Rastafari Worldview Traditions

In-Depth Subject Knowledge Essay

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This in-depth subject knowledge essay is also available on our website. We also have an accompanying glossary, available both on our website and for download.

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Beliefs, Teachings, Wisdom, Authority

Basic beliefs

Rastafari emerged in the 1930s in Jamaica. A central belief is that the Ethiopian King, Haile Selassie I (1892-1975), is the living God. Tafari Makonen was the birth name of Haile Selassie I, which was changed upon his coronation on 2 November 1930, and 'Ras' was his title before coronation, meaning 'duke' or 'prince'. The name 'Haile Selassie' means 'power of the Trinity'. The movement took his original first name and title as its own. Haile Selassie I identified himself as the 225th King of biblical Ethiopia. However, it is unclear whether he ever supported the Rastafari belief that he was also divine. For Rastas, Haile Selassie I is the black messiah, who redeems black people who have been exiled from Africa through slavery. Rastafari beliefs reject the subordinate status of black people under colonialism. It was a radical reformulation of Jamaican social conditions in the early 20th century. These conditions were still structured according to the colonial order where white, European people held higher status, while black, African-descended people were enslaved. In 1807 the slave trade was abolished throughout the British Empire, and then in 1833 slavery as an institution was abolished, due in part to a revolt by slaves in Jamaica.

Jamaica had a history of resistance to slavery, including the Maroons and revolts which often took a religious form [1]. In the early 20th century Jamaica and the rest of the British Empire was still a two-tier society. The claim that God was black, and that Jesus was also black, is an inversion of the racial order supported by Protestantism, which was the dominant form of Christianity associated with the Empire. Rastafari was just one of a number of 'revival' religions inspired by African religious traditions, mixed with elements of Christianity and Caribbean innovations. These new religions appealed to black people directly, providing hope and pride in their status as African-descended Caribbeans, rather than offering salvation through assimilation to white, European Christianity.

Rastas refer to God as 'Jah', which is a shortened form of the biblical 'Yahweh' or 'Jehovah' as in Psalm 68:4 of the King James Version of the Bible. Jah is spirit that has been manifested in the historical persons of Moses, Jesus, and Haile Selassie I. However, Jah is also present in all people. This concept is invoked through the phrase 'I and I'. In earlier Rastafari thought, this was limited to black people. As a rejection of the subjugated status of black people as the descendants of slaves, Rastafari viewed black people as the reincarnation of the biblical Israelites, meaning that they are God's chosen people. Black people were taken as slaves and were then living in exile in Babylon, a land of oppression, adapting the biblical narrative of the Jews' exile in Babylon. 'Babylon' is the name Rastas give to the white colonial system. It stands for evil. Rastas will be delivered from Babylon through a return to Zion, which for Rastafari is Ethiopia or Africa more generally. Ethiopia is heaven, also known as Zion, this is the Promised Land for the chosen people, where they will finally be free. Jamaica is Hell.

The repatriation of all black people to Africa was meant to occur whenever Haile Selassie decided. Repatriation is the Rastafari symbol of the return to freedom. It is a fulfilment of

biblical history, in which the true children of Israel held captive in Babylon are set free in Zion. In the Millennium, the time after the Second Coming when God's Kingdom is on Earth, the saved will sail to the Promised Land, which the Rastafari identified variously as Africa, Ethiopia, and Mount Zion. Repatriation would be symbolised with seven miles of ships leaving from darkness and hell fire. In the emerging movement this took a particular racial form that black people will be saved because they are special to God. In later formulations, Zion and Babylon are understood symbolically as states of being, which can be cultivated by people regardless of race. Rastafari beliefs can be seen as a religious formulation of social and political resistance to slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. Scholars have discussed whether it is best understood as a religion or an expression of black cultural or political identity, but some have concluded that it is impossible to separate out these strands.

Ethiopianism is an important influence on Rastafari beliefs, especially as formulated by Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). Garvey was a proponent of Black Nationalism and founded the United Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League. In his Pan-Africanism, Ethiopia-Africa is the Promised Land to which the African diaspora created through slavery should return. Garveyism was religious as well as political, asserting that God is black. Ethiopia was viewed as a great civilisation that existed prior to the white colonial empires. Garvey supported this belief with biblical references to Ethiopia and Egypt, which he used to construct a historical mythology of the superiority of black people. Garveyism formed the doctrinal base of the Rastafari movement, which also believed white people, through their actions as colonial oppressors, were inferior to black people, who were God's chosen people. However, the beliefs from the 1930s to the 1970s differed from post-1970s beliefs, when emphasis on black superiority and racial segregation gradually decreased. Rastafaris in the 21st century continue to see the post-colonial social structures as evil, but individual white people are seen and judged separately, based on their behaviour.

God is an immanent deity for Rastas, meaning that God is inherent in all people and that everyone is connected. The divine is found in the individual. This belief has far-reaching consequences. There is no single authority on doctrine for the Rastafari; it is up to individual interpretation how God or Jah is manifested for them. This means beliefs are fluid, as is membership, which is often a gradual process of realisation. There is no conversion ritual such as baptism or any creed to recite to make oneself Rastafari. There is a general dislike of 'isms', which is why most scholars do not call it 'Rastafarianism'. Rastas use the word 'livity' to denote following ital norms such as dietary and clothing regulations (explained below) but more broadly to refer to the Rastafari way of life, severing oneself from the ways of the West and embracing the spiritual, social, political and cultural ways of the black God. There is no agreed system of beliefs, as Rastafari beliefs are open to debate and interpretation. However, there is a widely shared theology: Haile Selassie I is the living God, Ethiopia is the home of black people, redemption through repatriation is close, and the ways of white people are evil. This could even be reduced to two essential truths: Haile Selassie I is the living God and salvation for black people will come through repatriation to Africa, although for many in a symbolic rather than a physical sense. There are also a number of

complementary and sometimes paradoxical 'truths' in Rastafari that are used as ways of explaining the past, present, and future circumstances of black people.

1. Maroons were Africans who had escaped from slavery and established free communities in the mountainous interior of Jamaica.

Scriptures

The Bible in the form of the King James Bible is a holy book for Rastafari, but not all of the contents are acceptable. They believe that the Bible as it was originally written gave the early history of the black race, their identity and destiny as the chosen people of Jah. They believe it was originally written in Amharic (the language of Ethiopia) and corrupted by later translations to support the philosophy of the European slave masters. Part of Rastafari practice is therefore decoding the Bible, learning how to decrypt it as a book of symbols and debate it in their meetings. They focus in particular on the Old Testament. Psalm 87:3-4 is read as proof that the messiah will be born in Ethiopia. Daniel 2:31-42 is read as meaning that black people are destined to rule the world. Psalm 68 was central to the Garvey movement and is also one of the most frequently quoted in the Rastafari movement. The Book of Revelation is a central text, in particular the prophecy about the Emperor, whose titles, 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah' (Rev 5:2-5) and 'King of Kings' (Rev 19:16), mirror Haile Selassie I's titles. References to Jesus in the Bible are read as references to Haile Selassie, the black messiah, whose true nature was hidden as white by the slave masters. Despite their view of the Bible as corrupted by white people, Rastafaris use the Bible because Haile Selassie, an Orthodox Ethiopian Christian, advocated it. However, they accept only their own interpretations by, for example, reading references to the devil as referring to the god of white Christianity.

The Bible is looked to as a source for Rastafari ways of living. There are biblical justifications for ganja use in Genesis 1:12, Genesis 1:29, Genesis 3:18, Exodus 10:12, Proverbs 15:17, Psalm 104:14, Psalm 18:18, Revelation 22:2, and many others. Dreadlocks are justified with Old Testament proscriptions against hair cutting such as "They shall not make baldness…" Leviticus 21:5, and Numbers 6:5, and 1 Corinthians 11:4-6 for women covering their hair. Rastas recite Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" at the beginning of meetings. Reading scripture is a regular part of weekly and monthly meetings. In 'reasonings' they strive to find hidden 'true' meanings in the Bible. One of the strictest 'Mansions' of Rastafari, the Bobo Shanti, read a section of the Bible nonstop for three hours, starting with Laws, then Prophets, and ending with the Gospels and Epistles, rarely commenting on what they are reading.

The work of Marcus Garvey and his organisation, the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), form a source of scriptural inspiration to Rastafari. Revered by Rastafaris as an inspirer, Garvey is second only to Haile Selassie. Garvey advocated a back-to-Africa movement. His spiritual mission was fighting against the social and economic oppression of black people in Jamaica and worldwide. A movement formed around him, which he organised into the UNIA in 1914. His work promulgates Pan-Africanism, a worldwide

confraternity of black people, with Africa as the united self-sufficient black nation. All black people could return there. He supported establishing black educational institutions for teaching about black cultures and worked to uplift the black race, proclaiming "Africa for the African at home and abroad". However, he never visited Africa himself; it was a symbol of a homeland that was never realised. He was never accepted in his native Jamaica, only achieving success in the United States. Garvey did not approve of Rastafari, which he saw as a form of religious fanaticism.

Other significant scriptures for the Rastafari include the Holy Piby, written by Robert Athlyi Rogers, an Anguillan, in the 1920s and distributed by the early Rastafari preacher, Leonard Howell. Rogers wrote it to support his own Afrocentric religion, the Afro Athlican Constructive Church, in which Ethiopians (meaning black Africans) were God's chosen people and Marcus Garvey was an apostle. Rogers' church did not find much support, but the Holy Piby became an early scriptural resource for Rastafari. The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy by Fitz Ballintine Pettersberg, an African American preacher, was also written in the 1920s and provided inspiration for the early Rastafaris. It refers to King Alpha and Queen Omega and the 'resurrection' of Ethiopia. The Promised Key was written in 1935 by Leonard Howell, echoing much of the sentiment and some verbatim text of The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy, although with King Alpha being identified as Haile Selassie. My Life and Ethiopia's Progress is the two-volume autobiography of Haile Selassie written over his life and used by Rastafari for inspiration from the life of the man that they believe to be the messiah, the incarnation of Jah. The 14th century Kebra Nagast gives an account of the meeting of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon and relates how the Ark of the Covenant came to Ethiopia. It is used by Rastafari who trace Haile Selassie's lineage to the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, making him the descendent of the biblical King David, and his descendants the true Israelites of the Bible to whom God promises salvation.

Founders

A number of preachers emerged in the 1930s in Jamaica with similar messages about black self-determination and Haile Selassie I as the black messiah. Among those recorded by historians were Leonard P. Howell (1898-1981), Joseph Hibbert (1894-1986), Archibald Dunkley (dates unknown), and Robert Hinds (dates unknown). They may have been Garveyites, although the specific details about their early lives are sparse. The best known is Leonard Howell, who served in the Ashanti War of 1896 and learned several African languages. He visited the United States and there experienced severe racial discrimination. Leonard Howell was a leading figure in the early Rastafari movement through his ministry in the West Kingston slums. Joseph Hibbert lived in Costa Rica from the age of 17; he was a member of the Ancient Order of Ethiopia, a Masonic Lodge, before returning to Jamaica in 1931. Hibbert started preaching in St Andrews and then moved to Kingston. Robert Hinds was a follower of the revivalist preacher Alexander Bedward until the latter was confined to an asylum; he then founded his own King of Kings Mission, which had the most members of the early known Rastafari groups. Archibald Dunkley was a sailor in the United Fruit Company, who began a mission in Port Antonio then moved to Kingston. All four were

ministers and founders of separate groups that claimed to receive the revelation that the newly crowned Emperor of Ethiopia was the messiah of black people.

The Rastafari movement began in the slums of Kingston, the capital city of Jamaica, and from there spread to the rest of the island. The early preachers worked separately and recruited Garveyites, with a core of the emerging movement formed by 1934. They offered hope at a time of social and economic depression and hurricane destruction, when the future of the poor seemed bleak. The coronation of a black Emperor identified by preachers as the messiah offered a vision of future renewal for black people who continued to be oppressed under British colonial rule. Leonard Howell preached six principles: hatred for the white race; the complete superiority of blacks; revenge on whites for evil; the negation, persecution, and humiliation of the government and legal authorities in Jamaica; preparation for black people to return to Africa; and Haile Selassie as the supreme being and only ruler of black people. This teaching presented a direct challenge to the government of Jamaica. Howell was arrested along with other Rastafari leaders and followers for sedition in 1934 by the British colonial authorities, and Howell was imprisoned. His teachings were continued by his lieutenants in secret.

In 1940, Howell founded a commune called the Pinnacle in the hills of St. Catherine, outside Kingston. The members were following the example of the 19th century Maroons, who had rebelled against slavery on the plantations of Jamaica and taken up arms against the colonial authorities, living in the hills in a self-sufficient community, which served as a beacon to other slaves in assisting their escape. Between 500 to 1600 followers lived at various times in Howell's self-sufficient community at Pinnacle. Howell proclaimed himself the chief, styled after African tribal organisation. He allegedly had 13 wives. The commune subsisted on its own produce but also planted cash crops to sell in Kingston, including ganja (marijuana) which went on to assume religious significance for Rastafari. In January 1941, the police raided the commune, having been tipped off by neighbours that the Rastafari had demanded taxes from them in the name of Haile Selassie. Howell was arrested and imprisoned again. The Pinnacle community dispersed in his absence.

The second phase of Pinnacle began in 1953, and it was during this period that some Rastas started growing the distinctive dreadlocks. The commune was raided and the members were arrested again in 1954. Pinnacle was destroyed on 22 May 1954. By this time, Howell was claiming that he was divine; following the destruction of Pinnacle his followers deserted him, and he was committed to a Kingston mental hospital in 1960. In 1975, he was living with followers in Bushy Park, a few miles from the original Pinnacle site. Howell has been charged with acting as an autocrat at Pinnacle by historians of Rastafari, because he meted out punishments and was in charge of everything. He was the first to use the honorific 'Gong', an abbreviation of the name 'Gangunguru Maragh' which has an East Asian origin with Gangunguru translated as 'teacher of famed wisdom' and Maragh as 'king'. The other early preachers achieved less lasting renown (or infamy), but each was a charismatic figure in the early movement. Hinds and Dunkley were seen as prophets. Joseph Hibbert was thought to have powers of clairvoyance, to see the truth of the past and what would happen in the future. Hibbert based his organisation on 'occultism', reading secrets hidden in the Books of

Maccabees (these texts are not in the Hebrew Bible and are either relegated to a section called 'Apocrypha' or omitted from Protestant Bibles, but included in Roman Catholic versions). While he was known for having occult powers, he did not like teaching his secrets to his followers who subsequently left him.

Revelation

The central revelation for Rastafaris is a prophecy by Marcus Garvey, in conjunction with the ascension of Haile Selassie to the throne. Garvey preached in 1916 (although this is often dated as 1920): "Look to Africa where a black king shall be crowned, he shall be your Redeemer". This inspired a number of Pan-African and Afro-Caribbean religious movements to expect a black messiah. It was not a reference to Haile Selassie specifically, as Garvey did not suggest that he was the messiah. However, with the crowning of Haile Selassie I as Negus Negusta (Amharic for 'King of Kings') of Ethiopia in 1930, taking the biblically inspired titles of 'King of Kings', 'Elect of God', and 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah' and placing himself in legendary line of King Solomon, this was seen by some as a revelation from God and a fulfilment of Marcus Garvey's earlier prophecy. Those hoping for religious renewal of the African diaspora created by the slave trade saw the coronation as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy and Haile Selassie as the messiah of African redemption. A reading of the prophecy of the Emperor in the Book of Revelation was taken as confirming Haile Selassie was the messiah due to the titles he adopted. Daniel 7:9 was also read as confirmation that the messiah was a black man and the king of Ethiopia because of the longevity of Ethiopian kingship. Haile Selassie was seen as the climax of the revelation of God, whose first manifestation was Moses, the second was Elijah, the third was Jesus Christ, then Haile Selassie was the final incarnation, and he would never die.

Successors

The Rastafari do not have a formalised structure with anointed leaders. Elders are generally given respect; this is considered something they earn through living the Rastafari way for many years. As such, there are few figures who are held above others as 'successors' of the original preachers. Prince Emmanuel (Charles) Edwards (1915-1994) founded the group or 'mansion' of Bobo Shanti in 1958 in Bull Bay, Jamaica (see 'Diversity' below). It was then that he called the first Binghi in 1958. These are communal celebrations of Rastas (see 'Religious/Ritual Practice' below). Edwards lived in the Back-O-Wall commune in Kingston until 1966 when his group was driven out by police. He claimed that he 'appeared' in St Elizabeth in 1915, that he had no father or mother, and that he was the reincarnation of the biblical Melchizedek. He was a key figure in the confrontations with the Jamaican government in the 1950s and 1960s. He led an attempted repatriation in 1959 that failed.

The reggae musician Bob Marley is a prophet and poet for Rastas and for Jamaicans more generally. As a teenager, Marley was apprenticed to a Rastaman and adopted the beliefs and ways of living himself. His music uses the rhythms of traditional Rastafari drumming. Many of his famous songs include Rastafari teachings. As a member of the Twelve Tribes (see

'Diversity' below), Marley's understanding of the livity was fairly unusual; however he became widely popular among Rastas. Marley was to the 1970s English and American Rastas what Marcus Garvey was to the 1930s Jamaican Rastas: a prophet and an inspiration. He was instrumental in the spread of Rastafari to the UK and the USA in the 1970s through disseminating Rastafari ideas and themes throughout the world using his music. While not every Rastafari sees him as a prophet, he has been very influential for the movement. He became a symbol of the archetypal Rasta after his death in 1980. He was posthumously given the Order of Merit, the third highest honour in Jamaica, and buried with a state funeral.

Authority

Haile Selassie I was deposed in 1974 by Marxist revolutionaries and died the following year on 27 August 1975 in suspicious circumstances. His ignominious fall from power and death undermined the idea that he was a living God, although the circumstances left enough doubt to allow other accounts of his fate to spread. There were three main responses to the death of Haile Selassie: that he is still alive and reports of his death were a lie spread by the agents of Babylon; that his spirit assumed a different physical form and therefore continues to live; that it was irrelevant because Haile Selassie the man was only a personification of Jah. Haile Selassie remains a spiritual presence for Rastafari and for some a supreme being. However, he did not accept Rastafari belief himself while he was alive, remaining a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He visited Jamaica once in 1966, when he met with Rastafari elders and discouraged them from attempting physical repatriation to Ethiopia, urging them instead to focus on redeeming Jamaica for themselves. He did not publicly repudiate their beliefs, however, as the Jamaican government of the time was hoping.

Rastas have no overall leader. Everyone is considered equal because each person is equally Jah. However, only those that follow the ways and beliefs of Rastafari realise this divine status. Becoming Rastafari is a spiritual birth in 'sonship', a personal divinity based on a relationship to Haile Selassie; the believer becomes a son of 'Jah Rastafari who is god' and shares his divinity. However, how this works out in practice is open to individual interpretation based on experience. No one member can lay down orthodoxy or tell any other member what to believe or how to behave. Elders and those who speak persuasively in 'reasonings' hold some authority; however, this authority is up to each individual to acknowledge, based on their own experience with that person. Authority ultimately rests individually in each Rastafari as an incarnation of Jah.

Ways of Living

Organisation

There is no formal, central organisation of Rastafari. They avoid bureaucratic or hierarchical organisations, which they see as characterising the social structures of Babylon. They reject governments, especially the colonial British government in Jamaica, but after this ended in

1962 they remained opposed to 'western civilisation' in general. The organisation of Rastafari is individualised, cellular, or reticulate in its structure. There is an open form of Rastafari organisation called a 'house' or 'mansion'. There is no individual leadership equivalent to a priest among Rastafaris generally, although some of the more structured houses, such as Bobo Shanti and the Nyabinghi Order, do have priests. A 'leading brother' acts as spokesperson during group meetings. Houses can have a chaplain, a local treasurer, a sergeant at arms, and a recording secretary; or some of these roles – or none of them. In Jamaica, Rastafaris often follow a communal way of living, patterned on the early Pinnacle communes, where they grow their own food and ganja. Membership is not based on baptism but on adoption of Rastafari beliefs and practices. This provides a broad solidarity of mainstream Rastafari, who largely support the three main Rastafari principles of the divinity of Haile Selassie, the spiritual use of ganja, and the principle of repatriation to Africa. Rastafari are then free to live their lives individualistically without collective discipline. This provides a collective sense of religious identity that is not supported by any specific ritual obligation. Houses strive for collective decision making, reaching a consensus on issues of importance to the group even if this requires extensive debate. Rastafari characterise themselves as a 'brotherhood' or 'brethren'. As there is no formal membership; there is a general ethos of coming, going, and participating solely on conviction.

Guidance for life

Rastafari is more about a way of living than an acceptance of doctrine. An early codification of morality was written as ten principles by the Jamaican Rastafari elder, Sam Brown (1925-1998), who was the first Rastafari to run for political office:

1. We strongly object to sharp implements used in the desecration of the figure of Man; e.g. trimming and shaving, tattooing of the skin, and cutting of the flesh.

2. We are basically vegetarians, making scant use of certain animal flesh, outlawing the use of swine's flesh in any form, shell fishes, scaleless fishes, snails, etc.

3. We worship and observe no other God but Rastafari, outlawing all other forms of Pagan worship yet respecting all believers.

4. We love and respect the brotherhood of mankind, yet our first love is to the sons of Ham [black people].

5. We disapprove and abhor utterly hate, jealousy, envy, deceit, guile, treachery, etc.

6. We do not agree to the pleasures of present-day society and its modern evils.

7. We are avowed to create a world of one brotherhood.

8. Our duty is to extend the hand of charity to any brother in distress, firstly for he is of the Rastafari order – secondly, to any human, animals, plants, etc.

9. We do adhere to the ancient laws of Ethiopia.

10. Thou shall give no thought to the aid, titles and possession that the enemy in his fear may seek to bestow on you; resolution to your purpose is the love of Rastafari. (reproduced from Barrett 1977: 126)

In general, Rastafari try to live in a way that defends the poor and oppressed, a worldview inherited from the early movement. The white race is seen as oppressive, but not all white people are evil, they accept individual white people on merit unless they are found guilty of racism. Rastafari became less concerned with racial separatism and aggression after the 1960s. There is, however, no uniform view on race. While there is a general principle that Jah is in everyone, Rastafari view themselves as a people apart. For many the sense is that they are a 'covenant people' like the Jews with special responsibilities rather than being a superior race, as early Rastafari preachers claimed. This means striving towards the ideal way of life including living off the land, growing their own food, not using the land for commercial profit, and eating only clean ital food (see 'Ethical Guidelines' below). This is seen as living in a natural 'African' way. This is phrased as being a 'conscious' not a 'careless' Ethiopian (using Ethiopian as a symbol for all black people). Those who are careless do not follow the Rasta way, the conscious do, and salvation comes from being a conscious Ethiopian.

Religious/ritual practice

A ritual celebration is called a 'duty', but there is no obligation to attend. Participation in ritual and ceremony is voluntary. In all types of Rastafari ritual, ganja (a form of marijuana) is smoked as a sacrament, often called 'wisdom weed' or 'holy herb'. It is used to meditate, called 'head resting with Jah' (see 'Prayer' below). This is smoked through a glass or wooden chillum pipe called a 'chalwa', 'chalice' or 'cup' because sections of Deuteronomy and other biblical books that mention sending up incense to God from a chalice or cup are read as referring to smoking ganja. Rituals also generally involve chanting, drumming, meditating, dancing, and prayer. Most Rastafari communities hold weekly and monthly meetings. The most important is the Binghi, held on special occasions for the purposes of celebration; more frequent are reasoning sessions. There are also less ritualised weekly meetings called 'business meetings' which are forums to solve problems and to discuss ongoing programmes such as community projects.

'Reasonings' are "a ceremony of varying degrees of formality in which participants access the spirit through the ritual smoking of herb (ganja) and the use of word/sound/power for the purpose of gaining clarity about spiritual, philosophical, political, and social truth claims" (Christensen 2014: 61). The discussion is cooperative not competitive, with the aim to reach consensus about the implications of a particular insight. There is a democratic atmosphere in which each member is given time for full and free debate on all subjects. Everyone has the chance to speak for as long as necessary. Participants tell each other about revelations they had in dreams and meditation. Reasonings are a form of ritual discussion that can also

include daily prayers, meditation, drumming, chanting, hymns, lyrics, and poetry. Another name for the sessions is 'groundings'. Monthly meetings begin in the early evening, last the entire night, and involve dancing, smoking and eating. Such meetings often begin with Psalm 122, then a Rastafari prayer, scripture readings, comments, and end with the Rastafari national anthem. This is followed by drumming and singing for fun for a few hours.

Larger celebrations are called Binghi. In Jamaica, members from all over the island join celebrations; these are held in various parts of the island, like a convention for Rastas. Binghi last for one to three days or for a whole week. The word 'Binghi' comes from East Africa, where it denoted a religio-political resistance movement to colonialism from the 1890s to 1928. The term in Jamaica meant "death to the Black and White oppressors" prior to its association with Rastafari ceremony. It is a gathering of brethren for inspiration, exhortation, feasting, smoking, and social contact. Binghi is also called 'Groundation' or 'Grounation'. The first one was held in March 1958, called by Prince Emmanuel Edwards in Bull Bay, Jamaica. It is the central communal ritual of Rastafari. It originated as a ritual burning down of Babylon. The drumming, dancing, building and tending the fire were meant to unleash cosmic energy pervading the universe to eliminate the forces of imbalance. While they can be held spontaneously, they are routinely held on holy days and on days commemorating significant events in Rastafari history. Anyone can hold a Binghi; first they get the support of their immediate group, then they announce the time and place for the gathering, then other Rastas arrive early to set up a tabernacle (see 'Places of Worship' below), prepare food, socialise, and then the ceremony begins at sunset. Drumming, chanting, dancing, and smoking ganja continues throughout the night and can last for several days. Proper dress for women is a long skirt, a top with long sleeves, and a covered head. Women traditionally cannot attend if menstruating.

The journey of life (life cycle)

Birth is celebrated with a Binghi, the same can be held for a formal marriage ceremony. However, it is not necessary, and a man and woman living together are regarded as married whether or not a ceremony is held. There is generally no funeral ceremony for Rastas, who believe in reincarnation and that following Rastafari ways faithfully grants eternal life. Only evil things die. Atoms form new babies and life continues. People only die if they are unfaithful to Jah and have not followed the ways that grant proper self-preservation. This means that a true Rasta cannot die. When people do die, it is explained away by saying the dead person had strayed from true path of Rastafari somehow. Death is seen as unnatural and avoidable, an evil brought about by the influences of Babylon. Dying is called 'transitioning' to denote that it is not the end of that person's life but a change to a new body. Rastafari believe reincarnation occurs with the same identity despite a change in physical form. This is how the line of black prophets from Moses to Jesus to Haile Selassie is of the same person. This notion connects the Israelites of the Bible to Africans and Rastas as the chosen people; Rastas and black people generally are the biblical Israelites reincarnated. However, notable Rasta elders have died after living exemplary lives following Rastafari codes of conduct. This has brought some reckoning of death among Rastafari. The first Rastafari funeral was for a Nyabinghi elder, Bongo Tawney, the chairperson of the Nyabinghi

Order. It was conducted and presided over by Nyabinghi priests in Jamaica in April 2010. The Nyabinghi Order were previously the most opposed to funeral rituals, claiming "let the dead bury their dead", implying Rastas should have nothing to do with death at all.

Holy Days and celebrations (life cycle)

The following holy days are observed by Rastafari:

- Ethiopian Christmas on 7th January. Ethiopian Christmas is observed on the date of the Orthodox Church celebration of the birth of Jesus, usually on or around the 7th January, using the Julian calendar rather than the Gregorian calendar to calculate the date of his birth. Ethiopian holy days are observed because of their importance to Haile Selassie I, who was an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian.
- Groundation Day (or Grounation) on 21st April. This is the date when Haile Selassie I visited Jamaica in 1966.
- Ethiopian Constitution Day on 16th July. The date commemorates the proclamation of the first modern constitution of Ethiopia by Haile Selassie I.
- Birthday of Emperor Haile Selassie I on 23rd July.
- Marcus Garvey's Birthday on 17th August.
- Ethiopian New Year's Day on 11th September. In leap years on the Gregorian calendar this falls on 12th September.
- Coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I on 2nd November.

Ways of Expressing Meaning

Stories of faith

Many of the Rastafari stories or mythology surround Haile Selassie I. One of the founding myths is that Haile Selassie was descended from the child of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, who in turn was descended from the biblical King David. Haile Selassie himself claimed this legendary heritage. It is used to back up the claim that the Rastafari are the Israelites (the people of King David) reborn, and therefore God's chosen people. The first marijuana was grown on the grave of King Solomon, according to another mythological story, connecting this biblical heritage to the plant that Rastafari use as a sacrament. There are stories that, when he visited in 1966, Haile Selassie left a constitution that was kept hidden by the government of Jamaica, guarded from the people, who can be charged under the authority of this document. The constitution sets out the rights of Rastafaris, which is why the government chose to hide it, since it undermined their own (in Rastafari eyes, illegitimate) authority. A story that expressed their millenarian hopes is that of the seven-mile flotilla of ships coming to take them to Africa for repatriation.

Symbols of faith

A central symbol for the Rastafari is the lion. One of Haile Selassie's titles was the 'Conquering Lion of Judah'. Representations of lions can be seen on Rastafari houses, flags, tabernacles, and artworks. The lion represents the 'King of Kings' and the dominant maleness of the movement. The lion is a symbol of strength and vigour. Rastafaris try to embody the spirit of the lion: proud, independent, and strong. The dreadlocks are likened to a lion's mane, and also to the biblical Samson. Rastafaris sometimes call themselves Nazarites, as they follow the Nazarite vow to remain unshaven, found in Numbers 6:5. Being unshaven is seen as natural and unencumbered. Initially it was a symbol of defiance to Jamaican society that saw long hair on men as a symbol of disorder and degeneration; the dreadlocks said that they were outside Jamaican society. Rastafaris called themselves 'dreads', where dread meant power and rebellion. Mid-20th century conservative Jamaican society saw it as unkempt, dirty, and dangerous. Police and teachers used to cut off Rastas' hair in the 1950s and 1960s. However, following the popularity of reggae music and the spread of Rastafari culture beyond Jamaica, dreadlocks have become a symbol of the Rastafari that presents less of an immediate challenge, having become familiar and to an extent sanitised. Dreadlocks for the Rastafari still symbolise power, with some calling them 'telepathic antennas' (Christensen 2014: 71).

Rastafari colours are red, green, gold, and black. Red, black and green were the colours of the Garvey movement. Red signifies the blood of martyrs in Jamaican history from the Maroons to Marcus Garvey. Black is the colour of Africans from whom 98 per cent of Jamaicans have descended. Green stands for the vegetation of Jamaica and signifies hope of victory over oppression. Gold is from the Jamaican flag, a cross over green and black.

Rastas consciously created a new type of language, variously called Lyaric, livalect (rather than dialect), I-talk, 'dreadtalk', 'soul language', or 'hallucinogenic language' (see 'Expression and Worship' below). Rastafari viewed English as a colonial imposition of Babylon, but they had lost their original African languages through slavery. Iyaric inverts the English language symbolically, for example 'oppression' becomes 'downpression' because it drags you down. Rastas strive to use language in a way that unites sound, word, and power, so that words that have a negative valence also have a negative sound, and words with a positive valence have a positive sound. Some individual words are given specific meaning in Rastafari language, for example 'Israelite' and 'Ethiopian' mean the same thing, referring to a holy people, chosen by God. They use the symbol of 'the Beast' from the biblical Book of Revelation for Babylon, which means the oppressive colonial, imperial system of which slavery was a part, and more widely everyone who is not Rasta. Babylon is a general symbol for evil and oppression. The image of the African continent is also a frequent part of Rastafari visual iconography, a symbol of the Promised Land.

Places of worship

For some Rastafari, there is no specific building for worship; they meet for weekly reasonings in believers' home or a community centre. In Jamaica, it is more common for Rastafari to live together in a commune, presided over by an elder, with a central yard for reasonings and Binghi. In some yards there is what is called a tabernacle, which can be constructed for specific ceremonies or can be a permanent feature. The tabernacle is a space that centres the Binghi and reasonings, which otherwise have a free-flowing structure. Tabernacles have a dirt-floor, a circular bamboo frame and a thatched roof decorated with Rastafari symbols such as the red, gold, and green colours, the lion, and depictions of the continent of Africa. They can also include a fire key, a high pile of stones with a wood fire on top, which is used in the Binghi ceremony. The fire key man is in charge of the fire at ceremonies. The Nyabinghi Order has an altar at the centre of their tabernacles.

Prayer and meditation

Chanting, prayer, and meditation are part of Rastafari ceremonies. Meditation is a way to be in communion with Jah, and through which they come to realise what is true or false in the Bible and what has been omitted in the Babylon translations. Rastafari meditate through 'head resting with Jah'. It is a way of knowing their inner self, understanding the 'book within' that contains divine revelation. Prayer begins and ends meetings. Prayer and meditation are accompanied with smoking ganja for heightened spiritual sensations. Rastafari go into a deep trance like state after smoking a spliff or chillum pipe. There is a specific prayer that accompanies ganja smoking: "Glory be to the Father and to the maker of creation As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be World without end: Jah Rastafari: Eternal God Selassie I". There is a specific prayer to Haile Selassie: "So we hail our God, Selassie I, Eternal God, Ras Tafari, hear us and help us and cause Thy face to shine upon us, Thy children" used on a daily basis to petition him. Women cover their hair to pray.

Pilgrimage

The main religious journey for Rastafari is repatriation, or return to Africa. This journey seeks to reverse the forced movement of black slaves from Africa to Jamaica and other colonies by the European empires. The early Rastafari preachers spoke of ships coming from Ethiopia to take them to land specially reserved for them in Africa by Haile Selassie. It was a journey to a land where they hoped to be free from oppression and racism. Repatriation was thought to be imminent in the 1950s. There was even an aborted attempt at repatriation in 1959, where hundreds of Rastafari gathered at docks in Jamaica waiting for the ships to arrive to take them away. Then in 1966 the visit by Haile Selassie I to Jamaica was interpreted as the last step before repatriation. However, Haile Selassie reportedly encouraged Rastafari elders to support liberation in Jamaica before trying to come to Ethiopia. He did grant around 500 acres in Ethiopia at Shashamane for members of the African diaspora who wished to settle there, in return for their support during the war with

Italy. Rastas, in particular, were drawn to Shashamane by this offer. Some Rastafari communities were established on this land, as of 2014 there were still around 800 Rastafari at Melka Oda near Shashamane, and a few in the cities of Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar. However, it became more difficult for Rastafari in Ethiopia after the deposition of Haile Selassie in 1974, when the Marxist revolutionaries nationalised the land the king had granted them. Furthermore, there was less enthusiasm for repatriation after the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s. It is still common for Rastafari to visit Ethiopia on pilgrimages without settling permanently. For many Rastafaris in the 21st century, it is not a physical or literal repatriation to Ethiopia but a symbolic one, achieved through connecting and celebrating the African side of their identity. Repatriation to Africa can be interpreted in both physical and spiritual ways. Spiritual repatriation occurs through becoming fully aware of their African identity, discovering the truth about themselves through 'head resting' with Jah. Fairfield House in Bath has become a place of pilgrimage for Rastas in the UK as it was the home of Haile Selassie during his exile in Bath (1936-41), and now houses a museum and gallery.

Expression and worship

Rastafari 'dread-talk' or lyaric is a conscious construction of language as a form of religious and political expression. It is based on the Jamaican dialect, or patois, in particular the syntax and grammar. The syntax is almost devoid of subject-object opposition and verbs. Rastafari use words philosophically. The pronouns 'me' and 'you' are replaced with 'I and I'. This is to try to overcome binary oppositions and identify with the sufferers and oppressed of society. The use of 'I' as the first and second-person pronoun is a way of reminding each person of their worth and value as not a 'slave by nature'. 'I' is used as both subject and object. 'I' also replaces the prefixes in certain words, such as 'I-ceive' instead of 'receive', 'desire' becomes 'I-sire', and 'create' becomes 'I-rate'. The use of 'I' expresses the unity and interconnectedness of all persons as incarnations of Jah. 'I' stands for the ability to see. It is a central concept of Rastafari word/sound/power. 'I' is aware of the connection to Jah, whereas 'me' is unconscious of this. Seeing and knowing are synonymous for the Rastafari. They change a negative to a positive sound vibration e.g. 'dedicate' to 'livicate', 'library' to 'truebrary'. They make sound vibrations descriptive, e.g. 'destroy' to 'downstroy' because destruction tears things down. Rastafari refer to themselves as kings and queens, and the knitted tams that cover their dreads are called 'crowns'.

Rastafari have a verbal culture centred on philosophising. It is a formulation of language that is used as a way of fostering group identity. 'Reasoning' is the name given to Rastafari discourse, in which members come together spontaneously on a regular basis to have lengthy discussions on any subject; people join and leave fluidly, topics change rapidly. It is how they interpret the world. Rastafari avoid language that contributes to servility, self-degradation, and objectification. They try to use language that sounds like what it is, for example 'down-pression' in place of 'oppression' because it drags you down. Language and music have power for the Rastafari. Chanting the name of Haile Selassie I resurrects him. Words have creative force. This idea comes from the African concept of nommo, that words and word-sounds have innate power. Emancipation requires a new language to liberate; the

language of Babylon enslaves. This is a process rather than a defined lexicon. It is a way of fighting against oppression and slavery through language, which they view as a spiritual battle, a battle of consciousness expressed through language.

Art, music, drama and creativity

Rastafari have been very influential for the artistic and cultural works of Jamaica, including literature, poetry, painting, sculpture and carving, ceramics, theatre, dance, and music. Rastafari use art as a medium for social and spiritual messages, not simply decoration. It is a way to transform society. Rasta artists use found materials, such as boards, glass, and cardboard, in keeping with their veneration of nature and identification with the poor. They eschew expensive materials. Their works try to portray the daily experience of the poor. Art for the Rastafari is about the enrichment of life not just display. Since the 1970s, Rastafari imagery has become more commercialised as it has been spread alongside reggae music. The cultural impact of Rastafari, especially in Jamaica, has been much greater than the number of adherents would suggest. Music has a religious purpose, which Rastafari phrase as 'churchical'. Traditional Rastafari music has its roots in 19th century gospel music and African drumming. Chanting and drumming feature heavily in meetings. Three types of drum are used: bass, a large drum; fundeh, a smaller upright drum; and peta (repeater) an even smaller drum. Count Ossie introduced ritual drumming in the early days of the movement; his rhythms were recorded from 1960. The drums each have a symbolic role: "The downbeat of the drummer symbolises the death of the oppressive society but it is answered by the akette drummers with a lighter upbeat, a resurrection of the society through the power of Ras Tafari" (Barrett 1977: 193). "The steady pulsing beat of the bass drum provides constant pressure which works to bring about the end of an oppressive Western system. The regular one-two heartbeat rhythm of the fundeh grounds and comforts. The repeater allows vent for protest as well as an avenue for the creative improvisation of the individual" (Christensen 2014: 66). The idea is to call to Africa through music. It is a music of invocation that aims to invoke the spirit and help it rise up over the oppressive system of Babylon. The Rastafari national anthem is taken from the anthem of the Garvey movement, "Ethiopia, Land of Our Fathers", and is often a part of Rastafari ceremonies.

Rastafari music has had a considerable influence on mainstream music in America and Europe. Rastafari music first inspired the styles of ska and rocksteady. More significantly, reggae music is based closely on patterns of Rastafari ritual music. Reggae continues the Rastafari theme of making strong social and political commentary through music. One of the first reggae songs to become internationally successful was "Do the Reggae" by Toots and the Maytals in 1968. However, it was Bob Marley, a Rastafari, who was the most well-known performer of reggae music. His religious and political message through music was inspiring to people worldwide as well as Jamaicans beyond the Rastafari movement. Marley toured the world and spread reggae music and with it Rastafari beliefs, around which many of his songs are based.

Identity, Diversity and Belonging

Religious identity

Rastafari identities focus on trying to recreate themselves in their image of Africans. This means rejecting ways of living associated with Babylon and adopting those of Rastafari. It is an elite and exclusive identity; they are the chosen people and everyone who does not follow their ways is part of Babylon. One must have insight to accept the divinity of Haile Selassie I. However, they do not have formal organisations or doctrinal orthodoxy which means that how individual Rastafari construct their identity has fluidity and openness. There are some accepted identifying characteristics. The most well-known and immediately recognisable mark of Rastafari identity is the cultivation of dreadlocks. Rastafari are forbidden to cut their hair, following the Old Testament law that prohibits trimming and shaving of the hair (the Nazarite vow mentioned above), and also of tattooing. For the Rastafari, dreadlocks are "a sacred and inalienable part of his identity" (Chevannes 1994: 145). The hair is called a crown, compared to the crown of Emperor Haile Selassie or the mane of a lion. In the early movement, dreadlocks were a challenge to the European colonialist constructions of race that deemed African hairstyles bad and European hairstyles good. They are a celebration and acceptance of Africanness. Rastafari identity is also expressed through speech by using 'dreadtalk', a way of speaking that distinguishes Rastafari from non-Rastafari. Some Rastafari study Ethiopian history and the Amharic language. There are also distinctive Rastafari diet restrictions (see below), the smoking of ganja, and wearing tams over their dreadlocks, which serve to separate Rastafari from Babylon, which can mean all non-Rastafari. Rastafari know who they are and carry themselves with self-confidence because of this strong sense of identity.

Family and community

Despite the Rastafari rejection of the ways of Babylon, for much of the movement's history their family structure has reproduced the patriarchal system that also characterised the colonial society of Jamaica. The man was the head of family and the woman was subordinate to him. The husband was called 'king-man'. Women were called 'daughters' or 'sistren' or 'queens'. There has, however, been historical variation in the roles of women in Rastafari. At first, women were active in the early groups as they were in contemporaneous Revival movements. Then there was a virtual disappearance of women except as spouses in the 1960s. Women could only be 'grown' into Rastafari by a Rastaman. A woman could only be Rastafari through her 'kingman'. Then from the 1970s, women began claiming space for themselves as Rastawomen.

Prior to the late 1970s, the status of women in Rastafari beliefs was as fallen creatures, echoing their status in the Old Testament. There was a strict division of labour, with women in the domestic sphere and men in the public sphere. Women were often excluded from decision making. A wife must obey her husband, cover her hair, and wear what her husband told her to wear. Women were said to find their salvation through men. Women for much of

the Rastafari movement did not participate in public reasonings, and rarely went to celebrations. They did not have the status of an elder in the house. There was an explicit ideology of the subordination of women among the Rastafari. Attitudes to women were the same as those in Jamaican society more widely, and found among the British colonisers the Rastafari opposed as Babylon.

However, the status of women has been changing since the 1970s. Women are coming into the movement independently, rather than being brought in by men. They are present at celebrations, participate in chanting and dancing, and no longer cover their dreadlocks. Women are often the main breadwinners and the main caregivers for children. However, it is often important for men to stay at home with the children and spend lots of time with them. Family life is important and highly regarded. This is a way of addressing the family system in slavery, which was disrupted by the control of slave masters, and often meant that men were unable to stay with their partners and children. Rastafari by contrast focus on a cohesive family with defined roles. Fathers try to be active and positive role models for children, for example by cooking meals and nurturing young children. In Jamaica, some men practised polygamy or secret polygamy (where the various wives were unaware of each other), claiming that it was a traditional African practice. However, this practice was resisted by women and did not take hold. Some Rastafari women observe menstrual taboos, mainly not cooking or attending Binghi while menstruating. There is a difference in the length of time among the mansions; 7 days for the Nyabinghi Order, 21 days for Bobo Shanti, whereas others do not have the prohibition.

Rastawomen joining the movement in their own right rather than as queens of Rastamen have challenged many of the assumptions and stereotypes of women. There is a tension between feminism as a liberation ideology and Rastafari as a liberation ideology that still subordinated women. Rastawomanism emerged as Rastafari women's ideology of liberation within Rastafari against structures of racial, class, and sexual subordination. The dress code became seen as a way of separating the self from Babylon and modelling African regal dress. Women in Rastafari portrayed themselves as 'African Queens' with natural beauty that is not modelled on European standards of beauty. Many claim their right to choose their own dress. They prefer the title 'queen' to 'daughter' or 'dawta'. They use the symbol of the lioness who partners the lion. Head wraps became a symbol of militancy analogous to dreadlocks rather than a covering that diminished them. Rastawomen smoke ganja openly and attend Binghi, participating fully in groundings, also known as reasonings, and playing drums.

Rastafari value community among brethren and are active in community programmes. They represented the lowest segment of Jamaican social classes in the early years when the movement spread in the slums, which meant that community organising amongst the poor has always been an important feature of the movement. However, this sense of community at first was exclusive, as they sought to withdraw from Jamaican society, which they experienced as ruled by whites but built on black labour, while exploiting them and giving them nothing in return. They experienced violence from the Jamaican police and other authorities. This position has changed since the 1970s. Rastafari became more interested in

liberating Jamaica, making it the land of the Rastafaris, and so they have become more active in Jamaican society rather than withdrawing from it. For example, Rastafari never voted until a Rastafari elder, Ras Sam Brown, first stood for election in 1961 for his Suffering People's Party.

Diversity within the tradition

Different denominations are called 'houses' or 'mansions' of Rastafari. Three of the oldest and most significant are the Twelve Tribes, Bobo Shanti, and the Nyabinghi Order. The Twelve Tribes of Israel call themselves the 'real Jews' or Israelites and trace their descent to the twelve sons of Jacob. There are twelve denominations within the Twelve Tribes each named after one of the sons of Jacob, membership of each tribe depending on one's month of birth. They are more open to giving a role to women than some of the other mansions. Bob Marley was a member of the Tribe of Joseph.

The Nyabinghi Order (also known as the Nyabinghi House) takes its name from the East African resistance and spirit possession cult of the Kiga people against colonialism, which in turn was named after a famous queen of the Kiga. The spirit of Nyabinghi was female and championed the cause of the oppressed and exploited. The Nyabinghi Order was previously called Young Black Faith. It emerged in the late 1940s, founded by Arthur and Pan-Handle. It was the Young Black Faith who started wearing their hair in dreadlocks. They were more militant than the early Rastafari, taking their inspiration from the Mau Mau colonial resistance in Kenya. The Nyabinghi Order leadership is by elders and those who show the initiative and desire to lead; there is no formal structure for choosing elders beyond this form of self-selection.

The group founded by Prince Emmanuel Edwards are known as Bobo Shanti (or Bobo Ashanti, the Ethiopian National Congress, or Bobo Dread). Shanti refers to the Ashanti, the African tribe from which the majority of Jamaicans are said to descend. They are one of the strictest Rastafari mansions, forming more of a formal church than the others. Prince Emmanuel is regarded as a God, part of the trinity with Haile Selassie and Marcus Garvey. The Bobo refer to him as 'dada'. The Bobo see themselves as a 'priestly order' of Rastas. They have a more formal church structure, with a specific church building, services from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, and they prostrate in silent prayer at meetings. They live in a self-sufficient commune on Bobo Hill outside Bull Bay in Jamaica. They wear their dreadlocks tightly wrapped in turbans and clothe themselves in priestly robes. After Prince Emmanuel's death, they split into three groups, all of which live on Bobo Hill.

Some Rastafari groups exclude white people, viewing them as having no authentic connection with Africa. However, in recent decades there are white Rastas, as parts of the movement have moved beyond black supremacy to seeing all races as Jah's children and the unity of all people of the world.

Attitudes to other religions and interfaith activities

Christianity is seen as the religion of the oppressors. Slaves in Jamaica were excluded from the Anglican Christianity practised by British colonials because it was seen as too sophisticated for them and it was thought that they might be inspired to think of themselves as equals in the eyes of God. In the past Catholicism was also abhorred because of the link with Italy as the power invading what was then Abyssinia. Rastas were seen by Christians as outcasts in Jamaican society: as criminals, poor, and not respectable. This began to change in the latter part of the 20th century, however, as Rastas lost some of their outcast status. There are, moreover, several points of convergence between Rastas and Christians; both revere Christ, for example. However, for Christians the veneration of Haile Selassie as the messiah is a heresy.

In the late 1990s some prominent Rastas converted to Evangelical Christianity. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is an inspiration and influence because this was the faith of Haile Selassie. Bob Marley was baptised into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church shortly before his death in 1980. There are few organised interfaith activities by Rastas inasmuch as there are few organised activities by Rastas. Members of other faiths are welcomed into ceremonies depending on the relationship with the specific group of Rastas holding the ceremony.

Meaning, Purpose and Truth

Religious experience

Rastas experience spiritual states through smoking ganja, drumming, and chanting. Religious experience is a way of testing whatever they hear to discern its truth. There is an avoidance of dogma and an emphasis on intelligence, as in reasoning sessions. Individual experience is central to this. It is a rejection of the racist denigration of black intellect as inferior, and the history of persecution in Jamaica in which authorities sentenced Rastafari to mental institutions for their beliefs. Rastafari interpret world events in a religious framework, especially events concerning Africa.

Answers to ultimate questions

"There is nothing neither bad or good, but thinking makes it so" (Barrett 1977: 140).

Early preachers focused on the identity of God. God as a black African king undermined the status quo in colonialism and the Christian God. Rastafari 'test' what they hear and read, discerning the truth to ultimate questions through intuition. They do this through 'head resting' with Jah, communicating on an individual basis with divinity. It is also done collectively at reasoning sessions and Binghi, in which they reflect on the Bible and history to come to an understanding. Truth is grounded in 'dread': "the confrontation of a people with a primordial but historically denied racial selfhood" (Clarke 1986: 64). Rastafari are inspired and authenticated by the Bible, as they understand and interpret it. They use the Bible and also the 'book within', intuition and experience, which comes from inner divine presence. Personal experience is the most valid way of establishing truth, a way of listening

to and being guided by Jah. Rastafari 'know' Jah; they do not just put faith in him. Knowing Jah means knowing oneself because the inner self is divine. It is not a question of belief but of knowledge, which for the Rastafari means being in the position of the master rather than the slave. They know their destiny and purpose, they determine events, and they are not determined by them. Knowing history and predicting the future through knowing Jah suggests the importance of memory in constituting life for the Rastafari.

Religion and science

Science is seen as Babylon's tool. It is part of technocratic imperialism. Rastafari try to turn away from the materialism, mass media, and commodity fetishism of white European supremacy. There is an antipathy to white man's ideas. When the sociologist Leonard E. Barrett attended a Nyabinghi, he was accosted for carrying cameras and tape recorder, which were called the tools of Babylon. Rastafari prefer natural things, living 'naturally', which means in accordance with their interpretation of 'the laws of nature'. This can mean that Rastafari can be sceptical of some forms of biomedicine, such as vaccinations. Science and technology are seen as artificial and unnatural. They make evil things like weapons of mass destruction. They are a means of enslaving man to machine, so that he is unable to do things for himself, like Africans were when they were used as slaves.

Values and Commitments

Moral issues

Rastafari oppose abortion and contraception, which they see as a colonial strategy to suppress the African population. Some Rastafari women do still use contraception, however. Medicines can be a problem, Rastafari do not use patent medicines, instead they use herbal remedies from folk traditions if they can. Consumerism dominates Babylon, so Rastafari turn away from materialist consumerist things and try to live 'naturally'. They reject consumerism and materialism as colonialist wastefulness. Entrepreneurial activity is a way to independence from the colonial system. They prefer self-employment to dependence on wage labour even if the income is lower, because wage labour is seen as a form of slavery.

Ethical issues

Marijuana has been smoked since the time of the Pinnacle commune in the 1940s. The specific form of marijuana smoked is known as 'ganja' in Jamaica. It is a sacrament for the Rastafari. It was seen as a way of opposing colonial society and asserting their own authentic form of freedom. Since it is illegal in Jamaica, smoking ganja is a way of showing freedom from the laws of Babylon, although recently it was decriminalised in small amounts for religious use by practising adult Rastafari. Furthermore, it is believed that ganja enhances spiritual states and reduces stress, produces visions, brings unity and communal feelings, and bestows tranquillity to the dispossessed. Ganja has become a dominant symbol of the Rastafari, who call it 'callie' and 'iley'. Ganja is seen as a natural product or herb, not as a drug. For the Rastafari, the free smoking of ganja is a religious right and an issue of religious freedom; however it is seen as criminal activity by most governments. One of the

reasons Rastafari in the 20th century were associated with criminality by authorities is their connection with growing and distributing marijuana.

Rastafari have a strict diet called Ital, or 'natural' food, which means the essence of things or things in their natural states. Ital refers to "a complex of lifeways that offer an alternative to the unnatural man-made Babylon system" (Christensen 2014: 142). The Ital complex came from the I-gelic House mansion who lived in the hills beyond the Kingston ghetto in the mid-1950s to mid-1960s. Ital food is mostly fruit and vegetables, grown without fertilisers. Rastafari are not allowed to consume alcohol, milk, coffee, salt, animal oil, cigarettes, heroin, or cocaine. Vegetarianism is preferred, but those who do eat meat avoid pork, shellfish, scaleless fish or snails, and fish over 12 inches long. This is similar to the Jewish Kosher diet, and Rastafaris are following the same Leviticus dietary and hygiene rules. Additionally, pig and cod are associated with slave food. Pigs are taboo animals. Rastafari prefer food from their own plantations and avoid food from unknown sources. They follow the principle of naturalism in personal care as well, washing hair with only water and locally grown herbs. They avoid chemically processed goods, they do not use soap or shampoo. Dreadlocks form when hair is left alone and unbrushed, but some do comb and groom them. Herbs and things from the earth are good. They also follow Old Testament prohibitions on trimming or shaving the hair, tattoos, and cutting flesh in any way, as mentioned above. Women do not wear makeup, use hair chemicals, or wear immodest clothes. Some women observe menstrual taboos and cannot cook for their husbands while menstruating. Rastafari reject war as the destructive practice of Babylon and tend to be pacifists.

Individual responsibility

There is a dominance of individualism among Rastafari. 'I and I' is a philosophy of radical individualism. Jah dwells within each person. Each person is held responsible for him or herself as an outcome of the belief that each person is an incarnation of Jah, the divine, which means each. This means their practices have a freedom of association and participation. There are no institutional commitments required for Rastafari. Being Rastafari comes from individual conviction. Most Rastafari are not affiliated with institutional forms like Bobo Shanti or the Twelve Tribes. They are an atomised population with no network of structured contact. They prefer self-reliance to handouts. Individual autonomy is particularly important as part of rejecting the legacy of slavery.

Community support

The individualism of Rastafari is balanced by an ethic of unity. This is a way of bringing Rastas together for communal purposes. All black people are thought to descend from common ancestors in Africa that were separated by slavery. Rastas act as self-conscious members of a brotherhood and sisterhood, sharing with each other, especially amongst the poor. They call each other 'brethren' and 'sistren' to emphasise spiritual kinship. They emphasise the kinship of humanity under the fatherhood of Jah. Spiritual brotherhood does not necessarily mean racial exclusivity, however, although black supremacy is an aspect of the Rastafari

movement. Rastas as brethren try to work together to harness individual spiritual power and create a positive, life-affirming philosophy for self and community. One way this is done is through one-to-one teaching by brethren and sistren, summed up in the phrase "each one teach one". State education is seen as indoctrination in the colonial or post-colonial system, called 'head-decay-shun'. Camps and yards are centres of learning the Rastafari way of seeing the world.

The environment

Rastafari endeavour to live in harmony with nature, as part of the oneness with Jah. 'Mother Nature' or 'Mother Earth' is divine and to be revered as Jah's creation. 'Sitting in the dust' means remaining close to earth, the primary manifestation of nature and developing an understanding of how to live in harmony with nature's laws. Babylon destroys Mother Earth, by making weapons, especially nuclear weapons, to destroy everything.

Global vision

Rastafari has extended beyond Jamaica, to the UK and USA in particular. There are also smaller Rasta populations in Japan, New Zealand, Brazil, and other countries. Some Rastas have no ethnic link at all with Afro-Caribbean people; not only are there white Rastas but also Rastas of Native American background, and Japanese background, among others. Rastafari spread internationally through the migration of Jamaicans and the popularity of reggae music. Rastafari symbols of colour, hair, language, and Ital diet have become symbols of identity for Jamaican and non-Jamaican youth more generally. Rastafari symbols became associated with gang violence in Jamaica and then the drug trade in cocaine with US. However, those who adopted the symbols often did not also have the religious values of the Rastafari. This, alongside the sacramental use of ganja, associated Rastafaris with drugs and as addicts in the US, which many Rastafari felt was an unfair and inaccurate association. In the UK, Rastafari was taken up by second-generation immigrants from Jamaica and the Caribbean from the 1970s onwards. It has become more common since then for young people in particular to dress as Rastas without following the religious values.

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