

RASTAFARIAN REPATRIATES AND THE NEGOTIATION OF PLACE IN GHANA



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For Africans in the Diaspora, Pan-Africanism includes identification with Africa as a spiritual, cultural, and ancestral homeland. Back-to-Africa movements have drawn notions of repatriation to Africa as a unitary Motherland. Yet, repatriation also lays bare the challenges that inhere between envisioning and living Pan-Africanism. Ghana became a significant site for repatriation with the rise of Kwame Nkrumah. For most Ghanaians, the tenets of Pan-Africanism are remote principles that bear little relevance in daily life, in which kinship, linguistic, ethnic, and national affiliations are primary markers of identity. This presents challenges for repatriated Rastafarians from the Caribbean, United States, and Europe, who attempt to establish a home and a place within Ghanaian society while retaining Rastafarian ways of living and spiritual philosophies drawn from a Pan-African ethos. (Rastafarians, Ghana, African diaspora, repatriation)

The African diaspora is conventionally defined as beginning with the forcible transportation and enslavement of upwards of 12 million Africans into the Americas, from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. To this can be added migrations by peoples of African descent from the Caribbean and Latin America to the United States, Britain, and by economic and political refugees from African nations. The transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and neocolonialism have significantly channeled the volume and patterns of movement of people of African descent and rendered the African diaspora replete with themes of collective resistance and struggles for inclusion in response to institutionalized marginalization, discrimination, and social, economic, and political repression. In short, the context and conditions of the African diaspora over the centuries have fostered conditions for Pan-African movements.

These movements are a vicarious identification among Africans and people of African descent, impelling a moral commitment to support the social and political struggles of Africans and African descendants globally. Pan-African movements have ultimately invoked the notion of Africans and people of African descent as a collectivity sharing a putative racial kinship that transcends the boundaries of kinship, language, ethnic affiliation, region, and nation. But this is reckoned differently by Africans who were brought to the Diaspora via the Middle Passage and by Africans in Africa. For the descendants of transported Africans, Pan-Africanism is an identification with

an imagined Africa as a unitary, ancestral homeland. For African emigrants, however, transcendence takes a more truncated form since their links to the continent—by kinship, language, village, town, or region—remain intact.

Ghana has come to hold a particular geographic and symbolic significance in the construction and expression of a Pan-African ethos, as witnessed in African diasporic populations' attraction to this West African nation after it became the first sub-Saharan African country to attain political independence from European colonial rule in 1957. Among the more settled sojourners to Ghana have been Rastafarian repatriates, primarily from the Caribbean. These Rastas must establish a physical space to call home, and a social space within Ghanaian society while reclaiming Africa as their homeland or Motherland, all while engaging Rastafarian intellectual and spiritual philosophies that draw upon Pan-African themes. Doing so comes with challenges, some of which are shared with Ghanaians who have become Rastafarian converts. Particularly for repatriated Rastafarians, challenges stem from the myriad and complex ways that Rasta practices and philosophies interface with local cultural institutions in Ghanaian society. This article is a case study of Rastas in Ghana with a focus on how Rastafari philosophy and practice have represented points of both resonance and dissonance between repatriated Rastas and non-Rasta Ghanaians.

RESEARCH METHODS

Primary research data were obtained through participant-observation conducted in Ghana during May–July of 1999 and May–July of 2004 in two Rastafari communities of differing orthodoxies. Both communities were in towns in the eastern region of the country. One was a self-contained commune, here called Eastern Village, whose members were affiliated with an orthodox Rasta mansion (sect). They grew produce for their own consumption, raised goats, and generated revenue through the manufacture and sale of handicrafts. The other community was associated with a more secular Rasta mansion whose members operated a community center with a restaurant. Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 15 Jamaican Rasta repatriates residing in the two communities, and who had been living in Ghana from 3 to 13 years. Data were also obtained from attending “reasoning sessions” in Eastern Village. Reasoning sessions are group discussions where participants are free to contribute their insights on topics ranging from the philosophical to the mundane. Two non-Rasta Ghanaians living adjacent to Eastern Village and 30 non-Rasta Ghanaians from different parts of the country were given structured and semi-structured interviews. All interviewees have been given pseudonyms. Additional research data were gathered in

rural areas throughout the country and such urban locations as Accra, Cape Coast, Koforidua, and Kumasi.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY, DIASPORA, AND REPATRIATION

Many immigrant populations maintain contact with the “old country” and events “back home,” but defining “home” is made complex for populations that are “diasporic,” for whom time and place have rendered links to a putative homeland more difficult. This is especially so where diasporic movement has occurred through forced expulsion or other forms of involuntary exile. For such people, a homeland may be physically and culturally too distant to return to, or beyond any remembrance for descendants of the original exiles, albeit preserved in collective memory across generations as a site of loss or even trauma. For people of African descent in the Americas, the forced exile from Africa and across the Atlantic, wrought from the transatlantic slave trade, made a return to homelands and a recovery of languages, family, and descent groups that would reconnect exiled slaves and their descendants to people and places on the continent impossible.

With reunification with kith and kin and repatriation to natal lands unlikely, by the late eighteenth century the African descendants in the New World who had no direct memories of ancestral lands had, nonetheless, preserved narratives that provided the basis for collective memories of an abstract Africa (e.g., Adderley 2006). This was expressed in the formation of black churches in the Caribbean and the southern United States whose congregations mobilized around the place of Abyssinia, as Ethiopia was known in antiquity, in biblical scripture. Ethiopianism could well be considered a precursor to Pan-Africanism, involving a celebratory and prideful recognition of Ethiopia’s former stature as cited through scripture. As Ethiopia became conflated with Africa, Ethiopianism provided additional sparks to nascent repatriation movements to the continent (Barrett 1988; Edmonds 2003).

Studies of back-to-Africa movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggest that in the U.S. multiple motivations drove the advocacy, sponsorship, and participation of the groups that became involved in repatriation schemes. There were the cynically driven interests of racist separatists and the conflicted altruism of white and black philanthropists. There were the spiritually inspired utopian dreams as well as more grounded aspirations of black repatriates themselves. The most renowned and extensive repatriation scheme involved the American Colonization Society (ACS), a coterie of white lawmakers, abolitionists, and slaveholders who shepherded repatriation for thousands of freed Africans to Liberia during the nineteenth century.

RASTAFARIANS AND REPATRIATION

Rastafarians launched the most pronounced campaigns for repatriation to Africa in the diaspora in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While most nineteenth-century repatriation schemes for African descendants were less grassroots in orientation, down to the funding of transport and selection of repatriation sites, Rastafarians have crafted their own vision and pursuit of repatriation throughout the course of the Rastafarian movement's evolution. Inspired by and spawned from the mobilizing influences of Marcus Garvey, the Pan-African activist and founder of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the Rastafarian movement has been in perpetual motion with the revision of its master narratives since the movement's founding by such leaders as Leonard Howell and other followers of Garvey's nationalist vision. Howell and others drew from Garvey's celebration of the African continent, validation of blackness, and entrepreneurial vision for black self-sufficiency to confront the color caste system of colonial Jamaica that had marginalized the black peasantry economically and socially. By the 1930s, after Garvey's prophetic reference to the rise of an African King just prior to Haile Selassie's coronation in Ethiopia, Garvey's stature rose to that of a prophet while Emperor Selassie was deified as the living embodiment of Jah (God) by Howell's followers. Garvey's efforts to repatriate UNIA members in the United States to Africa in the 1920s through his Black Star ship line became a testament to the persistence of repatriation dreams for African descendants in the Diaspora. Drawing from the influences of an earlier Ethiopianism and the King James bible, an emergent Rastafarian movement rallied around Marcus Garvey's advocacy for repatriation to Africa (equated with the biblical Zion) and away from Babylon (i.e., Jamaica, the United States, and countries of the global North) as a form of salvation for people of African descent in the Diaspora (Barrett 1988; Chevannes 1998; Edmonds 2003).

The significance attached to Ghana as a site for repatriation by people of African descent in the Diaspora stems in large part from the Pan-African links fostered by twentieth-century scholars and leaders who also helped propel movements for the independence of African nations from colonial rule. Ghana assumed a mecca status after becoming the first sub-Saharan African country to attain independence in 1957. The invitation from Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, to people of African descent in the Diaspora and to other continental Africans to settle in Ghana was in tandem with his grooming by such Pan-African mentors as George Padmore and W. E. B. DuBois. Subsequent leaders would revive such invitations and promote other institutionalized expressions of Ghana's position as a homeland for African repatriates, including the establishment of the annual Panafest conventions and the 2000 Immigration Act with its Right to Abode clause granting people

of African descent land and other provisions for settlement (White 2007). Rastafarian repatriates were among the first to respond to Nkrumah's invitations in the 1960s. For this research, when asked why Ghana had been selected as a site for repatriation, several repatriated Rastas referred to Ghana as "the gateway to the continent."

Repatriated Rastas are self-described Africans who, much like the first freed repatriates of Liberia fleeing the racism of nineteenth-century United States, must negotiate a space and place of belonging and bridge the cleavages between themselves and indigenous Africans that were wrought by the Middle Passage. But unlike the freed settlers of Liberia, those who arrived on the wave of Pan-African movements of the mid-twentieth century have sought repatriation as a more concerted process of reunification with the people and land of Africa. Rastafarians have cultivated the theme of repatriation as a form of salvation and the means toward the rejuvenation of an African identity and a cultural revitalization. As Edmonds (2003:52) suggests, "Rastas are aiming at rediscovering their true selves and at creating a cultural identity that synchronizes with their sense of their African past."

PAN-AFRICAN, RASTA, AND GHANAIAN NATIONAL COLORS

The symbolic deployment of flags and their colors in national and social movements are widely recognized as powerful tools for expressing public avowal of and commitment to a collective identity. This has been no less the case for Pan-African movements which, secondary to Ethiopianism, made the green, gold, and red colors of Ethiopia's 1798 flag the iconic colors symbolizing Pan-African solidarity. After Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association adopted red, green, and black for its flag, red, gold, green, and black became the Pan-African colors. While there have been different interpretations of the meaning attached to each color, red has generally been identified as the shared putative descent and the blood that people of African descent have shed in struggles against oppression and in defense of their rights throughout the Diaspora and in Africa. Gold symbolizes the minerals and the riches of raw materials that constitute the wealth of the continent. Green represents the lushness of Africa's land in nourishing and sustaining its people. Finally, where included, black typically connotes African people or people of African descent. Taken together, the colors signify resistance against oppression, struggles for liberation and justice, and identification with and a spiritual connectedness to Africa, Africans, and people of African descent. Much like Ghanaian kente prints adopted by African Americans, the colors are displayed by those who identify with Afrocentricity.

Rastafari has harnessed and reconfigured Pan-African themes into a repertoire of motifs that are now identifiably Rastafari. These displays include wearing clothing, beanies, jewelry, and other adornments, and painting vehicles, kiosks, buildings, and other objects in the three or four Pan-African colors, often accompanied by images of the Lion of Judah, a biblical symbol taken from the original Ethiopian flag that signifies Haile Selassie as Jah incarnate, as well as symbolizing strength and survival in the face of oppression. The ubiquity of red, gold, green, and black in Rastafarian motifs is a synthesis of Rastafarian links with Ethiopia, the deification of Emperor Selassie, the Ethiopian flag, and more secular associations with a Pan-African ethos.

Red, gold, and green were also adopted by many African nations upon attaining independence from European colonizing nations, reflecting the influences of Pan-African ethos in shaping the political orientations of the national leaders of the continent. In addition to being the first sub-Saharan nation to attain political independence, Ghana was the first nation to adopt the tri-colors into its flag. Through this flag, Nkrumah was affirming his identification with an orientation that included embracing affiliations with fellow continental Africans as well as African descendants throughout the Diaspora.

For Rastas in Ghana, as elsewhere, the quotidian display of the tri- and quadric colors helps keep master narratives of Pan-African ethos alive, and is an ever present source of inspiration. Rastas interviewed at their kiosks, shelters, homes, and businesses awash in red, gold, green, and black banners made references to Africa as the “bread basket of the world,” the original “garden of Eden,” and a continent wealthy in mineral riches much coveted by the global North. Yet, this synchrony between Rasta colors and Ghana’s national colors is also a source of cultural resonance and dissonance.

The incorporation of the tri-colors into the daily fabric of Rasta lifeways is a source of ambivalence and befuddlement for many Ghanaians. They view the tri-colors less through a lens of expressive Pan-African solidarity and more through an immediate recognition as the Ghanaian national colors and as those of several other African nations. Several non-Rasta Ghanaians interviewed struggled to comprehend Rastas’ conspicuous display of the colors, with some even regarding it as irreverent. Both Ghanaian and repatriated Rastas who display the colors in their dress or on vehicles barely receive passing glances in Ghana’s metropolitan areas. But some urban Ghanaians suggested that these behaviors challenged Ghanaian sensibilities about the propriety of such displays, which they suggested should be confined to commemorative events surrounding independence day or for expressing the national fervor and pride during international soccer tournaments. Still, while

the Rastafarian use of national colors on physical objects or draped on the person as part of daily adornment are considered, as one Ghanaian put it, “very strange” or bordering on the fanatical, the Rasta deployment of the colors registered minimal interest among Ghanaians beyond an exotic curiosity.

DREADLOCKS

More readily identifiable and a distinguishing physical feature of Rastas is locked hair. Numbers 6:5 is often referenced by Rastas as providing biblical support for wearing locked hair, and was cited by memory by at least two Rasta interviewees: “All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head, until the days be fulfilled, in which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.” While such biblical references suggest an antiquity of locks in the movement, Chevannes (1998) contends that locked hair became identified with Rastafari in the 1950s, roughly two decades into the movement’s founding. The origins of locks have been variously explained, including their initial adoption by members modeling their hair after the Ethiopian soldiers fighting against Italian imperialism (Chevannes 1998).

Locked hair relates to a broader Rasta emphasis on behaviors that preserve or restrict the adulteration of Jah’s creation. Foods consumed as close to their natural state as possible and a vegetable-based diet with restrictions or prohibitions on eating meat are the Rastafarian dietary prescriptions known as *ital* food, which two Ghanaian interviewees, drawing from Ghanaian societal standards that identify high meat consumption with prestige, derisively referred to as Rastas “eating like sheep and goats.” For Rastafari, the leap is none too far between restricting the consumption of foods that alter Jah’s bounty and restricting the treatment of hair that alters it from its natural state. Ideally, and for the most orthodox of Rasta mansions, no combs should be used so that the hair locks properly while for most Rastas the use of chemical relaxers and other products that alter the curled texture of the hair is shunned. This, in turn, resonates with the black aesthetic for “naturals” and cornrows that developed in the United States by the late 1960s in conjunction with black pride and Afro-centric movements. Much like these movements and others with Pan-African influences, the foundations of Rastafarian philosophy identify and confront social and structural practices that disparage the physical features of Africans, as well as their institutions and history. Hence, the validation of “blackness” and embracing the natural features of African people has been a core feature of Rastafari from its inception.

In Ghanaian society, locked hair has spiritual and social associations. This includes the coif locally known as *mpesempese*, which is a derivative of the

Akan translation meaning “I don’t like it, I don’t like it” (*me mpesaa, me mpesaa*). The name of the hairstyle reflects an emphatic and profound disdain for a coiffure deemed lacking in any aesthetic. In adults, mpesempese is identified with fetish priests. In children, it is worn by those born to parents who sought the spiritual assistance of a fetish priest for a successful conception and birth after miscarriages or infant deaths. An mpesempese coiffure on a child, who is regarded as the same spirit previously lost to the parents, renders the child unattractive to a spirit world that might otherwise avail itself of the child again.

That locked hair signals an unattractive presentation and a lack of grooming to many Ghanaians is nowhere more apparent than in that of the matted hair of mentally ill persons released from psychiatric hospitals or abandoned by families, living and sleeping in Ghana’s city streets. For many Ghanaians, the tattered, scanty clothing, matted hair, and disheveled appearance and regular occupancy of public spaces by the mentally ill signals their lack of care for themselves or care from others, marking their position on the extreme margins of society. This association between locked, matted hair and madness is reflected in the statement of one Ghanaian who pointed out that Rastas with locked hair are spared being labeled as “mad men” on sight by virtue of their beanies and clothing in Rasta colors. But the connections between locks, Rastas, mad men, and even fetish priests suggest a complex assessment of males with locked hair as a presence beyond the bounds of respectable society. Locked hair is a sign of social disorder in Ghanaian society. Fetish priests, for example, are increasingly condemned as harbingers of paganism and heathenism by the evangelical churches in Ghana. Individuals with locked hair face discrimination finding employment, which ensures a persistent marginalization and stigmatization of locked hair.

Repatriate Ras Ronnie noted that some Rastas have shorn their locks and some others have never grown locks because of “the response.” While sympathetic towards those who chose such actions to avoid stigmatization, he suggested that wearing the locks demonstrated one’s commitment as an authentic Rasta. As he put it, “to wear the locks, you have to be a real Rasta. You have to be able to defend Rastafari because you know you will get the response. So those who wear the dreads are real Rastas.”

Rastas in Ghana must grapple with the stigmatization of wearing locks that extends to their children with locked hair, who face teasing and ostracism from their Ghanaian peers, along with official proscriptions against locked hair in most schools. One report chronicling the conditions of members of the Rastafarian Ethiopian World Congress (EWF) in Ghana made references to struggles with the country’s school system, particularly in achieving recognition for Rastafarian children to wear locks in public schools, which

require both male and female students to wear closely cropped hair (Imara 2007).

CANNABIS AS SACRAMENT

Locked hair and *ganja* (cannabis, marijuana) present a stereotyped characterization of Rastafari among non-Rastas, for whom the use of cannabis is dismissed as a recreational pursuit under the cover of a pseudo-religious practice and a mark of Rasta indolence and indulgence. Rastas, for their part, emphasize the spiritual and medicinal significance of marijuana as a gift from Jah. Some Rastas smoke alone, but smoking in groups as a communal act is standard practice. As a sacrament, smoking marijuana brings on a state of elevated consciousness and an expansion of spiritual awareness that facilitates the communal truth-seeking associated with reasoning sessions. While marijuana use is widespread, its smoking is not universally practiced among Rastafarians. Rastas from Jamaica also use *ganja* for medicinal purposes in healing tinctures and elixirs for treating many illnesses or disorders.

In Ghana, there are no provisions that permit medicinal or other uses of *ganja*. Cannabis use is identified with smoking marijuana and is stigmatized as deviant. The cultivation, possession, use, and distribution of cannabis are illegal in Ghana, with maximum sentences of up to ten years imprisonment. Rastas in Ghana were resolute in emphasizing cannabis as distinct from heroin, cocaine, tobacco, and alcohol, among other controlled substances that they prohibit and counsel Ghanaian youth to avoid, and draw attention to marijuana's spiritual and healing properties. But in Ghana, marijuana's classification as an illicit drug has made the case for its health-promoting or even relatively benign properties difficult. The associations between mental illness and marijuana use are widely held in Ghana. Several Ghanaians interviewed suggested that smoking marijuana had made or could render individuals mentally ill. There is also a popular notion that the variety of marijuana grown in Ghana is much coveted within and outside the country for its potency, fueling a lucrative industry for cultivators and distributors. Ras Ronnie concurred that cannabis in Ghana is markedly more potent than that grown in Jamaica, stating that Ghana's *ganja* could "make people go mad" if used improperly or to excess.

A negative regard for marijuana in Ghanaian society has myriad implications for Rastas. Because the association of marijuana with Rastas is pervasive, its moniker in Ghana is "Rastafarian wee[d]." A purported increase in marijuana use among Ghanaian youth is blamed on the influence of Rastas in the country. Moreover, the associations between Rastas and marijuana and marijuana as a contributing factor in mental illness accentuate the associations

between Rastafarians and madness relayed by the identification of locked and matted hair with mentally ill persons living on the streets.

RASTA REBELLION

Many Rastas lament the appropriation of locked hair by non-Rastas, since locks and Rastas are conflated in popular wisdom. As locked hair and Rastas are used interchangeably in ways that reduce being a Rasta to a hairstyle, it erases the significance of following the tenets of Rasta philosophy and lifeways to designate a real Rasta as opposed to a dreadlocked “Rasta imposta” (Hepner 1998) or a “wolf,” as two Rasta repatriates referred to such persons. Moreover, locked hair is donned by some Ghanaian youth who seek to embrace a “bad” image. Several Ghanaians noted that one means for youth to “rebel” or willfully “act out” against their families is to “smoke wee,” and for added measure, to take on locked hair and assume “Rasta” as a nickname. These youths are distinguished from Ghanaians who are converted Rastafarians.

Elsewhere in Africa, “Rasta” and dreadlocks together mark insurgency. Hence, out of the genocidal wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda emerged the Rwanda rebels. A dreadlocked coiffed group blamed for terrorizing civilians, the Rwandan rebels became widely referenced as the “Rasta rebels” (Rafti 2006). Hence, “Rasta” has become a code for rebellion, whether rebellion constitutes acting out against, or in defense of, the status quo. In any case, Rastas lament the co-optation and defamation brought on by “Rasta impostas.”

Mass media have perpetuated and perhaps even fostered a criminal image of a Rasta brand with sensationalist crime stories that make references to suspects as “Rastas” or “Rastafarians” to so designate males with locked hair. The process is magnified when the Rasta moniker is headlined in print and electronic media news reports with such titles as “Court Remands Rastafarian for Rape,” “Rasta Grabbed with Human Head,” and “Rastaman Runs Amok.”¹ While such reports do not verify the suspects as Rastafarians, they reinforce associations between Rastas, crime, deviance, and madness. Additionally, there are cases where individuals committing crimes have deliberately employed a Rasta cover, as when a man “disguised as a Rastafarian” was captured with two imported firearms that were to be used to commit a robbery. That a Rasta “disguise” is used to commit crimes underscores the notion that in some quarters of Ghanaian society, Rastas are a transgressive element whose presence taps expressions of rebellion and a challenge to the social order. Hence, widely held stereotypes of Rastas culminate in the attribution of a Rasta label to rebels without a progressive cause.

KWAME NKRUMAH

In Ghana's Eastern region stands a concrete wall of vibrant red, gold, and green bands that marks a cultural and community outreach center staffed by Rasta repatriates from Jamaica servicing a village through provisions of such goods and services as ita food and computer classes. Lining the inside wall is a mural of Haile Selassie, Marcus Garvey, and Kwame Nkrumah. The regard for Haile Selassie as Jah incarnate is a defining feature of the Rastafari movement, as is the esteem of Marcus Garvey. On the one hand, such imagery, which places Haile Selassie, as well as Marcus Garvey, on par with Kwame Nkrumah, connotes a greater degree of secularization among the Twelve Tribes Rasta mansion to which members of this outreach center belong. On the other hand, it reveals the stature of Kwame Nkrumah as culture hero within the contemporary Rastafarian movement. Many Rasta repatriates and people of African descent in the Diaspora regard Nkrumah as having shepherded or facilitated the liberation of much of the African continent from colonial rule and being responsible for making Ghana an epicenter of Pan-Africanism. Several interviewed repatriated Rastas mentioned Nkrumah as one of the reasons for selecting Ghana as a site for repatriation. In the words of Ras James, "President Nkrumah was the first to reach out to his African brothers and sisters outside of Ghana."

The founding of Rastafari predates Nkrumah's rise to prominence, but his incorporation into the ménage and into Rasta iconography reflects the adaptations and transformations of the Rastafarian movement over time. The wave of popularity that President Nkrumah rode in the heady years leading up to and immediately following Ghana's political independence, and as he embarked on development schemes in education and industry, catapulted him to virtual deified status. Yet, in the decades since his political ouster, exile, and subsequent death, the Ghanaian citizenry has made Nkrumah's legacy the subject of ongoing revision and debate. His legacy of Pan-Africanist affiliations and vision is rarely promoted in contemporary Ghana and so does not resonate in the consciousness of most Ghanaians. Moreover, the reverential and heroic stature that Rastas and Pan-Africanists accord Nkrumah is regarded as naïve and uninformed by many Ghanaians. Middleton (2006) notes that such mystification extends to Haile Selassie, whose divinity is a point of contention between Ghanaian Rastas and Rastas originating from abroad. Some Ghanaian Rastas contend that they are in a better position to proffer a grounded assessment of African political leaders and the human foibles that they share with political leaders everywhere.

ANTI-CAPITALISTS IN A "RAT RACE"

Rastafarians of all orthodoxies engage in a pointed critique of capitalism, neoliberalism, and the attendant forms of institutionalized oppression that such systems have wrought. In forums ranging from reasoning sessions to reggae music, Rastas expose capitalism's forms of oppression, particularly as they pertain to Africa, Africans, and people of African descent. Global consumption patterns of gold, diamonds, and the electronics that depend on minerals extracted from African lands by multinational corporations are identified as inextricably wedded to the sacrifices made in African lives. Indeed, many Rastas cite the continuity between the transatlantic slave trade and current patterns of resource extraction that have taken wealth from Africa to support technological developments in the global North.

As Rastas make historical connections between the commoditization of the labor and lives of Africans on plantations during slavery and through the exploitative mining of minerals and raw materials from Africa, many also rebuff the consumerist, acquisitive, materialistic trappings of Babylon described as driving African exploitation. Rastas aver that Jah's children are stewards of the land and regard extraction for purposes of accumulating wealth as a misuse of Jah's creation. While some members of the EWF, who lead a more agrarian existence than other Rasta mansions, criticized Rasta musicians for engaging reggae music as a way of preaching and a means of livelihood, even Rasta musicians are impelled to distribute rather than accumulate the profits from their music.

Repatriated Rastas in Ghana and elsewhere lead lifeways that are anti-consumerist, which contrasts markedly with the acquisitive ethos in contemporary Ghana, where conspicuous consumption and a luxuriant lifestyle have become symbols of high status and a means to display the measure of one's success. But if Rastas are known in Ghanaian society for repudiating the competitive "rat race" of capitalist society and shunning conspicuous consumption, this generates a set of interpretations and assessments as Ghanaians apply these measures to repatriated and Ghanaian Rastas.

Several interviewees indicated that Rasta repatriates and Ghanaian Rastas in the Accra-Tema area and the Cape Coast, where Rastas reside in the largest numbers, stand out amidst the frantic bustle of Ghanaian merchants and hawkers along the main streets and market areas. Here, Rastas, owning few possessions, selling their wares while playing music, are perceived as leading lives of carefree leisure and as lacking the drive for economic success. Indeed, in Ghana, Rasta engagement of a rustic life and dismissal of the trappings of material success are often equated with "laziness." The adaptations of repatriated Rastafarians in Ghana illustrate areas of both interstitial accommodation as well as potential conflict. Many pursue a subsistence existence and most

have not attempted to establish market niches as retailers or enter commercial venues that would place them in competition with Ghanaians. For now, repatriated Rastas present more of a curiosity than an economic threat.

THE POINT OF A RETURN

After proposing a confederation of African nations and helping to found the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the early 1960s, Kwame Nkrumah and other leaders of newly independent African nations invited Africans of the diaspora to return to participate in Pan-African projects promoting political autonomy and economic self-sufficiency. The African Union (AU) has rekindled the call to people of African descent in the Diaspora to contribute to Africa's development through cultural, social, and economic exchange with continental Africans, to invest in development through remittances, business ventures, and by providing skills and services. There are implied parallels between the loss to the continent of 12 million Africans through the transatlantic slave trade and the loss of skilled African professionals, such as nurses and physicians, in the "brain drain" that characterizes contemporary waves of African immigration to Europe and North America. Indeed, many Ghanaians interviewed emphasized that for Ghanaians, the ultimate dream is to travel abroad to seek greener economic pastures anywhere, preferably in the global North, and ideally in the United States. The quest for immigration involves inventing lands overseas as "promised lands" of limitless economic opportunity and opulence. The desire to emigrate has made the market for visas lucrative for those who can make convincing claims to secure them. For example, Ghanaians mentioned church pastors known to pray for visas for congregants in exchange for generous "donations."

Meanwhile, repatriated Rastas have not found that Ghanaians regard their arrival in Ghana as long-lost relatives who have returned home. That Rastas from abroad have opted to leave lands of plenty for Ghana, whether or not conceptualized as a "return," is enigmatic for many Ghanaians. Those Ghanaian nationals who have resided overseas ("been-tos") are expected to return bearing gifts for kinfolk, visiting only as long as it takes to dispense the requisite monies and material goods before returning overseas. There is no expectation that they will return to live in Ghana.

Given the meanings that Rasta repatriates have attached to repatriation and to Africa as the real promised land, the Ghanaian longing and quest for emigration to Babylon has generated vituperative responses from Rastas. As Ras Rod stated:

All the wars the white man helped create in Africa so they could steal resources ... [and] take the diamonds, gold, minerals. The [African] people are not conscious. They don't know the

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wealth they have. Africa is the richest continent in the world. I-an-I got gold, diamonds, oil. Everything is here and more of it than anywhere else. What are they doin’? Sellin’ diamonds for firearms! That’s what happened in Liberia. Africa is the richest continent in the world. So why it not developed? The richest continent but still poor. Why the people are poor? From they own ways. The people of Ethiopia gave they own leader to Mussolini. They had a king, a black king, Emperor Haile Selassie, and they gave him to Mussolini. That what colonial propaganda can do.

From Ras Rod’s perspective, Ghanaians’ quest to leave for Babylon, abandoning Zion for fortunes abroad, reflects a lack of awareness of “the wealth they have” and leaves the continent vulnerable to further exploitation.

It is instructive here to consider curious parallels with Rasta repatriates of Shashamene Ethiopia, whose children “have no reason to think of the West as Babylon [and] have no knowledge of the West and its moral degradation since they did not live there” (Minda 2004:38). For them, “Ethiopia is not the ‘Promised Land’ [but] rather, the place where they were born like any other Ethiopian [and hence] like most Ethiopian youngsters ... aspire to immigrate to the West because they do not see a promising future in Ethiopia. It is easier for them to think of the West, rather than Ethiopia, as ‘the land that flows with milk and honey’” (Minda 2004:38–39).

In Ghana, most youth are only vaguely, if at all, aware of the history of the African diaspora. Neither the schools nor accessible educational resources provide young people or adults with the history of the transatlantic slave trade and a historical context to explain the presence of people of African descent in the Americas. Discussions with junior high-school students revealed that most had dealt with the quandary of explaining “black Americans” in the United States by presuming that they were second or even first generation immigrants from African countries. There was no familiarity with a slave narrative or struggles for civil rights for African peoples, which explains in part why repatriated Rastas have not been received by most Ghanaians as long lost brothers and sisters of the diaspora. Black oppression is understood largely in the abstract, and Rasta resistance is often dubbed “anti-white,” a charge often extended to Rastas more generally. As Dovlo (2002) argues,

The political message of reggae in Ghanaian popular culture does not hold attraction simply because it is considered anti-white. Most Ghanaians identify with reggae because its lyrics address some of the political and economic problems the people face. These problems are normally blamed on the political leadership of the country rather than Europeans. (Dovlo 2002:6)

The “anti-white” charge against reggae music and Rastafarians stems from the ways that critiques of Babylon as a historical oppressor of African people are wedded to an exaltation of Africa, African peoples, and African cultures. Ras Rod asserted that Rastafarians resist oppression in a spirit of “peace an’ love”

above all since “I-an-I love everyone.” The defining symbols and master narratives of Rastafari are anti-colonial, and against racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and all other “isms” that Rastas refer to as “downpression.”

Minda’s (2004) study suggests that even exposure to secondary sources on the ills of Babylon will not stem the desire for emigration. Non-Ghanaian Rastas such as Ras Rod seem cognizant of this and say their position is not only to reveal the tribulations of life in Europe and the United States but to discourage emigration from Africa through assisting with the development of schools, health clinics, and other infrastructure, and through stressing the continent’s splendor. Moreover, the vested interests of global capitalism, which now includes China, is ultimately based on extracting and appropriating resources from the continent to fuel the exploitative engines of Babylon. Because contemporary forms of extraction have met with little or no resistance, Ras Rod noted that promoting recognition of the ills of Babylon and the wealth of Africa is critical for defending and building the continent. Enlisting schools in the process is key to providing the skills that will allow Africans to meet countries of the global North on a more level playing field.

Most Rasta repatriates stressed Africa’s spiritual roots as the original Eden. From a more secular, political standpoint, and in line with a Pan-African ethos, Rastas referred to national boundaries as a pernicious creation of Babylonian agents to create mischief on the continent, fomenting warfare between nations, and civil and ethnic strife within nations. These divide-and-rule tactics were cited as having provided a cover for resource extraction from the continent. Several Rasta repatriates made reference to Africa as unitary in its divine creation by Jah, contrastive with the boundaries of nation-states as “man-made” creations and, hence, invalid.

CONCLUSION

In an earlier study of repatriation, Jenkins (1975) profiles the experiences of people of African descent from various parts of the Americas as expatriates, as spouses of African continentals, as students and entrepreneurs, who settle in West African countries, principally Ghana. About them, Jenkins offered a rather gloomy assessment:

It seemed to me that the more consciously a person felt himself to have been an African who had lost his way for a few years and had now returned intact to the homeland the more likely he was to become disillusioned and to fail. It is most unlikely that any will assimilate. Very nearly complete adjustment gives the illusion of assimilation, and in practice amounts to much the same thing. Some parents view with equanimity the fact that only their children or grandchildren would ever be truly African; others felt resentment and frustration at this. As ever, much depended on the expectations. (Jenkins 1975:51)

By these accounts and others (e.g., Hartman 2007), it seems that diasporic Africans finding a place of belonging on the continent is perpetually wrought with insurmountable unmet expectations and cultural dissonance. As Rasta Rod stated:

The reception was not proper. It was not proper at all. Most not happy to see us comin'. Most don't see us like brothers and sisters. They see us as foreigners. They call us ... "oburoni" [foreigner]. Then they think we come to take something away from them. But we come back to take what was already ours.

Yet, Rasta Rod and other repatriates were actively negotiating a place in Ghanaian society, notwithstanding areas of cultural dissonance. For these repatriates, the dissonance paled in the face of a life in Babylon that had become untenable. Minda (2004) argues that the quest for repatriation to Africa is of such consuming importance to Rastas that the achievement of repatriation renders the further existence of Rasta philosophy and life defunct. As he states, "Rastafari ... is a culture against another culture. It sprang up in opposition to the established norm of society and it does not stand for long in the absence of its enemy" (Minda 2004:38). Further,

It seems that Rastafari cannot survive for long after repatriation—because Rastafari is a goal-centered movement and its presence is not required once it achieves its goal. Its motto is "leave Babylon and inherit Zion." Once the believers left Babylon and inherited Zion, there was no extra sermon to preach; hence, this has to be the end of the congregation. (Minda 2004:38)

Presuming an end to Rastafari once Rastas reach Africa elides the flexibility and expansion that has characterized the movement since its inception more than eight decades ago. The notion that Rastafari is empty of content beyond a resistance anchored by dead-end utopian dreams of repatriation, and that it collapses or deflates once the dream of repatriation is fulfilled, belies the relevance of Rastafarian philosophy and ways of living in providing a basis for conceptualizing and mobilizing emancipating projects. Many Rastas interviewed identified forms of oppression and exploitation in operation that warranted constant vigilance.

From the perspective of several Rasta repatriates, neo-colonialism in Africa persists, to which Rasta lifeways and philosophy provide effective and informed terms of confrontation and engagement. Hence, if Ghanaian Rastas draw from their firsthand experiences to demystify African leaders, Rastas from the Caribbean, North America, and Europe bring news that demystifies the global North as lands of riches and opportunity.

Ras Bob emphasized that one of the goals of his outreach center is to emphasize the magnificence of Africa and its potential in order to obviate a

desire for Ghanaians to emigrate from the country or the continent. Yet, although Ras Bob says that Rastas “come like missionaries,” they differ markedly from the freed black settlers and black and white evangelicals who arrived in Liberia from the United States in the nineteenth century. Very few freed settlers of early Liberia reckoned a return to Africa as a repatriation and reunification with African people. Few of those settlers anticipated a relationship or identification with any indigenous African groups. Non-Ghanaian Rastas identify themselves as African people who have returned home, reuniting with the people and the land. Repatriated Rastas, Ghanaian Rastas, and non-Rasta Ghanaians are in the process of working through points of cultural dissonance in their interaction. Repatriated Rastas, in particular, pursue projects of revitalization which involve a Pan-African orientation toward, and identification with, Africa as the Motherland and Africans as “brethren and sistren.”

NOTE

1. See, for example, print media such as Ghana’s *Daily Graphic* and *Mirror* newspapers and electronic media such as the *Ghana News Agency* and *Ghana Review International*, which cavalierly make references to “Rastas” in crime reports.

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