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Creating African Futures in an Era of Global Transformations:

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Criar Futuros Africanos numa Era de Transformações Globais:

Desafios e Perspetivas

بعث أفريقيا الغد في سياق التحولات المعولمة :

رهانات و آفاق

“I’d Rather See a Sermon Than Hear One...”: Africa/Heaven and The Diaspora in Creating Global Futures and Transformation

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CODESRIA

08 - 12 June / Juin 2015

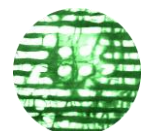
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ABSTRACT

This paper is focused on the case of the Rastafari, a grassroots, male dominated Pan African religio-political movement, which for almost a century has driven the Caribbean Diaspora to dialogue and action on issues of repair and redevelopment of the continent. Though often criticized as patriarchal, since the mid-1970s the Rastafari has increasingly seen women emerging, playing leading significance in globally coordinated initiatives. Indeed it could be argued that relative to the wider society Rastafari has made more significant advances with regard to gender parity and the advancement of women, as this is facilitated by the ongoing dialogical and grounded processes of 'reasoning' that provide ventilation and strategic solutions for contending ideas. Women within the movement are therefore ironically over represented relative to their numbers in positions of international leadership and the overall general administration of the community. This phenomenon has grown especially over the past two generations, as the role of the Rastafari Empress or the lioness as she is sometime referred has evolved to situate itself seated among the lions as a primary component within the 'works' of Rastafari. The paper seeks to develop a historiography of the evolution of the Rastafari family and its construction of a global administration, to determine the lessons to be learnt from various approaches over the last four decades to initiatives targeting Africa as related to impacting the continent's sustainable aims, objectives and developmental needs.





Introduction: "I'd rather see a Sermon than hear one..."

"I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day..."

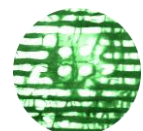
The eyes are better pupils than the ears..."

(Lines from Mama Blossom, a Nyahbinghi matriarch's poem)

The Rastafari movement has been viewed as an acephalous organization driven by 'leading administrators' but lacking centralized leadership figures. The Movement also offers varied *praxis* and philosophical cohesion, however is unified around the veneration of the last Emperor of Ethiopia, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, who especially after his November 1930 coronation became viewed as a fulfilment of a messianic vision for African redemption. Notwithstanding its marginal, antisocial and for some myopic¹ rhetoric, the movement has grown and is now recognized as an African-centred worldview with religio-politico undertones having made key contributions to the process of the Columbian African-American post-colonial reconstruction. Rastafari has been described as millenarian and holds repatriation to Africa as a central part of the ultimate objectives for its dispersed community. Critical is the issue of Rastafari operational approach in a fast changing world particularly given the *nativist* leanings that have shaped the core philosophy of the worldview. Described as a word driven faith², the Rastafari movement is by virtue of cosmology, ontology and epistemology a "travelling culture" (see Yawney:1995) fashioned out of various displacements with a central narrative of "relocation" or return to an original homeland – the mythic or real Africa /Zion, imagined as Heaven relative to the Caribbean, rendered by some as the pits of hell (see Howell :1935). Also increasingly it is the 'travelling community' of priests and attendants who are negotiating the global development of the central vision and orthodoxy of the worldview. Further as the Rastafari community has grown and matured it has provided organic understanding of the inner logic of religious community/communion fabrication. Through the Rastafari emergence the elaboration of the principles and signifiers of religio-political catharsis can also be put under microscope, to observe the construction and fulfillment of a type of distributive justice through this redemptive narrative centred on returning to Africa. Emerging from a state of nature fashioned in colonialism, Rastafari is able to reinvent freedom, but this freedom is also located in the exegesis of the Christian Bible as it is also firmly located in the persistent of traditional Africa played out for example through the mischief of the trickster, West African folklore hero Anansi (see Chevannes: 2006), and religio-naturopathic approach to healing. Rastafari emerges as an African-Jamaican hybrid

¹ Some such as Horace Campbell hold this view, suggesting that Rastafari because of its failure to strengthen in strategic and politico-economic terms has suffered a type of anachronism (offered in personal conversation August 2013); also see Campbell (1984)

² See Homiak (1998); Pollard (1994); Chevannes (2006)



worldview that mimics and builds on the meta-narrative of Christianity, African/ *myaalist*³ tradition, Hindu culture as well as the embrace of aspects of the modern; thus availing itself a springboard, or what has been described as 'a quantum leap', from which to advance its contemporary reparatory campaign. To this extent Rastafari is also a reflection of but also at the same time a critique of the colonial Jamaican society and its own Judeo-Christian patriarchal biases. However the demographics of the Movement place women in a grim minority with numbers well below twenty percent (20%) of the membership in Jamaica⁴. In this regard Rastafari curiously enough offers the potential for Black women's empowerment a point recognized by womanist oriented females who take on leadership within the movement. We are reminded by the womanists, that the Black woman was always equal in the toil that was expected of her as her male counterpart as she was also in the field and exposed to the same conditions of labour (see Montague FUSE November/December 1982).

It is perhaps at the level of leading *praxis* that Rastafari seemingly offers women potential because of its openness and lack of central leadership. One Rastafari woman contextualizes the potential as follows:

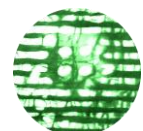
"...it not just a Rasta problem, is a human problem. People like to throw off the responsibility for self and community unto another person. And that is why leaders have existed....and why you will have them in the future. One of the things that I really check for in Rasta is that too much emphasis is not on leaders and with the exception of the "Twelve Tribes" and a few up-and-coming people. *Anybody with initiative can do what they think should be done – just move forward*" (my emphasis). (Yard Roots April/May 1981 – "Interview: Rastawoman as Equal!")

In this regard Rastafari might also be seen as a route towards liberation of women from the ubiquitous effects of white patriarchy which limits their engagement to primarily domestic affairs. This potential for female liberation is somehow ignored by much of the critiques of Rastafari but is underscored by Sis. Ilaloo, and by extension females who see the movement as a potential for revolutionary Pan African liberation (See Harris; *ibid*).

Rastafari operates on a principle of gender separation explicitly and has likewise centred its work and administration, ritual and domestic practice largely in this way. This paper outlines in brief major tenets of the Rastafari faith identifying the rationale of its gender representation and its day-to-day utility within the faith. It then engages a view accounting the approach to leadership through a patriarchal system that used to dictate that females', by some Rastafari described as the "weaker vessel" (see Homiak: 1986), way to this faith was through the tutelage of the guiding 'king-man' her 'groom' so to speak within conventions of Christianity;

³ *Myaal* is considered to be the genesis of Afro-Jamaican syncretic religious tradition thought to have emerged in the mid 18th century.

⁴ The 2011 Jamaican census places the number at approximately 15%, however I would argue that the demographics may be more balanced in certain locations across the Rastafari Diaspora, for example in Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom for example where I would assert that it ranges 20-30%.



and the king-man was thus the source of the Movement's agenda setting, inner logic and objectives, and the management and globalization of the same (See Yawney:2001). This paper addresses an ongoing debate within the Rastafari movement about its politics as it relates to its *modus operandi* as a religious community in the face of a fast changing world. It plays on an implicit tension within the Movement about thought and practice and the idea that the 'lion', the king-man are engrossed in ritualized thought through reasoning, while the lioness, empress or 'dwata', contends with the practice of managing the arduous struggles before the now global family. The paper brings into focus the idea of *epistemic performance*⁵ brought to light through issues of ritual practice and gender taboo, as it examines the key modalities of organization explored by the administrators of the movement. These issues are of greater significance as Rastafari seeks to consolidate its now global culture and community within an African diasporic bid held towards achieving repatriation to Africa, explicitly philosophized by the movement over the past fifty years. Through a focus on specific international events from the 1980s to present, I attempt to review the impact and specific achievement of these ventures particularly as it relates to African programmatic agenda.

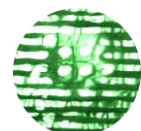
This research is derived from twenty-years of field work examining leadership within Rastafari and the materialization of the Movement as a global Pan-African community.

The Nyahbinghi Ritual of Redemption

The manifestation of salvation or the path to unburdening and renewing the 'soul-case' that embodied slavery in the Caribbean has seen many intentions played out as ritual words and deeds to provide catharsis for the crippled beings that inhabit these spaces. The Haitian Revolution has narratives accounting the usage of oathing rituals as a preparation for action. Consistently, the actions of the change-makers have been inspired by rituals developed by the leaders to raise levels of confidence and commitment. For Rastafari the Nyahbinghi⁶, an adaptation of an Eastern African religio-militia resistance medium, is the key collective ritual, but this is also buttressed by Judeo Christian influences such as Sabbath keeping, fasting, chanting, praying, also chalice smoking, dancing and silence/meditation – as well as supplication of the flesh through various abstentions within a system of understanding

⁵ This comes from Spivak and I think get to the heart of the convergence of issues at play in this patriarchal knowledge system which I have argued elsewhere is a male facility towards delivering Ethiopian centred pedagogy. Further it triggers the sense of gnosis or the interiority of the knowledge of life or the place from which 'livity' the core essence of the Rastafari culture is performed.

⁶ Nyahbinghi is a term that has been appropriated by Jamaican Rastafari since the late 1930s early 1940s derived from the Eastern African name of the spirit medium Queen Nyahbinghi who was a major force in the resistance against British colonialism in Uganda at the turn of the twentieth century. In the Jamaican context it grew to refer to the largest and in some accounts the oldest congregation of the Rastafari movement – somewhat of an ephemeral community, convened around 'holy-days' – sacred or significant Pan African celebration (ie. African Liberation Day, May 25th, HIM Emperor Haile Selassie I's coronation and Birthday November 2nd and July 23rd respectively) - constituting 3 to 4 generations of Rastafari cohered around the divinity of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I with the dominant ethos of never bowing. (Jake Homiak personal communication 21 August 2014). For discussions about the African connection and origins of the Nyahbinghi see Hopkins, Elizabeth (1970) "The Nyahbinghi Cult of Southern Uganda" in Robert I. Rotberg ed. *Protest & Power in Black Africa*, Oxford Uni. Press



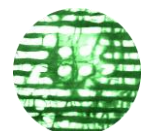
directed at manifesting visions of divine inspiration. It is within the administration of the Nyahbinghi ritual that there is the most evidence of organizational structure. With this ritual comes stringent and the widest community application of the separation aspects of the organization and this is somewhat universal within the various permutations of the movement, that is the various “tribes” or “mansions” as the multiplicity of Rastafari doctrinal congregations are described. To this extent one might say that the ontological criteria or leadership norms of ritual solidarity all militate/mitigate against female influence. Further, it could be argued that an analysis of the preoccupation with enforcing codes of separation can be employed to Rastafari in determining the position along a continuum that variously demonstrate the strategic location within each mansion as it relates to Christianity and modernity, Western cultural influences, and the application of the Bible mores⁷.

For the purpose of the Nyahbinghi ceremony menstruating females are barred access to this space in principle until they are beyond the fourteenth day (or instances twenty-first day) of their cycle. In congregations the language of “free” or “not-free”⁸ is often used for women who have been separated or returned to the congregation (or in some instances family) in the celebration of the ritual. Specifically the separation is considered important for “priests” and males post adolescence, and in the case of the Ethiopia Africa Black International Congress (EABIC) or Bobo Shanti involves up to twenty-one days of separate dwelling. Females who visit this community before they are afforded access are required to undergo an interview conducted by an empress (a Bobo female) at times with the aid of a calendar to determine if they may be permitted in to the camp. Noteworthy too in the Bobo congregations even when women are “free” separation is still maintained in relation to seating, as well as there is generally non-gendered avoidance of touching (hand-shaking, hugging/embracing etc.), in its stead salutations are usually accompanied by lowering of the head and torso in a bow often with a dipping of the knees. There are also other gendered norms as related to aesthetic features as it relates to covering of the head, shoulders and the length and fit of dresses. Further, routinely women are not allowed to wear trousers, play ritual drums, and originally could only sing, dance, play shakers and tambourines at ceremonial occasions, that chiefly being the Nyahbinghi. They were not allowed to bring ‘the word’, pray or read / interpret the word or ‘Bible’. Some of these traditions are changing as is the sentiment of woman as a ‘Delilah’ with the ironic capacity to “cut your nature” or to sap a man’s strength. Generally there is resistance against changing the taboo regarding contact with the drum for women in rituals and in some instances completely after puberty⁹. In response during a reasoning to questions from women directed to the elders as to why couldn’t they play drums Bongo Twanay said, “From I have been coming to Binghi I’ve never seen that!” For some the

⁷ This sentiment was shared by Homiak August 2014 personal communications.

⁸ There is also the use of the term ‘polluted’ or ‘unpolluted’ for the same context – however perhaps because of the implicit offensive suggestions the more popular term I have heard is ‘free’.

⁹ Recently an informant (August 2014) told me that Ma Shanti – a Nyahbinghi elder used to play the drums in the official ceremony. There are younger voices challenging the denial of women, in this way – Rastafari Village in Montego Bay is like a sanctuary for those who wish to break this taboo.

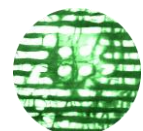


'purpose' of the Nyahbinghi ceremony necessitated that its essence not be tampered. An elder female, supportive of the tradition, responded that the drum embodies the female and that the magic and harmony of this ritual required the playing of 'her', the drum, by males for its purpose to be fulfilled¹⁰. Particularly because the Nyahbinghi is performed continuously over several nights one to twenty-one, these grounds become carefully structured whether permanently or through makeshift arrangements – into celebration space generally referred to as the Tabernacle with fire-key, 'man' and 'daughters' dormitory facilities separately (the male in close proximity to the grounds of the ceremony) a collective kitchen and bathrooms (see Homiak:1994). The tabernacle is the key ritual portal for the duration of Nyahbinghi ceremony and generally circulation within this space between males and females flows freely, while observing the taboo regarding the drums. The tabernacle serves as the ultimate threshold for separation of the desirable and the undesirable within the ritual space, the latter are wittingly and unwittingly told that there will be consequences for breaking the taboos they will be judged by the mystic omniscient Power. "Death to oppressors – black and white", "know thyself", and "truths and rights" are among the chants voiced while the congregations percussively beats along with the drums "do good" heart-beat rhythm stamping away the evil and elevating righteousness.

Fire is a most important aspect of performing the Nyahbinghi – as there is a requirement for a purging flame to burn unceasingly for its duration. Drumming usually occurs mostly at nighttime and is maintained without interruption until day-light. By way of its logic and execution the Nyahbinghi sermon compliments the practice of a patriarchal modality – explicitly and implicitly by way of the subtle and other administrative practices. Women are arguably – invisible structurally and even in relation to conventional ideas of meal preparation and overall nutrition – these matters are completely dominated by male operatives.

The logic for this adherence to separation is centred on a philosophy that eschews the 'carnal' and particularly sexual activities in the ritual space. Leonard Howell, the man reputed to have brought the knowledge of Rastafari in the early 1930s to Jamaica, had been preparing them to elevate themselves from that level of the animals and to see the women as more than bitches (see Howell, 1935). And further constructs a theory about the about carnal indulgency and perversions as a reason for the decadent state of the world and especially the black body / and the Black male – now completely diminished into a stud against knowing himself as the "father-provider", leader and patriarch. On view as far as revealing the logic of eschewing carnal indulgences is that in the 'wait' or anticipation of 'Zion' through repatriation there can be no undue focus on the flesh. This is the primary purpose for which this the oldest formally incorporated Rastafari mansion was designed by its founder, King Edward Charles Emmanuel in 1958. Hence as elaborated within the Bobo Ashanti, allegedly the most acetic of the mansions – there is a requirement for twenty-one days of separation of dwelling spaces,

¹⁰ Information gathered from field notes / Nyahbinghi Global Consultation, Scots Pass, July 2008.

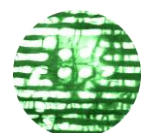


thereby reducing the incident of pregnancy keeping population to a minimum (that is given the normal fertility period usually at or around fourteen days in menstrual cycle).

This is not universally practiced and the converse philosophy with a strong 'pro-creation' and a procreation ethos also pervades within the movement, this is part of the duality reflected within Rastafari ontology (see Chevannes 2006). The pro-creation principle is vested in a contest of the natural logic of the coming together of 'alpha' and 'omega' to create the sons, male and female. The king should thus seek after the queenly, even as she is embodied in the character of the virtuous woman, not swayed by material things and vanity, but who through her faith and her modest devotion becomes a persona of mother of creation, performing accordingly with the natural cycle. The patriarch of the Movement, Leonard Howell had given them this example as well as he advised them of the virtuous Queen Omega as the Balming Mistress, alluding that she too was an important factor in the process for redemption (see Howell: 1935).

Howell preached that the African exemplar had emerged and he directed his congregation to focus their attention on him, the King of Kings. The Emperor at his coronation in 1930 demonstrates a new regard for the feminine principle, the Emperor departed from tradition of separate coronation ceremonies, to crown his Empress within the same ceremony. This was to depict a balancing of the scales of power and responsibilities. Subsequently Empress Manen undertook to engage with her stately functions pioneering the situation of women's development and supporting various charities and building schools and churches across the country in seeking to bring development to the people of Ethiopia. This model of the female complement to the King-man was the direction that Howell sought to guide his followers. Howell taught: King Alpha and Queen Omega as providing "the healing plough of the repository transplanted and rebuilds our very soul and body without fail" (Howell; 1935). Consecrated men and women were thus necessary – this could be achieved through the balm-yard, endowed with power that they command and handle to deal with the infirmities of the nations. In this regard Howell was interested in the restoration of the human – male and females – "as vessels of divine honour" (Ibid). This is performed with a rhythm that views life and creation as natural gifts, the fruits of man and woman loving interaction. The location of female within this design is somewhat complex and often times inconsistent. Nurture and care-giving though the domain of females is variously shared between males and females. Women largely appear in traditional domestic roles – however often enough sometimes, through better education, jobs/ employment opportunities are more gainfully occupied away from the home more so than their male counterparts, the latter thus seen, more often than in the general population, in role reversal and serving as primary care-giver, and generally responsible for much of the domestic chores. (See Nettleford 2013).

Noteworthy is too that in the mid 1970s and towards the 1980s the "womanist" movement emerged in the Caribbean which was lead by a progressive, liberal – pan African oriented set



of women. These individuals largely sought to insert female leaders/leadership and their agenda more clearly with the Rastafari movement. Sister Ilaloo explains:

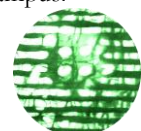
"I don't think the traditional Rastaman coping very well with this. They probably don't fully understand what is happening. But as the woman dem come into their own, in terms of one of the most outstanding thing that I see really happening to the Rasta culture is the arrival of the Rasta woman. In the sense that you never use to have a Rastawoman; you use to have a Rastaman woman..." (Ibid: p.6)

The omega energy as females are often described has been in an uphill battle to assert itself and Planno one of the central leaders takes credit for helping to breakdown some of the traditional barriers. Taking within his circle and nursing with a bottle his young, months old daughter in the early 1960s was the first step. He also shared his own intellectual transformation – when he dismissed his wife's "Rosaline", "vision" or dream of Planno himself playing a central role at the time of the visit of the Emperor. He had been told by her of a dream wherein the Emperor had called on Planno. She had effectively foreseen the Emperor's visit and his calling on Planno to assist with restoring the peace to the multitude which became frenzied upon his plane's landing in Kingston. Her vision originally dismissed by Planno he understood as having been fulfilled on April 21, 1966, he admits that after this he better accepted the abilities of females to be equally inspired to contribute to this work of Rastafari. It was Planno who a few years later was to further push the taboo when he entertained and developed strong linkages with white female researcher Carole Yawney – then a hyperbole of contradictions where here converged. He brought her into the inner sanctums of urban Rastafari hardcore leadership. She was effectively the first female 'outsider' to be initiated and was a part of the male ritual chalice circle space¹¹.

The 1960s saw the opening up of the movement beyond its then primarily urban margins; with this came increased participation from the middle classes and brown mixed populations. As the movement moved out of its strictly 'dungle' wastelands in the 1970s, the current of Black Power found favour in Rastafari in some quarters and increasingly women of educated middle class orientation also started to cleave the movement. And with these surprises in the way the movement was expanding and crossing boundaries came paradoxes. As the 1970s unfolded "Miss World" the acme of the establishment's aesthetics of beauty and comeuppance clashed in a love saga with the 'beast'¹², the top Rastafari warrior priest Bob Marley, reflecting the journey of the movement and some of its leading adherents in intersecting the society at multiple levels. Miss World and Rastafari in 1976 signal the peaking of the Rastafari penetration for some it was a reflection of a double standard, the leading Pan-African vocalist arm-in-arm with an iconic symbol of the system he sought to fight against. Marley had seemingly reversed the proclivity for colour, class and gender

¹¹See Homiak (2013) for more about Yawney's link to Rastafari.

¹² This was the argument presented by former Miss World Cindy Breakspere, at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Institute of Caribbean Studies' 18th annual Bob Marley Lecture, February 2014 UWI, Mona Campus.



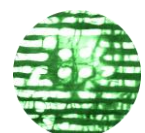
separation through this move. The 1970s was a mushrooming of Rastafari in Jamaica and its politico-economic diversity: reggae music rising, free education as a state, democratic socialist gift for all students up to tertiary level, and a thriving informal ganja economy resonating locally, in the reading of some analysis the Rastafari revolution was in full flight.

Also the period reflects the absorption of Afro-feminist debates with increasingly women challenging the stereotypes regarding their coming into the faith and asserted their capacity, right even, to sight Rastafari and move to the faith without the need for induction through a male – (having been grown as a daughter – the traditional language to account for the process of initiation, socialization and grooming at the hands of male). This also in reality meant that some women would come to the faith and in rejecting the masculine stereotypes, simply just choose to avoid associating explicitly with any mansion. A Rastafari female pioneer provides the following insights:

“...I remember like '71 and so....[t]here was no such thing as a Rastawoman. There were cultural daughters and sisters primarily. Then all of a sudden about '72 or '73 all the little West Indian daughters in the high schools start wrapping up dem head and chant Rasta an militantly a seh Rasta fi demselves, and independently of any man. I have to confess though that it was motivated by the large amount of young males in the school system that was turning Rasta. It was...just like wearing the clothing which would get you what you want kind a thing....

But from there it really moved into a situation where the daughters were checking out what is this Rasta thing and quite independent of any attempt to get a man. It was getting into the belief system and finding out what was in it that made sense and could make sense for them. And after a while woman started making commitment to Rasta independent of man. ” (Yard Roots April/May 1981 – “Interview: Rastawoman as Equal!”)

This space arguably created a basis for female lead Rastafari associations such as Queen Omega Foundation – emergent to tackle issues that fall outside the cracks of male centred ritualistic community activities (many of which restricted the participation / fullticipation of women), and perhaps more importantly as an extended camp of day and night celebration – it imposes various types of discomfort. The Rastawoman as opposed to the Rastaman's woman had now arrived. Effectively it took four decades for the Rastafari woman to emerge from the rib of the King-man and within a decade of her separation to stand on her own in the faith she had started to make her marked contribution, arguably her prowl the global family imperatives.

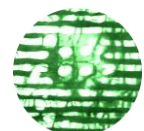


Outside of the EABIC, the celebration of Nyahbinghi is primarily a Theocracy Reign Order of the Nyahbinghi (TRON) venture and its hosting is the most full convention of the community group, which mobilizes its dispersed family across the landscape, individuals engaged in various sectors but largely self-employed, under / or unemployed. The Nyahbinghi organization is the largest single community and its membership is un-determinate because of their loose administration. What this means however is that for the organization, Nyahbinghi TRON, to effectively function it requires the modality of committee, councils, associations, conferences, as key insertions for effectively international community administration. EABIC and the Twelve Tribes of Israel (TTI)¹³, the other two dominant mansions, tend to operate more effectively through the central mansion's administration which exercises higher levels of command over the membership's initiatives embarked on in the name or identity of the organization. Among the established mansions of Rastafari the EABIC has taken a less aggressive global agenda where projects and activities in relation to its global and African interests are concerned. Notwithstanding this it has managed to be one of the most visible global representations of the faith – with members in North & South America, Asia, and Africa.

The Nyahbinghi Abroad: Defender of the Rastafari Faith (1982 – 2014)

By far the most globally dispersed administratively is the TRON and perhaps resulting from this there has been a greater orientation toward refining of its global administration, image and operations. In fact as the Movement globalizes the proclivity for organization within the mansions is best maintained by the Nyahbinghi which self-appoints / self-identifies as the *de facto* ecumenical Rastafari mansion (see Montague: 1984 & Homiak: 1994). This one can say has been systematically developed over the last four to five decades resulting in what is now a global community with transcontinental management systems. Though the TRON has been routinely described as the loosest in its administration, it has spawned highly elaborate

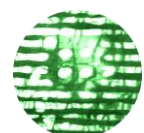
¹³ The TTI and its administration have been on a progressive and consistent agenda from the late 1960s for African repatriation. Through strong charismatic male leadership complex committees were developed to administer this agenda over the last forty years – the executive and active organizational membership reflecting more so than any other mansion the demographic shifts of the 1960/70s with a large congregation of women, brown, educated elite youth joining the ranks. Administration within TTI was made to reflect the logic of astrology with the convergence around the number twelve as represented by the twelve months of the year and expressed through the selection of twelve men and women to reflect this expression of mind/body completion – determined by individual's time of birth, gender as well as entitlement through years of membership. The members – were socialized towards leading their lives in preparation for repatriation to Africa – and so some have designated this as their retirement objective. From 1972 to 1981 this was actively pursued through exploring missions, sponsored settlements and various other initiatives resulting in the resettlement of several scores of its membership at a crucial time, thus paving the way for future settlers which have continued. These initiatives had active participation from committees reflecting mixtures of different skills and interests and ages; by far seem to be the most constructive and systematic planning and implementation. The achievement of the TTI include a significant settlement in Ethiopia – in some instances spanning three generations, and also notably a school in Shashamane operational for almost twenty years. (See Niaah 2012).





systems of patriarchal leadership, within an acephalous context, cohorts of elders/ patriarch have emerged within this congregation since the 1950s – as a result of which the mansion singularly brags the largest concentration of elders, generally and, especially of males who have been within the faith for over fifty years. Among these individual three to four generational cohorts of leaders have emerged to establish this Order – the revered names are: Bongo Watto, Shadrak, Meshak and Abenigo, Bongo Twaney, Bongo Rocki, Bongo Porro, and the list goes on of who are described within Rastafari lore as “ancients”, many of whom were formally illiterate, but nonetheless were the pillars around whose thoughts the doctrine and philosophy of the faith was constructed. These individuals were joined by a vibrant set of urban youth – individuals such as Mortimo Planno, Sam brown, Bongo Tyme, situated across the terrain, teaching of Rastafari faith and constructing significance around a system that argued itself as a representation of the return of a “theocratic” government. Within this team of leaders the Nyahbinghi immediately cleaved into various communities of interest – the theocratic as the dominant association pooled the “preacher” leader interest whereas the political and advocacy activism – tending towards the “teacher” leader. Crudely, this divide resulted in the establishment of liturgical constancy within the ceremony of Nyahbinghi whereas the advocacy/political work seems to have fodder the development of a critical thought a meta narrative exemplified in reggae music but also pervasive within the overall *conscientization* process meted out on the society through its pro-Rastafari vernacular / idiom and critical consciousness. This has made the Nyahbinghi perhaps in the widest sense, the most socially engaged and interactive resulting from the acephalous leadership system and its “unfocussed” mission regarding how to approach its repatriational objectives. Nyahbinghi adherents in this regard were conforming to what Gayatri Spivak describes as “strategic essentialism”, to refer to presenting themselves while pursuing and negotiating strong differences with collaborators while amongst themselves engaging in continuous debates towards agreements on "essentialize" terms and conditions.

By the mid to late 1970s the Nyahbinghi had grown beyond the shores of Jamaica into an international community directed largely by implementing the learnt ‘orthodox’ modalities of the Jamaican congregations from visits, recordings, texts as well as mystically directed. Regionally the University West Indies (UWI) school system facilitated exchange of students, workers and goods including literatures, music and ganja, considered by some of the key regional Rastafari leaders as an important step in the process of transfer of the faith into the wider English speaking Caribbean. Earlier after the end of the Second World War migrants from Jamaica had taken the ideology of the Rastafari into the United Kingdom establishing connected branches of the faith in London, Manchester and Birmingham. A decade later similar movements saw thousands of Jamaicans moving in cities along the eastern seaboard of the United States. Later in the 1970s and 1980s Europe, Japan and Africa became connected to the consciousness of the Movement through mostly the message of the faith depicted in reggae music. The globalization of the Nyahbinghi and the Rastafari faith by extension resulted in the need for global ministry and subsequently a global administration and agenda.



It is in this space that I will seek to situate the remainder of this paper seeking to examine the development of international work and the modality for achieving the same mindful of the issues of separation and patriarchy as two implicit features.

The impulse for embarking on “missions” and “trods” became necessary initially to provide correction to the bad publicity the community was receiving through Hollywood and other sensational media accounts (see Homiak: 1994). At the same time members of the emerging Rastafari diaspora had made inroads into their new societies and in this regard like Stuart Hall the intellectual cannon on ‘representation’¹⁴, individuals began to organize and engage in conversations about strategies to correct and consolidate the globalizing image¹⁵. At the same time the consolidation recognized the increased responsibility of the Nyahbinghi family to pioneer global Rastafari management.

The 1980s presented an international crossroads or what Yawney (1998: 59) describes as a ‘critical density’ on the global stage for Rastafari in particular the Nyahbinghi emissaries. This was occasioned by the void left when Thatcherism took roots eliminating radical currents in the West – Bob Marley’s passing while seemingly achieving the victory of awakening the minds of the formerly enslaved was coupled by the decline of the two best managed Rastafari mansions TTI and the Ethiopian Zion Coptic Church– allegedly infiltrated and destabilized. This counter revolution to cultural awakening and *conscientisation*, by some accounts deliberately removed Bob Marley¹⁶, Maurice Bishop and Walter Rodney – contemporaries who together had been shaking the Caribbean Basin – necessitating the 1983 United States of America’s invasion of Grenada – as a reminder of whose backyard the Caribbean is considered¹⁷. Across the political landscape of the ‘window of vulnerability’ which stood in the region was that of the ascension of the Rastafari identity, and epistemology. In the face of an overt campaign to criminalize the image of the movement, cultic, urban drug cartels and savage gun touting gangsters¹⁸. By the 1980s in Jamaica Rastafari had, despite social prejudices established itself as a genuine spiritual movement which eschewed violence in favour of its salutations of “peace and love”. There was an orthodoxy within the Rastafari by now established thus a group of Nyahbinghi elders were assembled and facilitated on touring missions to the United States, England, Canada and the Caribbean region, eventually these mission began to be drawn into Africa through emergent congregation – South Africa, Ethiopia, Malawi and elsewhere on the continent. This was a part of a deliberate effort to raise the profile of affirmative black cultural expressions that

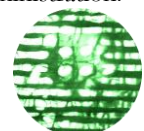
¹⁴ See Niaah: 2014 for a discussion of Hall and this connection.

¹⁵ Advancing individual rights for example the right for their children to wear their hair in lock while attending school

¹⁶ Yawney among others offers this suggestion; see Yawney, Carole D. (1984) “Who Killed Bob Marley? Review of Bob Marley: Reggae King of the World” by Malika Lee Whitney, in *Canadian Forum*, December 1984, Toronto: Williams-Wallace publishers., pp.29-31

¹⁷ At the 1980 celebrations for the independence of Zimbabwe Rodney and Marley were among the specially invited guest given their global stature as Pan African revolutionaries.

¹⁸ Rastafari was targeted it is believed as a radical and violent international drug trading community, a part of that ‘window of vulnerability’ which took hold of the Third World in the 1970s under the ‘softer’ Carter administration.



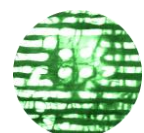


were being vilified in the media, wittingly or unwittingly this served to consolidate the international Rastafari community and strengthen networking.

Missions were variously facilitated by women, the earliest (1982), completely initiated and executed by women administrators, tapping into institutional agencies such as York University in Canada. These missions evolved within a context of showcasing the core spiritual values of the Movement by having the elders of the faith participate in expose and lectures. This recognized first assembly of international Rastafari spawned the need to include Jamaica as the site for a follow-up assembly, at this meeting which saw participants from the Caribbean wide region, North America and the United Kingdom, resulted in the consolidation of the Jamaican eldership and the resultant priesthood they had emerged. Immediately following this conference this cadre of Nyahbinghi officials made journeys across the Caribbean and beyond sharing their testimonies and delineating the faith. Between 1984 and 1988 Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States saw various high level Rastafari elders' delegations facilitating globally coordinated proselytizing ventures designed as extended trods, festivals, cultural exhibitions. Collaborators in the person of Carole Yawney and Jake Homiak (both outsiders working closely with the community) providing access for Rastafari to US and Canadian ports, while community members arranged the supportive travel and accommodations logistics. In the UK the movement had grown its own partners from within and these were able to incorporate official government assistance in staging a major Festival called "Rastafari Focus". Eventually this has resulted in two key North Atlantic nodules for international Rastafari administration, Washington DC and London.

Visitations from large groups of Nyahbinghi elders from Jamaica in some instances was akin to the meeting of different worlds, often with clashes of culture, tactically the community sought to convene the most rounded delegation. The need for high levels of representation, with respect to the faiths canons, clarity of message, the ability to document and initiate correspondence in total the capacity of the team – often meant inclusion of secretary/scribe/translator on missions – most often these role was assigned to the better educated female executives. Arguable this vantage point placed women largely within central aspects of communication recording, continuity and ultimately initiation of actions. Since the early 1980s there have been three or four major international conventions of Rastafari each decade, with this tendency increasing significantly since the dawn of the twenty-first century with international gatherings occurring several times per year and incorporating wider locations such as Central and South America, the eastern Caribbean and Africa. This was as a result of the Movements growth and transcultural migration as well as its indigenization in its various locales including it spread to Africa, where in counties such as Kenya, Tanzania¹⁹ it expressed the youth antisocial pensions and South Africa and Zimbabwe it bolstered the fight

¹⁹ In the case of Tanzania this indigenous community made serious linkages with their Jamaican counter-parts; in 1985 for example, the Universal Rastafari Improvement Association of Tanzania sent a 'fact-finding' mission to Jamaica, December 29th 1985 to January 28th 1986.



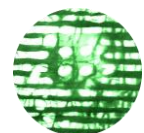


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to liberate the society from apartheid. Rastafari therefore by the dawn of the twenty-first century had become localized and a reference point within a black/ increasingly human index for articulating resistance. With these developments have come set agendas which now are focused beyond merely the proselytization mission and are oriented at the issues related to governance particularly as relates to returning to Africa for the dispersed as well as dealing with the challenges of settlement and development of the continent.

The centenary of the birth of the Ethiopian Emperor (July 23, 1992) was one such occasion where Rastafari in the diaspora used this as momentum for achieving a systematic focus, especially within the TRON, on repatriation to Ethiopia. 1992 Centenary Trod to Ethiopia as it was called was to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Emperor Haile Selassie I, marked the first International Assembly of Rastafari in Ethiopia, coordinated by a committee for Rastafari based in London. This saw the participation of large delegations from the Americas and Europe converging on the Ethiopian Highlands in celebration of an even made more possible by the fall of the Derge regime, the administration that had removed the Emperor almost two decades previously. This trod saw the participation of a substantial contingent from Jamaica and the United Kingdom and resulted in the deepening of the TRON related activities in Ethiopia, ultimately facilitating the commencement of building and settlement projects under the coordination of teams of Nyahbinghi members around the globe. The afforded that mansion the framework to fund raise for building for itself one of its largest tabernacles in Shashamane and the development of the infrastructure to facilitate the repatriation of members of its congregation.

Perhaps the most ambitious iteration of this task of reparatory development for Africa and its diaspora was developed by the Bob Marley Foundation in 2005 when it staged an Africa Unite concert in Addis Ababa Ethiopia. It used the opportunity to set before more than half million spectators a themed concert meant to inspire the young African youth into greater solidarity and higher levels of cooperation for achievement. Appended to the concert were a series of workshops and outreach projects related to health and homeless children, projects which initiated more permanent work through the agents of the Bob Marley Foundation now based in Ethiopia. Essentially the concert ramped up the administrative capacity of the Movement in Ethiopia and established a path for the future coordination of Rastafari activities in that region. Perhaps not surprisingly the thrust of the Marley coordination in Ethiopia was a TRON or Nyahbinghi supported and administered venture, that is: the key players identify as such, even though admittedly the Bob Marley Foundation has ecumenical appeal and is an ardent supporter of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the latter was largely engaged in the activities during the Addis concert. Since then there are yearly activities in celebration of Bob Marley's birthday which see Marley branded activities taking place across the continent, straddling the role of social worker, edutainment provider with regular and key activities in Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa. In this regard the Bob Marley Foundation demonstrates the core desire of the Movement which is to be enabled to return to the continent to make worthwhile contributions towards its future development. Before the Bob Marley Foundation the Rastafari history of such ventures saw the membership of the Ethiopian World Federation



performing similarly from as early as the 1960s, with the Twelve Tribes of Israel, the most active branch of the Federation which eventually became autonomous, anchored and actively working in Ethiopia since the early 1970s (See Niaah (2012) for more regarding this period).

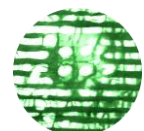
By the start of the new millennium, Rastafari held somewhat of a critical mass on the African continent and at this juncture a mode of operating was discernable, whereby Rastafari, a chiliastic worldview as they have described, had travelled over “land and sea” in seeking to actualize its words, reparation and repatriation. It had however done this by carrying the word, “Rastafari” as signifier of change and repair, across the world, as the elders used to sing: “Telling out King Rastafari doctrine across the whole world²⁰”. In 2014, this was unwittingly the mandate as the Rastafari through its Ethiopian anchor coordinated the first international gathering around exhibiting the life of the last Emperor, the first of its kind, entitled “Ras Tafari, the Majesty and the Movement”, at the Ethiopian National Museum in Addis Ababa. In this instance the world had come to the home of the king to have these ‘strange’²¹ Rastafari people teach of this significant king by way of an exhibition, appended to this exhibition were symposia and outreach particularly in Shashamane, the site of an international Rastafari community. These larger Ethiopian missions have been more or less spearheaded by females working closely with Mrs. Rita Marley as well as Ethiopian officials and members of the local Rastafari community.

Conclusion: “A Roaring Lion kills no prey”

Today Rastafari stands as a known Pan African champion and a worldview that has crossed boundaries to now have a global presence. It has moved from a merely male dominated patriarchal frontier to now exist as a global community often identified as a global family. Over the past three to five decades the community has globalized but while still clinging to the cosmological foundations. Dispersal of Rastafari has not eliminated Africa from the meta-narrative, rather it has made Africa central as envisioned as rebirth and renewal, the present and the future core within the organization practice. Given the seminal role played by Jamaica in constructing this faith there has been a universal link which keeps the Movement connected to the Jamaican Rastafari community. From this community cohorts of elders, ‘ancients’, priests, administrators/coordinators/facilitators and *de facto* leaders have emerged to steer the family, as the congregation became multiplied, scattered and the doctrine dispersed far and wide around the world. In the public domain the Rastafari are collectively labelled and perceived, even though in actuality is composed of various often disparate mansions, internationally one key mansion, the TRON, has responded to issues of Rastafari representation thus taking on the mandate of defending the ‘faith’ in various international fora over the past thirty years. This has been melded through a process of outward migration of

²⁰ See Mortimo Planno (1996) *Earth Most Strangest Man: The Rastafarian*, Institute for the Study of Man, Columbia University.

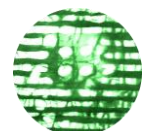
²¹ See Erin Macleod (2014) *Visions of Zion: Ethiopians and Rastafari in the Search for the Promised Land*, NYU Press for a discussion of the reactions from Ethiopians on the presence of Rastafari culture in Ethiopia.



individuals and the doctrine that has seen the rise of the Lioness or Rastawoman, within a movement that circumvented her on grounds of gender particularly as it related to issues of theocratic doctrine. Notwithstanding this the Lioness has emerged as a key facilitator, interlocutor even, within the international rise of Rastafari. The Movement I would here suggest operationally is very much within the construct of its totemic symbol, the all-pervasive symbolic conquering lion, preachers and teachers males roaring theocracy as the lioness learnt silence, patients and stillness while maneuvering in Babylon hunting, in search of prey. The story is often told of how Bob Marley had to take unto himself three women, the now famed I-Threes, and depart from the company of the 'Wailers' the two founding male band members in order to take Rastafari message to the world through international reggae music concerts. The other founding males (Peter Tosh and Neville 'Bunny Wailer' Livingston) were reluctant to take on the strategic essentials that North American and European touring often entailed²². In truth Bob Marley had pioneered a system of Rastafari ministries, by his passing in 1981 the awakening to the Rastafari message was well advanced and now the elders could move forward to preach and teach and bring their unique testimonies. They were enabled by the dialogical pension ritualized in the form of 'reasoning', a process which facilitates the ventilation and contestation of contending ideas; women within this ritual though marginalized with respect to the degree to which and as to when they may be present have been consistently negotiating boundaries beyond their ritual participation and have been key in international agenda development and execution. Partially whereas this participation of women might be linked to educational attainment, employment capacity and connections, increasingly their participation is recognized as by virtue of being best suited in total at the level of *epistemic performance*, in such instances gender become only a plus as increasingly the community's leadership seeks to assert the example of Emperor Haile Selassie with Empress Manen of the importance of balance and the need for sharing the tasks and administration including international representation. There is also the fact that after more than eight decades there are a few generations of women who come from within the Movement being born to Rastafari families without the need for a groom as an adult in the way of the earlier years before the rise of the Rastafari woman. That being the case some women now stood within the community who had more experience in the Rastafari faith than some older male who were just entering the Movement as adults. The additional impact of Marley's death, but more so the rise of his widow Mrs. Rita Marley as controller of the Marley enterprises, Reggae Queen in her own right and now heiress to a significant legacy provided her Mrs. Marley with the capacity to be her own exemplar and this provided additional thrust for female coordinated and administered initiatives, as she has been connect to most of the international venture since 1982.

The period 1980-1992 coincides with that period of strong political repression in the fizzling out of the Cold War politics saw the commencement of international conversation within the

²² The Wailers as they were called evolved away from this position and developed international reputations and touring engagements individually subsequently.





Rastafari community about forward strategies for global objective; since 1992 and more so since the 2007 Ethiopian millennium there has been more heightened and systematic planning with regard to approaching repatriation to Africa as well as the engagement of programmatic development within the continent.

Rastafari women have had to systematically negotiate their contribution – the push and pull of outward migration from Jamaica into North America and Europe has also buttressed the pace of the incorporation of women's contribution, often located within discrete associations formed by themselves to pursue specific issues and concerns. This has privileged networks of women who have demonstrated great resources and skills in moving forward global project often without budget or explicit resources. Over the past three years the Jamaican Rastafari community has gone one step further it has appointed for the first time in its existence a female a chairperson over the relatively newly established ecumenical / umbrella Rastafari organization – the Rastafari Millennium Council, as well as the administrative chairperson over one of the oldest and certainty patriarchal TRON. Both these developments may have been unheard of a decade ago and certainly ever five year ago could not have been anticipated. These development critically position Rastafari as a rejuvenating liberatory framework with seeming endurance for the twenty-first century.

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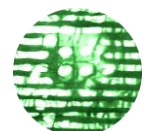
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