Giulia Bonacci

Exodus! Heirs and Pioneers, Rastafari Return to Ethiopia. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2015. xxii + 482 pp. (Paper US\$ 40.00)

Exodus! Heirs and Pioneers, Rastafari Return to Ethiopia is an ethnographically and historically commanding epic tome chronicling the return of “Black peoples,” as well as non-Blacks, from the West, the Caribbean, and Jamaica in particular to Africa/Ethiopia, as fulfilment of a complexly woven narrative instantiating the prophesied redemption of the formerly enslaved African captives of Europe. The text brings animation and evidence to debunk the assertion that the idea of “repatriation” had receded into the imaginary as there seems to have been “none” taking place, or as the book presents, it seems to have missed the discernment of those observers rendered flatfooted in the context of viewing this merely from the West. In order to make her case Giulia Bonacci walks into the heart of Rastafari cosmogony, intersecting channels that position her text as an essential void filler, serving to connect the “Ethiopian Belt,” an axis running from Kingston into the diasporas of Jamaica (through Rastafari and reggae music) in the United Kingdom and North America, and ultimately repatriated in Ethiopia.

The book is divided into three parts of three chapters each. Part One re-threads hitherto disconnected expressions of return to Africa within the construct of a protracted staging and development of praxes, through conventions of Black Nationalism, Ethiopianism, Pan Africanism and then its hybrid expression Rastafari. But the narrative is clear that Jamaicans, though not the first to have articulated this resolve for returning to Africa, have probably been the key factor to have translated it most into a palpable reality. It places the adversity of African nationalism as a palatable postcolonial option among those who chose this path and what unfolds as a protracted interest in providing “proof” to the rest of the society of the validity of this path. Bonacci’s work thus focuses on the movements toward repatriation from the 1950s onward, primarily reconstructing the story of Shashemene, for which she argues that Jamaican Rastafari were on the spot at the end of the 1960s, by then the key custodians of the spirit and purpose of the Ethiopian World Federation, constructed as a diasporan medium for responding to Ethiopian challenges worldwide.

Having established the Rastafari contribution to the imaginary entitlement to returning to Ethiopia, Part Two takes on the intimate journeys of moving the discourse, individuals manoeuvring to extend this Ethiopian Belt to bridge the limitations of poverty and underfinancing in fulfilling the call to Africa. Beginning with various embarkations from Jamaica and other western ports, individuals and small groups, identified by name, tell their stories of how

their vision and faith guided them forward into the pioneering task of settling Shashemene. All accounts are presented with thick description (drawn from Jamaican patois and Amharic) of the conditions and mind-set of these mostly Rastafari from the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Ethiopian World Federation, Bobo Ashanti, and the Nyabingi; the emphasis is clear that regular folk (men, women, and children)—some discriminated and dis-enfranchised—managed to cross international borders to actualize their *visions* of return. These movements truly engaged strong organizational devotion and performance, as well as the confidence to undertake negotiating with various stakeholders. The result is that the Rastafari navigate a presence in Ethiopia with a sense of timing that affords the Movement a critical cultural location just before the political context of Ethiopia, and by extension the world, changed. Four decades of repatriation had given the Rastafari a recognizable Ethiopian commitment.

Part Three provides the reality of Zion for those who went against the grain, journeyed, and remained within Ethiopia. Taking full account of the difficult task of community building in the context of rural Ethiopia with the added challenge imposed by the deposition of the Imperial government and the reign of the Derg, *Exodus* seeks to explicate how communities were molded, overcoming various challenges (extortion and bureaucratic hurdles) afflicting *Faranj* (translated as white foreigners in general); issues of land security, residential permits, citizenship, and for some statelessness are only some of their tests. But they also infuse a new energy into this southern town having captured the attention of everyone, bringing distinct cultural and developmental contributions. *Exodus* is a bricolage of interconnected histories: black peoples' return to Africa, a history of Ethiopia through the lens of Rastafari imaginary, histories of the particular parochial nexuses—Kingston, Shashemene, Twelve Tribes of Israel, the Ethiopian World Federation, and courageous persons of limited means, particularly the Jamaican Rastafari—and actualizing of an integrated and universalistic narrative of redemption. The book is a well-timed multidimensional cultural study of the substance of centuries of Back to Africa hope, the evidence of which is not only a tribute to the pioneers and heirs but an essential account for all persons inspired by human equity, justice, and achievement over adversity.

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