs readers that during this precarious time:

There went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.

After raising her son for three months, his mother made the difficult and insubordinate choice to place her baby in a basket and to set that basket into the Nile near where the Egyptian princess bathed. Because both Moses' mother and the Egyptian midwives Shiphrah and Puah, who ignored Pharaoh's decree for fear of Jah's retribution, rebelled against Pharaoh, Moses was able to become the emancipator he was destined to be. The rebelliousness that surrounds Moses from birth is meaningful for Rasta readers, for whom Moses is the ultimate revolutionary. In Judy Mowatt's "Black Woman," the Rasta sister describes a historic tradition of biblical women disobeying orders and pursuing a righteous path, one that allows the Rastaman to prosper. She commemorates the actions of Moses' mother:

When you're fighting stand up for the right thing/
And not that which is wrong/
I heard Rachel mourning for her children/
When Herod and Pharaoh took their little heads/
But just like Mary and Joseph/
Mother of Moses too/
Overcame its evil devices/
I dedicate my song for you.⁵⁶⁹

This celebration of biblical women differs drastically from a more prevalent Rasta theorization of biblical women, including Eve, Miriam, and Delilah, as representatives of womanhood's baseness.

Pharaoh's daughter too disobeyed her father when she accepted the baby she found on the bank of the Nile as her son. The daughter of the Pharaoh named her adopted son "Moses," whom she ostensibly knew was an Israelite, "because I drew him out of the water" (Exodus 2:10). According to theologians and linguistic scholars, including Gerard Gertoux and George Rawlinson, "Moses" derives from the Egyptian "*mes*," which translates as "child" or "son." Rasta readers concur that when the Pharaoh's daughter

bestowed her new son with the name “Moses,” she drew upon “*mes*.” And, Ras Ekowa states, “M is the prefix for son in many African cultures. The great and mighty Meru of Kenya use a prefixed M to represent ‘Son’ or ‘Son of’, just as the Egyptians used M or Ms or Mose.”⁵⁷⁰ And Abba Yahudah Berhan Sellasie notes that Moses’ name references his adoption as an Egyptian:

Moses is not a Hebrew name; it is Egyptian for *Son Of*. Moses was actually named for one of the Egyptian gods, and after he converted to belief in the god of Israel, the god of his forefathers, he slashed off the prefix and became just Moses.⁵⁷¹

The strategic dissidence of the women in Moses’ narrative does not end there. In Exodus 2:7, Moses’ sister, unnamed in the Bible at this juncture, asked the daughter of the Pharaoh, “Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?” The Pharaoh’s daughter responded, “Go. And the maid went and called the child’s mother” (Exodus 2:8). Thus, Moses’ own mother was given the opportunity to wean her child. Because of the defiant behavior of five women, Moses’ mother, sister, adoptive mother, and two midwives, Moses survived death.

Indeed, Moses thrived on account of these women’s actions. After Moses’ birth mother returned her weaned child to Pharaoh’s daughter in Exodus 2:10, “Pharaoh’s daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds” (Acts 7:21-22). For Rasta readers, that Pharaoh did not ask about Moses’ origin does not raise questions surrounding the verity of his narrative, which brethren and sistren understand to be true. Just as Rastafari subsist within Babylon, Moses similarly passed part of his life in his royal Egyptian home. Moses grew from boyhood in the heart of the Egyptian kingdom,

amongst Egyptian royals. Rasta readers believe that though he was raised in the heart of Babylon, represented by the Egyptians during his lifetime, he was not of Babylon.

Because his adoptive mother most likely recognized him as a Hebrew, in Exodus 2:6, because his very name references the scenario surrounding his adoption, and because his birth mother influenced his early years since she raised him until he was weaned, Moses might well have been aware of his Israelite nationality from an early age. However, his biblical narrative does not assert that he had this knowledge. Yet, when Moses saw an Egyptian “smiting an Hebrew,” in Exodus 2:11, he identified the victim as his “brethren.” Whether his mothers informed him of his origin or the truth lay in his heart, Moses recognized his allegiance with Israelites even from his comfortable position of power as an Egyptian royal. Moses survived certain death as an infant, thrived in Pharaoh’s society, understood by Rastafari to be the seat of Babylon during his lifetime, and survived another significant obstacle by not being swayed by the comforts of his royal life and by Babylon’s charms.

Moses as Rastaman

According to Rasta readers, Moses was a black man. Brethren and sistren aim to prove this claim by both analyzing his biblical narrative and/or by looking towards cultural conceptions of him. Sellasie, for example, suggests that he was dark like an Egyptian: “The scriptural Book of Exodus declares that some Hebrews in Egypt did not know that Moses, who was brought up in the house of Pharaoh, was a Hebrew. They thought that he was an Egyptian.”⁵⁷² In his reasoning, Sellasie makes the assumption that Israelites and Egyptians would have different skin pigmentation. He continues, “They assumed Moses

an Egyptian based upon his skin color.”⁵⁷³ This reading makes the assumption that Israelites had light skin, and thus it would be considered faulty by many Rasta interpreters.

Rastas inherently know Moses was black; that Moses married an Ethiopian is taken as irrefutable evidence of his race (Numbers 12).⁵⁷⁴ His sister’s curse of whiteness similarly points to his blackness. Because Miriam questioned Moses, in Numbers 12:1, Jah afflicted her with a skin disease that Rasta readers recognize as a curse of whiteness.

Rastaman P. Napti describes the importance of the passage:

Being inspired and enlightened, our forefathers read on and came upon a story of Moses and his marriage to an Ethiopian woman, (see Num.ch12). Aaron and Miriam, (Moses’ brother and sister) were upset and spoke against Moses’ marriage because his wife was an Ethiopian. Jahovah punished and afflicted Miriam with leprosy for criticizing Moses.⁵⁷⁵

Numbers 12:10 states: “Miriam became leprous, white as snow.” As Nathaniel Samuel Murrell and Lewin Williams note, “In Rasta’s view, not only does the punishment for that criticism fit the crime, but it also shows that God is on the side of black people.”⁵⁷⁶

Miriam was stricken with whiteness, and thus Rasta readers ascribe to her original blackness, thereby reversing the racial schema of readers who assume that she rejected Moses’ Ethiopian wife on behalf of the darkness of her skin.⁵⁷⁷ Since Miriam was Moses’ sister, Rasta readers imagine that he had the same original skin color, a rationalization that ignores that family members often demonstrate differences in skin pigmentation. Intriguingly, Rastafari are not disturbed by the seemingly most problematic element of this vignette from the perspective of livity: that Miriam critiqued him for marrying an Ethiopian, an aspect of this tale that practitioners for whom Ethiopia and Israel are fused as zionic spaces could rationalize as redaction.

A 1936 article by an unnamed minister from Ohio, who himself was not a Rasta, engages another text that proves that Moses was indeed black:

Moses, according to the Coptic or Ethiopian Bible, was the illegitimate son of one of the Princes of Egypt, the cause for the Pharaoh to issue an edict placing all Hebrew children in the water. He was a brown man and put his hand in his bosom and it became white or leprous (Read Exodus 4:6). And you can prove from the context he was brown.⁵⁷⁸

This approach to Moses' biblical narrative resonates with a Rasta hermeneutic. For Rasta readers, Moses' biblical narrative proves on numerous occasions Moses' blackness, which ensures his eligibility as an original Rastaman while his election by Jah and his rebellion against oppressors cement his role as a prototypical brethren. Bunny Wailer confirms his identity in his powerful track "Rastaman":

Remember... Moses in the pit of mud (he was a Rastaman)/ Trodding from Buzrak, with his garments dipped in blood/ (He was a Rastaman)/ Oh what a dread, dread, dreadlock one/ The Rastaman come from Zion/ What a strange, what a dread, what a righteous man.⁵⁷⁹

Though the redacted Bible denies his dreadlocked identity, Rastafari believe that Moses is a righteous Rastaman who ushered the chosen people towards the realization of repatriation. However, Babylonian redactors conceal his identity to damage a Rasta claim to Zion and adoption of a chosen status. Musicians, including Frankie Jones, instruct practitioners to remember their true identity, as well as the identity of biblical actors including Samson and Moses who are exemplars of livity despite what the Bible says in its redacted form. "Remember when Moses went up on the hill/ And then he come forward was dreadlocks man. Now you want to tell, I and I see, / That Moses wasn't a dreadlocks man. / Moses a dreadlock," sings Jones.⁵⁸⁰ Because Rastas read Moses to be a Rastaman, all Rastas are elect leaders who can communicate directly with Jah and who

have a great responsibility to lead Rastafari, as the chosen people, to Zion. Both brethren and sistren embrace him as exemplary and claim his attributes.

Rastafari assumptions of Moses' name and characteristics are not unique to the Rasta movement, though, and in fact are one manifestation of a longstanding African diasporic tradition of the claiming of and embodiment of Moses. This tradition has firm roots in Jamaica, where Moses and his brother Aaron symbolically played significant roles in Revivalism and appeared as elements of the Warner tradition. Sister Dixon, a Bedwardite who kept a written account of her life, recalled that in 1907, on the day that a monumental earthquake struck Jamaica, an "Obeahman," whom Barry Chevannes describes as a prophet in the Warner tradition, walked through August Town chanting "Aaron and Moses, mi Lord/ Aaron and Moses/ Aaron and Moses, mi Lord/ Aaron and Moses/ Fire da bun generation."⁵⁸¹ This "Obeahman" channeled the power of these biblical actors, just as Alexander Bedward, the Revivalist preacher, did. Bedwardites believed Marcus Garvey was a contemporary incarnation of Moses the prophet and that Bedward was himself Aaron the priest.⁵⁸² Both men spoke for Jah and pursued freedom in the Promised Land, and so they were believed by Bedwardites to be modern-day incarnations of the biblical duo. Similarly, Reverend Claudius Henry, who founded the African Reformed Church in Kingston in the late 1950's, referred to himself as the "Moses of the Blacks" and promised to lead displaced Africans to the Promised Land.⁵⁸³ Moreover, members of the Twelve Tribes of Israel envision Prophet Gad, born Vernon Carrington, to be Moses, even after his death. They further believe that he was responsible for finding the dispersed twelve tribes of Israel and that he acted as a mediator between Jah and humanity.

Moses was also of extreme importance for Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who channeled him and became, in his own eyes and in those of Garveyites, an incarnation of the biblical actor who adopted the biblical Moses' purpose and divinely inspired perspective. Bedwardites joined:

Thousands of black men in America and Africa (who) believed . . . that Garvey, as the "Moses" of their race, had the magic rod of the Prophet of Israel and that, therefore, there would be no difficulties for him to establish an African Utopia.⁵⁸⁴

Rastafari, which in part developed out of the Garveyite movement and drew significantly in its inception from Revivalism, adopted this assessment of Marcus Garvey as Moses' contemporary embodiment. Chevannes asserts that Rastas did not assume Garvey to be a Moses, instead arguing that they understood him to be a John the Baptist. However, that some Rastas might also envision Garvey as a John the Baptist resonates with the theory that each biblical actor exists as a manifestation of the ultimate incarnation of Jah, Haile Selassie.⁵⁸⁵ As Leonard Barrett explains, "To the Hebrews, God revealed himself in the person of Moses, who was the first avatar or savior, speaking God's word because he was actually God revealed in the shape and form as man."⁵⁸⁶ John the Baptist here is another "avatar" of Jah.

Moses offered and continues to offer African diasporic people fighting for freedom in and outside of Jamaica the authority of the great liberator of the Hebrew Bible. He was a frequent element of Negro spirituals, the inspired music of another downpressed African people. For example, the popular spiritual "Go Down Moses" includes the lyrics "Go down Moses/ Way down in Egypt land/ Tell ole Pharaoh/ To let my people go." Furthermore, Moses continued to play an instrumental role for Civil Rights activists of the 1960's who embraced his ability to free enslaved people from their

bondage. Martin Luther King employed the story of Moses and the Exodus in an attempt to engage and rally his audiences. In his famous speech from April 3, 1968, delivered in Memphis, Tennessee at the Masonic Temple, King channeled Moses' identity as he spoke:

I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!⁵⁸⁷

Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam from 1934 until his death in 1975, also referred to himself as Moses and spoke of Louis Farrakhan as Aaron because he envisioned himself as liberating African American people with Farrakhan's assistance.⁵⁸⁸

But it was not just significant leaders of the African diasporic struggle for liberation that adopted Moses' name and identity. A journalist writing under the pseudonym "Rambler" published an article in the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* on May 23, 1936, noting that in Africa "infants were named after the Black Moses, and learned to lisp his name on their mothers' knees."⁵⁸⁹ The practice of adopting his name and his identity continues today in Jamaica and elsewhere where Rastafari honor Jah and seek freedom from Babylon. For instance, Afro Moses, an award winning reggae artist from Ghana, accepts the responsibility that accompanies adopting Moses' name and personhood. Queen Mother Moses too, a member of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and the founder of Empress of Zion, a Rasta women's organization based in Kingston, derives strength from her name, a name that expresses her capability as a modern day incarnation of Jah's great prophet. She took Moses' name after visiting Ethiopia, where her faith in Haile Selassie's divinity grew exponentially. Upon her return to Jamaica, her husband at the time, reggae artist Stafford "Fred Locks" Elliot, experienced a vision in which he

recognized that the initials of her given name, Marcia Olive Stewart, with the addition of the two names she received as a member of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Elliott Simeon, spelled out Moses.⁵⁹⁰ She then took her determined moniker. The acceptance of such a powerful name inspired her to work for the greater good of all African people.

All Rastafari are capable of channeling the power of Moses, whether through the assumption of his name or through other means. Rastas reason that once people understand their true identity as Jah's elect, just as Queen Mother Moses did, that they will recognize themselves as biblical people according to the principles of livity. Frankie Jones calls attention to people's ignorance of their own worth, stating:

Look how long you've been around, / And you don't know yourself/ All those great prophet, priest and king, / In those times were dreadlocks man. / Solomon a dreadlock, / Moses a dreadlock. / David a dreadlock, Aaron a Natty Dread."⁵⁹¹

As Jones suggests, practitioners believe that all Rastas are biblical heroes and all biblical heroes are Rastas, even those who are imperfect, transgressive individuals who sometimes breach the dictates of livity.

Moses as Violent Rebel

In addition to identifying Moses as a Rasta, practitioners declare Moses to be a divinely elect revolutionary who leads the way toward the Promised Land. From birth, rebellion shaped Moses' existence, making him a born Dread. Thanks to his mothers and sister, he evaded a death warrant issued for all Israelite male babies (Exodus 1:22). And, though he was raised by the daughter of the Pharaoh in the heart of Egypt and the manifestation of Babylon that it was, Moses rejected Egyptian dominance and opposed their mistreatment of Israelites.

From early in his life, Moses recognized the struggle of his people who suffered under the reign of his adoptive culture. His actions in Exodus 2:11-14 prove his empathetic and rebellious spirit:

And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

Acts 7:23-25 reiterates this scene:

And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian.

Because Rastafari, as lifelong Nazirites, are forbidden to touch corpses, Moses' act of violence and his contact with a dead body raise questions about his Rasta status and observance of livity. However, since Moses' violence is perpetrated against Babylon System and since Moses is elect as Jah's mouthpiece and vehicle, Rasta readers rationalize his actions as necessary violence against Babylon. In the blogosphere, we read from a Rasta named Ten, for example:

In Exodus 2 Moses does kill an Egyptian but that is in retaliation to how the Egyptian had treated one of his brethren. . . . But Moses did immediately realize his actions were wrong so I wouldn't say he was a murderer, but he did commit the act. The Bible does not call him as such neither does it condemn him. The law of the land does say it is wrong but God still placed His trust in Moses. He gave Moses the ability to lead the Jews and performed holy miracles because God saw Moses as HIS prophet and leader of The Chosen People. I feeling is that calling Moses a murderer is a moral judgment, one that can be made by they themselves who have no sin and can be called upon by the Most High to perform His works.⁵⁹²

Ark I responds to Ten's comment, arguing that:

Purposely killing somebody is considered murder, so with that definition, then Moses did murder. There are several people in the bible that killed others. For example, King David killed a man because he wanted the man's wife. Sometimes people killed in defense and other times with malice and other times for various other reasons.⁵⁹³

Ark I then admits that even biblical actors elect by Jah are flawed, noting: "Anybody who reads the bible can see that nobody walked perfectly except Christ. It was never meant to be a book only about perfect people." Ten acknowledges in response that even Moses, much like Samson, is a transgressive character and yet still elect by Jah.

As Ten reasons, though Rastafari are forbidden from contact with dead bodies, Moses' act was a response to injustice. This act thus proves him to be a revolutionary "Soul Rebel" for some Rasta readers.⁵⁹⁴ According to Pauline Vetuna, an Australian writer of Tolai (Indigenous Papua New Guinean) descent who draws on Rastafari and the concept of the "Soul Rebel" in her own spiritual quest, a "Soul Rebel" is "someone who sees the right thing to do is hard, but does it anyway.... It's someone who refuses to dismiss or ignore the suffering of others."⁵⁹⁵ In Bob Marley's song by that name, he claims the identity of a "Soul Rebel," singing, "I'm a rebel, soul rebel/ I'm a capturer, soul adventurer."⁵⁹⁶ And in slaying the Egyptian on account of his mistreatment of human beings, let alone Jah's elect Israelites, Moses confirmed his Soul Rebel Rastaman status.

Moses' singular act of defiance in Exodus 2:12 portends that he will be charged with bringing the Israelites out from Egypt and points to his eventual defeat of Pharaoh. That Moses defeats Pharaoh with Jah's assistance ensures for Rasta readers that they too will vanquish Babylon System by the grace of Jah. Reggae artist Tony Rebel puts forth a warning to contemporary pharaohs:

This is a warning to all pharaoh/ All false leader, all the downpressor/
Them have the whole world under severe pressure/ And them don't love

people, them only love more power/ But your days are numbered, Massa
God nah sleep/ And if you follow we through the red sea/ then you must
get defeat.⁵⁹⁷

Though Moses' behavior in Exodus 2:12 foreshadows the damage that he, as a
mouthpiece and bodily vessel for Jah, would cause to Pharaoh and the Egyptian people
the immediate results of his actions do not significantly effect the status of the Israelites.
They continue to endure hardship. Bunny Wailer compares that suffering to that which is
endured by Afro-Caribbean people and others beset upon by contemporary
manifestations of Babylon in "Moses Children":

It's just work, work, work and get no pay. Slave driver! / Sledgehammer
in my hand and the pain in my chest. Slave driver! / Dry bone crying in
the wilderness.⁵⁹⁸ Slave driver! / Only muscle and blood can stand the test.
Slave driver! / For Moses Children! / I know, was in the shadows of death,
the shadows a death.⁵⁹⁹

Wailer is hopeful, though, as he continues, "But Moses Children! / They rose from
strength to strength."

When Pharaoh learned of his act of vengeance against the Egyptian slaver, "he
sought to slay Moses" (Exodus 2:15). In order to escape punishment for his behavior in
2:12, Moses fled to Midian, where he married one of the seven daughters of Jethro, or
Reuel, the priest of Midian. He settled in Midian and tended to his father-in-law's flock.
This period in Moses' life is of the utmost importance for Rasta interpreters. According
to an unnamed author writing for Rastafari TV:

The Bible tells us that after Moses fled from Egypt, he fled into Midian, a
kingdom of Ethiopia. There he sought the family of Jethro, the Ethiopian
priest of Midian, in whose sight, after a short residence, he found favor,
and married his daughter Zipporah. Zipporah, was a shepherdess and
priestess, as all priests were shepherds. You know the rest of the story of
Moses. His children are thus Ethiopians. God bless our country.⁶⁰⁰

Abba Yehuyda reads this passage as proof that Moses “married an Ethiopian princess, one whose father, Jethro, was a Midianite Priest-King.” For Rasta readers like Yehuda, his union with Jethro’s daughter proves that he married an Ethiopian and married into a priestly family, thereby ensuring that his children would also be priestly. Some biblical scholars, including Karen Strand Winslow, question whether Zipporah is the same wife as that Ethiopian wife Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses for marrying in Numbers 12. This debate is insignificant for Rasta readers, however, since both episodes prove Moses’ priestly lineage and African linkages.⁶⁰¹

Though Moses became a shepherd in Midian, he was destined to free the Israelites from bondage. His slaughter of the Egyptian slave master portended his future actions against evil Israelites, Egypt and other foreign nations, each a manifestation of Babylon. Moses did not personally execute human beings in the following episodes, yet he was undoubtedly partially responsible for deaths of members of neighboring tribes and unruly Israelites. However, because his actions against human beings stemmed directly from Jah’s instructions, Rasta readers can rationalize these acts of violence as being divinely destined and necessary for the wellbeing of obedient Israelite people. Rasta readers understand that as Jah’s servant and medium, Moses played an instrumental role in the “the wars of the Lord” (Numbers 21:14). Moses instructed the Israelites of Jah’s plan to destroy seven foreign nations in Deuteronomy 7:1-2:

When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them.

Exodus 17 describes Moses' role in the Israelite's war with the Amalekite people in particular. Though Moses did not physically come into contact with dead bodies or engage in physical combat, he played a noteworthy role in the skirmish. According to Exodus 17:9-11:

Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek . . . And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed.

Israel fought and prevailed against the Amorites, in Numbers 21:24, under Moses' leadership. In Numbers 31:14-18, Jah instructed Moses to slay the Midianites in an act of tribal warfare, but to spare the unsullied "women children." Moses commanded the Israelites to do as Jah asked. Moses also led an attack on the kingdom of Og, in Bashan, in Deuteronomy 3:2-7, at Jah's behest. Because these hostilities were "the wars of the Lord," Rasta readers recognize them as necessary actions against Babylon System. In "Send Another Moses," for example, Lopez Walker highlights the strength necessary to defeat Babylon, a strength owned by Moses and inspired by Jah:

Seventy thousand heathens coming down/ We'll throw them on the ground/ Oh Lord, give I the power to stand up and fight, yeah-eh/ Fight for I right, yeah-eh/ With all I might, yeah-eh/ Send another Moses (to free His children).⁶⁰²

In terms of livity, more difficult to rationalize for Rasta readers, for whom Moses is an untainted Rastaman, is that Moses was also responsible for killing Israelites who had sinned in the eyes of Jah. In Exodus 32, Moses instructed the Levites to kill three thousand idolaters who worshipped the golden calf that Aaron had fashioned for them, while Moses sat atop Mount Sinai. Ras Zion Mountain critiques Jah's violent tendencies as executed by Moses:

Obviously this god isn't god of Ithiopia, this god of Israel isn't God Haile Selassie I. InI can see the example set by Haile Selassie I. How Him forgive the Italians after all the atrocities against InI. How Him never want anymore bloodshed than the god of Israel.

Zion Mountain continues: "By the way, the Israel are also slave masters, look how they invade a nation and their land, the land of Canaan but it was justified."⁶⁰³ Melchezidek responds:

The God written in the bible isn't wicked. It's the people that are wicked, that sins against the God. It's the people that make fake gods and goddesses and it's the people that praises these idols. God cannot be wicked. It's the people that believe God to be wicked. It's the wicked people that goes against Jah. Jah told Moses to treat them as enemies because they treat Jah and his chosen and faithful as enemies. It's the wicked people that don't like Jah and the same wicked people calls Jah wicked.⁶⁰⁴

According to this blogger, Moses acts on Jah's behalf, and his actions as well as Jah's actions are justified because of the wickedness of the Israelites who were the object of Jah's retribution. Melchezidek continues by acknowledging that Moses demonstrated compassion by begging Jah's forgiveness on behalf of the Israelite people who had repented. While some Rasta readers struggle with Moses' involvement in deaths of foreign people and Israelites, others like Melchezidek reason that Jah dictated Moses's role in such violent episodes, and thus they assign responsibility to Jah for determining his course of action. Allowing Moses to remain blameless in spite of these bloody acts of violence enables Rasta readers to embrace him as a role model of strength against oppressors, and thus as an exemplar of livity.

Moses' Encounters with Jah and Ganja

Rasta readers who are familiar with Moses' biblical narrative and those who embrace his extra-textual character celebrate and claim his intimacy with Jah. After all, Jah spoke directly to Moses and revealed his majesty to him in a unique way. Jah first communicated with Moses in Exodus 3:2-4:

The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed... And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

Jah then instructed Moses to remove his shoes and specified that "the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Priest Ras Menelik, of Accra, channeled this interaction and similarly sanctified his home when he asked scholar Darren Middleton to remove his shoes upon entering his compound. He cited Jah's instructions to Moses in front of the burning bush, for he "was on holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).⁶⁰⁵ By employing Jah's instructions to Moses in this passage, Priest Ras Menelik adopts the unique sanctification that Jah's direct interactions with Moses offered the prophet and identifies Jah's presence in his home.

Moses recognized the burning bush as a manifestation of Jah and Jah communicated directly with Moses from this point in his life until his death in the land of Moab. For Rasta readers, the scene in front of the burning bush not only cements Moses' relationship with Jah but also confirms ganja usage as a divinely inspired act. Rastafari believe that ganja elevates practitioners to "higher heights" of consciousness from which they can communicate directly with Jah, as Moses did in Exodus 3. As Joseph Owens notes, smoking ganja serves for Rastafari as the "purest and most natural form of

attaining communion with God.”⁶⁰⁶ Iyah Binghi Negus Natty describes the connection between the burning bush, Rastas’ relationship with Jah, and practitioner’s usage of ganja: “Here, a direct connection, a dialogue between man and God is associated with the burning bush. Rastafari ritually recreate this connection by burning the bush, or herb, cannabis sativa.”⁶⁰⁷ And, Ras Mandito further contends that the “uniqueness of a certain ‘burning bush’ (and not being consumed) had been established with Moses. The burning of this special herb became established among the elders of the Tribes of Israel, whenever they sought the council of the almighty.”⁶⁰⁸

This is not the only instance in Moses’ narrative in which Rasta readers recognize ganja’s presence. Ras Mandito sees evidence of the usage of ganja as a spiritual tool throughout the journeying of the Israelites, for instance:

It is the same holy herb that Moses and the elders of the tribes of Israel used to take with them to the hills, there to burn in praise and honour the Almighty God, and to seek His counsel on special occasions.⁶⁰⁹

Moreover, Ila Addis shares that:

The holy sacrament really is a ‘tool’ to hearing and overstanding the word of Jah. Israel relied on it for direction and hope. Moses believed in it and listened to it. His whole mission for Israel was founded in the voice from the burning fire.⁶¹⁰

Where the Hebrew Bible describes Israelites as venerating Jah with smoke, and where smoke or clouds appear in general, Rasta readers recognize ganja as the source of holy fumes. In Exodus 19:17-18, for example:

Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

In her commentary on the passage, Addis spoke of clouds of smoke and their linkage with the Israelites' usage of ganja as a sacrament:

The clouds of the fire were likened to the shining glory of the Creator, it surrounded the Ark of the Covenant - the seat of truth and way of life. This is why it is an abomination for people to use the sacrament as part of their "get high" routine. . . . Let those clouds raise and bring Jah glory! Jah RasTafari!⁶¹¹

Moses' encounter with the burning bush is essential to Rastafari because it is an example of ancients' usage of the holy herb. But, as mentioned above, the potent scene also describes the first physical encounter of Moses and Jah, though Jah did not fully reveal his greatness to Moses at this juncture. Jah manifested physically in Moses' presence numerous times throughout his biblical narrative, often as a cloud or as smoke. As the Israelites escaped their trials in the Red Sea, Exodus 13:21 explains that "the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire."⁶¹²

In Exodus 33:18-23, Moses begged of Jah, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." But, as Ras Iadonis Tafari notes of this passage, Jah did not want to be seen in his true form.⁶¹³ Jah responded:

I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. . . . Thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

Though Jah spoke to Moses as if face-to-face, Moses does not see Jah's face. Instead, Moses witnessed Jah in natural form (as lightening, cloud, and fire) and from behind while the majority of Israelites only saw his natural manifestations. However, for Rasta readers, that Moses saw Jah's "back parts" without beholding Jah's face (Exodus 33:23)

and observed Jah in the form of a thick cloud and as lightening, as in Exodus 19:16, and 20:18, did not preclude him from seeing Jah's fullness.⁶¹⁴

It is in nature that Moses experienced Jah's true greatness and saw his fullness. And, because Jah manifested as a cloud, Jah's appearance proves for Rasta readers that ganja is a holy herb.⁶¹⁵ Clouds, however, are found in the sky. The idea that Jah would reside in the sky contradicts Rastafari arguments against a sky-based God and for a God on earth that is inherent in man. Poet Mutabaruka contends that:

The Rastas don't believe in the sky god. Their redemption lies within the human character. When the Europeans came and say, 'Jesus in the sky,' the Rasta man reject that totally. The man says, 'When you see I, you see God.' There is no God in the sky. Man is God, Africa is the Promised Land.⁶¹⁶

Moreover, Marley sings, "Most people think, / Great God will come from the skies, / Take away everything/ And make everybody feel high. / But if you know what life is worth, / You will look for yours on earth."⁶¹⁷ This element of Rasta argumentation locates Jah in biblical references to clouds and yet denies that Jah is a sky god. Nonetheless, a denial of a sky god does not eliminate Rasta interpretations of such passages that prove Jah's presence in nature or confirm ganja's value as a holy sacrament.

Once he had spent a significant amount of time in close proximity to Jah and received the divine law, Moses had to shield his own face from the Israelites. After descending from Mount Sinai following forty days and forty nights on its peak receiving Jah's covenant, Moses' face frightened his people. Exodus 34:29-33 describes his ethereal glow and the Israelite's reception of him:

And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses,

behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face.

After this interaction, Moses avoided showing the Israelites his face because in his intimacy with the Supreme he accrued Jah's characteristics, some of which alienated him from the Israelites, such as his luminous and sparkling face. Ras Iadonis Tafari suggests that because Moses did not look upon Jah's face, he is rewarded with an incandescent glow.⁶¹⁸ And, Peter Tosh adopts Moses' lineage and then defines himself as a "firm ripe diamond," in an acknowledgement of the prophet's alighted visage.⁶¹⁹ Moses' closeness with Jah resonates for Rastafari with a sense of self as I-n-I, a role that intertwines an individual with all of humanity but that simultaneously can differentiate Jah's elect. As I-n-I and as Moses, Rasta brethren and sistren are pieces of Jah who must strive to achieve divine directives, to live in accordance with livity. Their intimacy with Jah distinguishes them as unique, perhaps lending them a bit of the shine of Moses' face.

Moses and the Word

Rasta readers find intrinsic to his biblical narrative that Moses spoke on behalf of Jah, a concept that resonates with the importance that Rastafari ascribe to language. However, Moses did not initially see himself as capable of speaking for Jah, of embodying Jah's divine spark, or acting on Jah's behalf. Ultimately, though, Moses did become Jah's great prophet. In Deuteronomy 18:18, Jah states, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." This echoes Exodus 4:12, in which Jah informs

Moses, “I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” According to Max Weber, spirits are “concealed ‘behind’ and responsible for the activity of the charismatically endowed natural objects, artifacts, animals, or persons.”⁶²⁰ Rasta readers adopt that which is “concealed behind” Moses, the ultimate charismatic leader of Israel and Jah’s great prophet, as they assume his identity.

During their first intimate conversation, Jah informed Moses that “I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt,” a task Moses accomplished largely by channeling control over nature (Exodus 3:10). Moses commanded the Red Sea to split, he issued plagues on the Egyptians, he fed Israelites in the desert, and he brought forth water from stone on multiple occasions through his command of Jah’s power. But Moses initially resisted Jah’s election and his call to free the Israelites. He asked, in Exodus 3:11, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” Jah responded, “Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (3:12). In Exodus 3:14-15, Jah shared his name with Moses in a central passage that confirmed Moses’ closeness with him:

God said unto Moses, I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever.

Here, Jah instructed Moses to prove their intimate relationship by using the power of his name. Peter Tosh not only assumes this closeness with Jah but also claims to be like Jah in “I Am That I Am,” in which he announces: “Don’t belittle my authority/ It is time you

recognized my quality/ I said, "I am that I am, I am, I am, I am." He continues by sharing Jah's commandments, singing, "Learn to love to love your brother/ Don't covet your neighbor."⁶²¹

To Rastafari, Moses is the ultimate vessel for the Word of God, the truest human source of livity. Exodus 33:11 notes that "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." This passage confirms for Rastas including Ras Jimmy that he is an exemplar of livity.⁶²² After leading the Israelites out of enslavement in Egypt, Moses ascended Mount Sinai to communicate with Jah. He alone could survive climbing Mount Zion's peak, thereby coming into contact with Jah. This physical and conversational closeness is central to Rasta celebrations of Moses and to practitioners' assumptions of that same intimacy. Ras Jimmy explains, for instance, that "those who dwell in his theocratic realm are privileged to encounter God just as Moses did: face to face."⁶²³

Rasta readers celebrate Moses because he encountered Jah physically and because Jah employed him to speak as his prophet. In Exodus 7:1, Jah commanded: "You shall speak all that I command you." And in 19:9, Jah informed Moses that he would speak so that all Israelites could hear and learn of Moses' election as Jah's voice. Jah told Moses, "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever." On the third day after Jah informed Moses that he would descend from Mount Sinai, "There were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled" (19:16). The trumpet marked Jah's presence in Moses' biblical narrative, and connotes for Rasta readers the presence of divinity, as well. To illustrate,

reggae band Culture sing of the importance of the instrument: “Sound ye the trumpet of Zion/ That the inhabitants of earth may tremble/ Just to see when the Rastaman a come.”⁶²⁴

When Jah spoke the Ten Commandments to the Israelites:

All the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die (Exodus 20:18-19).

Empress Yuajah details this biblical scene in her instructional text for new Rastas, before describing a true Rasta’s intimacy with Jah and then explaining the importance of living by the Ten Commandments as fundamental aspects of livity.⁶²⁵

Moses could handle the gravity of communicating directly with Jah, and thus, according to Empress Yuajah, so can Rastas. Once Jah ensured that the Israelites recognized Moses as Jah’s delegate, his chosen prophet and liberator spoke on Jah’s behalf. Rastas take on a similar role as prophets whose mission it is to spread a message of livity to a world of people who may not be able to communicate with Jah directly. During much of his leadership of the Israelites, however, Aaron spoke for Moses. In Exodus 4:15-16, for example, Jah directed Moses to utilize his articulate brother Aaron as his mouthpiece:

And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.

This divine command situates Moses in a godlike position before Aaron, the great priest. Jah’s command follow’s Moses’ questioning in Exodus 4:10: “Moses said unto the Lord,

O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” While Aaron may have spoken because of Moses’ inability to communicate effectively, because he is Jah’s chosen mouthpiece, Aaron may have also spoken on behalf of Jah because Moses is too divine to effectively communicate with Jah’s chosen people, a man liminal in his positionality betwixt and between Jah and the masses. In this reading, Moses’ voice could not be heard directly by his people. Just as Moses shielded his face from the Israelites to prevent disturbing them after he descended from Mount Zion in Exodus 34:29, so may he have safeguarded the Israelites by speaking through a mediator.

That Aaron delivered Jah’s messages for Moses is a textual reality that, for Rastafari, does not challenge Moses’ role as divine voice. Though Moses doubted his capabilities, Rasta readers focus not on his questioning of Jah’s designation but on his righteousness as the elect conversation partner and mouthpiece of Jah. As contemporary Moseses, Rastafari embrace this role. To illustrate this point, Pablo Moses proclaims in song, “Moses of the past said it/ Therefore I, Pablo Moses declare it.”⁶²⁶ Aaron’s role only confirms the holiness of Moses’ voice and the ability of practitioners to remove themselves from Babylon System. For, though Babylon attempts to dominate Rastafari and distance Jah’s chosen people from their true nature, because Moses spoke for Jah and Aaron spoke for Moses, Rastas know that they have ownership of the Word. “Well I and I say these be the words of his majesty,” announces Sizzla in “Babylon A Listen.”⁶²⁷

The conception that Rastafari speak for Jah as contemporary Moseses sanctions the unique linguistic system of Rastas, as reflected in the very word “livity” itself. Rastas accept their role as Jah’s mouthpiece and their election as divine conversation partners as

they employ terminology that restructures their world to suit their chosenness and shape linguistic determinations of self-righteousness. By, for example, using the term “overstand” instead of “understand” because “understand” includes the word “under,” and by referring to the Bible as the “Ible” as a way to emphasize brethren and sistrens’ ability to read the holy text successfully in spite of Babylonian redaction, Rastas use language to structure the world around them and elevate their experience to a zionic level. As Clinton Hutton and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell note, language creation:

not only demonstrate(s) Rastas’ determination to free themselves completely from the culture of Babylon but also make a statement to the primacy of the black presence and reality in social and cultural discourse that is fundamental to the Rasta psychology of somebodiness.⁶²⁸

An anonymous Rasta stated in 1976 similarly that:

Rasta must a free dumb fe talk freedom. The British slave master a beat out your own tongue and put in the King’s tongue. What if me say you’re dumb and you can’t talk and you’re free? Your tongue glued.⁶²⁹

A Jamaican Rasta told John Pulis that it is “jus words-sounds-paawa, bradda, dat wha I-n-I a-deal wit.”⁶³⁰ Dub poet Bongo Jerry’s “Mabrak” echoes the words of both of the unnamed brethren quoted above:

Every tongue confess/ every language express/ Word Works/ You must come to Ras/ MABRAK/ Enlightening is BLACK/ hands writing/ the words of/ black message/ for black hearts to feel/ MABRAK is righting the wrongs and brain whitening/ HOW? /Not just by washing out the straitening and wearing dashiki ting:/ MOSTOFTHESTRAITENINGISINTHETONGUE/ so HOW? / Save the YOUNG/ From the language that MEN teach, / the doctrine pope preach/ skin bleach/ HOW ELSE? / MAN must use MEN language/ To carry dis message: / SILENCE BABEL TONGUES; recall and / recollect BLACK SPEECH.⁶³¹

As Moseses, Rastas speak for Jah and communicate authentically as chosen people, channeling true power through word and sound. Moreover, according to Ras Poley,

language connects practitioners to Jah. He states, “The word is God, because the greatest weapon is the creation of words. Words! Words is the greatest weapon that man ever have within.”⁶³² It is in their ability to speak the Word of Jah that Rastas know their true nature as I-n-I. As Jah Bones describes, “Jah the Father is in his people through words, the sound of the words make Ihi yahnhi Ihi realize the ‘Power and the Glory’ (in a very real and conscious way) of Jah Rastafari.”⁶³³

In his biblical narrative, Moses spoke “face to face” with Jah and was given the responsibility to talk on Jah’s behalf. He communicated Jah’s Word and, furthermore, he sang Jah’s glory. After parting the Red Sea, Moses led the Israelites in prophetic song giving thanks to Jah:

I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him (Exodus 15:1-2).

Moses’ song prophesied the defeat of Canaan:

The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away (Exodus 15:14-15).

Here, Moses offers Rastas who chant down Babylon a model for their behavior and confirms that song can be a great prophetic act. Reggae artists and Nyabingi drummers join Moses in prophecy as they spread messages of Babylon’s fall and the promise of Rastafari’s redemption. As Marley chants in “Redemption Song,” “Won’t you help to sing/ These songs of freedom? / ‘Cause all I ever have, / Redemption songs, / Redemption songs.”⁶³⁴

According to Rasta readers, Aaron, too, conveyed Moses' message in song, as reflected in Garnett Silk's "The Rod: "Music is the voice of his brother Aaron, yes/ Preaching and comforting at the Father's command."⁶³⁵ Meanwhile, the French reggae band Tu Shung Peng sing:

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. / Come before Him with thanksgiving and praise. / Jah, how good and how pleasant it is/ When brethren and brethren can dwell together. / For it is like the precious ointment that runneth from Aaron's beard/ That went down to the skirts of his garments.⁶³⁶

The musicality of the two biblical brothers resonates for a people for whom music is a weapon against Babylon, a tool of prophecy and the most powerful manifestation of the Word. For a people who envision their songs to be of divine origin, the concept that Moses spoke and sang Jah's words as Jah's prophet resonates profoundly.

Moses and the Law

Neil Savishinsky describes Dread Talk as a linguistic path "created by Rastas to express their heightened consciousness and profound awareness of the true nature and power of the spoken word."⁶³⁷ I would extend his analysis to the written word, which also holds the power to shift consciousness, as evidenced by Rasta readers' approach to the Hebrew Bible. Thus, of primary importance for Rasta readers is that Jah tasked Moses with receiving and scribing his Word "upon this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). That Moses received the Ten Commandments is central to his identity as Jah's ultimate Rastaman prophet (Exodus 34:28). As Jah's prophet, Moses performed the scribal task of divine transcription, for he wrote the Pentateuch and brought the Israelites the tangible word of Jah. As biblical scholar David S. Sperling suggests, Moses' prophetic supremacy

indicates a shift in Israelite culture towards an emphasis on scriptural authority: “The author of the pericope was, in fact, claiming that scripture, which contained the divine word in its clearest form, was far more reliable than prophecy orally delivered.”⁶³⁸ Likewise, Karel Van Der Toorn recognizes in Moses’ transcription movement toward a preference for written prophecy, further acknowledging scribes and scholars as “the successors of Moses in his prophetic office.”⁶³⁹ Scribes and scholars are also indispensable for Rastas, for whom the written word holds extraordinary value, even when redacted by Babylon, as is the case in the current version of the Bible. The significance of Moses’ transcription pertains to his ability to channel and disseminate the Word of Jah, a task impossible for all others; for Moses, as the elect of Jah’s elect, could hear and honor Jah’s Word. Rastafari, as contemporary Moseses, can do the same, an ability that allows practitioners to speak as divine beings, decipher a fitting linguistic path, read the Bible with clarity despite its inaccuracies, and write Jah’s truths. Through their divinely inspired prophetic words and actions, Rastafari seek to reorder their world in what Weber would recognize as an attempt to structure their lives in accordance with “ultimate ethical principles,” a phrase that conjures images of prophetic Moses bring Jah’s covenant to the Israelites.⁶⁴⁰

This ability to reorder their worlds extends to the interpretation of biblical text and to the definition of the path of livity, which itself is an extension of the laws transcribed by Moses. For, as Ras Baba tells William Lewis, “The law of the Rastas is the righteous law of the governments, the laws of Moses.”⁶⁴¹ As mouthpiece and conversation partner for Jah, Moses alone was capable of receiving Jah’s law and transmitting it to Rastas as a cornerstone of righteousness and livity. In “Deliver Us,”

Prince Malachi reminds listeners that “Brother Moses stand up on Mount Zion high/ And get the book of rules mankind should know/ You’ve got to give thanks and praise/ To the Almighty, in everything that you do.”⁶⁴² Prince Fari also sings of Moses sharing Jah’s commandments to the Israelites: “Prophet, prophet, prophecy! / Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together/ And said unto them: There are the word which the LORD hath commanded, that ye shall do them.”⁶⁴³ Similarly, reggae artist Prince Buster hails the importance of Jah’s commandments and instructs brethren and sistren as follows: “God son, take heed to the laws of thy father/ As Moses, did in the days, of yore.”⁶⁴⁴ He then sings the Ten Commandments to his audience. That Moses delivered to the Israelites Jah’s law is fundamental for Rasta readers and this transmission is a frequent element of roots reggae.

Nonetheless, the Israelites betrayed Jah’s commandment against making graven images by sculpting a golden calf under Aaron’s direction (Exodus 32:4-5). Rasta readers, however, do not generally focus on Aaron’s and the Israelites’ breach of Jah’s commandments, instead reading “Aaron a Natty Dread,” a prophet of Moses, and Israel’s High Priest.⁶⁴⁵ As practitioner Alfredo Johnson confirms, “Aaron was a Rasta man and a priest through his bloodline, with oil on his beard running down to the skirt of his garment as the dew of Hermon (Psalm 133:1-3).”⁶⁴⁶ However, Abba Yahudah acknowledges the fallibility of Aaron and the Levites, noting that:

The Levitical Priesthood was destined to fall short of the true glory that was reserved for the Most High. . . . The carnal nature of the Levitical Priesthood under Aaron the Levite, brother of Moses, was a crude stage. . . . But, the carnality and corruption of this priesthood was only matched by the level of spiritual development of the whole people called Israel.⁶⁴⁷

Even most of those Rasta readers who, like Abba Yehuda Berhan Sellasie, read Aaron and his lineage as flawed, recognize him as a holy individual. Thus, many practitioners still identify as members of the Levitical priesthood. Reggae group Tu Shung Peng express this stance and echo Psalm 133 as they sing:

For it is like the precious ointment that runneth from Aaron's beard/ That went down to the skirts of his garments; / Even so the Lord commanding his blessing forever more. / Rastafari - yeah you know, for God is with us.⁶⁴⁸

Others reject the Levitical priesthood and envision a Rasta priesthood differently. Psalm 110:4 states, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." This passage proves for Rasta readers their priesthood, just as Moses' lineage does, but assigns Rasta priests a different heritage, that of Jesus Christ. A post on Rastafari TV Network's Facebook page reads: "Psalm 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind."⁶⁴⁹

Hebrews 5:5-6 recognizes Jesus as a high priest of the order of Melchizedek, an assignment essential to a Rasta adoption of Melchizedek's priestly lineage. Prince Far I celebrates Melchizedek in song, proclaiming, "Melchezedek the high priest of Salem/ And the king of thief honors the priest of the most high God."⁶⁵⁰ While some Rastas critique the Levitical priesthood because of Aaron's problematic actions, for example his critique of Moses in Numbers 12 and his role in the construction a golden calf, these practitioners prize Melchezedek's order because his priesthood is envisioned as perfecting the priestly role. Midnite shares this perspective in "Rasta Man Stand": "Levitical Priesthood sell out our Nation/ Peter and Paul sell out our Nation/ Them play them hand and that the Vatican build upon/ Ina the order of Melchi Zadok/ Selassie

stand.’⁶⁵¹ This critique of Levitical priests is unusual and yet notable. Generally, both the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of Melchizedek are honored.

Because of his close relationship with Jah, Moses was able to mitigate his wrath over the Israelites actions, including Aaron’s. In Exodus 32:12-13, Moses interceded on the Israelites behalf, asking Jah to remember his covenant. And, in 32:14, “The Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.” But when Moses initially descended from Mount Sinai, “He saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount” (32:19). Though Moses carved replacement “tables,” he transcribed Jah’s laws, whereas the original tables were “written with the finger of God” (21:18). For Rasta readers, however, because Moses spoke for Jah as his instrument, the second set is also of Jah’s authorship. Prince Far I tells the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments, for instance:

And the LORD said unto Moses: / ‘Hew thee two tables of stone, like unto first/ And I will write upon them the table of words/ That were the first table of words, which thou art brakest/ And be ready in the morning/ And come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai.’⁶⁵²

Moses broke the first set because the Israelites disobeyed Jah, but this was not the first or the last time the chosen people disappointed their creator and Moses as Jah’s elect mouthpiece and instrument. For some Rastafari, residency in Babylon is the result of this insubordination. Sister Missis, a founding member of Rastafari recalls:

Mi mother said those Africans that are in Africa, they don’t come out in no slavery. They remain saints. They don’t know what we know in the outer world. We are a sort of disobedient people, that’s why we are cast out into the hands of our enemies; because we were disobedient to God. We would not hear what he say. And he said he don’t want to discard the whole land of Israel, so he would just cast us into the hands of our enemies

and let we feel their hand. He will stretch his hand out the second time to take us back to his land.⁶⁵³

This conception of exile and oppression resonates with younger generations as well. In his 1999 track “Send Another Moses,” Lopez Walker references Proverbs 22:15, Psalm 55:23, and Isaiah 38:18, channeling particular biblical passages that describe Israelites who sin against Jah. Walker cries out, “Send another Moses (to free His children)/ To whip them with the rod of correction/ To throw them in a pit of destruction/ I sing unto the Conquering Lion/ Forward I children, onward to Zion.”⁶⁵⁴ But Jah’s chosen people can mend their wicked ways. As Walker continues, “Forward I children, onward to Zion, yeah-eh-eh.” Jah’s children progress towards Zion when they turn to the laws of Jah as recorded and instructed to them by Moses. As Barrett recognizes, however, “They have long since been pardoned and should have returned to Ethiopia long ago, but because of the slavemasters’ trickery have been unable to return.”⁶⁵⁵

Conclusion

Though Rastafari is an acephalous movement devoid of a unifying doctrine, Rastas generally observe behavioral guidelines of livity largely derived from their engagement with the Hebrew Bible. The adherence to biblically oriented restrictions ensures Rastafari success in their struggles against Babylon System; Moses’ journey informs Rasta notions of correct practice. By living according to the strictures of livity determined in part through negotiations with Moses’ story and, more largely, the laws he brought to the Israelites, Rastafari believe that they are ensuring “life-everlasting” and paving the way towards Zion in Africa. As the Rastaman keeper and transmitter of Jah’s Word, Moses confirms for Rastafari that they know Jah intimately, that they can channel the power of

Jah's Word as prophets, and that the path of livity is one befitting Jah's elect, for practitioners believe it was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai. Moses' biblical narrative also promises that when Jah's guidelines of livity are followed, Babylon will fall. However, Jah's elect may have to use divinely sanctioned force to achieve that goal. Bounty Killer emphasizes this concept, in "Hip-Hopera," featuring the Fugees, as he encourages brethren and sistren to "Keep the path straight and narrow, while we bombin' on pharaoh."⁵⁶⁶

When Jah determined that the Israelites had suffered enough, he elected Moses to redeem them from their suffering. In order to achieve his divinely ordained mission, Moses sometimes acted violently on Jah's behalf. But, Rastas reason that his forcefulness was needed in order to achieve freedom from the grasp of Pharaoh. Moses remains, for Rasta interpreters, an exemplar of proper conduct. Because he spoke for Jah, Moses was able to bring Jah's law to the Israelites. And as a Rastaman, Moses proves that Rastas, too, channel Jah's Word and inherently know Jah's way, the way of livity. Because Moses experienced Jah intimately and communicated with and for Jah throughout his biblical narrative, Rastas, as his brethren and sistren, reserve the personal experience of Jah as an indelible right ensured by a life of livity.

⁵⁶⁷ Peter Tosh "Moses' the Prophet," *Bush Doctor*, Rolling Stones Records (1978).

⁵⁶⁸ Anthony B., "Stranger," *Seven Seals*. VP Records (1999).

⁵⁶⁹ Judy Mowatt, "Black Woman," *Black Woman*, Island Records 2005.

⁵⁷⁰ Ekowa, 2006, "Locking, Plaiting and Braiding: Symbols of an Ancient Rulership and Priesthood," *Essays by Ekowa*,
<http://www.essaysbyekowa.com/Locks%20and%20the%20Priesthood.htm>.

⁵⁷¹ Abba Yahuda Berhan Sellasie, *A Journey to the Roots of Rastafari: The Essene Nazarite Link* (USA: Trafford, 2014), 7.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 313.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 313.

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- ⁵⁷⁴ Though he could have married someone of another race, Rastas do not generally consider this possibility.
- ⁵⁷⁵ P. Napti, "Jamaicans of Ethiopian Origin and the Rastafarian Faith," *zhurnal.ru*, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://www.zhurnal.ru/music/rasta/napti.htm>.
- ⁵⁷⁶ Nathaniel Samuel Murrell and Lewin Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, eds. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian McFarlane, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 332.
- ⁵⁷⁷ See Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 42.
- ⁵⁷⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 3, 1936.
- ⁵⁷⁹ Bunny Wailer, "Rastaman," *Blackheart Man*, Island Records (1976).
- ⁵⁸⁰ Frankie Jones, "Jessy Black," *Satta An Praise Jah*, Third World (1977).
- ⁵⁸¹ Sister Dixon, quoted in Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 82.
- ⁵⁸² Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 99.
- ⁵⁸³ Leonard E. Barrett, *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 95.
- ⁵⁸⁴ Nnamdi Azikiwe, "Obituary in the Bantu World," in *The Marcus Garvey and UNIA Papers: Africa for the Africans 1923-1945 Volume X*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 692.
- ⁵⁸⁵ Chevannes, *Rastafari*, 108.
- ⁵⁸⁶ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 112.
- ⁵⁸⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop" (speech presented at the Church of God in Christ Headquarters in the Mason Temple, Memphis, Tennessee, April 3, 1968).
- ⁵⁸⁸ Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and The Nation of Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 127.
- ⁵⁸⁹ Rambler, Untitled Editorial, *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, May 23, 1936.
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CHAPTER 8: MOSES AS REDEEMER AND DIVINE DISAPPOINTMENT

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?
-The Melodians, "By the Rivers of Babylon," (1970)⁶⁵⁷

Moses is the ultimate Rastaman for Rasta readers because he not only spoke as Jah's prophet and brought to the Israelites Jah's laws, he also delivered Jah's people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, using miraculous acts to accomplish the feat. His leadership from Egypt, as a manifestation of Babylon, to Zion is perhaps the most essential element of Rastas' ownership of him as a Rastaman and exemplar of livity. Yet despite Moses' election by Jah and guidance of the Israelites, his biblical narrative concludes with Jah's ultimate prophet finding himself to be an outcast sentenced to die within view of the Promised Land. While Moses guided the Israelites to freedom and channeled Jah, he also questioned and even disobeyed Jah, clearly in breach of the dictates of livity. Because of his indiscretions, Jah prohibited Moses from entering Zion in Numbers 20:12. Nonetheless, though he could not enter, Moses' efforts enabled the Israelites to escape bondage in Egypt. Because of this, Rasta readings that acknowledge his eventual outsider status consider his inability to enter to be a necessary act of martyrdom or read his fate as the result of Babylon's redaction. However, Rasta readers that engage his biblical narrative and those that draw on other exegetical sources and biblical motifs generally do not directly contend with Moses' exclusion from Zion, while

those readings that do often suggest that his exclusion from Zion stemmed from his distrust in and lack of obedience to Jah.

Rasta interpreters adopt Moses as an ideal brethren and see themselves as manifestations of him, emphasizing his redemption of Jah's chosen people and his leadership to the Promised Land. Yet a comprehensive investigation of his narrative must consider how practitioners contend with the tricky elements of his textual presence. Asking such questions can provide insight into the ontological framework of Rastafari and the movement's objective of repatriation to Ethiopia. This chapter investigates the value Rastafari assign to Moses' divinely inspired miraculous acts and asks what Moses' exile-status means in terms of the Rasta goal of repatriation, interrogating how Moses' questioning of Jah and consequent inability to enter the Promised Land factors in to the biblical hermeneutic of a people who hope to return to Ethiopia as Zion. In minimizing Moses' doubt and his contravening of Jah, while celebrating his ability to perform miracles, Rasta readers confirm Moses as a paradigm of the practice of livivity who freed the Israelites from Babylon and who channeled Jah's might, thereby offering themselves the same capabilities and ensuring that freedom from Babylon System remains a possibility for them.

I-n-I in Babylon

While practitioners do not live exclusively in the Caribbean, the region is the site of the origins of the movement and remains the center of practice for Rastafari. For Rastas from the region and for those living elsewhere, the conception of Babylon looms as a primary site of connectivity that resonates for people facing situations of domination and

colonization. Rastas traditionally aim to leave a space they believe to be controlled by Babylon System, the morally bankrupt, commercial, political, and technological system that alienates human beings from their election and the natural world. Bob Marley reminds practitioners that they are prisoners of Babylon as he chants, “Think you’re in heaven, but you’re living in hell.”⁶⁵⁸ And, The Melodians express a similar message in their chart-topping track “Rivers of Babylon,” which adapts Psalms 19 and 137 in which they question, “How shall we sing King Alpha’s song in a strange land?”⁶⁵⁹ Desire to return to Ethiopia, imagined as an idyllic space untainted by Babylon’s corruption, is paramount. Practitioners reason that in Ethiopia all brethren and sistren will be united and will finally be free of domination. For instance, a popular Rasta hymn promises:

When we asunder part/ It gives us inward pain/ But we shall still be joined
in heart/ And we hope to meet again. / And hope to meet Again/ In Mount
Zion/ With King Alpha and Queen Omega / Father and Mother of
Creation/ HalleluJah.⁶⁶⁰

The situation of Israelites enslaved in ancient Egypt resonates with Rastafari who envision themselves as being analogously beset upon as residents in Babylon. Thus, reggae artists often channel the biblical themes of Israelite bondage and exodus. For instance, in “Nah Look Back,” Raging Fyah describes the anguish of Rastas induced by Pharaoh’s hand: “Pharaoh river is blood/ And my bed is stone/ And while they sit ‘pon throne/ We have to struggle for our own, my people.”⁶⁶¹ Similarly, Dicky Burton compares the Caribbean to ancient Egypt, singing “Four hundred years/ I and I left Africa shore/ And brought to Pharaoh’s land.” Furthermore, Freddie McGregor describes the dangers true Rastas face while living under Pharaoh’s control: “There was Pharaohs standing, peeping over/ Trying to capture Rastaman bredren/ Them want fi carry I name inna them mix-up, now Jah/ But, oh Father, will you hear my cry? / And deliver I and

I.”⁶⁶² McGregor, Burton, and Fyah each equate Jamaica to Egypt, as both are sites of Babylon’s rule.

As biblical scholar Allen Dwight Callahan notes, because Moses led the exodus out of Egypt, he “is the proper point of figural reference for . . . protests against slavery” for African diasporic people.⁶⁶³ And, author and literary critic Albert Murray concurs that “no one can deny to Moses, the great emancipator that he was, his position as epic hero of anti-slavery movements.”⁶⁶⁴ This is true for Rastas, many of whom still struggle within a dominant and degrading society. Reggae artist I Wayne warns, “Babylon waan smear and tear out,” but he suggests that in order to counter that threat, Rastafari “Bun dem sodomy and pharaoh.”⁶⁶⁵ Because Moses is a Rasta-liberator, all Rastas are Moses imbued with the powers to rebel against Babylon System and eventually achieve their objectives. Moses’ attempts to sway Pharaoh to allow the Israelites passage out of Egypt are mirrored in the efforts of Rastafari, as contemporary Moseses, to escape the colonial world in which they dwell. Like the biblical Pharaoh though, Babylon does not easily submit to modern-day Moseses’ requests.

Moses resolves the pain of Rasta Israelites and lends strength to those who embody him. When Moses is read as a Rastaman, the reign of Babylon System, or “shitstem,” as Anthony B. calls it, can only be temporary. And yet the pain endured is real. Steel Pulse’s “Biko’s Kindred Lament,” a song that honors the life of Steve Bantu Biko, a South African anti-apartheid activist who spearheaded the country’s Black Consciousness Movement and who died in police custody in 1977, beseeches Jah for a contemporary Moses who can remove the agony of black people: “O Jah Jah, /Take them where life sweeter, Send a Moses to set them free. / Pharaoh’s army won’t let them

be.”⁶⁶⁶ And, the Congos sing, in “Children Crying,” meanwhile, “Send us another Moses, to lead the nation/ the hungry must be fed, so there’ll be no more sufferation/ All the people that you see/ Will be the children of the Most High.”⁶⁶⁷ When he is read as a contemporary actor, his biblical narrative informs readers that Moses of today will conquer Babylon and achieve liberation for his people in their true motherland. As Damian Marley croons, for example, “Jah gave Moses ten commandments upon two tables of stone. Led Israel out of Egypt an’ den promise them a home.”⁶⁶⁸

Rastafari understand that Moses is their exemplar of livity and brother in the struggle against downpression, and thus they own his virtues and aptitudes. As such, Jah stands with them, and they too can escape the terrors of Pharaoh’s land to return to Ethiopia as Zion. Though Pharaoh, as a representative of Babylon, may not recognize the authority inherent in Jah’s prophet, Rastafari know their power as contemporary Moseses, who also claim a Solomonic legacy. Sizzla sings of their power that derives from this holy lineage: “Old Pharaoh, me sey that you nuh know me, / Remember that a King Solomon grow we.”⁶⁶⁹ In “I am that I am,” likewise, Peter Tosh affirms his worth in song: “I am the son of Moses, you cannot move I at all. I am the son of David, you cannot move I at all. I am a firm ripe diamond, no you cannot move I at all.”⁶⁷⁰ Moses offers Rastafari who embrace and embody him the strength to conquer Babylon and the possibility of freedom.

In order to gain that freedom, however, Rastafari must persevere, just as Moses had to endure forty years in the desert after he struggled to convince Pharaoh to free his people from bondage. And, in order to gain liberation, Rastas must use their power over the Word. Bob Marley and the Wailers echo Moses’ vocal efforts to sway Pharaoh in

their version of the African American spiritual dating back to the middle of the 19th century, “Go Tell It On The Mountain,” in which they chant, “Go tell it on the mountain, / Over the hills and everywhere. / Go tell it on the mountain, to set my people free.”⁶⁷¹ Furthermore, “Zion Gate,” by Yabby You, reiterates Moses’ recurring demand of Pharaoh to “let my people go”: “King Pharaoh open the gate, let us repatriate/ And set Jah children free/ King Pharaoh open the gate, the time has come/ To set Jah children free.”⁶⁷²

Just as Moses had to continually confront Pharaoh to ensure that he ultimately agreed to free the Israelites, Rastafari repetitively chant for their freedom. This chant is heard worldwide, particularly in reggae artists’ rejection of Babylon System. In 1978, five years after The Wailers’ *Burnin’*, an album that featured one of his most popular tracks of the era, “Get Up, Stand Up,” was released by Island Records, Marley asked “How long must I protest the same thing? I sing ‘Get Up Stand Up’, and up ‘til now, people don’t get up.”⁶⁷³ And yet, Marley kept on singing, paving the path towards freedom with his voice, just as Moses continually requested liberation from Pharaoh despite his resistance.

Moses eventually achieved the liberation of the Israelites, in Exodus 14:30. Working as an agent of Jah, he drowned the Egyptians who were pursuing his people on their way out of Egypt after he parted the Red Sea for the Israelites. Thus:

The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses (14:30-31).

As the representative of Jah on earth, Moses used the power of the Word to temporarily convince the Pharaoh to free the Israelites, though Jah hardened Pharaoh's heart, as he warned Moses he would in Exodus 7:3, causing him to pursue the Israelites. Nonetheless, Moses eventually prevailed in his efforts because of his ability to channel Jah's greatness into a miraculous act. Just as Moses ultimately achieved freedom for the Israelites in his biblical narrative, contemporary Moseses use their control over language, their reasoning skills, their livity, and their song to gain mental and physical freedom from Babylon. They, too, like Moses, may have to use the power of wonders as granted by Jah. In the end, as Midnite explains in his track, "Blaze Up," "it's Fari not pharaoh."⁶⁷⁴

Moses and Miracles

Early in his biblical narrative, Moses experienced the miraculous. In Exodus 3, Jah spoke to Moses from a burning bush, assuring him that the Israelites would have solace in the Promised Land. Jah said:

I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey (3:7-8).

Jah tasked Moses with leading that journey to freedom in a scene in which the value of Jah's Word is amplified by the miraculous scenario out of which it was delivered. As Early B confirms in "Take Up Your Bible," despite Moses' modest origins, he was destined for greatness. He sings, "Moses was born in a poor man city/ The man them in the river from Pharaoh's army/ But he free the Israelites from captivity."⁶⁷⁵ Jah instructed Moses at this juncture "I will send thee unto Pharaoh, thou mayest bring forth my people

the children of Israel out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). Though Moses questioned his abilities despite his unique experience, he led the exodus of the Israelite people, but not before proving his divine connection and the supremacy of the Israelite God to Pharaoh, as the ultimate representation of Babylon System.

Because Moses was elect above all other Israelites, he spoke with and on behalf of Jah. Though he admitted, in Exodus 4:10, that he was “slow of speech, and of a slow tongue,” Moses’ ownership of Jah’s Word enabled him to sway Pharaoh to release the Israelites from captivity, if only temporarily. But, Moses’ speech was accompanied by his performance of miracles. When Moses doubted his ability to speak for Jah and receive the respect of the Israelites, Jah assured him of his capabilities by showing Moses that he had the ability to perform great wonders. In Exodus 4:2-4, Jah enabled Moses to turn his rod in to a serpent and then back into a rod. And in Exodus 4:6-7:

The Lord said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh.

Far from being mere party tricks, these miracles ensured that Moses could prove himself as Jah’s chosen vessel. Yet, as Callahan recognizes, “What is missing from Moses’ wizardry is the very thing that makes magic so desirable- the promise of mastery. Moses is not the master of his own magic.”⁶⁷⁶ This aspect of his biblical narrative is of the upmost import for Rastafari who generally do not believe in magic, but only in miracles performed by Jah.⁶⁷⁷

For Rastafari, Moses’ second wondrous act does more than prove that he was Jah’s elect of the elect. That Moses’ hand turned “leprous as snow” proves that he was

black. Both Moses' ability to turn his hand leprous and then healthy (i.e. black), as well as his ability to change his rod in to a snake and then back in to a rod, demonstrate his unity with Jah and his I-n-I nature. Wade Bailey, whose writings aim to prove Rastafari theology faulty and to persuade young Rastas to commit to Jesus Christ as the only savior, recognizes that Moses "always worked miracles in the name or under the authority of God, it was never a trick or gimmick these miracles were always meant to demonstrate the superior power of YHVH over the other so called gods."⁶⁷⁸ The miracles of Exodus 4 are the first of many that Moses performed on Jah's behalf and through Jah's hand in his quest to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. Achieving that liberation did not prove an easy task. Jah informed Moses in Exodus 7:3 that "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt."

Jah instructed Moses in Exodus 7:9, saying: "When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent." And, in 7:10-12:

Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

Ras Oskar interprets the passage as follows:

My overstanding of that Exodus passage is like this: The rod is the rod of righteousness as righteousness is like a rod unto man. Aaron went up before the Pharaoh and displayed his righteousness and it was clever like a serpent. The Pharaoh called upon his wise and learned and they too came, each one, with their rod of righteousness, clever like serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. Righteousness is like the higher power of Jah. It doesn't matter what name you call it or what God you worship or not. If you reason, righteousness is king as righteousness abides by the very rules of creation that the Most High HIMself establish.⁶⁷⁹

In this passage, Ras Oskar highlights the virtue and miraculous acts of Aaron that stems from his relationship with Jah. The magic of Jah overshadowed and consumed that of the Egyptian magicians because it was more righteous than theirs, yet Pharaoh was not persuaded to free the Israelites.

From Exodus 7:14 through 11:10, Moses plagued the Egyptians through miraculous acts of Jah. These acts involved channeling the powers of the natural world. Raging Fyah engages these deeds as he relates his experience of life in Jamaica to that of the Israelites who await freedom while the plagues of Jah befall the Egyptians: “Pharaoh river is blood.” And Sizzla similarly sings, “Run go tell Pharaoh him city dey go blaze.”⁶⁸⁰ For Rasta readers including Sizzla and Raging Fyah, the plagues beset upon their captors are a stage in their inevitable journey toward freedom from Babylon.

In Exodus 14, Moses parted the Red Sea by Jah’s will by stretching forth his hand to enable the Israelites to walk through the body of water. The sea then returned to its normal state, consuming the Egyptians and causing grave harm. Sizzla reminds reggae fans of this act in “Azanldo”: “In a the red sea Pharaoh and his squad, he, them drown/ Pharaoh watch him pretty city going down ayy/ Who a who run the zone, hey.”⁶⁸¹ Rasta readers thus celebrate Moses’ miraculous acts mentioned above because they enabled the Israelite journey to freedom. According to Empress Yuajah, though, it is essential that brethren and sistren remember that Jah is behind these deeds: “Rasta ‘know’ that Jah created heaven and earth, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and he parted the Red Sea for the Israelites.”⁶⁸²

While Rastafari often reference Moses’ plagues, or rightfully Jah’s plagues, against the Egyptians and the parting of the Red Sea in song and poetry, practitioners also

focus on Moses' other miracles, such as his providing food and water for the Israelites during their lengthy period of wandering, in Exodus 15:22-25, 16:4, 16:13-18, 17:2-6, Numbers 11:31, and 20:2-13. By way of illustration, Garnett Silk addresses Moses' ability to coax water from rock, in his song "The Rod": "Striking the rock, making true love flow/ Oh, that flowing love is what we need to go/ With this, things can only be better/ Setting the foundation for the future."⁶⁸³ Scholar Janet DeCosmo reports that in Salvador, Brazil, meanwhile, a:

Fundamentalist Rastafari informant spoke of the ghetto in Pelourinho in which he lives: 'We survive by miracles. We evoke the all-powerful God and we use the positive, supernatural powers. Like the people were fed for forty years in the desert, like our patriarch Moses, the leader of our people invoked the all-powerful God and the all-powerful God sent food to us'.⁶⁸⁴

A Rasta embrace of Moses' ability to perform miracles at Jah's behest contrasts with a general trepidation in Rastafari about false magic. But, his are Jah's works. Steel Pulse instructs listeners, in "Chant a Psalm," to "Remember the magic of Moses, so: Dash away your bluesy feeling."⁶⁸⁵ It is because of Jah's ordination that Moses had the ability to perform miracles. And, as modern-day Moseses, Rastas are similarly able to conduct miraculous acts.

Moses and the Rod

The most visible sign of Rastas' embodiment of Moses is the rod, something that many practitioners carry at all times. They do so because of the importance of the rod in Moses' biblical narrative and because of the extreme cultural significance assigned to the item in Jamaican society, as originally derived from biblical sources. Though Moses is not the only actor in the Hebrew Bible to carry a rod, his is instrumental in liberating the

Israelites from enslavement and thus takes on great value for Rasta readers. As mentioned above, the assumption of Moses' identity betroths the embodying individual with his divinely inspired abilities. In order to assume his facilities, many of those who seek to embody Moses may carry a "Rod of Correction"(Proverbs 22:15), representative of his staff and its ability to perform wonders. By carrying a rod, Rastafari also unite with Aaron and Joshua, though it is Moses whose identity is paramount, as his relationship with Jah was unlike any other biblical actor. By emulating him and embodying him, practitioners claim such closeness to Jah and define themselves as Jah's priests and prophets. Rasta Moses of Curacao, for instance, explains, "Either you are born a pastor or not. I believe that I was born to be a pastor. That's why I carry the staff; it represents power."⁶⁶ And, Stephen Marley describes "The peaceful, righteous, Rastaman/ Rod of correction, inna him hand/ Preachin' out to man and woman."⁶⁷

The biblical Moses carried a rod with him as a shepherd in Midian. The same rod became representative of his leadership of the Israelites and his divine election. In his biblical narrative, many of Moses' miracles involved this rod, which he often lifted up or used otherwise to initiate divine action. Jah even proved to Moses his worthiness to free the Israelites, in Exodus 4:2-5, by commanding him to use his rod. Jah said to Moses:

What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers.

In Exodus 14:16, Moses lifted his rod in order to part the Red Sea for the Israelites, in 17:2-6, Moses struck a rock twice with his rod in order to procure water for thirsting Israelites, and in 17:9-13, Moses lifted his rod to aid the Israelites in battle against

Amalek, Esau's grandson. In Numbers 20:2-13, Moses again struck a rock twice to procure water for his people, though Jah instructed him only to "speak ye unto the rock," a mistake that Numbers 20:12 infers cost Moses entry into the Promised Land. In Exodus 7:17, Jah identified Moses' hand as his own and the rod as his instrument: "Thus saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand." Because of the importance of the rod in these biblical episodes and because of the cultural significance attached to the rod by Rasta readers, Moses' rod symbolizes for practitioners the ability to issue divine commands and perform divine actions.

Both Moses and Aaron carried rods, though biblical scholars debate whether they shared a rod or each held his own. Rasta readers do not interrogate the number of rods in Moses' narrative, but they do emphasize these instruments' tremendous significance. Just as Aaron spoke for Moses, Aaron's rod is central to many of Moses' divinely inspired actions. In Exodus 7:10, for instance, when Moses and Aaron first spoke to Pharaoh about freeing the Israelites, "Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent."

Again in Numbers 17, the budding of Aaron's rod evinced its miraculous qualities and confirmed priesthood to house of Levi, though in this scenario, as in Exodus 7, his rod was miraculous without contact with Aaron's flesh. In 17:2, after Korah challenged the Levite's right to priesthood, Jah commanded Moses to:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod.

Moses did as Jah commanded him and thus he:

Laid up the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness. And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds (Numbers 17:8-9).

This experiment cemented the house of Levi as that of the priesthood. The *Kebra Nagast*, too, identifies “the rod of Aaron that sprouted after it withered, though no one watered it with water.”⁶⁸⁸ In his interpretation of this text, E.A. Wallis Budge describes Aaron’s priesthood and explores his rod’s behavior in Numbers 17 as being representative of Jesus’ cross and Mary’s womb: “The rod which without water burst into bloom indicateth Mary, from whom was born, without the seed of man, the Word of God.”⁶⁸⁹ Rastas accept the message of Aaron’s rod’s power as well as of his priestly reign. For instance, the Twelve Tribes of Israel, wherein each member is assigned to one of the tribes, or houses, of Israel, dependent upon their month of birth, elevates Levites above all other Rastas as priests, and those members assigned to the house of Levi leads meetings because of their priestly capacity.

As the era of his leadership concluded, Moses passed on to Joshua the responsibility for ushering Jah’s chosen people into Zion. Joshua accepted Moses’ ability to perform godly feats by lifting his “rod,” though Joshua lifted a “spear” in his own biblical narrative.⁶⁹⁰ For Rasta readers, Moses’s rod, the rod of Aaron, and spear of Joshua, whether envisioned as one instrument or many, represent divinely sanctioned authority and miraculous power.

In Jamaica, the association of authority with ownership of a rod carries over into the political arena. While campaigning to become Prime Minister of the island nation in 1971, Rasta sympathizer Michael Manley, the People’s National Party candidate (PNP),

tapped Rasta mythology by notably proclaiming himself a “sufferah’s man” and exploited the symbolic power of the “Rod of Correction” by carrying a staff he supposedly received from Haile Selassie during the Emperor’s visit to Jamaica on April 21, 1966.⁶⁹¹ In doing so, Manley aligned himself with Moses’ as well as with Joshua’s leadership and charisma. According to Olive Senior, “Thousands of Jamaicans came to believe that the Rod was imbued with supernatural powers, and everywhere (Manley) appeared people wanted to touch this potent source of power, a few even ascribing to it healing properties.”⁶⁹²

In fact, Manley represented himself as Moses’ successor, Joshua, by adopting his name and his inheritance of Moses’ rod. Manley’s father, Norman Washington Manley, was known throughout Jamaica as “Moses” because of his contributing role in achieving Jamaican independence in 1962. In aligning himself with Joshua, who led the Israelites to the Promised Land, not as Moses, who would perish on Mount Moriah, never having set foot in Zion, Michael Manley accepted leadership from Moses and looked towards the future. Inherent in his acceptance of Joshua’s name seems to be a promise to personally deliver the Jamaican people to the Promised Land. Though Rastas generally focus on Moses’ ability to free the Israelites, readers too acknowledge Joshua’s potential to lead the journey begun by Moses. In his 2011 song “New Generation,” featuring Micah Stampley, Prodigal Son embraces Joshua as the leader who will move Rastafari as Jah’s elect forward: “New York, London, Canada, Caribbean people, / one the Joshua’s generation they, yo, yo yeah! /We’re a new generation, call to the nation.”⁶⁹³

Early Rasta revolutionary Reverend Claudius Henry “proposed a trinity of Henry (Moses), Manley (Joshua), and Selassie (‘lord of lords’)” during Manley’s campaign to

become Prime Minister in 1972.⁶⁹⁴ And, in his quest to sway Rastafari support (though Rastas generally avoid any and all involvement with politics) and to tap into a nationwide, not to mention worldwide, interest in Rasta ideology, symbology, and reggae music, Manley appointed Clancy Eccles, a ska and reggae singer, producer, and songwriter, as an advisor. Eccles organized popular reggae artists of the era, including Marley and the Wailers, Max Romeo, Inner Circle, Dennis Brown, and Delroy Wilson in a musical “bandwagon” in support of Manley’s efforts.⁶⁹⁵ Artists involved in his political effort traveled around the island playing concerts to support Manley’s campaign. Eccles himself wrote and performed several songs in support of Manley and the PNP, including “Joshua’s Rod of Correction.” The song includes the lyrics “King Pharaoh was grounded/ down in the bottom of the ocean/ Lead ‘em with the rod of correction.”⁶⁹⁶ In the same period, Romeo wrote and recorded “Press Along Joshua,” which served as Manley’s campaign song. Romeo’s track includes the following lyrics: “Press along Joshua, press along/ in God’s own name/press along Joshua, press along/In God’s own name/For persecutions we must bear/ Trials and crosses in our way.”

After Manley was elected Prime Minister in 1972, Rastas, Rasta sympathizers, and those very artists involved in Eccles’ “bandwagon” became frustrated with Manley’s leadership. Romeo even recorded and released “No Joshua No,” in which he detailed Manley’s unfulfilled promises. In it, he sings:

You took them out of bondage and they thank you for it/ You sung them songs of love and they try to sing with it/But now in the desert, are you battered and bruised? / They think they are forsaken, they think they have been used/ Since you are my friend, Joshua/ I think you should know, Joshua/ Rasta is watching and blaming you/ Since you are my friend, Joshua/ I think you should know, Joshua/ They say, you must forward and start anew/ You know those who fought for you, you thank them for it/ You led them across the Red Sea when fear of drown in it/ But now in the

jungle, you man, shout out, Lion/ Older men are patient but they long for Zion.⁶⁹⁷

“No, Joshua, No” conflates Joshua’s biblical activity with Moses’, speaking of issuing Jah’s chosen people out of bondage and the parting of the Red Sea. Moses performed those duties Romeo references, and, in both scenarios, Moses used his rod. Because both Moses and Joshua worked towards the goal of delivering Jah’s people into Zion, Manley and Romeo conflated their biblical roles, thereby enabling Manley to claim the great feats of Moses while retaining the promise of access to Zion ensured by taking Joshua’s name.

Moses used his rod to perform Jah’s miracles. He also channeled the Word of Jah throughout his biblical narrative. And though Rasta practitioners still carry rods as representations of Moses’ miraculous ability and authority, most Rastas value the Word over physical objects and particular miracles as a source of guidance and fortification. As Tony Rebel explains in “The Voice and the Pen,” “Moses was protected because him have a rod/ Now we use a chapter a day run the devil away method.”⁶⁹⁸ Furthermore, Garnett Silk suggests that the Word and music as its vehicle cause miraculous change and act like Moses’ rod: “Music, music is the rod and we are Moses/ Leading God’s children to the Promised Land.”⁶⁹⁹ Here, Silk acclaims music to be capable of miracles. Just like Moses’ rod; music has the ability to change the world and free Rastas from domination in Babylon.

Moses approaches Zion

Though most Rastas have never visited Ethiopia, nor will they in their lifetimes, Ethiopia serves as their mythologized homeland, as the divinely promised Zion. But a resulting disengagement from Caribbean society, envisioned as Babylon, can cause brethren and

sistren to struggle financially. Economic security often requires engagement with Babylon System, however ironically, such that involvement with Babylon might facilitate physical repatriation to Ethiopia, as the for-profit public musical performances of the Twelve Tribes of Israel did for members of the group in the 1970's and 1980's.

The economic benefit of engagement with Babylon System was a major theme of the Second Rastafari Conference and General Assembly held in Kingston in August, 2013. Over a three-day period at the University of the West Indies' campus, a younger generation almost unanimously advocated the shaping of a zionic world in Jamaica. According to Nigerian reggae artist Majek Fashek, who shares this perspective of creating Zion wherever one lives, "Promised Land is a state of mind."⁷⁰⁰ This message was seemingly well received by several older Dreads, however, some brethren and sistren in attendance disputed the value in making Zion in Jamaica. For these conference attendees, Jamaica remains firmly entrenched in Babylon System and offers no opportunity for redemption. This particular dialogue surrounding repatriation is representative of a larger discord within Rasta communities and between generations of practitioners.

This major point of contention is not a new one for Rastas. The issue of the conception of Jamaica as unsalvageable Babylon was foremost on the minds of many Rastas on April 21, 1966, when Emperor Haile Selassie visited the island. Upon his arrival, one to two hundred thousand Jamaicans met Selassie at the airport. The Emperor Selassie suggested, in a highly publicized speech during that trip and during a private meeting with Rasta leaders, including Mortimo Planno, that Jamaicans should attempt to better their situation in the Caribbean before aiming for repatriation to Ethiopia.⁷⁰¹ He

advocated that Rastas should involve themselves in shaping the Jamaica they envisioned as fitting and hope for “liberation before repatriation.”⁷⁰² Reverend Henry accepted this message wholeheartedly and started advocating for “building Africa in Jamaica,” as did other significant religious figures in Jamaica at the time.⁷⁰³ Politician Ras Sam Brown likewise encouraged brethren and sistren to better their situation in Jamaica. For him, “repatriation consisted of erasing one interpretation (of the Bible) . . . the Babylonian one--and restoring another--the African and/or Ethiopian one.”⁷⁰⁴

The conception of an ideological repatriation, as advocated by Selassie, Henry, and Brown, resonated with many practitioners at the time, as it did for attendees of the 2013 conference, while others disregarded the notion and still aimed toward physical repatriation to Africa. The idea of physical repatriation entailed, both at the time of Emperor Selassie’s visit and contemporarily, significant logistical challenges. Moreover, those who have repatriated to Shashamane, Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa are not always well received. As Henok Semaegzer Fente notes:

Those who repatriate from the Caribbean and the west assume that, going back to Africa, they would be accepted as African brothers and they would be welcomed into a community. The reality is that once they get on the ground they find out that they are treated as foreigners.⁷⁰⁵

As Horace Campbell notes, when Marley visited Shashamane in November of 1978 he recognized “the problems of translating a dream (of repatriation) into reality.”⁷⁰⁶ His experience in Ethiopia, and more specifically with the Rasta settlement in Shashamane “led Marley to see repatriation as more of symbolic attempt at refocusing (or repatriating) the mind to an understanding and valuation of Africa.”⁷⁰⁷ As a result, Marley’s music shifted in focus from physical repatriation, a central element of his music in the era leading up to his 1977 release of *Exodus*, towards freedom for African nations,

as evidenced by his 1979 track “Zimbabwe.” Interestingly, the Twelve Tribes of Israel, the mansion with which Bob Marley was affiliated for many years and who are represented in great numbers in Shashamane, initially embraced the concept of a physical return to Africa. But, since the group’s leadership visited Ethiopia in the 1970’s, the mansion has historically emphasized the benefit of a mental return.⁷⁰⁸ The mansion has since focused its resources on developing Jamaica’s economy and establishing Rastas place within it. The Twelve Tribes of Israel are not alone in this perspective. For instance, the 1985 Rastafarian Manifesto EATUP (Ethiopian-African Theocracy Union Policy), written by Ras Jubie and Bongo Floyd, focuses on the transformation of Jamaica’s political, economic, and cultural systems.⁷⁰⁹

Some practitioners’ desire to physically leave Jamaica as Babylon, and others’ yearning for a better Jamaica through an eradication of Babylon, is a prevalent debate amongst Rastas. Though Haile Selassie’s words resonated with some practitioners, while undoubtedly disappointing others, repatriation remained an essential prospect of many practitioners in the wake of his momentous visit to Jamaica. Rastas’ hope to return to Ethiopia as Zion has roots in the Garveyite movement and the Ethiopianism of the early 1900’s. But, the origin of the quest for home in Africa stretches back to the forceful capture and enslavement of African peoples during the transatlantic slave trade. The Garveyite movement, a major influence on Rastafari, mobilized African diasporic people to actively attempt the return journey to a continent they envisioned as home. In order to facilitate the return of black people to Africa and to ensure their economic independence, Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association organized the Black Star Line, a black-owned and managed steamship company that was in operation from 1919 to

1922, whose goal was to transport goods and to eventually take people of African descent back to their mother continent. On the occasion of the incorporation of the Black Star Line, Garvey proudly spoke to a crowd of eager listeners:

They said that the Negro had no initiative; that he was not a business man, but a laborer; that he had not the brain to engineer a corporation, to own and run ships; that he had no knowledge of navigation, therefore the proposition was impossible. Oh! ye of little faith. The Eternal has happened.⁷¹⁰

He continued, “Sons and daughters of Ethiopia, I say unto you, arise! The hour has struck and Ethiopia is now calling you to achievements and to glory.”

Though Garvey’s Black Star Line was a financial failure, the effect of the business on the psyche of African Americans and Afro-Caribbean people cannot be overstated. The excitement surrounding the Black Star Line and Garvey’s larger mission of repatriation for all black people energized proto-Rastas and early Rastafari who aimed to leave Jamaica in their lifetime. In August of 1934, Rasta pioneer Leonard Howell picked up on the power of the promise of a ship that would return African diasporic people home. He told his followers to await that ship. For Howell, Moses’ biblical narrative ensured that a ship would indeed bring black people back to their rightful home in Africa; Marcus Garvey would, Howell believed, be that Moses who led a downtrodden and once enslaved people to freedom in Zion. Howell’s followers expected the sea to part to enable this journey, as it had for Moses, though this time they believed the sea would only permit the transport of people with beards.⁷¹¹

For Rastafari, the economic solvency that the Black Star Line offered to black people was secondary to the opportunity for repatriation that the steamship company promised African people whose ancestors had been ripped from their homeland. Yet,

Garvey's shipping line never successfully transported black people to Africa and Garvey and his associates were consistently taken advantage of in their business dealings; they drastically overpaid for the boats they purchased for example.⁷¹²

Yet, early Rastafari remained hopeful in the promise of some iteration of a successful Black Star Line. And in 1955, when an official of the Ethiopian World Federation visited Jamaica to announce that Haile Selassie had granted land in Shashamane, Ethiopia to Africans living throughout the diaspora, the enthusiasm and optimism surrounding the promise of a return by boat resumed.⁷¹³ The "mass agitation" of the 1920's, 1930's and mid 1950's was recaptured in the late 1950's and early 1960's as a reaction to the immigration of West Indians to Britain and a Garveyite belief in the increased possibility of repatriation to Liberia and other West Africa countries.⁷¹⁴

The Black Star Line remains for Rastafari a symbolic vehicle for achieving the goal of repatriation. It has, for generations, retained its symbolic potency and therefore is a consistent element of roots and culture reggae. In his 1975 song "Black Star Liner," for instance, Fred Locks chants hopefully:

I can see them coming/ I can see I-drens running/ I can hear the elders saying/ 'These are the days for which we been praying'/ Seven miles of Black Star Liners/ Coming in the harbor/ Seven miles of Black Star Liners/ Coming in the harbor/ It's repatriation/ Black liberation/ Yes, the time has come/ Black man, you're going home.⁷¹⁵

In 1977, Culture released the track, "Black Starliner Must Come" which includes the lyrics: "So long Jah Jah, Jah Jah so long/ We are waiting on the Black Star Liner"; they rereleased the song in 1997 with slightly modified lyrics.⁷¹⁶ The 1984 release by Black Roots entitled "Far Over" challenges black people to "get on the Black Star Liner/ And follow the sound of the drums/ African people unite."⁷¹⁷ Even in 2009, British

reggae artist Gideon Jah Rubbaal's "Get Ready Rasta Children" engaged the Black Star Line and the promise of Zion it holds for Rastafari. Rubbaal sings:

Mother Africa, here I come/ Stepping out of Babylon/ No more sorrows,
no more pain/ No more shall I live in vain/ Get ready Rasta children, get
ready/ Get ready Rasta children, get ready/ Black Starliner is in the
harbor.⁷¹⁸

Thus, the Black Star Line remains a powerful symbol of Rasta perseverance, one that ensures that Zion is a possibility, one that resonates with Moses' promised deliverance of Jah's chosen people. Blogger Garveys Africa employs its authority, noting that:

Moses, lead his people out of slavery and into their promised land (by way of Canaanite genocide). . . . Marcus Garvey was about to lead probably a greater number of people out of slavery to their promised land in Africa with the black star liner. It was only the usurping European and his negropean counterparts which prevented this. What Garvey did do was successfully lead millions out of the mentality of slavery, and many physically into Africa as a result of their liberated mindset. Marcus works still perpetuate today. For me, if your a bible follower and if Selassie is Jesus reincarnate then Marcus Garvey is the reincarnation (and upgrade) of Moses, in this time.⁷¹⁹

Garvey is but one modern-day Moses. All Rastafari are capable of leading Rastas to Zion. Because Moses issued the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12) and brought them to the Promised Land, the possibility of Zion remains for Jah's displaced elect. And when Rastas become Moses, they lead this righteous journey, drawing the movement ever closer to their goal of repatriation.

Though countless Rastas identify with Moses, whether through their adoption of his name or through their assumption of his physical connection to Jah as demarcated by the carrying of a rod, practitioners still await "another Moses," just as they await the Black Star Line. For example, Marley, who practitioners often identify as a Moses, himself asks for a contemporary Moses in "Exodus": "Movement of Jah people! Send us

another brother Moses! /Movement of Jah people! From across the Red Sea!”⁷²⁰ Before Marley asked for another Moses, The Mellow Cats released “Another Moses,” a song in which they too plead: “Send another Moses, Master/ to kill foes with your hand.”⁷²¹

Because all Rastas are potentially embodiments of Moses’ identity, that another Moses is necessary to usher in a return to Zion raises questions about the effectiveness of personal identifications with Moses and adoptions of the role of Jah’s prophet and liberator of the Israelites. In spite of this paradoxical need for another Moses whilst countless Moseses trod the earth, the promise of Moses’ deliverance, like the promise of the Black Star Line’s departure for Africa, invigorates Rastafari with hope.

Like Moses and as Moseses, Rastafari strive against Babylon System because in conquering Babylon, practitioners can actualize a journey to Zion. In “Can’t Cool Cant Quench,” for example, Sizzla details his actions against Babylon and his intentions for accessing Ethiopia as Zion: “Ah lick down Babylon like a power drill/ Well Pharaoh them ya fire cyar chill/ Repatriation Babylon me melt yuh will.”⁷²² Here, the promise of Zion ensures Pharaoh and Babylon cannot triumph. 4th Street Orchestra echoes this belief in “Run Dem Out,” in which they confirm that actions against Babylon lead to the triumph of Jah’s elect in Zion:

The loyal brothers of the tribe of Moses/
And all man who is black/
We shall reign Africa forever/
We shall fight and take it back/
Ah-huh-huh,
yeah/
Jah a go run dem out, ohhhh/
Jah a go wipe dem out, Lord/
God a go run dem out.

Though Rastafari await another Moses to free the Israelites, each practitioner, as a potential Moses, has a responsibility to strive towards the defeat of Babylon, practice livivity, and attempt to pave the way to Zion.

Moses Misbehaves

For Rasta readers, Moses' liberation of the Israelites and his ushering of them to Zion prove him a Rastaman and exemplar of livity. But, according to his biblical narrative, Moses erred in the eyes of Jah. After receiving notice of his divine appointment, Moses articulated skepticism that he was capable of leading the Israelites out of bondage. In Exodus 3:11, Moses said to Jah, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

Even in spite of Jah's assurance he was capable of serving as Jah's vessel, Moses continued to doubt his ability to effectively lead the Israelites or sway the Pharaoh. He questioned his abilities again in Exodus 3:13, furthermore, and vocalized concern in 4:1, stating "they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee." In 4:14, Moses angered Jah due to his persistent distrust:

Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses (Exodus 4:10-4:14).

Even after accepting his new role as Jah's mouthpiece and vessel, Moses still complained about his responsibility for the Israelites. In Exodus 17:4, Moses cried out, "What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me." In Numbers 11:11, he asked Jah, "Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?" In these passages, Moses questions and complains, instead of accepting Jah's direction and persevering in faith.

In his textual narrative, Moses also accepts the blame for all of Israel's missteps. In Exodus 16:27-28, for example, the Israelites gathered manna on the Sabbath, a behavior forbidden by Jah and communicated to the Israelites as such by Moses. "The Lord said to Moses, How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions?" In Deuteronomy 1:12, Moses asks the Israelites, "How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?" And, in Deuteronomy 1:37, he states "the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither." He repeats similar messages in Deuteronomy 3 and 4.

Moses also made egregious errors in behavior before Jah, most significantly in Numbers 20:10-11:

Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.

Moses procured water in this manner before in Exodus 13:3-6. However, in this case, as Rasta author Clinton Tulloch recognizes, Jah instructed Moses to "speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth water."⁷²³ Moses did not heed Jah and neglected to mention Jah's greatness when he addressed the Israelites, thus inciting Jah's fury. In Numbers 20:12, "The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." Throughout his biblical narrative, Moses doubted Jah's decision to elect him above all others and he continually complained to Jah. And Moses accepted the repercussions for the ills of his people. But it was in this instance, when he did not listen to Jah's specific orders or acknowledge Jah's

greatness when addressing the Israelites, that Jah issued the ultimate punishment, one that may have reflected not only Moses' misstep in Numbers 20 but also his acceptance of the repercussions for his peoples' behavior. Because he and, more frequently, his people did not heed Jah's command, and thus, strayed from the path of livity, Jah forbid Moses from entering Zion. In Numbers 27:14, Jah explained his castigation to Moses. "For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin."

Moses must undergo punishment for both his missteps in the eyes of Jah and for the doubts and the indiscretions of the Israelite people. Though in his biblical narrative Moses hesitated to accept Jah's election and exhibited questionable behavior, thereby disabling himself from leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, for Rasta readers, he remains infallible. Luciano confirms his retained Rastaman status: "Jah send Jonah and Elijah, / Moses and Noah, Martin Luther King and Marcus too, / Them never falter, the man them do them works and them move on/ I and I must carry on Jah works."

Jah elected Moses above all others. And, Moses ushered in a new age of rootedness in a promised homeland. Yet, Moses behaved insubordinately in his textual narrative. Because Rastas benefit when Moses is a chosen liberator and prophet who retained Jah's favor, readers consequently address his narrative with prerogatives of empowerment, divine unification, and repatriation in mind. Rasta readers prioritize Moses' leadership to Zion and his role as instrument of Jah over his missteps and moodiness, thereby ensuring reception of Moses as an ideal Rastaman and exemplar of livity.

Moses' inability to enter the Promised Land poses hermeneutic questions for Rasta readers, for whom a return to the Promised Land, whether envisioned as a physical, spiritual, or ideological repatriation, stands as an essential tenet of Rastafari. Moses beseeched Jah to allow him entrance, in Deuteronomy 3:23-26, yet Jah did not acquiesce. Jah showed Moses the Promised Land in Deuteronomy 34:4:

And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither.

For Rasta readers, Moses achieved the goal of bringing the Israelites out of bondage and to Zion when he views Canaan. "And Moses behold and Joshua say behold/ This a promise land" sing the Foundations in "Glory to the Kings."⁷²⁴ However, he cannot enter Zion. A Rasta hermeneutical approach enables the adoption of Moses' identity in spite of this textual element, for in claiming him and embodying him, Rasta readers ensure their deliverance from enslavement in Babylon to freedom in Ethiopia as Zion. If Moses cannot enter Zion, however, then Rastafari, as contemporary Moseses, may not be able to achieve their goal of repatriation unless his inability to enter is rationalized as redaction. Most Rasta interpreters do not contend with this element of his narrative, though some do indeed wrestle with Moses' inability to enter. Prince Alla tries to assure himself that he will not face the same scenario the biblical text dictates for Moses, the aging prophet-priest, in "I Don't Want To Be Late":

Moses saw the land (yes he saw the land)/ Yet he never reach (yet he never reach)/ To that land where that milk and honey flow/ I don't wanna be late/ I don't wanna be late/ Time is at hand/ We must seek that promised land/ Yes, I will be there/ Yes, I must be there/ The time is at hand/ We must seek to repatriate.⁷²⁵

“Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 34:5). “And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated” (Deuteronomy 34:7). But before his death, Moses entrusted his leadership of the Israelites to Joshua. “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses” (Deuteronomy 34:9). Many Rasta readers know, however, that Moses did not perish, but transitioned into another role and/or another bodily incarnation. According to Leonard Barrett, Rasta readers envision Moses as the first earthen avatar of Jah who was “Actually God revealed in the shape and form as man. His mission fulfilled, Moses disappeared from the earthly scene,” leaving Joshua to actually bring Jah’s elect in to the Promised Land.⁷²⁶ Similarly, Ras Mandito reasons:

In the King James Version, the thread of the ‘Christ Order in the Earth’ seem to have enveloped Melchizzdeck, Enoch, Moses, and Elijah and (the man called) Jesus. There are crucial and significant similarities between all these; the most crucial and significant of all being that “their flesh did not see corruption!”⁷²⁷

He continues to substantiate his perspective, arguing that:

Moses, like Jesus, just went missing off of the top of a hill! Only, they did not see Moses leaving, and so they reported and recorded that ‘God had buried him’! . . . All these men had a conscious timing of their mission in Earth, and knew when the time for completion of their mission had arrived.⁷²⁸

While some Rasta readers might recognize this generational shift and celebrate Joshua as that leader that would achieve entry into the Promised Land for the Jah’s chosen people, Moses largely remains that figure that Rastafari celebrate above all others as liberator and deliverer to Zion. Many Rasta interpreters attribute Moses’ inability to

enter Zion to Babylonian redactors. As agents of Babylon, they deny Moses entry because doing so might convince modern Moseses that they too are unable to achieve access to Zion. From this perspective, Moses' eventual status in his biblical narrative denies Rastafari a homeland.

Other Rasta readers rationalize his prohibition as a requirement for Israelite entry, as a personal sacrifice in the name of liberation meant to pave the way for a new generation of Rastafari. Tony Rebel channels the classic Negro spiritual "Go Down Moses" as he sings, for example:

When Israel was in Egypt's land/
Oppressed so hard they could not stand/
The more things change a the more they remain the same/
And God said, go down Moses/
Way down in Egypt's tend/
We say pharaoh but you know them name/
'Cause I will be the voice, I will be the pen/
I will be the Moses weh come back again/
And if it cost me me wealth, cost me me fame/
I will wear the next X behind my name.⁷²⁹

In Rebel's words, Moses' inability to enter proves the patience and sacrifice needed of brethren and sistren in order to achieve eventual repatriation. From this perspective, when Marley calls for "another Moses," he does not deny that he is a Moses. Instead, he recognizes that generations of Moseses many have to serve as martyrs to ensure the freedom of future generations.

Though "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face," according to his biblical narrative, Moses died alone on top of Mount Moriah (Deuteronomy 34:10). Rebel acknowledges Moses' outsider status by the end of his life. But most Rastafari readings center on other aspects of Moses's tale. Such readings do not emphasize the end of Moses' life, because his death in exile too poignantly speaks to potential fears surrounding the possibility of physical, and even mental and spiritual repatriation, especially since many practitioners believe that true

Rastas do not die. If all Rastafari claim the identity of biblical actors, including Moses, they face the potential martyrdom required of the elect of the elect and the promise of personal repatriation expires even as Ethiopia seems within reach.

Conclusion

In his biblical narrative, Moses succeeded in bringing forth the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt towards freedom in Zion, using his capabilities to speak and act on Jah's behalf to accomplish the lofty task. Rastas celebrate Moses as the ultimate leader and paragon of livity, for he is a liberator, a guide, a teacher and a divine channel. He offers Rasta readers the promise of redemption and demonstrates Rasta righteousness through his own election. Yet, Jah punished Moses in a most drastic manner on account of his and his peoples' missteps. Rastas benefit from reading Moses as a virtuous, revolutionary Rastaman who ushered Jah's people to their destined homeland through his command of the Word and through his miraculous acts. And, Rastas reason his inability to enter Zion as redaction or an act of martyrdom in a hermeneutic strategy that ensures the movement's potential for repatriation.

In spite of his misbehaviors and consequent prohibition from Zion, Rastafari read Moses to be the ideal Rastaman, thus they assume intimacy with Jah and ensure entry to the Promised Land, determining themselves to be elect leaders destined to fight and win against Babylon System. In reasoning Moses' questionable behaviors as redaction or by not actively negotiating with them, Rastafari articulate their ambiguity towards and dependence upon the Bible, as well as their fears and hopes surrounding repatriation. Moses was a flawed hero, though he was elect over all others. And human beings, even

Jah's chosen people, are similarly imperfect. But when Moses retains his role as Rastaman-liberator and as prophet-warrior who ushers in a new age in Zion, Rastafari remain sanctioned and brethren and sistren become Jah's prophets and agents of freedom.

⁶⁵⁷ An interpretation of Psalm 137:1.

⁶⁵⁸ Bob Marley, "Time Will Tell," *Kaya*, Island Records (1978).

⁶⁵⁹ The Melodians, "Rivers of Babylon," Beverly's Records (1970).

⁶⁶⁰ Frank Van Dijk, "The Twelve Tribes of Israel: Rasta and the Middle Class," *New West Indian Guide* 62 (1988): 16.

⁶⁶¹ Raging Fyah, "Nah Look Back," *Destiny*, Soulbeats Records (2014).

⁶⁶² Freddie McGregor, "Rasta Man Camp," *Bobby Babylon*, Studio One (1980).

⁶⁶³ Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 105.

⁶⁶⁴ Albert Murray, *The Hero and the Blues* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 62.

⁶⁶⁵ I Wayne, "Book of Life," *Book of Life*, VP Records (2007).

⁶⁶⁶ Steel Pulse, "Biko's Kindred Lament," *Tribute to the Martyrs*, Island Records (1979).

⁶⁶⁷ Congos, "Children Crying," *Heart of the Congos*, Black Ark Studio (1977).

⁶⁶⁸ Damian Marley, "One Loaf of Bread," *Gang War* (Anthology), Ghetto Youths International (2007).

⁶⁶⁹ Sizzla, "Babylon Homework," *Royal Sons of Ethiopia*, Greensleeves Records (1999).

⁶⁷⁰ Peter Tosh, "I Am that I Am," *Equal Rights*, Columbia Records (1977).

⁶⁷¹ Bob Marley and the Wailers, "Go Tell It On The Mountain," *The Best of Bob Marley and the Wailers*, Beverly's (1971).

⁶⁷² Yabby You, "Zion Gate," *Deliver Me From My Enemies*, Blood and Fire (2006).

⁶⁷³ Ian McCann, *Bob Marley: In His Own Words* (New York: Omnibus Press, 1993), 24.

⁶⁷⁴ Midnite, "Blaze Up," *Assini*, I Grade Records (2002).

⁶⁷⁵ Early B, "Take Up Your Bible," *History of Jamaica: Early B at Midnight Rock*, Roots Records (1984).

⁶⁷⁶ Callahan, *The Talking Book*, 90.

⁶⁷⁷ See Barry Chevannes, *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1994).

⁶⁷⁸ Wade Bailey, *Rastafari and it's Shamanist Origin's: The New Age Movement in the Caribbean* (USA: Lulu, 2007), 33.

⁶⁷⁹ Oskar, 2006, *Rasta Nick' Forum*, <http://forums.rastaman.co.uk/smf/index.php?topic=2969.10;wap2>.

⁶⁸⁰ Sizzla, "Can't Cool Cant Quench," *Good Ways*, Charm (1998).

⁶⁸¹ Sizzla, "Azanldo," *Good Ways*, Charm (1998).

⁶⁸² Empress Yuajah, *Rasta Way of Life: Rastafari Livity Book* (Toronto: Empress Yuajah Books, 2014), 5.

⁶⁸³ Garnett Silk, "Music is the Rod," *Music is the Rod: Reggae Anthology*, VP Records (1993).

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- ⁶⁸⁴ Janet L. Decosmo, "Rastafari Fundamentalism in Bahia Brazil" in *Rastafari in the New Millennium: A Rastafari Reader*, ed. Michael Barnett (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 107.
- ⁶⁸⁵ Steel Pulse, "Chant a Psalm," *True Democracy*. Elektra Records (1982).
- ⁶⁸⁶ Shardinouska Schoop, "Rasta Moses 'Living a Mission,'" Amigoe, September 9, 2014, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://Jah.amigoe.com/amigoe-express/interviews/191418-rasta-moses-living-a-mission>.
- ⁶⁸⁷ Stephen Marley featuring Capleton and Sizzla, "Rock Stone," Republic Records (2014).
- ⁶⁸⁸ Gerald Hausman, ed., *The Kebra Nagast: The Lost Bible of Rastafarian Wisdom and Faith from Ethiopia and Jamaica* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 33.
- ⁶⁸⁹ E. A. Wallis Budge, *Kebra Nagast: The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek* (Loschberg: Jazzybee Verlag, 2014), 98.
- ⁶⁹⁰ Joshua 8:18.
- ⁶⁹¹ William F. Lewis, *Soul Rebels: The Rastafari* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1993), 12.
- ⁶⁹² Olive Senior, quoted in Rachel Lara Mordecai, "Narrative Wars with My Cousin: The 1970's in Jamaican Literature" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2007).
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- ⁶⁹⁴ Carole D. Yawney, "Remnant of All Nations: Rastafarian Attitudes to Race and Nationality," in *Ethnicity in the Americas*, ed. Francis Henry (The Hague: Mouton 1976), 234.
- ⁶⁹⁵ Basil Walters, "Remembering Clancy Eccles," *Jamaica Observer*, July 10, 2005.
- ⁶⁹⁶ Clancy Eccles, "Joshua's Rod of Correction," *Joshua's Rod of Correction*, Jamaican Gold (1970).
- ⁶⁹⁷ Max Romeo, "No Joshua No," Jaguar (2009).
- ⁶⁹⁸ Tony Rebel, "The Voice and the Pen," *Vibes of the Times*, Columbia Records (1993).
- ⁶⁹⁹ Garnett Silk, "Music is the Rod," *Music is the Rod: Reggae Anthology*, VP Records (1993).
- ⁷⁰⁰ Majek Fashek, "Promised Land," *Rainmaker*, Light Year (1997).
- ⁷⁰¹ Ennis B. Edmonds and Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 185.
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- ⁷⁰³ Rex Nettleford, *Mirror, Mirror: Identity, Race and Protest in Jamaica* (Kingston: Sangster and Collins, 1970), 101.
- ⁷⁰⁴ Leonard E. Barrett, *The Rastafarians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 148.
- ⁷⁰⁵ Henok Semaegzer Fente, quoted in Erin C. Macleod, *Visions of Zion: Ethiopians and Rastafari in the Search for the Promised Land* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), vi.
- ⁷⁰⁶ Horace Campbell, *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1987), 143.

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⁷⁰⁸ Wolfgang Bender, "The Way to Shashamane: The Rastafari Return to a Fictive Ethiopia" in *Creating and Crossing Boundaries in Ethiopia: Dynamics of Social Categorization and Differentiation*, ed. Susanne Epple (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2012), 220. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell and Burchell K. Taylor, "Rastafari's Messianic Ideology and Caribbean Theology of Liberation" in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 398.

⁷⁰⁹ Murrell and Taylor, "Rastafari's Messianic Ideology and Caribbean Theology of Liberation," 398.

⁷¹⁰ Marcus Garvey, "Negroes of the World the Eternal Has Happened: The New Negro Has Made History for Himself and Ethiopia Shall Be Redeemed," *Negro World*, December 6, 1919.

⁷¹¹ Barry Chevannes, "Rastafari and the Exorcism of Racism and Classism" in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, ed. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian Anthony McFarlane, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 60.

⁷¹² Rupert Lewis, "Marcus Garvey and the Early Rastafarians: Continuity and Discontinuity" in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, eds. Clinton Chisholm, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, William David Spencer, and Adrian McFarlane, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 156.

⁷¹³ Chevannes, "Rastafari and the Exorcism of Racism and Classism," 60.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁷¹⁵ Fred Locks, "Black Star Liner," *Black Star Liner*, VP Records (1975).

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⁷¹⁷ Black Roots, "Far Over," *The Frontline*, BBC Records (1984).

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⁷¹⁹ Garveys Africa, November 25, 2013 (12:22 p.m.), "Marcus Moses," *Jah-rastafari.com*, http://jah-rastafari.com/forum/message-view.asp?message_group=5387&word_search=liberated+mindset&SearchType=All&SearchWhat=Messages&search_user=garveys%20africa.

⁷²⁰ Bob Marley, "Exodus," *Exodus*, Island Records (1977).

⁷²¹ The Mellow Cats with Count Ossie and his Warickers, "Another Moses," Blue Beat (1961).

⁷²² Sizzla, "Can't Cool Cant Quench," *Good Ways*, Charm (1998).

⁷²³ Clifton Tulloch, *Rasta Bible: For Success and Prosperity* (Lakeland: Rastullo, Inc., 2013), NP.

⁷²⁴ Groundations, "Glory to the Kings," *Young Tree*, Young Tree Records (1999).

⁷²⁵ Prince Alla, "I Don't Want To Be Late," *Only Love Can Conquer*, Blood and Fire (1996).

⁷²⁶ Barrett, *The Rastafarians*, 112.

⁷²⁷ Ras Mandito, *The Testament of Rastafari: Unlocking the KJV* (Raleigh: Johnson & Sinclair Publishers, 2014), 19.

⁷²⁸ Ras Mandito, *The Testament of Rastafari*, 20.

⁷²⁹ Tony Rebel, “The Voice and The Pen,” *Vibes of the Times*, Columbia Records (1992).

9. CONCLUSION: READING RASTAFARI IN THE 21ST CENTURY

A dis ya version,
A no King James version.
'Cause out of Africa,
Came the Garden of Eden.

Hidden from me I was never told, no way!
Ancient prophets black and gold.
Like Daniel, King David and Abraham;
Israel were all black men.
-Steel Pulse, "Not King James Version," (1985)

"Every village in Jamaica has a Samson. Every town has a David. Every heart has a Solomon."⁷³⁰ Gerald Hausman here speaks of a tendency for certain Jamaicans to adopt the identity of characters of the Hebrew Bible. Doing so lends their voices authority and allows them to channel the virtues of the biblical actors they personify. This trend resonates for Rastafari who embody individual actors, becoming modern-day incarnations of Moses, Samson, Solomon, and David. In turning into manifestations of Samson and Moses in particular, Rastas accept the personal relationships each biblical figure enjoys with Jah, embrace their revolutionary status as their own, and espouse their distinct election as Jah's prophets and Nazirite warriors. By becoming embodiments of Samson and Moses, Rastas define themselves as credible and assert their chosenness by Jah, thus establishing their inherent divine worth.

Practitioners read in the biblical narratives of Samson and Moses proof of Jah's prophet and his Nazirite warrior as exemplars of livity. Because Samson is notoriously dreadlocked and because he is a Nazirite from birth, he represents the epitome of righteousness. And because Moses is born to a priestly family and brings Jah's law to the Israelites, Rasta interpreters reason that he too exemplifies livity in every facet of his life.

Delilah, on the other hand, is proof both that non-Israelites, women, and especially foreign women pose a threat to the livity of the ideal Rastaman. An analysis of the ways in which Rasta readers assess the biblical tales of Samson, Moses, and Delilah illuminates the essentiality of livity to Rasta practice, to exclamations of Rastafari righteousness, and to Rasta biblical hermeneutics.

Because Rastas read Samson and Moses as brethren, when the duo stand as exemplars of livity, Rastas also own the purity and discipline they associate with a successful life of livity. Through an assumption of the identities of these biblical actors, envisioned as pillars of livity, practitioners identify male Rastas as the elect of the elect and as uncontaminated by Babylon. Because of the positive existential ramifications of this reading strategy, Moses and Samson remain unblemished, notwithstanding their occasional transgressive behaviors. Despite Samson's dalliances with foreign women, for instance, contact with dead bodies, ingestion of non-ital food, and potential consumption of fermented beverages, he serves a Rasta objective of empowerment and ablution as a dreadlocked exemplar of livity. And, Moses offers Rastas proof of their revolutionary nature, as well as their capability to communicate with and for Jah. Because he offers Rasta interpreters so much, his disobedience and his inability to enter Zion do not factor significantly in to Rasta readings of him. The transgressive behavior of these biblical actors does not problematize Rasta interpretations of them, both because practitioners rationalize their questionable behavior as sanctioned by Jah and because of a Rasta belief in Babylonian redaction. The oppressor, in other words, has nefariously altered the Bible, but the Word of Jah still echoes therein; it just has to be read with a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Rastafari assess Babylonian redaction as the primary reason for the Bible's misinformation. This reality resonates in Rasta approaches to Moses and Samson. It allows them to remain untainted despite their questionable behavior. Additionally, however, that Rastas themselves are transgressive must be considered. Although practitioners generally pursue livity to some degree, many participate in behaviors that challenge elements of the life path. For example, some Rastas eat meat and others drink alcohol. Some use technology, while other practitioners decry the usage of technology as an engagement with Babylon. Some Rastas involve themselves with women who are deemed dangerous because of their race and/or non-involvement with Rastafari; these elements also make them foreign. Though Rastas commonly attempt to manifest livity in their lives, they, like Moses and Samson, sometimes err. Representing Moses and Samson as perfect then not only heals the aberrations of the biblical actors but also of Rastafari as contemporary manifestations of them.

Though Rasta interpreters read Samson to be Jah's chosen Nazirite warrior without investigating his defiling behaviors, they do recognize that he falters in his relationship with Delilah. Her narrative proves that women, especially foreign women, are persuasive and incredibly dangerous. Delilah's tale warns Rastafari that women pose a real hazard to the elect of Jah, even to his strongman Nazirite. The story of Delilah and her subjugation of Samson should pose enough of a warning to prevent Jah's elect Rastas from dallying with dangerous women and yet reggae artists frequently sing of and Rasta writers compose works that describe their experiences with modern-day Delilahs who strip them of their livity and betray their love. Even a seemingly good woman has Delilah's nature at her core, according to many brethren. Often, even when a Rastaman

finds a woman that he thinks is a suitable mate, she is shrouding corrupting and malicious tendencies.

According to most male practitioners, and thus according to most governing bodies of Rastafari, in order to be a good woman, a Rastawoman must be under the guidance of a Rastaman.⁷³¹ Even so, her ability to actualize livity in her own life is limited by her own biological functions as well as her Delilah-like tendencies; i.e. her innate womanly, immoral nature. Thus, livity is gendered. Rastawomen live lives of livity by cultivating dreads, eating ital, avoiding contact with death, educating their youth, heeding the word of their male partner, and avoiding communal contact during menstruation. Men participate in several elements of a woman's path towards livity; generally, raising children is primarily a woman's responsibility and men are not required to observe monthly purity regulations. Men often also assume a regulatory role over women and over the ritual sphere, one that includes regulations over livity.

In their unique ways, both brethren and sistren pursue livity, a path defined by Jah as befitting his chosen people and detailed in the Hebrew Bible. The manners by which sistren enact livity are changing, however. In progressive Rasta mansions and smaller groups of practitioners, women are taking on more active roles in the ritual arena and assuming positions of community leadership.⁷³² These shifts in gendered practice raise concerns for many older and traditional practitioners who envision a woman's rightful role as a supportive one.

Contemporary debates surrounding a woman's place in Rasta culture are frequent. But they are far from the only site of cultural disagreement in contemporary Rastafari communities. As practitioners age and as more founding members of Rastafari die (or, as

some Rastas believe, transition to the next bodily incarnation), the movement must wrestle with its foundational stance on the denial of death. Similarly, the notion of Jamaica as an unsalvageable island of Babylon is a contested one, with a diversity of Rastas assuming wide-ranging perspectives on the topic. Generations after the originators of the movement promoted repatriation back to Africa as a primary goal of Rastafari, practitioners still live in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean, and indeed the world. Some younger Rastas are now centering their anti-Babylon efforts on creating Zion in the Caribbean, while other contingents still vehemently deny the possibility of creating an ideal homeland in what was once the colonial world. And while some Rastas embrace technological advances, others decry technology as a tool of Babylon, one that distances practitioners from their I-n-I status. Those that embrace it contend that technology is a vehicle to spread messages of black election and of the importance of livity to a global audience. As Rastafari spreads across the globe, definitions of proper Rasta practice diffuse and modify. And yet, the goal of livity, though defined variously by a diversity of practitioners, is an ultimate goal of Rastafari.

The guidelines of livity are largely derived from the pages of the Hebrew Bible. In particular, they are based upon the laws that Moses brought to the Israelites by way of Jah. In the very act of bringing Jah's law to the Israelites, practitioners recognize that Moses, a Rastaman, spoke as a conduit for Jah, thus as his ultimate prophet. Rastas adopt his prophetic legacy for themselves, as well as the priestly legacy of Moses' family. And, they assume the Nazirite identity of Samson as their own. While accepting these birthrights, Rastas do not shoulder Moses' breaches of Jah's commandments or Samson's unbecoming behavior. Instead, they accept the positive legacy of these transgressive

biblical actors by applying to their narratives their distinctive biblical hermeneutic.

Whether Rasta interpreters contend directly with biblical text or derive their knowledge from other sources, including extra-biblical tales and oral communication, they ask Moses and Samson, as complex biblical actors, to retain their purity, obedience, and loyalty to Jah, because when Moses and Samson are flawless, Rastas too are perfected subjects of Jah.

Though not all Rastas live in once-colonized locales, and though not all practitioners are African diasporic people, the majority of Rastafari and/or their ancestors have experienced some form of domination, whether as a result of the transatlantic slave trade or other instances of colonial rule, or due to racialized schemas of worth that reign in different regions of the world. For individuals who have experienced domination in some form, Rastafari serves as means of revolution and empowerment, as a method for extricating oneself from the psychological hold of determinations of worth imposed by controlling forces.

Through their interpretation of the Bible in particular, Rastas reject messages of black inferiority and corresponding notions of white supremacy and authority. Rasta readers replace such theories with knowledge they derive by reading the Bible for themselves and by employing their existentially rejuvenating biblical hermeneutic. By applying their hermeneutical approach to the text, Rastas identify black biblical actors in its pages and confirm Jah's blackness. They acknowledge Ethiopia as Zion and the West as Babylon. And, they reason their own chosenness by assuming an Israelite identity. Such rejuvenating readings have radical ramifications.

In concentrating my argument on the ways in which Rasta readers contend with Samson and Moses, in particular the reading strategy that they employ in order to claim Samson and Moses as pillars of livity, however, I hoped to shift the scholarly dialogue surrounding Rastafari biblical hermeneutics, which generally centralizes on the revolutionary element of Rasta interpretations. By drawing attention to readings of specific biblical actors as Rastas themselves and, further, as exemplars of livity, I argue that the Hebrew Bible is more than a source of empowerment for practitioners. It is a ritual and behavioral guide, one that offers Rastafari a path toward spiritual growth and intimacy with Jah.

In this dissertation, I have aimed to expand scholarly conversations about Rastafari biblical hermeneutics by examining a Rasta adoption of an Israelite identity and declaration of Jah's blackness. Furthermore, by focusing on Rasta engagement with Samson, Delilah, and Moses, I have highlighted the essentiality of livity in Rasta reading strategies, ritual, and declarations of self-worth. By examining Samson and Moses as prototypes of livity and Delilah as a threat to that very livity, this work negotiates gendered notion of righteousness in Rasta practice and draws attention to the relationship between Rasta approaches to the Hebrew Bible and practitioners' emphasis on livity.

Biblical actors, including Moses and Samson, are powerful and complex characters to claim as exemplars of livity. And in order to fully comprehend the Rastafari movement, scholars must investigate the interpretive techniques Rastafari apply to their narratives to deduce Rastas' unwavering dedication to Jah and to livity. By interrogating how Rastafari read the complicated pieces of Samson's and Moses' textual presence, and by examining the hermeneutical strategies and rationality behind the existentially

rejuvenating reading methodologies of Rastafari in Jamaica and across the world, scholars can cultivate a deeper understanding of the movement, practitioners' dedication to the path of livity, and Rastafari's particular ontological perspectives on life.

⁷³⁰ Gerald Hausman, *Rastafarian Children of Solomon: The Legacy of the Kebra Nagast and the Path to Peace and Understanding* (Rochester: Bear & Company, 2013), 41.

⁷³¹ See Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

⁷³² As described to the author by several Rasta practitioners at the inaugural and second Rastafari Conference and General Assembly held at the University of the West Indies in Kingston.

GLOSSARY

Arawak: Indigenous people native to the Caribbean and South America prior to European colonization of the area. The Arawaks were largely wiped out during the colonial period both due to the harsh treatment they endured as a result of colonization and because of their lack of immunity to illnesses brought over from Europe.

Babylon: The nefarious and corrupting white colonial project, of which Rastas believe the pope is at the helm.

baldhead: Non-Rasta.

Bobo Shanti: Widely considered by scholars and Rasta practitioners as the most “orthodox” group of Rastas. Bobo Shanti generally assess technology as polluting and therefore they often avoid it.

brethren: Male Rasta practitioner(s). Can refer to multiple or to individual Rastas. The term infers the connectivity enjoyed between Rastas.

dancehall: A musical genre that is popular in nightclubs around the world. It evolved from reggae in the 1970’s, but it boasts a faster tempo and songs often focus on partying, violence, money, and sexuality.

downpression: Rastas believe that the term “downpression” more accurately describes the experience of domination than “oppression” because “oppression” sounds like it includes the word “up” while domination brings down individuals and communities.

dreadlocks: The natural result of leaving hair uncombed and untreated. The cultivation of dreadlocks is a fundamental aspect of livity and a means by which Rastas prove their devotion to Jah.

duppies: Ghosts or spirits of Caribbean folklore.

ganja: Rasta term for marijuana or cannabis. Rastas envision ganja as a sacred herb that enables practitioners to access a meditative state and achieve divine-like insight.

Grounation: Rasta assembly celebrating Haile Selassie's visit to Jamaica on April 21, 1966. During a grounation, practitioners play music, chant, smoke ganja, and reason together in communal celebration of Selassie and Jah.

I-n-I: A term utilized by Rastafari to refer to themselves in the first person. Practitioners believe that a divine presence abides in all Rastas. As an individual acknowledges this, he or she appreciates an intrinsic relationship with Jah and with other Rastas. Thus, Rastas refer to the self as I-n-I in a linguistic move that iterates each practitioner's connectedness with Jah and inherent divinity.

I-ssembly: An assembly of Rastafari.

Incients: A Rasta interpretation of the term "anceients" that bestows ancestors with an I-n-I identity.

Irie: A Jamaican Patois term for a positive feeling or state of being.

Ital: Natural and suitable. The term "Ital" derives from "vital." Rastas believe that Ital food increases vitality.

Itation: A form of meditation that stems from Rastas' relationship with Jah as I-n-I.

Jah: The Rastafari name for God. Stems from the biblical YHWH.

Kette Drum: A large hand drum played during Rasta rituals. African origins unclear.

Kumina: An Afro-Jamaican religion influenced greatly by Kongolese practice. Kumina is focused on the veneration of deities and ancestors. Drumming, dancing, and spirit possession are major elements of ritual.

livit: Given that practitioners eat to generate wellness, they reject the term “diet” on the basis that it includes “die” and instead employ the term “livit,” which is rooted in “live.”

A proper “livit” consists of foods that promote spiritual and physical wellbeing.

livity: The Rasta practice of livity involves ascribing to ritualized practices aimed at purification and a healthful, clean life. These practices including an embrace of naturalness and Jah’s law, the cultivation of dreadlocks, the usage of ganja, and the consumption of a specialized “ital” diet. Livity has its roots in the Hebrew Bible and relates to commandments directed to the Israelites as interpreted by Rasta readers.

Maroons: Once enslaved individuals who escaped slavery in the Americas and formed sovereign communities during the colonial period.

Mento: A style of acoustic Jamaican folk music popular during the 1930’s and 40’s.

misphilosophy: The mistaken philosophy of Babylon.

Myal: An Afro-Jamaican practice that is focused on healing. This healing takes place through the channeling of the powers of ancestors. Myal-men, or spiritual leaders and healers, focus on alleviating physical pain and mental anguish. The practice of Myal also involves divination and spirit possession.

Nyabinghi: The holiest of Rasta I-semmbles during which practitioners sing, drum, and use ganja as methods for chanting down Babylon and celebrating Jah and Haile Selassie. Practitioners adopted the term “Nyabinghi” from a resistance group active in Kongo and Rwanda during the late 19th century.

Obeah: A popular tradition in West Africa and throughout the Caribbean. Though the spiritual path is largely focused on healing and protection, it has a negative reputation in

Jamaica. Practitioners are believed to have the ability to channel spiritual powers, often considered malevolent, and direct them at enemies.

overstand: Because the term “understand” includes the word “under,” Rastas replace it with “overstand” which they believe more suitably signals comprehension because it includes “over.”

politricks: Babylon’s employment of politics to fool black people.

Pukumina: A form of Jamaican Revivalism that borrows the deities, dependence on spirit possession, and emphasis on drumming and dancing of Kumina and fuses them with Christian elements.

Ras: An Amharic title of honor that has been adopted by Rastafari. In Amharic, the term signifies rulership.

reggae: A musical genre that took shape in Jamaica in the 1960’s and is now performed across the globe. Reggae developed out of Rasta ritual music, ska, mento, and R&B. Its accent on the second and fourth beat in every measure makes it distinct.

Riddim: Jamaican patois for “rhythm.”

rocksteady: A musical style that developed in Jamaica in the early 1960’s that emphasizes the bass instead of percussion.

sistren: Female Rasta practitioner(s). Can refer to multiple or to individual Rastas. The term infers the connectivity enjoyed between Rastas.

ska: A musical genre that developed in Jamaica in the 1950’s. Ska was influenced by mento, calypso from Trinidad and Tobago, jazz, and R&B.

spliff: Ganja rolled in paper or a in leaf and sometimes mixed with tobacco.

Taino: An Arawak people with a distinct language. They lived throughout the Caribbean prior to European colonization.

trod: To join or participate in the Rasta effort to disarm Babylon.

Zion: Paradise. Rastas envision Zion as the Promised Land.

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