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RASTAFARI: TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH¹

The Rastafari movement has been described variously as escapist, nativistic, millenarian, visionary, revitalistic – all terms which reflect the impulse in our discipline towards scientific generalisation. However, in only a very few cases of the many works written on the Rastas in Jamaica is the use of the particular terminology based on original field research, as opposed to secondary sources, and on the considered attempt therefrom to classify.

One notable example is that of Klaus De Albuquerque (1977), who makes the strongest case that I am aware of that the Rastafari is a millenarian movement. His approach is to construct a theoretical model of millenarian movements and to test it using the Rastafari movement. To establish the relationship between any millenarian movement and the wider society, he says, one has to examine the “prerequisites” and the “conditions” which give rise to it. In practical terms this requires an understanding of four distinct factors. The first is the form: whether the millenarian movement is a religious or a secular one. According to De Albuquerque, what determines the form is the level of development of the society. In industrialised societies the political structure is sharply differentiated from the religious; in pre-industrial and “modernizing” societies this is not so. As a result, millenarian movements occur mainly in the latter and are generally religious. They are not unknown in the former, but there, he says, that depends on the *locus* of the origin of oppression.

Thus, a second factor is the type of society. Industrialised societies are characterised by political structures which have developed the “capacity to absorb and deflect protest”, or to mobilize and so defuse revolutionary threats. Pre-industrial societies are lacking in this capacity.

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A third factor is the religious belief system of the society, whether it is given to strong or weak eschatological expectations. If these are weak, the millenarian movement will likely take a secular, non-revolutionary and passive form; but if strong, the movement is more likely to be religious, revolutionary and active.

Finally, there is the aetiological origin itself. Here, De Albuquerque argues, the factors may be exogenous or endogenous. In an industrialised society endogenous factors condition the movement to be passive and escapist, appealing to bourgeois elements, whereas in pre-industrialised societies exogenous factors of origin lead to revolutionary millenarian movements, with appeals to the "external proletariat", external, that is, in the sense of being marginal to the system. Endogenous factors may also have the same effect, if the political structures are at the same time well-developed, even if the society as a whole is not.

With a model constructed of these elements, De Albuquerque situates Jamaican society within the ranks of the pre-industrialised, or modernizing, societies, but one which also has a well-developed political structure. After examining the Rastafari, he concludes:

Given the existence of oppression ... and the above specifying conditions, we would expect the Rastafari movement to assume a revolutionary character and appeal to the external proletariat (landless peasants and urban unemployed).

The case study of the movement bears this out, with the exception, that the movement had initially, and continues to have, very little impact on the Jamaican peasantry, landless or otherwise. (De Albuquerque 1977: 358-59).

Apart from the fact that the theory tends to rule out the possibility of revolutionary millenarian movements in industrialised societies, the main difficulty it presents is not even so much the one acknowledged by the author in the above passage, namely that after nearly fifty years of existence the movement still lacked appeal to the external proletariat (for it is possible to bring forward evidence to show that it is precisely this sector to which the movement has appealed), but the definition of the Rastafari as a revolutionary movement.

De Albuquerque, unfortunately, does not define his use of the word "revolutionary", so one is not absolutely sure of what he means. In the context of the discussion that would make no sense, since any movement that is radically different from the mainstream could qualify as revolutionary. However, it seems to me, given the context of the discussion, in which he defines politics as participation in some goal seeking, and in which he accords a high place in the paradigm to an activity-passivity dichotomy, that he is using the concept revolutionary in much the same way Hobsbawm used it in relation to the "primitive rebels" of Sicily: people who, in reaction to existing social and other conditions, actively take measures in pursuit of a radical transformation. If this

is so, one would have to concede that the Rastafari movement is revolutionary, not just because it consistently preaches a doctrine about a new order, in which every Black man will have his own "vine and fig tree", thus reversing the order of Black people at the bottom of society, but because it has occasionally (1934, 1956 and 1959 most notably) taken measures to bring about repatriation to Africa. If one reads De Albuquerque correctly, one cannot be revolutionary and passive at the same time.

But is the Rastafari a revolutionary movement? Is that what it is all about? In what follows I wish to advance a different way of looking at the religion, one which departs from a purely social structure type of perspective and tries to see it rather in the context of cultural continuity. Specifically, I raise two issues without trying at this time to resolve them. One examines the relationship of Rastafari to Revivalism and the other looks at the structure of the movement itself.

THE REVIVAL PAST

In 1860 a great revival took place among the Christian Churches in Jamaica. Church leaders viewed it as a sign of great outpouring by the Holy Spirit of God, as thousands of the former slaves and their descendants swelled the congregations to overflowing. Quite unexpectedly, the revival turned sour as people began expressing their religious fervour not in the "Christian" ways planned by the Churches but in pagan ways, thus marking a resurgence of Myalism, an Afro-Jamaican religion. Spirit possession, groaning, convulsions, manifestations of Myalism, subverted the great revival, as Church leaders denounced them as the work of the devil. To add insult to injury, the people appropriated the name Revival, distinguishing between Revival Zion, from Pukumina, its less christianised and more distinctively African variant.

Thus Revival Zion grew out of Myal. According to Schuler (1975), Myal first appeared in the middle of the eighteenth century and provided the basis on which slaves could build pan-African resistance to enslavement, whereas up to then revolts had been largely tribal. One of the features of African religion, according to Alleyne (1988: 59), is its receptivity to external influences. As an African-derived religion, therefore, Myal was easily able to adopt Christianity, as well as to be adopted by Christianity, as soon as the Black Baptists, George Lisle and Moses Baker and others began preaching to the slaves late in the century. Sometimes this religion appeared under the name Myal, but it was content to thrive under the name Native Baptist. Robotham (1988: 35) calls it a critical development, because it constructed "the synthesis for consciousness

in which traditional ethnicities were dissolved" and "established a new ethical code for the people not only in the religious but in the *cultural* sense".

Revival Zion is indeed a religion. But underlying its expression is a coherent world view, which I refer to as Revivalism, or simply Revival. Briefly summarised, this religion has three central features, which I shall briefly discuss.

1. God, Spirits and the Dead

The Jamaicans, like their African forebears, believe in a Supreme Being, a Creator, called God, or Maasa Gad, or the Father. Though He knows and sees all, God is, nevertheless, distant from the affairs of mankind. The acts of the elements are His, such as earthquake, lightening, thunder, storm and floods, and swearing by God or by the elements, particularly lightening, is regarded as a grave and solemn act, for which reason it is seldom done.

As God is distant, so are the Spirits near. In, around, and even within. In recognition of this, rum drinkers even today will pour a libation before drinking, and children used to be taught when eating always to leave a small portion by the edge of their plates. Of all spirits Jesus is the greatest. His role of dying to save all mankind has imbued him with special powers. Jesus is the object of supplication and prayer, and is often called, Father Jesus or Pupa Jesus. The most central shrine or seal in the tabernacle is devoted to him, but he never possesses anyone as Jesus. His Spirit, though, or the Dove or Messenger, may possess devotees.

Lesser spirits include Angels and Archangels such as Michael, Gabriel and Raphael; prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist; and apostles. The spirit world also includes the very powerful Fallen Angels, Satan being the highest among them. They too can be supplicated, especially for material favours, but they are dangerous.

Spirits of the dead, duppies, complete the Jamaican pantheon. The elaborate death rituals are characterised by great mourning and display of grief among near relatives; a compulsive need to show respect for the deceased and solidarity with the bereaved; and by elaborate precautions to prevent the duppy from returning across the threshold separating the worlds of the living and the dead. Duppies are thought to roam abroad at nights, frightening and terrorising the living. They may also be used by obeahmen to harm people. The most feared are East Indian, Chinese and baby duppies. To relatives, however, duppies may assume protective roles, communicating with them in sleep. Such communications from the spirit world are called visions, to distinguish them from ordinary dreams.

A function of the spirits is the possession of man. Spirits are not feared on account of this, and spirit possession is considered not only a normal part of

religious worship but an honour. It is the way some people are chosen for a higher life.

2. *Man, Nature and Magic*

Nature represents a zone which interfaces the material and spirit worlds, thus establishing a continuum of universal existence. Nature is material, but it is also spiritual. The same croton which makes a beautiful hedge also symbolises the Prophet Jeremiah, and adorns graves because it is thought to keep duppies within the graves. Herbs, such as mint and sage, trees, such as the majestic cottonwood, rivers and certain species of animals, like frogs and large moths, similarly have both sacred and profane identities. One never kills large moths, or bats as they are called; they are believed to represent the ancestors.

But if nature is a threshold across which the spirit world crosses into the world of the living, it is also a zone whereby man can acquire the power of the spirits and control both worlds. Here, even inanimate things may be used by man: a pinch of salt and a swig of rum, for example, are all the guarantees gravediggers need. And a saucer of salt may always be found on the sacred table during mourning rituals. Red fabric, pencils and scissors are used to ward off evil spirits.

With the right knowledge, therefore, one can control even the spirit world. The obeahman is invested with this knowledge, which he uses mainly for harm, but anyone may use to his advantage: charms and amulets for protection; oils and powders to achieve certain goals.²

But perhaps the greatest asset of nature is its healing properties. A general belief is that there is no illness for which there is no remedy provided by nature. The healing process may take place at not one but several levels, from the straightforward application until relief comes to treatment which combines nature with magic and ritual. The religious healer practices in a "balm yard". A good practitioner is able not only to heal but to divine and read the future.

Hence, the general attitude toward nature is one of respect and harmony. Man himself is regarded as a sinful creature, but also a vital part of nature and subject to its laws. Like the children of Israel of old, enslavement and oppression are a consequence of sin, a condition which will be remedied only in the next world, following a life of righteousness in this. Black skin colour is a sign of debasement. Not only are expressions common which assume this (for example, our failure as an ethnic group to advance, compared to other ethnic immigrant groups), but there are also tales which tell, not without humour, how Blacks came to be black. They all tell of some aberration or weakness of character.³ When the great Revival preacher and healer, Alexander Bedward, told ethnographer Marthe Beckwith that in heaven his hand will become as lily white

as her own, he was expressing commonly held views about black skin colour, sin and oppression (Beckwith 1929: 169-70). Holding such views, however, did not prevent him from calling for the overthrow of white rule (Chevannes 1971).

Mankind as a whole is sinful, but in the Revival world view woman represents a particularly serious danger to man, even as she also represents a particularly delightful pleasure. The Adam and Eve myth tells the tale of what lies in store for man if woman is allowed to control him. Woman is therefore not to be trusted, even when she is loved. Eve and Delilah are prototypes of the female. Man is vulnerable during woman's menstrual flow, and to avoid all possibilities of contamination male and female underwear are strictly segregated. Indeed, only a woman herself may wash her own underwear. Pregnant and menstruating women are thought to have a malignant effect on certain crops.

At the same time, women are a source of delight and comfort. Feelings about sex are not as guilt-ridden as would appear from the attitudes preached by the Christian and the Evangelical churches, though the situation could be changing, given the dramatic growth of the latter. Women are believed to be always satisfied with sex. But it is in their role as mothers that women elicit the greatest respect from menfolk. A woman's pride in motherhood is strong. The bond between mother and son is the strongest of all domestic relationships, and the greatest insult possible to any man is to berate his mother. Motherhood is so highly valued that the title *Mada* is given to women who gain the wide respect of their communities, and those who become Revival leaders.

3. *Ethical and Social Values*

The world view fashioned by Myal in its interaction with Christianity holds to a sense of moral and cultural equality for all Blacks, as Robotham (1988) points out. It also has imbued the people with a strong sense of community. For instance, it values individualism and respects achieved status, but only if communal values are also upheld. People who achieve but by their actions and attitudes reject their community are sanctioned. "The higher monkey climb, the more him expose."

The world, God, spirits, nature, man are all governed by order and interdependence. It is really one world. Nowhere is this more deeply manifested than in the concept of "helping out", whereby voluntary and spontaneous acts of responsibility and sharing are undertaken, oftentimes on behalf of strangers, out of a sense of mutual interdependence and reciprocity. The good one does today will redound to one tomorrow; the good that is done one today is the result of the good one did yesterday. The concept is akin to the Christian teaching about storing up treasures in heaven, except that the reward is expected in this life rather than the next.

For this reason, the belief in retribution and fate is equally strong. The evil which one does will be repaid sooner or later. "What is fiyu kyaan be anfiyu" (one cannot escape one's fate).

This summary of the world view of the Jamaicans is neither exhaustive nor intended to imply that these beliefs are shared fully by everyone. I do argue, though, that they are generalised throughout the population, which is why the Revival religion could be found anywhere in the island without having had a centrally organised structure of the type possessed by most Churches. The closest it came to this was under the great prophet Bedward, and even then not all entered into formal affiliation with him, and those who did seemed in any case to have been allowed to retain their autonomy. This process of a generalised world view giving rise to non-centralised religious expression is replicated in identical fashion with the rise of the Rastafari.

RASTAFARI BELIEFS

The most important belief of the Rastafari is that Haile Selassie, the late Emperor of Ethiopia is God. This alone was enough for the general public to identify them by (from Ras, the Ethiopian title meaning Prince, and Tafari, the Emperor's name), although they originally called themselves the King of Kings people. But underlying the belief in the Emperor's divinity is the conclusion they reached that the Black man was destined to return to his native Africa, after centuries of ongoing injustice at the hands of the White man. Repatriation, as the return to Africa is known, thus became the first important departure from Revival, and remained up to the recent past a source of inspiration for the faithful as a whole and Rastafari artists in particular.

Babylon is a wicked one
Babylon is a wicked one
Babylon is a wicked one
O, Jah Rastafari O, Selah!

Our forefathers were taken away
Our forefathers were taken away
Our forefathers were taken away
O, Jah Rastafari O, Selah!

Open up da gate mek I repatriate
Open up da gate mek I repatriate
Open up da gate mek I repatriate
O, Jah Rastafari O, Selah!

The motif in this plaintive song, which may be heard at Rastafari celebrations, is one which is quite common among Blacks with a Christian tradition, namely their likeness to the ancient children of Israel who were rescued from their captivity by the intervention of God. Here, the image is used not as metaphor, but as reality itself. We are the true Israelites; what is written in the Bible being only a foreshadowing of real events now unfolding. The Babylon of old is none other than the white colonial and neo-colonial world.

These themes are not confined to ceremonies, but may be found in popular songs as well. *By the rivers of Babylon* is perhaps one of the best known Rastafari songs, made internationally popular by the European group, Boney M. In Jamaica one of the most popular songs of all times evokes images of the promised land:

There is a land, far, far away,
Where there's no night, there's only day.
Look into the Book of Life and you will see
That there's a land, far, far away.

The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords
Sits upon his throne and he rules us all.
Look into the Book of Life and you will see
That there's a land, far, far away.

Originally sung by the Abyssinians in the 1960s, it had by 1980 undergone over seventy different versions. The far away land was Ethiopia, where the King of Kings, Haile Selassie, ruled. Its title is *Sata amas agaana*, the Amharic for "Give thanks and praises". *Babylon Burning*, with musical motifs of the round *London burning*, sung by the Wailers, *I want to go back home*, by Alton Ellis, *Seven miles of Black Star Liners*, by Burning Spear and numerous others express the same theme of exile and repatriation.

By contrast, one is hard put to find a single Revival song which expresses the sentiment of return to Africa. There is the following:

I want to go home to that land,
I want to go home to that land,
I want to go home to that land where I am from;
For there is joy in my soul,
Peace and happiness in my mind –
I want to go home to that land where I am from.

The "land where I am from" could be interpreted as Africa, but the feelings of present joy, peace and happiness are not congruent with yearnings of return. Rather, the song expresses the readiness of the faithful, the saved, to go "home"

to heaven. This is particularly clear in another very popular Revival song, which was adopted with a change of words by the Rastafari.

Fly away home to Zion, fly away home:
One bright morning when my life is over,
I will fly away home.

The Rastafari change of the word "life" to "work" reflects the main difference between the two religions: salvation in the here and now of this life as against postponement into the next. "Zion" is no longer the heaven in the skies but Ethiopia, or Africa, where God is.

A second major tenet of the Rastafari, which also marks an important divergence from Revival, is the conclusion that God is Black. It derives from the racial characteristic of Haile Selassie himself, and gives to Blacks a sense of being one with, of sharing in an attribute of God. Black man is thereby elevated in status.

Two things follow. First is the rejection of the hegemonic system of values whereby "if you are white, that's right; if you are black, you stay back". The alienation between God and man need no longer exist, because there is a profound way in which God shares a part of his being with those who once were poor. Man, that is Black man, is also divine. Rastafari resist speaking of Black men becoming converted. One does not become converted, one begins to *manifest* Rastafari, thereby implying the evolution or unfolding of something already within.

Where does that leave whites? Rastafari, instead of going the way of the Black Nationalists of the United States with a mythology that makes whiteness an attribute of the Devil, allow the possibility of salvation for whites, based on inward acknowledgement of the evil of white society and rejecting it.

Second, the elevation of man to the status of shared identity with God is at the same time an elevation over the world of Spirits. Rastafari do not recognise the existence of, let alone communicate with, those beings which are so central to Revival. They have no need of them. If there are no spirits but only God and man, and if man is also part God, then God himself no longer is the distant Big Maasa, without a real role in the affairs of man, but a loving Father. When Rastafari speak of "the Father", they do so with great reverence and with an awareness of his central place in their lives. To some extent the identity with the Father gives coherence to the strong patriarchal orientation for which the movement is noted. This alteration of the spirit world marks a radical departure from the African tradition, so far as the retention of a particular form is concerned. But, as we shall see later, there is strong retention of belief in the immanence of God.

The above two tenets of Rastafari are the most fundamental, and they characterise the main divergence from Revival. They were made possible by a most important development in the history of Blacks, the rise of Marcus Garvey as a great visionary and teacher. Although his Back-to-Africa scheme failed,⁴ his Shipping Line and other economic enterprises floundered and his years of involvement in Jamaican politics came to nought, Garvey positively and permanently laid the foundation for a transformation in the thinking of Blacks through his tireless teachings on their past achievements and future possibilities and the respect he won by the magnitude and daring of his schemes. He identified race as the defining characteristic of a Black nationality, thereby giving a sense of brotherhood to millions in the new and old worlds, and a new sense of power and identity. The early Rastafari, leaders and followers, all considered themselves Garveyites. To them he was John the Baptist, leading them to the one who was to come greater than himself.

So great was Garvey's impact on popular consciousness, that the Bedwardites paired him with Bedward in the roles of Moses and Aaron, respectively. But other people also influenced by Garvey had other ideas: if Garvey was Moses (his middle name was Mosiah) the land of Jamaica must be Egypt and there must be a real promised land, not a metaphorical one.

Rastafari, then, started off as a radical departure from all that had gone before it. The image was helped as much by the two central doctrines as by the adoption of certain symbols, notably the beard and, by the 1950s, the use of ganja and the dreadlocks, and millenarian and non-millenarian activities to effect repatriation.

Despite the centrality of and insistence on this belief, Rastafari is not a Repatriation movement. For one, repatriation initiatives have not been many in over fifty years. In 1934 Howell was believed to have preached repatriation on August 1. In 1958 Prince Emmanuel Edwards called an all-Rasta convention and some Rastafari reportedly sold out their belongings and gathered in expectancy of the ships to take them "home". In 1959, Claudius Henry distributed blue cards to be used in lieu of passports for a "miraculous repatriation" on October 25. And in the following year his church was associated with attempts to force its way back to Africa.⁵ The closeness of the last three episodes was related to the heightening of migration to Britain at the time. Other activities range from the 1961 Mission to Africa, sponsored by the Government, participation in Back-to-Africa marches in the 1950s, and attempts by some leaders to press Government and the United Nations.

In addition, Repatriation does not mean the same to all. By Repatriation is meant not just the return of Africans to Africa, but also the restoration of Justice, by which Europeans would give up the lands they have seized from the

Amerindians and return to Europe. But naturally the focus is on "Africa for the Africans, at home and abroad!" Thus, some Rastafari even dissociate themselves from activities like the 1961 Mission, holding that while Governments can bring about migration, only Jah can bring about repatriation. Still others, such as the Twelve Tribes of Israel, adopt the position that since God helps those who help themselves there is nothing wrong in trying to get its members one by one to Ethiopia, where the Emperor left lands for settlement by Blacks in Sheshamane.

Finally, none of the above initiatives had the full support of Rastafarians, for the movement is a highly fragmented and unorganized one, a characteristic which works against united action. This point being of some relevance to the present discussion, I think some explanation is needed.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION

Rastafari is an acephalous movement. There are groups, quasi-groups and individuals, who while sharing the core beliefs, nevertheless remain separate and independent. Consequently, the fortune of the movement as a whole is not tied to the fate of any particular leader or group, and it has been able not merely to survive the ups and downs of its relations with society over the years, but also to influence it.

Leonard Howell is generally thought to have been the very first to reach the conclusion that Haile Selassie was God. But Hibbert claimed to have done the same independently. Whether or not the initial Rastafarians influenced one another, the point is that from the very inception there were several men all preaching the same thing but *independently* of one another. There was one exception: Robert Hinds first began preaching with Howell but soon went his separate way. Thus Howell, Hinds, Hibbert, Dunkley, Napier, Powell and a few others were preaching Rastafari on the highways and byways of the city and countryside, and organising the converted into churches which they gave the name King of Kings, all at the same time, and without reference to any one as leader, even *primus inter pares*.

A second feature was thus its resistance to centralised organisation. Except among very specific sects, of which there are three – the influential Twelve Tribes of Israel, the Bobo led by Prince Emmanuel Edwards and the remnants of Claudius Henry's church, the Rastafarian refuses to surrender his freedom and autonomy by joining any organisation, Rastafari or not. A common explanation of the brethren is, "wat jain kyan brok!" (what is joined together can be broken). But in truth it is their ethical value of complete freedom from the force of man-made rules which informs this resistance. If one acts, it should be out of inner conviction, rather than out of the need for outward conformity. "Man free" is

another common expression, which means "Do as you feel justified to do". There have been repeated attempts in the past to forge a united body, to no avail. The Ethiopian International Unification Committee led by Attorney-at-Law Michael Lorne is only the most recent of a series which has included the Rasta Movement Association and the initiatives of others.

Third, this value of freedom from outward constraint finds expression for the majority of Rastafari in the quasi-organisation they refer to as the "House", that is the House of Nyabingi. The House is run by an "Assembly of Elders", theoretically numbering 72, but in reality far fewer. Homiak (1985: 490-91) summarises Eldership as combining cunning and resourcefulness with initiative and trust, but avoiding selfishness, arbitrariness or conceit. One does not become an Elder by appointment or election. The Elders oversee the affairs of the House, such as planning liturgical events, settling disputes, or appointing delegations as the need arises. But beyond the Assembly of Elders, there is no membership, as such. All are free to come or stay away, to participate or remain silent, to contribute or withhold financial dues. Yet one retains one's qualification as a member of the House simply by being a Rastafari. The openness of this sort of structure permits a great measure of democracy, in which all are equal, regardless of age, ability or function. But at the same time it makes a united, organised structure difficult if not impossible.

These characteristics of the Rastafari have a remarkable similarity to Revival, whose origin is traced to the incorporation by Myal of Christianity. The first Baptist to convert slaves was himself a Black slave who was brought to Jamaica by his Loyalist master fleeing the American Revolution. But the more slaves George Lisle converted, the less control he had, as converts went on their own, preaching their own understanding of Christianity, which in effect was Myal. Gibb, Lewis, Baker were three of those identified. They had no central organisation, no mutual cooperation. Their movement reproduced itself in a cellular way.

Yet, it was clear by what the missionaries referred to as "myal outbreaks", beginning not long after the turn of the century and appearing as late as 1860, that there was a fairly uniform system of beliefs distributed over the wide geographic regions of the island. This allowed for Revivalists to distinguish between two broad trends (or "houses" in fact), the "sixty" and the "sixty-one". The former worship only the sky-bound spirits, Jesus, the prophets, etc., the latter worship these as well as the earth-bound spirit, such as Satan and the fallen angels. Anywhere they go across the island, Revivalists are able to identify "sixty" from "sixty-one" and to associate with the one or the other.

No attempt was ever made to organise Revival into a united body, though at the height of Alexander Bedward's fame, scores of groups throughout the island were affiliated to him.

I do not intend to stretch the comparison to say that Revivalism also like Rasta was impervious to organisation, but the similarities are indeed striking in their spontaneous and acephalous nature.

There are similarities of a different kind, which in the context of the discussion deserve mention. I refer to the many examples where it is evident that certain crucial aspects of the Revival world outlook are very much alive in Rastafari. I distinguish two kinds: first, direct traces, where the forms are the same; and second, indirect traces, where Revival traditions provide the basis for what appear to be new Rastafari traditions.

Direct Traces are far more numerous than generally recognised, and may be summarised as follows:

1. *Ritual structure.* Revival meetings are basically divided into two parts: an initial period of drumming, singing, dancing and spirit possession, followed by the specific rituals which define what the meeting is about. Thus, the healing ritual, testimony service, and table all begin more or less the same way. The Rastafari meetings retain this element: an initial period of considerable duration in which the drumming-singing-dancing triad reigns, but without spirit possession. At the time of my fieldwork in 1975 this initial period gave way, just as in Revival, to a different element, namely Bible reading and preaching. At one ceremony I attended in Westmoreland, the Table from which the Elder spoke hosted a glass of water – another Revival trace.⁶

2. *Ritual instruments.* It is very interesting that in Professor Simpson's description of the anniversary celebration by one group of Haile Selassie's Coronation in 1953 the musical instruments included rhumba boxes, saxophones, guitars, violin, banjo, tambourines and rattles (Simpson 1955: 143). All this changed within ten years, as uniformly throughout the movement a bank of drums had replaced all other instruments and with a rhythm, called *nyabingi*, peculiar only to the Rastafari. The drums are of three types: a huge bass, larger than Revival's but struck the same way with the padded end of a stick; the *funde*, which establishes the rhythm; and the repeater, which pronounces the variations. The latter two are played with the hands and fingers. These drums are central to all Rastafari gatherings. Bilby and Leib (1986: 23) trace the origins of this music to a complex interpenetration of Buru, Kumina and Revival styles of drumming in West Kingston, and thus establish the accuracy of "Rastafari insistence on the 'African roots' of Nyabingi" (1986: 27). Most of the ceremonial songs of the Rastafari with adjustments in certain key words, as observed above, are legacies of Revival.

3. *Magic*. To “dance nyabingi” against an identified oppressor was, Rastafari believed, to invoke in a sure and compelling way the power of God to destroy him. According to one informant, fire was made to consume an effigy of the person. Although the practice may have ceased, I have heard Rastafari threaten to dance nyabingi for public personalities they considered oppressive to Rastafari. The dreadlocks are also believed to have magical properties, not to be used to harm the owner, however, but to be able to wreak destruction on Babylon. Such beliefs in magic are not surprising, since, according to Robert Hill (1983: 38) “popular belief in the power of the occult played a formative role in the early stages of Rastafari consciousness”.

4. *Divination*. Rastafari believe in the power of the Bible to expose evil. In one incident concerning the loss of money belonging to the House, the Holy book was used to establish the guilty from the innocent.

5. *Herbal Lore*. Rastafari place heavy stress on nature as a gift of the Father “for the healing of the nation”. This attitude applies not only to ganja but to all of nature, whether herbal or plant. Thus, with almost the force of doctrine, they reject artificial things pertaining to life, preferring the natural: herbal medicinal cures, herbal teas, natural spices and flavouring such as pepper and coconut milk.⁷

6. *Visions*. Rastafari share the same world view with other Jamaicans, which distinguish dreams from visions. Dreams are the images and fantasies which appear in sleep. Visions are dreams of particular significance, usually rich in symbolic meaning, and regarded as encoded messages from the world of the spirits. Although not believing in spirits other than the Father, the Rastafari nevertheless believe in his communication through visions.

Indirect Traces may be found in many new traditions which seem unique to the Rastafari but which may in fact be shown to owe much to the earlier world outlook. I now present some of the more obvious.

1. *Word Power*. The creation of a new mode of speech by the Rastafari has been noted by linguists (Pollard 1985; Alleyne 1988). Underlying it is a belief in the magical power of the word. Alleyne, while being too uncertain “about the earlier stages of language development in Jamaica to be able to reconstruct a continuous process through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”, is of no doubt that Rastafari ideas about language are “an expression of African culture” (Alleyne 1988: 150). What he obviously implies is that more research is needed to establish the link, more research in fact on the world view I have been calling Revival.

To begin with, ethnographers have noted the predilection of the Jamaican peasant for the spoken word (Beckwith 1929), a tendency not adequately explained by the absence of a tradition of literacy, since even literate people

have the feeling that to address one in person is more effective than in writing. And a predilection not just for the spoken word, one might add, but for "big words", as if their use transformed the speaker's ability to be more effective. These traditions persist. Contemporary Jamaican culture, observes Brathwaite (1986), is essentially oral:

Names were viewed somewhat like extensions of one's person, and therefore the possible object of imitative magic. Hence, at night, one never answered to one's name being called, unless it was uttered three times, the number three thought to be outside the range of duppies. Similarly, one should not call out another's name in public. One attracts the other's attention either by a clapping of hands or the hissing of teeth. This custom considered it bad etiquette to do otherwise, but it was also believed that it exposed one to possible evil being conspired by strangers. The tradition still persists of giving children, especially girls, "pet names", that is names by which they were known by family and community, and official or "real names", sometimes known not even to the owner until read in adulthood on a birth certificate.

Nowhere is the power of the word more manifest today in non-Rastafari contexts than among the Pentecostal sects, where spirit possession takes place through the power of the preacher's words. But even in other conventional denominations the measure of satisfaction with the worship is directly a function not of the singing or the ritual but of the sermon. If good, it is described as "sweet".

These examples indicate that Rastafari predilection for the spoken word did not surface from nowhere. I see no difference between the Dreadlock's preference for "performing" than for writing his complaint or petition and the peasant's. His attribution of power to the word, so beautifully expressed in his phrasing, "Word, Sounds and Power!", is but a refinement of a tradition.

2. *Contamination of Death.* I noted the elaborate rituals traditionally taken in the wake of death, noting the fear of contamination of the world of the living by the spirits of the dead which inspires them. Rastafari carries this fear of contamination to its extreme. The brethren do not believe the true Rasta, as against the posers, will die. I am not now in a position to say whether this belief was institutionalised from the 1930s, though it is not unlikely. None of my "ancient" Rastafari ever made mention of death or burial. At any rate, up to the very recent past the belief that Rastafari cannot die was very strong. A change became noticeable in the 1980s, following first the report of the death of His Imperial Majesty in 1974 and that of Bob Marley in 1981. Today, some brethren admit that man is put on earth only for a time, not to live forever. This, however, is not the majority view.

As a result of not believing he will die, the Rastafari will have nothing to do with death: he attends no funerals, takes no part in their arrangement, no matter

how close the deceased, does not mourn or even discuss the event. Thus, in an ironic way, his ideological distancing has the same source as the ritualised distancing of the traditional believer: belief in the contaminating power of death.

3. *Woman as a source of evil.* Much is made of the Rastafari male supremacy over women (Nettleford 1970; Kitzinger 1971; Rowe 1980; Yawney 1983), buttressed by beliefs in her natural inferiority and power to contaminate. Rastafari believe that a woman is of such wayward nature that only through her male spouse, her "king-man" may she attain the enlightenment of Jah. Relationships are therefore marked by female submissiveness and obedience to the male, and ritual avoidance and even confinement during the menstrual flow. While this strong patriarchal tradition is indeed a direct contrast to traditional household patterns in Jamaica, its ideological root within the traditional world view is often missed.

4. *Man as God.* I have already drawn attention to the rejection of the spirit world by the Rastafari and its replacement with a belief in the nearness of God and oneness of being between Him and man. Yet it may be argued that the new doctrine is but an elevation of the most essential feature of the Revival beliefs about the relationship between the human and spiritual world, namely the fusion of identity which is possible in the form of ritual possession. Just as in Revival possession is the means by which the spirit performs, so in Rastafari identity with God is the means whereby His works are manifested. Father Owens, to date the only presenter of a comprehensive view of Rasta theology, explains:

Simple man is not completely divine, in the Rastafarian view, because he is still partly under the sway of Satan, the embodiment of all that is in opposition to God in man. Just as the God of the Rastas is not allowed to be an other-worldly, intangible being estranged from the ways of man, so also Satan is conceived by the brethren as being immediately present to the working of history: "Satan is the people who live upon earth who manifest themselves in Satan way. In other words, Satan is the man who trying to keep you down. Yes, that is the devil!" (Owens 1976: 132).

Thus, to do good means to allow the God in you to perform his work, just as to do evil means allowing Satan to perform his. But, as Owens (1976: 130) carefully notes, the brethren do not allow their identity with God to gloss over "the real distance that they know exists between man in his present state and man in his divine state to which he is summoned".

GENERAL IMPLICATIONS

The view of the Rastafari I have so far presented is one which when silhouetted against the historical backdrop of the world view of which Revivalism was the

religious expression appears as a new departure but also as a continuity. The question now is what does it all mean? This is what I think it means.

1. Rastafari must be included when considering Africa-derived religion in Jamaica and the Caribbean. It is a more authentic expression of that tradition than generally thought. Even Alleyne is hard put to find anything of African continuity in Rastafari beliefs and behaviour. "Rastafarianism", he surmises, "is probably an excellent example of a cultural form being generated virtually *ab initio* out of the social circumstances" (Alleyne 1988: 103). But evidently conscious of the implications of such a statement,⁸ he later on observes that the religion in integrating language, music and religion at a higher level than before merely continues an African and African Jamaican tradition (Alleyne 1988: 149). It is in this latter context that he regrets the paucity of knowledge that might have allowed linguistic, and obviously other, links to be proved.

2. Owing so much to the Revival past yet being so remarkably different, Rastafari may be regarded as its fulfillment. For it is clear, particularly after Marcus Garvey, that the Revival world view was inadequate as a pan-African one, since it had no really viable answer to the problem posed by white racism. After Garvey, a return to a world view which accommodated black skin as an ontological deficiency to be rectified only by transmogrification was out of the question.

3. Thus, Rasta is itself essentially a world view movement, "a system of beliefs and a state of consciousness", as Post (1978: 165) correctly put it. This accounts for its acephalous and somewhat spontaneous nature, very much the same as in the emergence of Myal and Revival. Its greatest impact lies here, and it would be quite wrong to judge it by the failure of its prophecies of repatriation.

4. Without doubt, Rastafari has manifested millennial tendencies, which, in terms of the discussion with which we started out, give the movement a political character. But it is much more fruitful to conceive of it as a cultural than as a political movement. What has accounted for its growth is not the dream of the millenium but the appropriation of a new and more coherent reality. There is the real revolution. As I have already said, Rastafari search for the millenium occurred only three times. Yet it is a fact that its periods of greatest growth occurred after them: in the decade of the 1930s and first half decade of the 1940s, when the focus was on spreading the message that Selassie was God; and in the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of the Dreadlocks and their symbolic announcement of a new and separate identity.

This is not to deny the impulse to action which is inherent in the appropriation of any new ideas about the cosmos, and which is obviously present in the Rastafari movement. It was present, too, in Myal and Revival, which did as much in the struggle against slavery and colonialism as Vodun did in Haiti, yet

no scholar as far as I know would regard any of them as essentially activist in the broad political sense. It is one thing to recognise these impulses, it is another to make them the essence.

The general drift of this essay is perhaps not original, though no other scholar has treated the subject matter in quite the same way or has been able to document the living continuity within the Rastafari of Jamaica of a unifying world view honed out of a variegated tribal melange. The thrust of the Nettleford essays (1970), for example, was on the issue of a Black identity. He perceived, notwithstanding the millennial dream of the movement, a dream he could well appreciate being a member of the University team whose Report on the movement recommended the dispatching of an investigative Mission to Africa, that the centre stage was Jamaica itself and its Black majority. But Katrin Norris (1962) had sounded a similar note almost a decade before, when she observed the Rastafari were facing the issue of a black identity, which the black middle classes were ducking.

Among more recent scholars Ernest Cashmore and Laennec Hurbon adopt a similar position. Cashmore (1979) bluntly dismisses Rastafari's potential as a revolutionary force but argues that in fact previous scholars underestimated its importance in creating a culture. Hurbon (1986: 164) sees the movement as building a new identity for Jamaica and all the Caribbean islands, but he lapses into seeing it also as a sort of nativistic "revival of the basic core of the slave and nineteenth-century cultures", again, I think, because of the failure of scholarship to uncover its living continuity with the past. And precisely this constitutes the insight of Mervyn Alleyne, whose central thesis it is that the culture of West Africa lives on in the Jamaican world view. For example, he says,

The reluctance of Jamaican peasants to accept modern scientific agricultural techniques, including the use of chemical fertilisers and other agents that artificially quicken growth must be seen within the philosophical framework of this oneness with nature. The Rastafarians, whose complex eating taboos reflect a belief that body, mind, and nature form an integrated whole, have developed and enriched this philosophical tradition. (Alleyne 1988: 157).

It is easy to miss this because "world view ... cannot be observed directly like artifacts" (Alleyne 1988: 157), and in the study of religion where it could have been gleaned the focus has been on ritual and organisation to the neglect of the "underlying philosophies".

Alleyne's observations are well founded. Nevertheless, the approach taken in this paper to the Rastafari phenomenon raises a number of issues which need

airing. Is the existence of a world view enough of an explanation for the lack of centralised leadership in religious movements? After all, ideas do not spread *sua sponte*. They need human agents. And is it not the case that often what makes some people leaders and others not is their quicker grasp of ideas and better ability to communicate them more lucidly? What, therefore, is the place of charismatic leadership in religions of this sort? Among the Rastafari all four of the most mentioned early leaders, Howell, Hinds, Hibbert and Dunkley, were personalities thought to have heroic, if not divine, abilities. De Albuquerque tells of one Rastafari who would come every morning and reverently kiss the locks of Mortimo Planno. Henry up to the time of his death was thought to be part of the triune deity, as is Prince Emmanuel presently. The lack of central leadership should not allow us to gloss over the presence and role of leaders.

Inasmuch as changes in world views imply changes in the conception of man and his place in the world, are Africa-derived religions in the Caribbean any different from religious movements generally described as messianic, nativistic and millenarian? BurrIDGE, for example, reduces all religions to concern "with the discovery, identification, moral relevance and ordering of different kinds of power whether these manifest themselves as thunder, or lightning, atomic fission, untrammelled desire, arrogance, impulse, apparitions, visions, or persuasive words" (BurrIDGE 1969: 5). The logic of his argument would lead us to answer no, for although each situation may be specific, what he calls the "logic of social relations" may allow a generalised explanation. This needs to be examined.

NOTES

1. This paper was first presented at a Workshop at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, September 20-21, 1989.
2. According to Elkins (1986: 215) oils and powders are early twentieth-century additions from the influence of DeLaurence, which "significantly influenced the development of the new type of obeah in Jamaica" known as "Science".
3. Daryl Dance (1985: 5-8) collected no fewer than six, as late as the 1970s. In one, God had not made anyone Black, only straight haired people. As a set of them laughed at a monkey because his tail was on fire, he thrashed his tail around in the air. "The fire burned the hair [and made them] black". Similar stories may be found in the United States. They are taken with only half-serious intent. At the same time, like all jokes which are based on real people, they have a serious side.
4. It was also grossly misunderstood. Garvey did not campaign for all Blacks to return to Africa, but for Blacks to resettle, develop and unify the continent. With united Africa a major power in the world, Blacks could command the respect denied them by Whites. Were he leading an exodus, the

Black Star Shipping Line, linking Africa, North America and the Caribbean and Central America in a triangular trade would have made no sense.

5. Significantly, sometime after he returned from serving a ten year sentence, Henry told his congregation that the Emperor had told him on a visit to Africa that there was no need for Black people to leave Jamaica, because Africa was already in Jamaica (Chevannes 1976).

6. That experience was very formative. It first alerted me to the existence among the Rastafari of links of continuity with the historically earlier Revival religion. The insight gained was to become my central thesis. See my *Social and Ideological Origins of the Rastafari Movement in Jamaica* (1989), from which most of the examples of direct and indirect traces of Revivalism discussed in this paper are drawn.

7. Even the taboo against salt may derive from this prejudice against artificial things, since as a commodity bought in shops, salt is man-made and not "natural". Another possibility is the re-emergence of a retention from slavery. I am grateful to Dr Roland Littlewood for bringing this to my attention. See his *Pathology and Identity* (Littlewood 1987: 497-98). Alleyne (1988: 104) also mentions that avoidance of salt recurs among the Maroons of Jamaica and among Kumina cultists.

8. The burden of proof must be to show how it is possible for people to be bereft of culture. Even in rejecting the past they would have to do so in culturally meaningful ways, such as language and other symbolic ways.

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