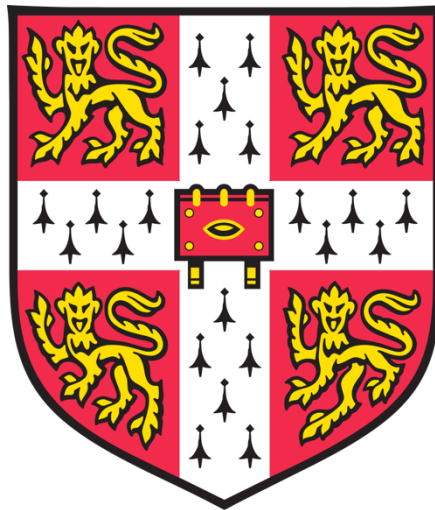


Stepping in Iration: Rastafari Ital Livivity, Ecologies and Ecotheologies in Saint Lucia/Iyanola

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Faculty of Divinity Degree Committee.

Abstract: Stepping in Iration: Rastafari Ital Livity, Ecologies and Ecotheologies in Saint Lucia/Iyanola – Joseph Powell

This dissertation represents an exploration of the ecologies and ecotheologies present within the philosophical outlooks of the Rastafari spiritual movement in St Lucia/Iyanola. Primarily, this research seeks to elucidate “Ital Livity”, a bricolage of Rastafari philosophical and cosmological concepts, and to place it in contemporary dialogue taking place in ecological and ecotheological scholarship. This seeks to generate both awareness of an under researched spiritual group and to further novel connections that might exist between new conversation partners. “Ital Livity” exists as an idealisation of, and a yearning towards, the greenest and most natural form of all in creation - human, non-human, earth, spirit. “Livity” itself serves as a broad categorisation for an individual’s own spiritual outlook, a “lived” spirituality in contrast to one that exists purely conceptually. “Ital” serves an Iyeric ‘I’ form of the word vital to confer a sense of the most essential and most organic form. The two together then convey a sense of the most ‘vital’ and the most organic philosophical outlook, one which valorises and divinises the natural world, humanity, non-humanity, the Almighty, feelings, sounds and vibrations, in their most natural form. This dissertation seeks to explore the development of this rubric, as well as its manifestation in the present. In doing so I attest, as others have, that the development of Rastafari philosophy is intimately connected to the history of the movement as emergent from a context defined by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its colonial aftermath, as well as the spiritual milieu present in Jamaica in the form Jamaican folk cosmology and Christian inspired religious groups. From this, this dissertation argues that in regards to Ital Livity three core strands emerge which serve to define it in the present, a yearning for the green and organic, a sense of a common divinity and a rejection of death. These core elements are then explored and examined through ethnographic data gathered during fieldwork, crudely divided into chapters exploring the spiritual and the ethereal, the more practical, physical manifestations, and lastly the spiritual sources which inform them. The point reached through all of this allows for an ending which seeks to establish Rastafari Ital Livity as a vibrant and dynamic conversation partner for groups and thinkers operating in ecological and ecotheological spaces, suggesting ultimately that a plurality of voices is fundamentally necessary in generating both sensitivity towards divergent human communities as well as in heightening the possibility of novel ideas and approaches towards the various environmental crises faced today.

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Glossary

Almighty – also Jah, the ultimate spiritual divine authority

Babylon – a spiritual and temporal force epitomising the most wicked and evil

Ganja – cannabis

His Imperial Majesty/H.I.M – Haile Selassie, central spiritual authority

Holy herb – cannabis, ganja

Ini – Iyaric, a pronoun used both in place of the first person “I”, to convey unity with The Almighty (as each becomes one of the two “I’s”), as well as a plural pronoun in place of “we” or “us” to highlight unity with those in reference.

Iration – Iyaric word meaning ‘creation’, a phrasing which indicates the created universe in its most fundamental form inseparable from the Almighty.

Irie – good, pleasing

Irit –Iyaric, spirit

Ital – Iyaric, vital. A sense of that in its most essential and organic form

Ivinity – Iyaric, divinity

Iyaric – distinctive Rastafari dialect. Most commonly the first sound of an English word is replaced with “I” both to emphasise the harmony between the speaker and the subject whilst also providing a transcendental link to The Almighty through connection with the pre-regnal of Haile Selassie, Rastafari

Iwah – Literally hour, conceptually in this time or current state of being.

Livity – one's spiritual/philosophical outlook

Upful – good, positive

Vibrations – a communicative form of energy which serves to connect all within Iration

Zion – a spiritual and temporal force epitomising the most good and righteous

Abbreviations

CARICOM – The Caribbean Community

CRO – The Caribbean Rastafari Organisation

H.I.M – His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie

KJV – King James Version of the Bible

ICAR – Iyanola Council for the Advancement of Rastafari

NRSVA – New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised – Bible

SLP - St Lucia Labour Party

UWP – United Workers Party, St Lucia

Introduction

The Rastafari movement stands as one of the most instantly recognisable and socially influential spiritual groups of the last century. Having successfully crossed into the realm of popular culture with the worldwide popularity of reggae music and its suffusion with Rastafari symbols and motifs, the movement has been able to achieve a level of recognition from the global public that other spiritual groups of their weight in numbers have not. Contemporary Rastafari influence can be seen in music, fashion¹, art², food and the culinary arts, ethical dietary practice³, ethical consumption more broadly⁴, and in spirituality. Within a Caribbean context from which the movement springs forth, this influence is even more pronounced. Cultural motifs of the region, particularly in Jamaica, are visibly Rastafari-tinged⁵, and the movement and the individuals within it often occupy a place of influence and authority amongst fellow citizens, particularly in matters of personal health⁶.

However, knowledge of the groups' practices and beliefs beyond reggae, the veneration of ganja (cannabis) and recognition of the divinity of His Majesty Haile Selassie remains limited. This is the case in a broad public sense, within universities, and further within the theology and religious studies departments from which this research emanates. Despite the groups' prominence on the world stage, there are currently no university theology departments in the UK offering regular teaching or established research programmes on the Rastafari movement. Additionally, whilst universities in the USA and the Caribbean have made significant contributions to Rastafari academia, these are still outweighed by the movements impact. Whilst the pioneering foundations laid by Barry Chevannes, Jake Homiak, Carole Yawney and Joseph Owens have been reinforced by those including Jahlani Niaah, Michael Barnett, Daive Dunkley and Robbie Shilliam amongst others, these examples stand as exceptions and outliers in their respective disciplines. These scholars represent an assertive push at the ontological boundaries of their respective fields rather than being

¹ Edmonds *Outcasts* 3

² See Middleton *Rastafari*

³ Powell *Ital Hermeneutics* 32-33

⁴ See Jaffe *Ital Chic*

⁵ Perhaps this is most visible through the centrality of Rastafari inspired reggae music within tourism marketing in the region. Indeed, the Director of Tourism for the Jamaican Tourist Board Donovan White has described this use as relating to the "outsized demand of Jamaica's music" globally. See Country Reports, *Jamaica's Tourism*

⁶ Powell *Plandemic Iwah* 9-11

reflective of larger shifts towards the exploration of Rastafari⁷. Further, efforts to study the movement theologically have been very limited⁸. All of this belies a movement with immense cultural significance and influence in its native context of the Caribbean and beyond. This lack of academic awareness and survey simultaneously allows, and is indeed facilitated by, a global and local economic and cultural context in which Rastafari spirituality is regularly commodified and separated from the community itself for the commercial gain of others. Communities are often disempowered to respond, and consumers are invariably unaware of the context that drives this separation⁹. Such commodification also threatens to essentialise a movement which is deeply heterogenous and anti-hierarchical, itself often further complicating an informed understanding of the movement.

Such a paucity of awareness and research is no less the case in regard to Rastafari ecologies and ecotheologies¹⁰. The Ital Livity that lies at the heart of these outlooks may be peripherally familiar to some in the context of Ital restaurants and the Rastafari dishes that are served from them. Awareness of this manifestation is however rarely matched by an awareness of its core, and the practical, spiritual and theological dimensions within it. Indeed, as Dutch anthropologist Rivke Jaffe notes, in the context of Rastafari cultural influence and its appropriation, Ital Livity exists as “one of the less studied but central tenets”¹¹ of the movement¹². Exploration and elucidation of this “central tenet” is then a task of significance for academic and non-academic audiences.

The term Ital Livity comprises a collection of Rastafari philosophical and cosmological concepts which ground an idealisation of, and a yearning towards, the greenest and most natural form of an individual, the earth and of wider creation. “Livity” itself serves as a broad categorisation for an individual’s spiritual outlook, a “lived” spirituality in contrast to one

⁷ Further layers exist within this, with communities in the UK and Jamaica receiving far greater focus than those in St Lucia where this research focuses.

⁸ Joseph Owen’s formative *Dread* approaches the movement from the background of a Catholic theologian, and offers a chapter on Rastafari conceptualisation of nature. Jack Johnson-Hills’ *I-Sight* and William David Spencer’s *Dread Jesus* also offer efforts.

⁹ Jaffe *Ital Chic* 41-45

¹⁰ My use of ecotheology here and throughout stands in contrast as an ‘etic’, ‘outsiders’ term against the ‘emic’ Ital Livity used by Rastafari ‘insiders’. See Young, *On Insiders* for further exploration.

¹¹ Throughout this dissertation speech marks are used to denote the words of scholars and participants whilst inverted commas are my own emphases.

¹² Jaffe *Ital Chic* 32

that exists purely conceptually. “Ital” serves as an Iyaric¹³ “I” form of the word vital to confer a sense of the most essential and most organic form. The two together then convey a sense of the most “vital” and the most organic philosophical outlook, one which valorises and divinises the natural world, humanity, non-humanity, the Almighty, feelings, sounds and vibrations, in their most natural form. It is this outlook and this formulation that serves to define Rastafari ecological and ecotheological manifestations, and which will form the crux of this dissertation.

Iyaric and Rastafari modes of speech more broadly do not however merely serve to reference things in the world and to evoke broader concepts behind them. As well as grounding an ontological connection with the broader cosmos, these forms of speech serve to distinguish ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. To demarcate a boundary between those on the inside who attest to and are to varying degrees purified by a Rastafari worldview, and those who do not. A dichotomous separation that shall be seen frequent in this dissertation between the righteous, of Zion, and of the corrupted, of Babylon. This dual purpose renders Rastafari speech forms of particular importance in gaining a sense of both individualised and broader group worldviews present within the movement.

This research then, as the title indicates, seeks to explore, chart and contrast Rastafari Ital Livivity and the ecologies and ecotheologies within it, utilising theological and anthropological research methods to inform it. Rastafari invariably view their interactions with the earth, its inhabitants and all within/beyond it with great intimacy, and from this construct a deeply spiritual and emotive ethic surrounding it. As with many Rastafari tenets, this is demonstrated no more clearly than in dialect, as creation becomes “Iration”, another Iyaric phrasing which sees the placement of oneself at the centre of the created world in its most fundamental form, inseparable from the Almighty and imbued with a sense of the accountability and relational attachment this necessarily entails. In this, and further into this study, we are able to see Rastafari speech functioning at a level beyond merely describing that around but actively constructing a ‘world’ to be interacted by and with. ‘Stepping in Iration’, a term employed in discussion with one interviewee to describe their movement through this earth and this

¹³ Iyaric refers to a distinctive Rastafari dialect in which the first sound of an English word is replaced with “I” to both emphasise the harmony between the speaker and the subject whilst also providing a transcendental link to The Almighty through connection with the pre-regnal of Haile Selassie, Ras Tafari. Whilst the term ‘Iyaric’ was not used frequently during my fieldwork its use was present (if less regularly utilised) and consistent with previous forms I have encountered. See Homiak, *Dub History* 173.

cosmos, denotes the life journey of one within this vast, interrelational space. Engendered from this is a form of belief in which humanity and creation are distinctly and symbiotically interrelated. For many, this manifests as an almost conversational relationship whereby the good “positive” energy one places into ones immediate surroundings and into the cosmos is matched and returned in the form of positive energy by other forms involved in the interaction through the sharing of “vibrations”. Likewise, should one engage the earth with harmful negative energy the same negative energy will be returned into Iration. This energy is often interpreted within the polarity of a Babylon/Zion dichotomy which surrounds Rastafari cosmologies¹⁴. The title of this dissertation thus speaks to a motional verve, best encapsulated in the oft-cited phrase “forwards ever backwards never”¹⁵, that sees adherents moving amongst Iration and sharing energy around it with every step.

Environmental Challenges

As well as the importance of further establishing the vibrant theologies of groups previously underexplored in academia, there also of course exists great pertinence in research engaging with ecologies and ecotheologies in a time of immense ecological trial and uncertainty. Rising sea levels, greater extremity in temperatures, desertification, decreased fertility, loss of sea ice, extreme weather events and loss of habitat and biodiversity are just some of the challenges facing the earth and everything upon it in a time of increasingly precarious fossil fuel extraction, emission and environmental neglect. Warnings of the essentiality of limiting future temperature increases to 1.5°C are longstanding, yet statistical forecasts beyond it are myriad and invariably stark. Growth in methane and nitrous oxide emissions threaten a 2.7°C increase¹⁶, whilst recent heatwaves in the UK and Europe have bought record temperatures previously thought to be decades away¹⁷. Continuing, then, with present behaviours, and consequently on present trajectories, renders the point of no return a cataclysmic inevitability.

¹⁴ Babylon serves as a Biblical allusion frequently employed by Rastafari to refer to imperialist, capitalist and industrialised societies and institutions; the land, people and institutions of the wicked and evil. This is countered by “Zion”, the divine promised land variously interpreted as present in this world in Africa (most commonly Ethiopia) and also as the ultimate place of salvation for the righteous. In an environmental context these are sharpened, as the life-affirming, regenerative power of Zion is contrasted against the polluted and poisonous force of Babylon.

¹⁵ Motional verbs and depictions are frequently utilised by Rastafari to speak to this sense of constant movement and progress. See Powell, *Ital Trod*

¹⁶ Future Earth *10 New Insights*

¹⁷ Fritz *Hypothetical Weather*

Indeed, as Lawler rightly notes, these times of extreme precarity demand innovative thinking and “new approaches”¹⁸. Such innovation necessitates broad and diverse voices entering conversations around ecology and environmental policy, bringing with them not only fresh perspectives but interactions with the natural world unique to them. It is as such incumbent on researchers to further this diversity and increase the number of participants entering these spaces. The decisions made within them will, after all, ultimately define both human and non-human life on this planet for centuries to come. As is evident in this study, the depth and richness of environmental connection embodied within the Rastafari community offers much in the way of originality and reflection here. This is doubtless also the case for many communities around the world yet to be academically engaged with, particularly similarly Indigenous groups¹⁹²⁰. This is a point that must be emphasised. It is only when the needs and considerations of a broad human community rather than a narrow group of self-interest and personal gain take precedence that true ecological progress might start to be made.

Whilst this is in part a future-oriented task, it invariably speaks to a past in which these communities currently outside of such conversations have been under-engaged with and ignored. Minoritised groups across race, faith, socio-economic status, gender, sexual identity, Indigeneity and those more broadly side-lined by global power structures which identify little benefit from empowerment, or even consideration, of such communities, are quietened in environmental discussions²¹. Often, as is the case with Rastafari communities in the Caribbean and the UK, it is also these groups that are most vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate, compounding historic injustice as present inequality. This is a deeply inequitable reality which requires immediate attention, and further engagement with, and subsequent awareness of, previously marginalised communities such as those within this dissertation seeks to contribute towards a shift here in some way.

¹⁸ Lawler *Climate Change* 79

¹⁹ In line with conventions present amongst many community activists and organisations, Indigenous will be capitalised throughout this dissertation. See SAPIENS, *Why Capitalize “Indigenous”?* for further discussion of this.

²⁰ Whilst academic definitions of Indigeneity vary, those who formed this research invariably considered themselves Indigenous Africans displaced away from Africa. Rastafari spirituality itself is unquestionably Indigenous to the Caribbean region.

²¹ Dietzel and Venn describe the day-to-day reality of this imbalance in reporting that amongst six environmental groups in Bristol “women of colour [...] spoke 2% of the time” whilst for “men of colour” this figure was just 1%. See Dietzel & Venn, *Just Transition*

This research does not explicitly seek to further this diversity of voices in a policy context, although emphasis is offered at several points on the essentiality of these considerations for policy makers. It does however seek to achieve further plurality within the fields of ecotheology and environmental humanities. These areas of discussion are in the present immensely vibrant and innately interdisciplinary fields at the cutting edge of reshaping thought and practice in regard to the environment. Scholars such as Celia Deane-Drummond, Catherine Keller, Donna Haraway, Ursula K. Heise, Michael Northcott and Beth Rose Middleton, amongst many others, offer deeply thought-provoking contributions which continue to shift paradigms and perspectives. The importance of intersectional considerations within these and those of Indigenous communities specifically are also increasingly recognised, with again a wider diversity of approaches and perspectives enriching consideration and debate.

It is then these two broad aims that lay at the heart of this dissertation. First, an exploration, an outlining, of Rastafari Ital Livity as it manifests and as it “lives” amongst the Rastafari communities in St Lucia/Iyanola²² who contributed to this research. Such an exploration is at present lacking, an absence conspicuous and unfortunate given both the cultural influence of the Rastafari movement and its centrality in the lives and spiritual practice of Rastafari communities. In this, it was my perception that Ital Livity occupied a prominent place in the daily lives of those I researched amongst, something perhaps partly attributable to the developmental journey of the movement in Iyanola as shall be explored in the first chapter of this piece. Two further motivations also exist within this. Through the exploration of the philosophy and praxis of Ital Livity in one space, St Lucia, Rastafari communities in disparate spaces may find within this study space for reflection and comparison, perhaps gaining in this a broader sense of a ‘global’ Rastafari Livity. Additionally, it is hoped that this will also establish a foundation within Rastafari academic scholarship upon which others may research further, whilst also offering those in broader theological and social scientific scholarship an opportunity to engage with the Rastafari movement in familiar terms. Further, this dissertation offers the first scholarly piece of research on what is a deeply vibrant Rastafari community in Iyanola.

²² Iyanola is the name used by many Rastafari I engaged with during this study for the island officially named Saint Lucia, and was the name given to the island by the Arawak natives who originally inhabited the island before Western colonists. The two names were however used interchangeably by many, as I have done throughout this piece

Second, this research aims to connect Rastafari worldviews, cosmologies and outlooks to contemporary conversations occurring within ecotheology and the environmental humanities. These fields stand arguably as the most pertinent and most impactful within broader disciplines in the present times we inhabit. This impact is furthered when the vibrancy of these discussions is increased, as new interlocutors offer opportunities for contemplation and novel connection. The unique spirituality of Rastafari as it has emerged through its Jamaican folk peasant and Judeo-Christian roots represents similarity and yet marked difference with much ecotheological discourse that has gone before it, and it is again hoped that this dissertation will lead others to seek out conversations with the movement and its adherents whom the Almighty's all loving divinity courses through.

Such a study, in my view, must be conducted within and amongst Rastafari communities 'on the ground'. Purely practically, the paucity of research on the community offers little to no opportunity to offer novel explorations of Rastafari spirituality from afar through material that has already been published. More importantly, however, such an approach affords the researcher the ability to listen and look to Rastafari spirituality as it sounds and as it manifests amongst those who embody it. The central importance of this amongst a movement which, again, foregrounds a "lived" theology alongside the "Word, Sound, Power"²³ paradigm is paramount. The movement's history and theological development is formed and charted almost exclusively orally, shaped and sounded out in "reasonings" across ages and generations²⁴. Indeed, the foundational sociologist of Rastafari Carole Yawney describes reasoning as an "exploration of intersubjectivity" which aims to gain "access to ones visionary stream, to the condition of I and I [InI²⁵] consciousness", with this process serving as the primary outlet for Rastafari epistemological formations. Seeing, hearing, and, perhaps most importantly, feeling, this spirituality (as much as one outside the community ever possibly can) is of enormous significance. This research accordingly took the form of an ethnographic, interview and participant observation study.

²³ Prahlad describes "Word, Sound, Power" as an "orientation that imbues sound with agency [and] with the power to manifest in the material world" in which "the nature of matter is [understood to be] vibrational."

²⁴ Reasoning can be understood as a deeply communal discursive ritual process of wide-ranging philosophical discussion between two or more Rastafari often but no means always accompanied with ganja.

²⁵ InI serves as another Iyaric form as a pronoun used both in place of the first person "I", to convey unity with The Almighty (as each becomes one of the two "I's"), as well as a plural pronoun in place of "we" or "us" to highlight unity with those in reference.

Numerous research questions then emerge from the above. What is Ital Livity? How does it manifest? What are its intellectual roots? How do Rastafari individuals and communities engage with the world and the creation around them? What responses exist towards a changing climate? What spiritual sources ground this? How do Rastafari respond to the climate mitigation strategies of governments and states? Equally, how do states respond to Rastafari in this? How can Rastafari engage with environmental debates within scholarship? What lens does Rastafari offer contemporary ecotheological discussion? How might contemporary ecotheological discussion respond to Rastafari?

This study aims to offer a contribution which speaks to these and the broader issues described. It aims to further elucidate Rastafari ecologies and ecotheologies within an Ital Livity, explore the historical roots which drive their manifestation today, establish Ital Livity as a vibrant element of global theological discourse and engage these themes with ecotheological and ecological discourse in the present.

Methodology

This research primarily takes an ethnographic form, with research further informed by available readings in books and journal articles. I undertook fieldwork in St Lucia for three months between the end of 2020 and the start of 2021. Here I engaged in formal and informal interviews, conversations, group discussions, reasoning sessions and participant observation²⁶ to provide myself with as full an understanding of Rastafari Ital Livity as might be attainable for an “outsider”²⁷ in this time by living, studying and working alongside those who “live” Rastafari spirituality every day. As noted above, the scarcity of pre-existing material on this topic alongside the almost exclusively oral nature of Rastafari history and theology renders such an exercise essential in gaining an understanding of the spirituality of the movement. Formal interviews were semi-structured and ranged from one-on-one conversations to those amongst myself and three others, whilst group interviews and participant observation ranged up to group worship sessions of around thirty participants. In total, I spoke with seventy-one self-identifying members of the community at length, most of these on numerous occasions,

²⁶ As well as previous experience carrying out these forms of research I have received training from the University of Cambridge as to how to carry them out ethically and effectively.

²⁷ Sherif offers some pertinent reflections on this dynamic. See Sherif, *Ambiguity of Boundaries*

and conversed with many more in a more fleeting manner, a number may have been higher if gatherings and the general movement of individuals had not been impacted by Covid-19. Audio recordings were taken from participants for formal interviews for which explicit consent was gained, whereas written notes were taken from others. Preceding these conversations I discussed my own background and the purpose of my research, establishing awareness which generated increasing familiarity as my research went on.

During my time on the island, I spent several weeks based on the farmstead of my very accommodating host Bongo Wisely and his adult son Ibed Negus in Vieux Fort on the south of the island, before then heading into my own rented accommodation in Micoud for the remainder of the stay. Throughout this research I attempted to integrate myself amongst the community as much as was possible and feasible, engaging in agricultural and building work around farms and homes, attending group meetings and worship sessions, speaking about my research on a Rastafari-hosted national radio programme “Calling Rastafari”, joining visits to other individuals and communities around the island and listening and learning from the conversations that happened around me every day. The hospitality and patience shown to me by the community was truly humbling, and I am deeply grateful for the time, wisdom and energy offered to me by all of those who engaged with me.

It is important to note from this that this research speaks only to the contributions of those who engaged with me during research. It does not seek to offer anything towards a ‘complete’ categorisation of Rastafari Ital Livivity across the community globally or even nationally within St Lucia, and indeed it would be undesirable to do so. As will be noted, the Rastafari movement stands as one which is deeply heterogeneous and individual manifestations of faith and praxis offer much variation. This is evident even from the range of practices and perspectives contained within this dissertation.

When commencing this research I had resolved that in line with established social scientific practice and also my previous research experience that I would render all contributions anonymous. I made this clear in conversations with participants and described that they would be represented through pseudonyms. Whilst this approach was accepted by all of those who contributed, I have since reflected after engaging in further conversation with the Iyanola community and with scholars of Rastafari and have subsequently concluded that this

approach is in fact undesirable. Whilst I had considered previously that anonymisation might offer participants the ability to speak with a greater degree of freedom, it is an approach which is ultimately less literally representative of the community it emanates from. Conversations with Professor Robbie Shilliam were particularly formative in this regard for which I am grateful, as I was helpfully offered the reflection that I might view my dissertation not only as a theological and social scientific piece in its nature, but also as a historical one. Research which has the potential to represent a repository, an archive, of the thoughts, feelings and experiences of an actual community and of the actual people within it. This is particularly pertinent with consideration towards the largely oral nature of Rastafari thought, as work such as this represents the opportunity to commit some of these “reasonings” to an alternative and perhaps more broadly accessible medium. It is also hoped that this approach serves to more fully credit the immense spiritual and intellectual depth found within the thoughts of individuals who contributed to this research from which I grew enormously. All of the profundity, innovation, poetry, effectivity and wisdom within them is entirely theirs and wholly and unequivocally not the author’s, who acts here merely to record and to consider.

With this change in approach in mind, during the ‘writing up’ phase of this research, I endeavoured to contact all of those I had engaged with throughout fieldwork to inquire as to whether they would like me to include their actual name rather than a pseudonym or not, a task invaluable aided by my host. All of those I spoke with described that they would like me to do so. I was however unfortunately unable to contact three participants who are as such represented by a pseudonym as denoted in Appendix I with an asterisk. Further to this, context including rural/urban, older/younger, male/female and profession is offered both in Appendix I and in prose.

Given the space constraints present in this exercise, and indeed present in any collected written form, it fell to me as the researcher to select which ethnographic data to expand upon here from the great mass collected in fieldwork. Amongst a movement which is at its very core distinctly heterogeneous, this means certain perspectives of equal representation of those included will not feature. Very simply, I endeavoured to include material which spoke to the most broadly represented ideas and concepts. Of those with more equal representation perhaps amongst one or two contributors, I sought to examine those which either piqued my

own curiosity the most or bought to mind points of comparison with prior research or other research contexts. Inevitably, these selection decisions shape the dissertation they form a part of and which should as such be read with this in mind.

Not all of those I spoke with are quoted in this research, however all added to my understanding of the community and its outlooks and their sentiments are often reflected in the statements of others. Contributors identified as “one participant” or similar indicate the thoughts of those who I spoke with and who were aware of my research aims but were not interviewed formally. Transcription of participants has been attempted to be as phonetically accurate to the original recordings as possible. This is of great importance in attempting to represent the contributions of participants as accurately and transparently as possible. The written spelling and formulation of certain phrases where ambiguous has thus been attempted by myself to be as close to their original utterance as it can be. Express oral permission was gained for all recordings. Interviews with a small number of participants involved the partial and generally brief use of St Lucian Creole with others present in the conversation, a language I am unable to speak or understand. These are as such not included in this dissertation and do not feature in the material analysed.

Formal interview participants were split across a wide range of demographics but were most commonly semi-rural, male and between 45-65. I spoke with fifteen women, an imbalance that is objectively undesirable but one which speaks to the anecdotally higher number of men in the community. In regards to mansions²⁸, contributors to this study were largely split between non-identifying and Nyabinghi, with contributions from a small number of Bobo Shanti. The community worship sessions and celebrations I attended were all attached to the Nyabinghi House on the island.

A note on terminology should also be made. As well as the glossary provided, I have noted throughout words and terms utilised by participants alongside how they may be interpreted in ‘standard’ English. Maintaining the original phrasing is essential to convey the words and sentiments of the speaker as they intended, particularly within a movement in which words are understood to be physical agents of change through “Word, Sound, Power”. Many I spoke

²⁸ Loosely, denominations. See Barnett, *Doctrinal Diversity* for further exploration of the themes and nuances within this.

with were uneasy with the term ‘religion’ applied to Rastafari, a descriptor considered to be tainted by the imposition of ‘religions’ onto those in Africa and the Caribbean. The words of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie are pertinent here. “Africans are in bondage today because they approach spirituality through religion provided by foreign invaders and conquerors. We must stop confusing religion and spirituality [...] spirituality is a network linking us to the Most High, the universe and each other”. Others terms, most commonly movement, are as such utilised instead.

Positionality

It is crucially important to reflect here also on positionality. I engaged in this fieldwork as a white British male in my mid-twenties, who does not identify as Rastafari. This background, appearance and sound unquestionably had an impact on the research gathered as one who was invariably ‘read’ to be outside of the community and an ‘outsider’. Many I spoke with will not have been aware of my research background of several years amongst Rastafari communities, although many were. As a result, some respondents were more cautious in their responses to me as a researcher emanating from a country and an institution, Cambridge, which are deeply connected to the histories of colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. My status as a white British researcher exploring Black²⁹ spirituality amongst Rastafari also echoes colonial patterns of knowledge production. All of this engenders certain power dynamics which, although individually interpreted, are invariably unequal, and render the data I received a product of it. Acknowledging this is imperative, both in contextualising the research below and its emergence amongst a Rastafari community which strives to challenge colonialism in all its forms.

Some participants engaged me enthusiastically, perhaps keen for the opportunity to further educate an ‘outsider’ potentially assumed to have a rudimentary understanding of the movement. Assumptions may also have been made about my awareness of and personal belief in Christian religious forms as a Western theologian. For others, my status engendered a feeling that my research, either consciously or unconsciously, represented an effort to profit from the knowledge I was receiving³⁰. This was a response I had encountered before, and

²⁹ In line with conventions present amongst many community activists and organisations, Black will be capitalised throughout this dissertation. See CJR, *Capitalize Black* for further discussion of this.

³⁰ I interpreted that profit here was meant broadly, describing direct financial benefit and personal advancement.

strikes me as entirely reasonable, particularly given an aforementioned history of Western commodification of the movement. These individuals often refused to engage, and my research thus does not include their perspectives which may differ from the perspectives which have been included. Both of these responses and a spectrum in between attest to some aspects of the power dynamics present within this research project. These factors shape the project's data alongside others I will have been aware of such as the gender and age of participants and myself as well others I will have not been conscious of. As Merriam et al note, "during fieldwork the researcher's power is negotiated, not given"³¹. My status, as permitted to research amongst the community, was thus contingent on the particularities of an individual's interaction with this "negotiation," and the conversations that sprung from it indelibly shaped by it. I continue to reflect on these dynamics at points throughout this dissertation.

Chapter Summaries

This dissertation has six chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion. Chapter One introduces the historical roots of the Rastafari movement, examining how the foundations and subsequent manifestations of Rastafari spirituality offer a crucially important foundation to the beliefs, practices and Ital Livity within the movement as it presents itself today. It also briefly explores the emergence of the Rastafari in the St Lucian context in which this research took place.

Chapter Two establishes an understanding of Ital Livity which grounds itself within three broad intellectual themes present throughout the dissertation, a yearning for a green and natural environment, a holistic sense of the divinity in all and an emphasis on the "lifelike" in a rejection of death. In doing so it seeks to build on the historical roots established in Chapter 1.

Chapter Three represents the first of three wholly ethnographic chapters. The first two of these are crudely divided into 'practical' and 'spiritual data', recognising that much crossover exists between the two. Chapter 3 looks to what might be very broadly termed the spiritual dimensions and manifestations of Ital Livity, exploring how participants interpret this in their

³¹ Merriam et al *Power and Positionality* 409

interactions with the Almighty and the spiritual forces that suffuse creation. At the centre of this emerges the sense and importance of being attuned to the pervasive “vibrations” that connect all in “Iration”.

Chapter Four examines Ital Livivity in practice, seeking to further elucidate how this rubric informs and influences the interactions individuals and communities have with the earth and all of that within and upon it. These are largely agricultural, although other aspects are explored. Both of these chapters speak to what might be termed a ‘Rastafari ecology’. We see in this again an important emphasis on engaging oneself in practices that further the positivity of the “vibrations” that connect all

Chapter Five seeks to explore some of the spiritual sources that inspire Rastafari Ital Livivity and its manifestations. These are broad and typically heterogenous, as participants describe drawing inspiration primarily from Haile Selassie and the Bible. Here, I offer further expansion on an ‘Ital Hermeneutic’³² utilised in the interpretation of spiritual sources which attests to the core intellectual themes established in prior chapters.

Chapter Six places Rastafari Ital Livivity in conversation with contemporary ecotheology and ecological humanities scholarship, establishing it as a vibrant interlocutor within the field. Here, it serves both a lens through which present discussion can be critiqued whilst also importantly offering the field another viewpoint and another voice which it can itself engage with and further shape future considerations.

³² See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics*

Chapter One: Historical Development of the Rastafari Movement and its Philosophy

In order to attempt to understand the ecotheological outlooks of the Rastafari movement it is important to first situate the movement more broadly in its historical and intellectual context. Rastafari cosmology and ontology are profoundly grounded in the immense cruelty of a trans-Atlantic slave trade which commodified and brutalised Black communities in the name of economic gain and racist superiority. The colonial system which followed and defined the Caribbean de jure until the late 1970s and de facto into the present further prioritised the interests of a white minority over a Black majority. Many encountered during this fieldwork described this as a feature of life in the Caribbean today through the Queen's presence as head of state in both St Lucia and Jamaica³³. Any attempt to understand Rastafari belief and Livity must thus start from an exploration of the historical and social factors which spawned a context in which the Rastafari movement was able to form.

This chapter will also feature an exploration of early spiritual influences on the Rastafari movement which are of crucial importance in understanding the cosmological outlook of the movement throughout its development. Indeed, the influence of early 20th century Jamaican peasant spirituality, itself grounded in syncretic African and Christian forms, is distinctly visible. Within an ecotheological context more specifically this influence is just as pronounced. As Homiak notes Rastafari ecological outlooks are “rooted in folk taxonomies of the natural world” in which “nature [is] use[d] to resist the dominant culture”³⁴. Here, we shall explore these folk taxonomies and trace through them attitudes towards the natural world which would go on to have an indelible impact on the formation of the movement's primary ecotheological rubric, that of Ital Livity, several decades later.

Post-Colonial Jamaican History

³³ Efforts from Barbados to establish itself as a republic had begun during fieldwork, a move widely lauded by participants as an act of long overdue “freedom fighting”. Many in Iyanola also expressed frustration that its neighbour ‘Bimshire’ (it's suffix so added due to its purportedly close resemblance to the culture and customs of England) was able to “cast off the appendages” of the House of Windsor before St Lucia.

³⁴ Homiak, *Dub History* 143-144

In acknowledging the formation of the Rastafari movement in 1930s Jamaica it is of course crucial to note the imperialist, colonial context from which both Jamaica and the Rastafari movement emerged. This context both occasioned the creation of the nation-state of Jamaica and has defined its existence through independence in 1962 and into the 21st century. Yawney describes Jamaica as an “artefact of imperialism”, evoking both this all-consuming influence as well as the possessive and covetous attitude with which the island was regarded by its colonial oppressors³⁵. Jamaica’s early history was to be defined by a struggle between two of the most well-resourced and domineering colonial forces of the era, Spain and England. Spain had initially colonised parts of the island in the late 15th and early 16th century despite fierce resistance from Indigenous Arawak and Taino populations. British theologian Robert Beckford is right to note that this engagement marks the first instance of defiance toward European slavery and imperialism on the island, and the tragedy that befell these native people must be highlighted in any exploration of Jamaican history³⁶.

After an expansion in its colonial efforts, English forces arrived on the island in 1655 and subsequently defeated the Spanish militarily to establish overall control. The English, and subsequently British, administrations set about establishing and maintaining Jamaica as a plantation colony, and the beating economic heart of its burgeoning Caribbean empire³⁷. Jamaica’s natural wealth, in this early period largely its highly fertile soils and prosperous growing conditions, were exploited through an abasement of enslaved Africans bought to Jamaica as possessions mostly from occupied British territories in west Africa³⁸. Those that survived the excruciatingly harrowing journey through the ‘Middle Passage’ were tasked with maximising economic output for an imperial force which had stripped them of every right and freedom belonging to them as human beings, a system legislated for by the British parliament until increased unrest and rebellion saw it outlawed in 1833. By 1800, over 300,000 enslaved Afro-Jamaicans were being put to work on the island. After legal emancipation, systems of ‘apprenticeship’, indentureship and white racial hegemony followed which allowed colonial overseers to maintain tight controls on the economic and social freedom of non-English derived Jamaicans up until independence and beyond³⁹.

³⁵ Yawney *Grow a Daughter* 179

³⁶ Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal* 99

³⁷ McCusker, *Essays* 205-206

³⁸ Bishton, *Black Heart Man* 50

³⁹ King & Foster, *Revolutionary Words* 254-257.

Afro-Jamaicans present on the island were forcibly cut off from the social communities and physical institutions that had embodied their Indigenous culture. Brutally beaten, indiscriminately murdered and restricted from free exchanges with those around them, the colonial system built itself at every level to destroy that which had made those at its base functioning human beings in the place from which they had been taken. It is however visible that each of them served as a “depository” of African cultural materials, holdings that would both insulate them from their trauma through a connection to their homeland and go on to tangibly shape the development of both Jamaican and Rastafari culture and spirituality⁴⁰. American sociologist Jeanne Christensen, in her insightful treatment of the place of Rastafari women in the shaping of Rastafari Livity, describes this reconstruction process appositely. Her description here is worth quoting in its entirety. “Africans who laboured on plantations attempted to salvage the fragile remains of African cultural content amid the realities of extremely unequal power relations. Not only did plantation owners impose new identities and hierarchies, but they actively thwarted efforts by Africans to reconstitute viable communities. Nonetheless, working from cultural residue lodged in memory, embodied in ancestors and spirits that followed them to the new world, embedded in stories told and retold, and existing in the kinetic memory in the body itself, enslaved Africans *did* create communities that allowed them to survive as a people in the New World”⁴¹. This subsistence on a “cultural residue” has offered a lasting testament to the strength in resistance of Afro-Jamaican communities, and ensured the passage of African cultural and spiritual modes into post-slavery Jamaica where they would go on to influence the Jamaican spiritual landscape, and the more specifically the Rastafari movement, intimately.

Some of the earliest manifestations of this cultural “residue” as faith movements came through the Myal and Obeah traditions. While Afro-Jamaican individuals emanated from varied localised settings in Africa, broad congress emerged around patterns of spiritual belief which enabled these communities to manifest a new pan-African syncretic spirituality. Both Myal and Obeah centred around the interaction between the physical and spirit worlds and the utilisation of energy to mediate between the two. Broadly, Obeah ceremonies covered two very distinct modes of practice, firstly the use of “spells” and incantations for both benevolent and nefarious purposes, and secondly the use of “African-derived healing

⁴⁰ Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries* 50

⁴¹ Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning* 12

practices” in the application of “herbal and animal medicinal properties”⁴². Myal operated with a greater focus on the spirit, spirit possessions and ecstatic worship. Obeah often operated as an individualised or small group ritual process, whilst Myal represented a wider community procedure led by a mediator who would involve audience participation in the ceremony⁴³. The two broad spiritualities were highly influential and widely practised amongst Afro-Jamaican populations. Although initially dismissed by the plantocracy as illegitimate and unimportant, the popular power of these spiritual forms came to be left in no doubt during Tacky’s Rebellion in 1760. Hundreds of Afro-Jamaicans rose up to destroy multiple estates having been led into battle by the charismatic “Obeahmen”⁴⁴. The spiritual framework offered through Myal and Obeah were also to be of central importance in future convergences and syncretisations with Christianity.

Cultural Interlocutors

It is amongst these two interlocutors, African-derived spiritualities and Christianity, that a distinctive Jamaican spiritual context would emerge. Forcefully ripped from familiar environments and deprived of the cultural norms previously used to rudder their human journey in this cosmos, Afro-Jamaicans were forced to reorient themselves not only in a strange new land but also in a strange new society. A dominant British hegemony established a system in which European cultural norms and values represented the only officially legitimate form of cultural practice, and in which Anglican Christianity represented the only legitimate form of spiritual practice⁴⁵. As the enslaved endured the status of possessions, they were afforded little choice as to their level of engagement with Christianity. Some plantation owners sought to push their workforce towards Bible worship, whilst others took no interest or saw no benefit. For any Afro-Jamaican or those of mixed heritage free from bondage with ambitions for any form of social mobility, there was only one spiritual route. A structure designed to further denigrate and degrade any traces of African culture remaining.

⁴² These African-derived healing practices remain influential through to the present, as I have explored in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah*

⁴³ See Fernandez Olmos & Parvaisini-Gebert *Creole Religions* 155-183

⁴⁴ Paton, *Cultural Politics of Obeah* 38-42

⁴⁵ Brown, *Color* 50

In the early period of British colonial rule, the administration and the plantocratic⁴⁶ elite below them fiercely resisted any attempts to broaden the church's mission beyond the white society it was intended to prop up⁴⁷. Plantation owners often feared that Christian messages of love and freedom might detract from their desire to “emphasize the fact that slavery was a permanent condition”. Ostensibly virtuous provisions found within the 1696 “slave code” which required all slave owners to “make provision for the religious instruction and conversion of their slaves” were countered by authorities fixing the fee for administering the Holy Baptism to slaves at “£1 3s. 9d”, an amount noted by historian Keith Hunte to be “large enough to be prohibitory”⁴⁸.

Any thrust towards large-scale Christianisation of Afro-Jamaicans, then, was to come from outside this intimately plantocratic and hegemonic Anglicanism. This became the task of non-conformist missionaries who established themselves on the island in the mid-18th century⁴⁹. Particularly significant amongst these was the largely Black, American-inspired Baptist movement which arrived in Jamaica after the American Revolution most prominently in the ministries of former slaves George Liele and Moses Baker⁵⁰. These Baptist movements consistently preached an egalitarian message of, in the words of a contemporary source, “equality of man in the sight of God and that the time was come for all men to be free”⁵¹. Preaching initially began amongst the plantations of owners who were not against their slaves acquiring a Christian moral grounding and some literacy skills, and by the 1840's the Baptist-inspired missions had, in the words of historian Abigail Bakan, “a firmer hold than European orthodoxy” amongst the Afro-Jamaican population⁵².

Baptist Influences

As Beckford rightly notes, these Black Baptists practiced a “syncretistic Christianity” which lead them to be dubbed “Spirit Baptists” due to their emphasis on spirit possession in a similar vein to that of Myal⁵³. This represented one of the first more formalised

⁴⁶ Or plantocracy, an era of de facto rule by plantation owners.

⁴⁷ Beasley, *Christian Ritual* 74-76

⁴⁸ Hunte *Protestantism and Slavery* 91-92

⁴⁹ Morgan, *Slavery* 125-126

⁵⁰ Petley *Slaveholders* 77-78

⁵¹ Times, *Jamaica* 5

⁵² Bakan, *Ideology and Class Conflict* 52

⁵³ Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal* 101

syncretisations of African and Christian beliefs in Jamaica, as a wider Christianisation of Afro-Jamaican's brought African-derived spiritual traditions into Baptist missions with more frequency. Socially, the Baptist movement must also be noted for its role in producing many leaders and ministers who would go on to inspire some of the most significant rebellions and attempted revolutions in Jamaican history, including Paul Bogle, Sam Sharpe, and George William Gordon⁵⁴. The fiercely violent response by planters and colonial administrators to the so-called "Baptist War", spearheaded by Sharpe, proved catalytic in leading British parliamentary voices away from positions of either status quo maintenance or of "gradualist" deconstruction of the institution of slavery, and towards one of immediate de jure emancipation embodied in the Slavery Abolition Act 1833⁵⁵.

Bogle and Gordon would themselves also come to radically alter the social and political landscape of Jamaica. The Morant Bay rebellion in 1865, as it came to be known, saw hundreds of protestors take to the streets amidst a context of drought, disease, disenfranchisement and the loss of Jamaica's status as Britain's favoured importer of sugar through the Sugar Duties Act⁵⁶. The response was merciless, as colonial forces indiscriminately fired on the Afro-Jamaicans present despite meeting no resistance, in what was to be amongst the most severe repressions of unrest in the history of Britain's occupation of the Caribbean⁵⁷. This event further stoked fears that Jamaica was on the verge of self-liberation as Haiti had experienced a few decades earlier, a concern that facilitated governor Edward Eyre's successful petition to the British Parliament for the dissolution of the Jamaican House of Assembly and the placement of Jamaica under the direct rule of London as a "Crown Colony"⁵⁸. This resulted in greater disenfranchisement of Jamaicans, with a handful of local politicians selected for the pretence of a "ruling council" and non-whites barred from public office⁵⁹. For the purposes of the study going forward, we should note from the above the historic intertwining of faith and resistance in Jamaica. Within the cosmological reformulations of Myal and Obeah alongside the fierce social opposition of the Baptist churches, Jamaican resistance to hegemony and environmental/social norms has often

⁵⁴ Stanley, *History of the Baptist Movement* 262-3

⁵⁵ See Turner, *Baptist War and Abolition*

⁵⁶ Eudell, *Political Languages of Emancipation* 147-148

⁵⁷ Green, *British Slave Emancipation* 381-385

⁵⁸ Smith, *Liberty, Fraternity, Exile* 136-146

⁵⁹ Wilmot, *Black Politics* 103-117

been conceived through spirituality, a connection we shall turn to explore in greater detail for the Rastafari movement in subsequent chapters.

The Emergence of Rastafari

What might be considered the emergence of the Rastafari movement as it can now be understood comes in 1930 amidst a context of further unrest. Domestically, the early 20th century had seen little to no improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the majority Afro-Jamaican population. High rents, an inequitable taxation system and the greater concentration of land in the hands of fewer large agricultural landowners had seen the prospects of small cultivators shrink⁶⁰. Basic subsistence remained the primary challenge for many and the number of peasants (defined by Gisela Eisner as those cultivating less than 50 acres each) had grown exponentially⁶¹. For these peasant farmers, a concentration of competition through the greater involvement of the United Fruit Company on the island forced many male labourers to head abroad in search of work around the Caribbean and the America's where they often experienced new forms of racial discrimination such as Jim Crow laws. Many in Jamaica faced a daily reality of poverty, unemployment and racial inequality that had pervaded beyond emancipation, all underpinned by shrinking opportunities in rural villages and a lack of political representation⁶². Internationally, Jamaica found itself amidst a global context of economic slowdown and an international war toward which the country had little choice in joining. This context offered fertile territory for popular movements intent on gaining greater representation, social status and economic security for the Black majority population in Jamaica.

Marcus Garvey

Most notable amongst these movements was the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA), formed by Marcus Garvey in Kingston in July 1914. The UNIA's mission was to further pan-African, Black pride solidarity, and later repatriation, with a stated purpose to "establish a Universal Confraternity among the race",

⁶⁰ Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers* 35

⁶¹ Eisner, *Jamaica* 233

⁶² Paris, *Religion and Poverty* 141

“to promote a spirit of race pride and love” and “to reclaim the fallen of the race”⁶³. This mantra was predicated on emphasising Black pride and racial confidence in the face of continued white domination in Jamaica and other former slave-owning countries, facilitating the greater involvement of the diaspora in the development and self-determination of Africa, and ultimately unifying the “Black race” through the repatriation of the African descended back to Africa⁶⁴. The UNIA was to capture the imagination of enormous amounts of those in the diaspora, particularly in the USA and the Caribbean, and is estimated to have numbered multiple millions of directly involved members at its peak⁶⁵.

The sentiments and ambitions broadcast by Garvey would go on to be hugely influential amongst the embryonic Rastafari movement. Whilst ostensibly a political and social leader, Garvey was a devout Christian who would regularly infuse his messages of racial pride and reunification with Christian themes and imagery often shared alongside an “Ethiopianist” message as shall be examined in the next section of this chapter⁶⁶. In Garvey’s hands this was to prove a powerful rhetorical combination which would light a touch paper for the Rastafari movement, as pan-Africanism and racial self-assertion met with a sense of prophetic destiny to form a distinctly Black spirituality which no longer conformed to European hegemony⁶⁷. This context would combine with a number of intellectual traditions to provide the bedrock upon which the early Rastafari movement would form and build.

Spiritual Development

Amidst this tumultuous historical milieu, a distinct and uniquely Jamaican spirituality was emerging. From the arrival of the non-conformist preachers through to the independent spiritual movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, Jamaica emerged as an island imbued with a vibrant faith context unique to its borders. The Rastafari movement and its emergence goes only to offer further evidence of this, and we shall here explore the ideas and groups which would prove integral in the ultimate formation of the Rastafari movement and its distinctive spirituality through Ethiopianism, Revival and Revivalism.

⁶³ Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions* 117

⁶⁴ Ohadike, *Culture of Resistance* 111

⁶⁵ Pinkney, *Red, Black and Green* 44

⁶⁶ Hill & Pirio, *Africa for the Africans* 209-212

⁶⁷ Stolzoff, *Wake the Town* 78

Ethiopianism

Ethiopianism, broadly defined, refers to both an exegetical approach and the African diasporic movements that have sprung forth from it which have sought to idealise and yearn towards the Biblical ‘Ethiopia’ of the Jewish Testament⁶⁸. This has been interpreted variously over time as the historic and modern nation-state of Ethiopia, sub-Saharan Africa or Africa as a whole. Jamaican sociologist and scholar of Rastafari Michael Barnett offers his view that it represents “the effort of the English-speaking Black or African person to view their past enslavement and colonial domination in terms of a tragic historical experience that will profoundly assure them of a great future”⁶⁹. This ideological core witnesses an identification with the oppression of the Israelites in the book of Genesis alongside Biblical references to Ethiopia, perhaps most significantly Psalms 68:31, that “Princes shall come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God”. The prophetic thrust contained within this passage would go on to become emblematic of an independent and uniquely African-derived spirituality present in Ethiopianist movements and would serve as a crucial foundation stone in the central spiritual event of the Rastafari movement in the coronation and divinisation of Haile Selassie.

Beckford rightly describes that Ethiopianism was “never a systematic movement or coherent ideology”. Instead, it served as a simultaneous intellectual impetus amongst African and African diaspora communities from the 18th century onwards and would “provide[] a reservoir of ideas from which many resistance traditions drew in the early part of the twentieth century”⁷⁰. Prominent groups include those in the Caribbean, North America and South Africa, with its specific manifestations particular to each context and each time⁷¹. Some groups would seek to align themselves more closely to the European Christian denominations present in their locality, whilst others were inspired to demonstrate a break with the theologies of old in search of something that could be seen as more ‘African’.

More specifically, allusions to the Biblical Ethiopia in Jamaica can be traced back to the aforementioned American missionary and former slave George Liele, who founded the

⁶⁸ Or ‘Old Testament’

⁶⁹ Barnett, *Rastafari Movement* 9

⁷⁰ Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal* 107

⁷¹ Price, *Becoming Rasta* 40-41

‘Ethiopian Baptist Church’ on the island in 1783⁷². It is amongst Liele’s ministry and the arrival of senior Methodist missionary Thomas Coke that Christensen first traces the preaching of Psalms 68:31 with an “Ethiopianist” sentiment in Jamaica, also noting that early 19th century English Baptist missionary William Knibb regularly referred to his freed slave congregation as the “children of Ethiopia”⁷³.

Ethiopianism as it would come to exert influence on the early Rastafari movement also had an important international element however, with some simultaneous origins visible in late 19th century South Africa amongst dissident Anglican and Methodist movements seeking to emphasise Black self-determination. This desire saw multiple groups break away from movements which had been founded by colonial missionaries to form their own churches which were Black-led, and looked to emphasise African spirituality and Christianity with the Biblical “Ethiopia” as their orientation⁷⁴. These movements and their appealing, assertive ideology spread beyond South Africa and around the diaspora before taking a firm root in Jamaica primarily through travelling workmen. Here, they would go on to influence many including the oratory and political operation of Marcus Garvey⁷⁵.

Garvey and Spirituality

As previously stated, Garvey’s influence on the Rastafari movement was enormous in articulating a powerful and deeply relevant political message transfused with an alluring charismatic spirituality. Ethiopianism was an important part of this influence. For Garvey, it represented a spiritual mirror for the political narrative he espoused of Black pride and a yearning towards Africa. American anthropologist Charles Price rightly states that Garvey “held constant some of the mystical symbolism and religiosity of Ethiopianism” and incorporated it into a political rhetoric which “brilliantly utilized religious imagery”⁷⁶. For many in the Rastafari movement and still today, Garvey served as the connection between this Ethiopian orientation and the coronation event of His Majesty through the prophetic words attributed to him in which he is said to have instructed audiences to “look to Africa,

⁷² Erskine, *Plantation Church* 88

⁷³ Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning* 18

⁷⁴ Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets* 39

⁷⁵ Barrett, *The Rastafarians* 75-78

⁷⁶ Price, *Cleave to the Black* 17

when a black [sic] king shall be crowned as the day of deliverance is at hand”⁷⁷. The importance of the association of Garvey with this message is hard to overstate in Rastafari cosmology as the prophetic spark which foretold of the coronation of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie. Garvey remains a highly venerated figure in the movement today where he is variously considered to be part of a God-head, a prophet, a divine messenger, or a divinely inspired political leader.

More broadly, beyond the prophetic words attributed to him, Garvey’s reorientation of the relationship between God and the Black audiences gazing upon him laid the foundation for a very important distinctive Rastafari and proto-Rastafari concept which would further facilitate an interpretation of Haile Selassie as divine – an emphasis of ‘Blackness’ as divine and with it the possibility of a Black god. This is a notion we shall turn to in the following chapter, but for now this is perhaps best encapsulated in his oft-cited statement that “we as Negroes have found a new ideal. Whilst our God has no colour, yet it is human to see everything through one’s own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through white spectacles, we have only now (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles [...] we Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God [...] we shall worship him through the spectacles of Ethiopia”⁷⁸. As American anthropologist Obiagele Lake rightly surmises, “these notions were crucial in creating a counterhegemonic ideology among diaspora Africans” as a community is “bound to see themselves as inferior if their god is represented in someone else’s image”. This “counterhegemony” would eventually emerge as integral to the formation of a Rastafari spirituality⁷⁹.

Revival/Revivalism

Another hugely important spiritual influence on the development of Rastafari movement comes in the form of Jamaican ‘Revival’. Jamaican Revival emerged in the 1860s amidst a period of increased religious fervour and can be loosely defined as a range of spiritual modes which resulted in new and more distinct fusions of elements of Christian and African-indigenous inspired Jamaican beliefs under the broad umbrella of “Revival”⁸⁰. A

⁷⁷ Palmer, *Messianic ‘I’* 17

⁷⁸ Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions* 44

⁷⁹ Lake, *Rastafari Women* 30

⁸⁰ Gordon, *Christianisation and Emancipation* 86-88

syncretisation of these two belief systems was perhaps an inevitable result of a context which had seen the removal of humans from an African setting with its own spiritualities (and the subsequent attempts of Afro-Jamaicans to reconstruct this) and a European hegemony which emphasised a Christian system as the only manifestation of spiritual and social worth on the island. The aforementioned greater Christianisation of Afro-Jamaican populations with the arrival of the Baptists further facilitated this fusion, and laid foundations for the Revival movement.

In 1860, however these two came together in an unprecedented way. Theological tension between missionaries keen to bring emancipated Afro-Jamaicans into their flock and Afro-Jamaicans eager to utilise their greater freedom to establish a more independent 'spirit' based praxis saw Moravian and Baptist missionaries begin to acquiesce. Some began to encourage their congregations to "receive the spirit of God" in worship, often interpreted in a Myalist mould which would go on to give rise to the "spirit Baptists" noted by Beckford. This initiative soon spilled out of the control of the missionary groups who had initiated it, and Afro-Jamaican communities were soon left with a form of belief distinct and independent from any centralised Christian denomination.

During this process, the early syncretic form of Myal was to be subsumed by the "impact of Revival fervour" and transformed into two further syncretised subsets which would come to be known as "Zion and Pukumina" or just "Kumina"⁸¹. Zion functioned as a more identifiably Christian belief system with some elements of spirit worship whilst Pukumina operated as a more identifiably African Indigenous faith group heavily centred around spirit worship and possession. Both however made use of the Bible and of recognisably Christian liturgy⁸². Whilst Revival can rightly be considered a Christianising force in both of these strands, I am more inclined towards Jamaican-American anthropologist Leonard E. Barrett's argument that Revival is "better understood as a rejection of Christianity and a Revival of the African [spiritual] force" in a context of greater spiritual autonomy and independence which allowed Afro-Jamaicans more freedom to move further from previously hegemonic Christian modes of practice⁸³. Although utilising Christian practices, symbols and imagery, a rejection

⁸¹ Paris, *Religion and Poverty* 141-142

⁸² Alleyne & Payne-Jackson, *Jamaican Folk Medicine* 62-66

⁸³ Barrett, *Soul-Force* 116

of the Christian hegemony here comes in a subversion of the accepted, state-supported manifestation of Christianity and towards one distinctly and unmistakably African.

The ensuing Revival period saw the establishment of newly emancipated, independent peasant communities in the rural villages of Jamaica who were able to develop distinctive modes of worship and practice in keeping with this spirit-centric thrust. Here, an emphasis on the interactivity between humanity and nature and the ability of humanity to influence the spiritual world gave Afro-Jamaicans, still firmly under the yoke of a colonial power, an important locus of control as it had their enslaved forebears. It is in these communities seminal Jamaican anthropologist and scholar of Rastafari Barry Chevannes designates the emergence of “Revivalism”, a spirituality intimately connected to the Revival but of even greater independence and variation from a Christian hegemony present within it⁸⁴. It is hard to overemphasise the importance of these peasant communities in the eventual development of the Rastafari movement and its beliefs. Many early followers and preachers of the movement would emanate directly from these villages, drawn into the cities in the early 20th century as the Jamaican labour market was drastically altered by mechanisation and global economic shifts, carrying with them their beliefs and philosophies which would indelibly shape the Rastafari movement.

Revivalism and Rastafari

Chevannes pioneering work “Rastafari: Roots and Ideology” demonstrates at length the distinctive influence Revivalist spirituality was to have on the formation of Rastafari beliefs. This includes early ritualistic practices, musical styles and performances, and a ceremonial liturgical influence that would have been instantly recognisable to those moving between Revivalism and proto-Rastafari groups. Chevannes also describes the impact of Revivalist beliefs on Jamaican perceptions of nature. He traces this through to the present in stating “the Jamaican view of nature is concrete rather than abstract, manifesting itself in important animistic beliefs about natural objects and products”, a worldview he attributes to the deep influence of Revivalism on the island. For illustration, he details some lunar examples including the absorption of the moons rays causing “insanity to the sleeper”, bamboo cut during a full moon serving as easy prey for termites, and pregnant or menstruating women

⁸⁴ Chevannes, *Roots and Ideology* 13

having a “malignant effect on young crops, in the same way that the moon does in some of its phases”, although “the presence of the dragon plant in the fields is believed to neutralize this ill effect”⁸⁵.

As I shall explore later in this dissertation, it is my contention that Rastafari Ital Livivity as an ecotheology could not neatly be considered a form of animism. At present however, it should be noted that this interface between humanity and nature afforded a sense of power and control that was not afforded to these communities in the highly stratified colonial context which surrounded them. This sense of an ability, and indeed a necessity, to interact with nature on a deeper level than the immediately visible and to see the natural world as a partner in conversation would transfuse into the Rastafari movement. More immediately this ability for a sense of control would be of central importance as the movement sprang forth from the decrepit slums of Kingston.

Beyond this broader contextual influence, many in the early movement straddled a line between Rastafari and Revivalism. This is perhaps most directly visible in the early ministry of Robert Hinds, one of the first preachers of Haile Selassie’s divinity whose “King of Kings Mission” numbered “over 800 adherents” at its peak. Hinds services featured fasts, feasts and baptisms, and afforded women a prominent place in services, all of which offer familiarity with Revivalist missions⁸⁶.

American anthropologist and foundational scholar of Rastafari Jake Homiak has ably demonstrated that these more typically Revivalist elements of liturgy eventually drew the ire of a zealous and righteous sect within the Rastafari movement in the 1950’s known as the “I-gelic House”. The I-gelic House saw these modes of practice as superstitious, and an unfortunate legacy from the early movement’s Revivalist context. As such they set about successfully expunging such practices from the movement, bringing Rastafari modes of worship more into line with what could be broadly recognised as Rastafari praxis today⁸⁷ However, despite this expunging process it is, as Homiak also notes, amongst these “folk taxonomies of the natural world” that the Rastafari movement utilised nature in its “resist[ance] of the dominant culture”. It is this we shall turn to in the proceeding chapter.

⁸⁵ Chevannes, *Roots and Ideology* 26

⁸⁶ Erskine, *Rastafari* 343

⁸⁷ Homiak, *Dub History* 132

Spiritual Development of Rastafari

For further context behind the ethnography within this research I will now turn briefly to chart the development of the movement from its foundation through to the present, also exploring the emergence of the movement in St Lucia. Towards the former, the aforementioned work of Ennis Edmonds, Chevannes and Barnett offer far more thorough charting than this dissertation and I would encourage readers to engage with these sources. Greater attention will be paid towards the development of the movement within Kingston in the following chapter as attention is turned to the development of an Ital Rubric. At this moment however it would be valuable to explore broadly the development of the movement through to the present, both to provide further, broader context and more specifically to understand the journey of the movement from a persecuted religious ‘cult’ to a pervasive and indeed dominant cultural force in the Caribbean and beyond. This serves to contextualise a striving towards resistance which remains prominent in the movement today and importantly serves to ground elements of Rastafari Ital Livivity.

In this, the movement began to take root throughout 1930’s Kingston and subsequently wider Jamaica first through the foundational preaching of Leonard Howell, Archibald Dunkley, Robert Hinds, Joseph Hibbert, and others, who led influential early ministries proclaiming the divinity of Haile Selassie⁸⁸. Haile Selassie was thrown into greater global prominence in 1935 when fascist Italy under the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini launched an invasion and eventual occupation of Ethiopia. This event, and the subsequent inaction of the League of Nations to honour its promises to protect the country, galvanised mass discontent and demonstration in the African diaspora. In Jamaica, this built upon a fertile Ethiopianist spiritual base and combined with long-running labour grievances to form a popular movement which bought about strikes, protests and a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the colonial regime⁸⁹. Canadian sociologist and similarly foundational scholar of Rastafari Carole Yawney notes that these “events were seized upon by the Rastafarians” and were

⁸⁸ Homiak informs me that, in further demonstration of Revival roots, the experience of “catching ena Myal”, having been “caught” or possessed by an ancestral spirit, was prevalent in Howell’s Pinnacle community. Both this practice and this phrasing would have been familiar to those in the Kumina tradition, and set those in Pinnacle apart from those in Kingston who largely rejected spirit possession.

⁸⁹ Bean, *Jamaican Women* 48

coupled with a spiritual and anti-colonialist political alienation from mainstream Jamaican society that would form “the basis of what initially appeared to be a utopian ideology⁹⁰”.

Through the work of these early preachers this “utopian ideology” found a firm base among the peasant population on the island. In this period of early growth, the movement and those within were frequent targets for persecution as a perceived threat to Jamaican society and the presence of the crown on the island. An anti-imperialist, anti-colonial religiopolitical movement with its own divine authority and its own social models. This is perhaps demonstrated most clearly in tracing the ministry of Leonard Howell. Reported to have described himself as the ‘messenger’ of Selassie and perhaps even divine himself, Howell was a preacher of great charisma who commanded increasingly large followings and devotion from his followers. Howell first appeared on the authorities’ radar in late 1933 after being reported by the Daily Gleaner newspaper to have been selling photographs of Haile Selassie in St Thomas parish intended for use as “passports to Ethiopia”, before another report describes his arrest in Port Morant on 5th January 1934 for these sales. Howell was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for this “seditious” act, after which he and his meetings were closely monitored by authorities⁹¹. This later motivated the newly released preacher to utilise his own funds to establish the “Pinnacle” community up in the hills of St Catherine parish. Howell established what is sometimes termed the “first Rastafari village”, a settlement still cited and idealised by many Rastafari today for its reported self-sufficiency and spiritual and social agency⁹². Pinnacle could be categorised as an agrarian commune, a place where families and individuals lived, ate, worked and worshipped together⁹³. Howell remained on the authorities’ radar however, and under the ostensible motivation of dismantling the cultivation of ganja the settlement was raided several times before police authorities enforced its closure in 1954, sending many of its inhabitants back to the city and Howell back to prison.

⁹⁰ Yawney, *Lions in Babylon* 47

⁹¹ Barnett, *Rastafari Movement* 58

⁹² Edmonds, *Outcasts* 37-38

⁹³ Many participants during this fieldwork and in previous drew upon Pinnacle as an exemplar of Rastafari autonomy and self-sufficiency. Additionally, K’adamawe K’nife, Edward Dixon and Allan Bernard in their excellent treatment of Pinnacle in the anthology *Leonard Percival Howell & The Genesis of Rastafari* discuss this further, offering Pinnacle as an example of a ‘social enterprise’ which can both empower a community and offer a sustainable approach to its surrounding environment. The authors state that “through Pinnacle, Howell empowered the people by strengthening their social, political and economic capital” developing “a unique concept of a self-sustaining community anchored in social agricultural entrepreneurship”.

Persecution against the movement in the form of beatings, forced shavings and social and economic ostracisation continued on a regular basis throughout the 50s and 60s. This peaked in April 1963 in an episode now referred to within the community as the ‘Coral Gardens Massacre’ or ‘Bad Friday’, in which an individual with dreadlocks attempted to rob a petrol station on the outskirts of Montego Bay⁹⁴. This incident and a subsequent violent backlash to it culminated in the deaths of civilians and police officers, and although Rastafari community members distanced themselves from the initial robbery and its perpetrator, a pogrom ensued. Police and military forces trawled city streets and encampments searching for Rastafari to assault, detain and forcibly trim, whilst fellow citizens and neighbours were purportedly encouraged by Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Prime Minister Alexander Bustamante to “bring in all Rastas, dead or alive”⁹⁵. Loss of dreadlocks and loss of blood was then compounded by loss of property, family and employment, as many Rastafari were sentenced to arbitrary prison sentences frequently couched in narcotics charges. Coral Gardens served to instil a hostile environment for the movement which would remain in place for decades following. Many Rastafari I spoke with on fieldwork in Jamaica in 2017 continued to suffer the after-effects of the massacre, with physical injuries still present and lost earnings never returned. Later in 2017, the government of JLP Prime Minister Andrew Holness, upon recommendation from a public inquiry, issued an apology “without equivocation” for the government’s role in the atrocity, establishing a trust fund for survivors of the incident. Whilst the apology was largely welcomed amongst those I spoke with, the fund’s financial size of \$10,000,000 Jamaican dollars (£60,000 at the time of its establishment) was invariably considered derisory. Issues in distribution of the funds also remain, and I’m aware of several survivors who have in recent months and years passed without receiving any compensation.

Despite this context of ostracization and open hostility, the Rastafari movement would make a remarkable rise from its beaten and bruised state to become the dominant cultural force on the island and the wider region. Edmonds neatly describes the movement as having gone through three phases in its relationship with wider Jamaican society: “(1) resistance and repression, (2) accommodation and assimilation, and (3) co-optation and commodification”⁹⁶. I would contend there is significant cross over between these three broad descriptors both

⁹⁴ Edmonds, *Short Introduction* 22-24

⁹⁵ See Thomas, *Exceptional Violence* for further detailing of this.

⁹⁶ Edmonds, *Outcasts* 89

historically and in the present. Edmonds charts the “beginning of the rapprochement” of phase two as commencing in 1960, three years before the brutality of Coral Gardens, whilst repression is very much still encountered by those in the movement today who struggle for the right to education⁹⁷ and self-expression⁹⁸. This framework is however broadly applicable and speaks to a gradual shift in public perceptions towards the movement through the 1960’s and beyond. A government-sponsored University of the West Indies report in 1960 gave intellectual and spiritual legitimacy to a movement it recommended engagement with, whilst the 1961 ‘Mission to Africa’ saw influential Rastafari elders and leaders partake in a diplomatic mission to further the status and rights of the group. This preceded a visit to the island from the movements divine inspiration as Haile Selassie arrived in Jamaica in 1966, an event which gave islanders a sense of the strength of devotion adherents as the airport was overrun by those hoping to get a glimpse of the ‘King of Kings’. The pan-African and anti-capitalist sentiment present within the movement was also beginning to percolate further amongst the island’s middle classes through the emergence of a reggae music infused with Rastafari themes, imagery and reverence for Haile Selassie. Through this, Rasta spirituality and its theology was bought beyond the ghettos of west Kingston to those across the island and eventually to the world⁹⁹.

Edmonds charts this third phase as beginning in the 1970s. He writes that as Rastafari ideas were now “more diffused in the society” the image of the Rastafari “sufferer”, one who calls out the ills in society and looks towards a better future, “became an item to be exploited by politicians in their quest to outdo their rivals”¹⁰⁰. From the calls for violent persecution from Prime Minister Bustamante in 1963, little over ten years later in 1976 JLP leader Edward Seaga would go on to brazenly employ Rastafari “dread talk” on the podium as he informed his electoral rival Prime Minister Michael Manley¹⁰¹ that “Eddie is trodding¹⁰² creation, and the kingdom over which he [Manley] rules no longer exists, because ‘Jah Kingdom Gone to

⁹⁷ Chappell, *School Can Ban Dreadlocks*

⁹⁸ Gleaner, *Haircut Ruling Next Week*

⁹⁹ The spread of reggae served as the primary point of germination for Rastafari movements across the world in the present, from Western Europe to New Zealand. In the UK, reggae combined with the physical migration of those amongst the ‘Windrush Generation’ to establish Rastafari as the vibrant force it is today.

¹⁰⁰ Edmonds *Outcasts* 90

¹⁰¹ Manley’s PNP had itself made heavy use of reggae music and Rastafari themes during campaigns in 1972 and 1976 including Manley adopting the Jewish Testament name of Joshua and campaigning with a rod allegedly given to him by Selassie on his visit dubbed the ‘rod of correction’.

¹⁰² “Trodding” or one’s “trod” is most often employed by Rastafari simultaneously to refer to one’s physical and spiritual journey through the movement.

Waste”¹⁰³. This invocation of Rastafari tropes in order to win votes from a public and a youth now alive to the movement epitomises the journey into commodification that Rastafari would face. Musicians and record companies soon recognised the commercial benefit of adopting a Rastafari sound and image as reggae began its march to global ubiquity. The status of reggae and the Rastafari representations at its core through to today represents big-business for the nation state of Jamaica which uses it to promote itself as an island of innovative and independent culture. As Edmonds notes, “reggae has become the most saleable element of Jamaican folk or popular culture”, something visible and audible across a plethora of Jamaican national brands – from the inevitably Bob Marley soundtracked adverts for holidays to its national football teams nicknamed the ‘Reggae Boyz/Girlz’.

It is this tension that defines Rastafari existence in the present for many across the globe. Seen as a mystic and independent spiritual force on one hand but then commodified and mass-produced by society around it. Viewed as innovative and spiritually intriguing, but stereotyped as ‘drug-addled’ or criminal. Utilised as a potent national brand when convenient but denigrated and degraded when not. Many of those I engaged with in Iyanola spoke with power towards fighting this tide and reclaiming Rastafari identity for the movement. Reclaiming the means of production, as it were, so that interest in Rastafari is converted into financial independence for the movement itself and not the global corporations who currently profit in a typically predictable bi-product of existence in Babylon. This forms one of many realities that Rastafari in the present express resistance towards, conscious that the movement is now treated with greater acceptance and tolerance than in previous generations but one still all too often determined by a system that does not seek to further its interests. Again, it is this resistance, and unfortunately this commodification, that can be seen to form part of Rastafari Ital Livivity in the ensuing chapters.

Development of Rastafari in St Lucia

I will now briefly chart the development of the Rastafari movement in St Lucia. This is apposite both for understanding the context within which this research took place and also as scholarly historical examinations of the Iyanola community are presently lacking, something I would implore researchers to engage with more explicitly. The movement is attested by

¹⁰³ Edmonds *Outcasts* 92

community elders to have arrived on the island in the late 1960s and early 70s. This arrival came amidst greater movement amongst citizens of the Caribbean thanks largely to the establishment of the “West Indies Shipping Service” (WISS), established in 1961 and linking the islands of the Eastern Caribbean with Jamaica in the west and Trinidad and Tobago in the south. The two vessels on this route, the Federal Maple and the Federal Palm, reflecting in name the Canadian origin of the boats as well as their destination in the tropics, served to ferry passengers, cargo and cultures between these territories. Amongst this group of Caribbean travellers were those who would bring the transformative message of Rastafari to St Lucia. This would come both from the outside in and the inside out, as those who arrived on the island for work combined with those who had left it for university education before returning after graduation carrying with them an intellectual pan-African inspired Rastafari outlook.

These students, travelling largely to Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Cuba, found themselves immersed in the pan-Africanist and Black liberationist intellectual currents that defined Caribbean campuses of the late 1960s and 70s. This was exemplified through the towering intellectual figure of Walter Rodney, himself a University of the West Indies at Mona student and eventual lecturer banned from returning to the University and to Jamaica by Prime Minister Hugh Shearer for his strident anti-colonial critique. Students who had left St Lucia frequently returned with a deeper connection to Africa and a deeper sense of injustice at the lot of Caribbean countries in the present. Some of these, like St Lucia itself, remained legal parts of the colonising nations who had done so much to develop themselves at the expense of their colonial ‘possessions’. Many amongst this group also returned with a spiritual connection to Africa expressed through Rastafari. Indeed, four contributors to this study experienced this very journey, one heading south to Trinidad and the others west to Jamaica. All had their first encounters with Rastafari on university campuses, and all spoke with intensity about the transformative experience that the spiritual and intellectual atmospheres they encountered had had on them through to the present. Robert Devaux, Guy Ellis & Jolien Harmsen write that of those who “return[ed] from campus with dreadlocks in their hair” many did so “to the despair of their parents”¹⁰⁴, a statement which largely bears out for those in this category who contributed to the study. My host was one of these, and was ultimately forced out of his family homestead and hometown in Gros Islet before heading

¹⁰⁴ Devaux, Ellis & Harmsen, *History of St Lucia* 324

south to Vieux Fort to achieve spiritual independence. From conversations with the wider community I quickly gained the impression that those amongst these returnees played a crucial role in bringing a zeal and an organisational proficiency to the movement, offering an important political intellectualism and establishing several of the first Rastafari groupings in Iyanola.

These educated members were however not described as the foundational core of the movement, a sobriquet as it was repeatedly put to me that belongs to a group known as the ‘Wharf Rats’. This was a group who formed part of the first category of WISS passengers who sought employment and opportunity in St Lucia. To this end, emigres who arrived adorned in Rastafari clothing, hairstyle and spirituality lived and congregated around the shipping wharves in Castries so as to be as close to any newly arising work opportunities as possible. It was here amongst the working and under-employed classes, much like in Jamaica, that the movement would take its first tentative steps onto the island from where it would flourish into a movement visible and audible across its entirety.

An important point should be noted here in the context of the development of Ital Livivity on the island. As an ‘imported’ spirituality to Iyanola rather than one generated within as with Jamaica, Rastafari arrived in the late 60s and 70s as a movement which had already undergone several intellectual transformations. The emergence of Ital was one of these, and as such those who brought Rastafari with them to St Lucia likely came as ‘Italists’, those who embodied the dietary and ritual purity practices contained within the rubric¹⁰⁵. It is also perhaps the case that this cohort, largely younger males, were able to operate with a greater degree of intellectual freedom that enabled further innovation and the embrace of newer spiritual ideas, such as Ital, than those in Jamaica in the orbit of highly influential elders. It is thus important to bear in mind the probable centrality of Ital amongst the first and subsequent generation of Rastafari on the island, something that may render it more central to

¹⁰⁵ Richard Price’s theorisation of the “first time” or “first time knowledge”, and David Scott’s subsequent application of this to African diasporic communities is worth noting here. The sense that the knowledge which belonged to the first of those to make it over a threshold of before and after, I.E the disempowerment and before the arrival of Rastafari and the awakening after its emergence, is of a particularly sacred character. Knowledge that marks out a “temporal and even a spatial break” between the two periods, leading to a valorisation of the forms which came in the latter. This may well be a feature here, as the established Ital forms served as prominent features of this ‘break’. See Scott, *That Event*

contemporary practice than in Jamaica, when considering the perspectives given towards it in the following chapters

The early days of the movement were said to be defined by a tangible fervour of a new movement that offered pride, agency and resistance against a colonial master which still considered the island a ‘federated state’ in its ‘association’. During this time the early movement adopted a somewhat itinerant existence, with members travelling around the island by bus, car and foot to join regular binghi¹⁰⁶ celebrations and gatherings either at yards or communities up in the hills. One elder amongst the first generation of Rastafari on the island, Sister Sheba, a deeply passionate Rastafari matriarch and vivid orator now living in a small town on the east of the island, spoke to me about the “zeal” present in these times. “To go like different places, different Rasta homes, hills, valleys, mountains. Carry our children on our back, we would make dat ting happen”. Some particular community members were said to have played an instrumental role during these times, ferrying Rastafari all around and through the island in three seater flatbed trucks painted red, gold and green. Both the front and back would be filled to capacity, a not uncommon sight on the roads of St Lucia still to this day, and multiple pick-up runs would be taken on each night.

As the movement grew however, in a mirror of its country of origin, state sponsored persecution soon followed. Rastafari was deemed to be a nefarious degenerate ideology which sought to set people against people and, perhaps most troublingly, people against crown and state. St Lucian Rastafari experienced persecution including savage beatings at the hands of police forces, evictions and job loss, forced shavings, arbitrary detention and the subsequent break up of families. Many contributors to this study amongst the first generation spoke in vivid detail of this brutality, something again attributed to the highest echelon of St Lucian political power within an openly hostile policy towards the movement under Prime Minister and ‘Father of the Nation’ John Compton. A desire for autonomy and to leave the persecution of the “system” behind led several Rastafari up into the central hills of the island to form agrarian communities. Most notable amongst these was the ‘Mount Gimmie’ settlement, a name that, like Pinnacle, lives long in the imagination of St Lucian Rastafari as

¹⁰⁶ Communal Rastafari worship events, most often to mark particularly significant occasions such as the coronation of Haile Selassie or Marcus Garvey’s “earthstrong” (birthday).

a place of independence, natural living and free spirituality¹⁰⁷. The parallels with Pinnacle go further in the ultimate demise of the community through barbaric police intervention, when in 1977 the community's members were beaten and arrested and its structures dismantled and destroyed in an effort to "bring man back to di system" as one interviewee present during the raid put it¹⁰⁸.

In further Jamaican parallel, this hostility was also coupled with political attempts at co-optation. Ras I-ron, at the time of interview the president of the islands Rastafari umbrella group and an unceasingly active entrepreneur, recounted to me memories as a young child of the 1979 election, a contest in which "the first time the issue of legalising cannabis [featured and] it was done by the Labour Party (SLP). The Labour Party at the time said 'look, we gunna do this', so they want the Rastafari to support them this that and the other and they won the election. So there was evidence that the Rasta's at the time who very strongly against politics they say well you know that's the only party which is talking about this issue which is central to us". Motivated by assurances towards what would have been a globally avant-garde cannabis policy and a desire to see the directly discriminatory regime of Compton behind them, Rastafari were moved to engage in a political process generally considered anathema to the anti 'polytricks' philosophy of the group. Such a move ultimately proved against this better judgement. After unseating twelve-year premier Compton with a seven-seat majority, I-ron reports the SLP "came into power then they had this big victory rally to thank people and so on and so forth and one of them on the platform said 'Oh, they know they say about legalising marijuana but they have come to the realisation that they on a battlefield and they don't wan no blown minded soldiers'". This incident inevitably damaged the very much borrowed good will with which the community engaged with the political process, and the public denigration of cannabis as producing "blown minded soldiers" entrenched a sense that the perception of Rastafari amongst those in the halls in power had changed little if at all from the regime of open persecution under Compton. After a party

¹⁰⁷ Both Mount Gimmie and Pinnacle attest to the importance of physical separation and altitude within Rastafari communities as a means of separation from Babylon. Within this we might see Ital Livity not necessarily as an end in itself, but as something that is practiced to further break from the far-reaching tendrils of Babylon. In a physical location which is itself separated this is emphasised.

¹⁰⁸ This notion of having escaped and escaping from the system points to intellectual roots emerging from 'Maroonage' present within the movement. See Goldson, *Liberating the Mind*

schism the SLP would lose power after only three years to be replaced by the return of Compton who would remain in power until 1996.

Through a transfusion of Rastafari throughout the island in its members, the spread of its message through reggae music and the growing cultural influence of the movement in Jamaica as a dominant cultural force across the Anglophone Caribbean, the status of Rastafari in St Lucia became more settled over the years to a point today of largely normalised relations. Participants reported to me the restriction of access to education through a ban on dreadlocks in schools in the 90s and 00s, something which saw some children sent to live with other members of the community in the catchment area of schools with more sympathetic principals. This was described as rare in the present. Today, Rastafari represent a significant segment of the St Lucian population. During my time conducting research on the island I was struck by the level of engagement between the government and the Rastafari community through the islands Rastafari umbrella group the Iyanola Council for the Advancement of Rastafari (ICAR), something I had not encountered in any other location and perhaps partly attributable to the island's size¹⁰⁹. During fieldwork, ICAR met with governmental figures including Prime Minister Alan Chastanet on issues varying from coronavirus to the provision of agricultural land. Some community members celebrated this as progress and legitimacy whilst others saw it as legitimising a Babylon system only interested in utilising Rastafari towards its own ends. A struggle towards the legalisation of cannabis occupied many of those engaged throughout this research, something which shall be explored later in this piece¹¹⁰.

It should also be noted that there exists a well-established network of exchange that has existed between Rastafari groups in St Lucia and the Caribbean in an inter-island network. Whilst the movement emerged from Jamaica out to Iyanola connections between the two, as well as other islands in the region, has remained strong. Today the Caribbean Rastafari Organization (CRO)¹¹¹ exists to link individuals and communities across the area, with

¹⁰⁹ Such engagement threw was questioned by some in the community, with historical perceptions of a 'strictly Ital' mode as one which offers no engagement with government or "polytricks".

¹¹⁰ After my departure the new SLP government of Phillip St Pierre enacted legalisation to decriminalise small amounts of ganja.

¹¹¹ The CRO represents the contemporary evolution of previous efforts towards regional cooperation, emerging out of the ECRO (Eastern Caribbean Rastafari Organisation) which followed the 1983 Second RITA (Ras Tafari International Theocracy Assembly) gathering at the UWI Mona campus.

worship celebrations, conferences and, as necessitated in recent times, online events, allowing the exchange of ideas and forward planning into the present.

Conclusion

The historical roots of the Rastafari movement are central to its contemporary manifestation. Emerging from a context of sheer brutality and inequality, spiritual innovation and resistance to dominant cultural forms has offered empowerment, protection and guidance. All of this is visible in the movement and within Ital Livivity today as shall be explored. Further, establishing the history of the movement in Iyanola is a task befitting a far larger treatment than it receives here. It is hoped the above offers something of a foundation for other researchers to build on and to trace this development in much greater detail. In the next chapter I will explore core elements of Rastafari Ital Livivity, offering some possible sites of influence towards their emergence in the present in which the historical roots above serve as cornerstones.

Chapter Two – Establishing Rastafari Ital Livity and Ecotheology: Organic Yearnings, Common Divinity and Rejection of Death

When I spoke with those who contributed to this research as to the core of an Ital Livity, what came across most frequently and most vividly was a sense of connection with the earth and with everything on, in and around it. As was so often reported to me throughout fieldwork, a “holistic” view of the interconnectivity of all and thus the interdependency of all. This was invariably grounded in a sense of an interconnectivity *through* the Almighty from which emanates a divine energy which serves as both source and conduit for the connection which abounds all in creation. Naturality is also essential to this conceptualisation. As I have explored elsewhere¹¹², this connectivity between all in creation is at its strongest and most potent when all exist in as natural a state as possible. It is this natural state, after all, in which the world and wider creation first came into being, and thus a state far more in tune with the design vision of the Almighty than the altered and corrupted landscapes enforced onto the world by Babylon. Within this, Rastafari emphasise what might be termed the ‘liful’ and the vibrant, that which oozes with this pulsating energy, and accordingly a rejection of that which does not.

In this chapter, I will thus further establish Rastafari Ital Livity through an exploration of three broad intellectual tropes which constitute it as emerged from fieldwork. I will suggest that this yearning for a green and natural Iration sits alongside an emphasis on the ‘liful’ as well as a holistic sense of the divinity in all. I will then chart some historical roots for these outlooks, offering some possible sites of influence within the movement since its inception. In this, I am in agreement with Jamaican theologian Anna Kasafi Perkins in witnessing in Rastafari Ital Livity and its broader cosmology a panentheistic formulation which I shall expand on here¹¹³. I will then in the next two chapters turn to explore the more specific spiritual outlooks and practices these broad themes engender.

¹¹² See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics*

¹¹³ See Perkins, *Earth is the Lord*

As I will outline, all three of these tropes were formed around resistance¹¹⁴. Resistance to the filth and squalor of the Kingston slums. Resistance to the cultural and religious hegemony that paints white as divine and Black as corrupted. Resistance to a colonial plantocracy which uses death and suffering as its tools of oppression. Rastafari spirituality and the ecotheology built upon this foundation renders itself anti-colonial and postcolonial. Challenge is made towards the dominant power structures of subjugation that defined life for those around the movement's formation as well as the dominant narratives that sprang forth from it and continue to preference the climatic wellbeing of those outside the Caribbean. It is crucially important to note here however that although doubtless integral to the formulation of Rastafari philosophy and present within it still, notions of resistance are often employed by some scholars in far too totalising a manner in regards to Rastafari throughout history and in the present. So much of Rastafari thought, identity and praxis orients itself towards *being*, existing as an established form and an established community in the present in and of itself. This shall be witnessable throughout this dissertation.

Yawney's formative research paper 'Strictly Ital' offers a description of Ital informed Livity as being constructed upon "three sources [...] First, we find African cultural elements which persist as an aspect of Jamaican peasant culture¹¹⁵ [...] Secondly, the Bible can serve ideological ends [...] Finally we have the counter-colonial ideology of the natural man".

Whilst Yawney here highlights three important sources which are doubtless influences on the development of Rastafari Ital Livity, I will put forward the view that there are possibly even more sites of influence for contemporary manifestations of Ital Livity. African cultural elements can be seen in the Revival-influenced worldviews explored in the previous chapter and shall be further outlined here. The sense of striving towards a counter-colonial "natural man" is also visible through the conceptualisations of an insulating ritual purity that emerged out of the movement's urban congress in Kingston, a descriptor I will assert can also be broadened to include a yearning towards a 'first man' primordial orientation. I would however contend as I have elsewhere that the direct Biblical influence that Yawney points to in terms of proscriptions seems to have waned somewhat over time in place of a more holistic

¹¹⁴ Whilst the theme of resistance is very much prominent within these Rastafari conceptualisations, it should be noted still that contemporary manifestations of Rastafari are frequently grounded in communities and exist through being rather than a constant force of resistance to that around. This will be visible in subsequent chapters.

¹¹⁵ Further detail towards these African-Caribbean similarities is offered by Chevannes. See *Roots*

approach to diet and Livity¹¹⁶. I shall note however that the Bible remains influential for some participants who utilised it largely as a broader source of cosmological inspiration. I would suggest also that Yawney's piece, perhaps due to its brevity as a conference paper and one primarily concerned with Rastafari health approaches, does not take into account development *within* the movement, particularly the hugely cosmologically significant influence of Haile Selassie which may specifically have served to ground two of the tropes I identify.

Whilst Chevannes rightly notes the deeply formative Jamaican peasant roots explored in the previous chapter, I will also offer three possible further sites of influence within the prominent tropes which ground Rastafari Ital Livity in the present.

Defining Ital/Livity

Before beginning to ground Ital Livity further it is important to further specify these interrelated but also separate terms. Across scholarship, definitions of Ital and of Livity often represent a great deal of crossover. Yawney describes Livity as “roughly a ‘way of life’ or ‘lifestyle’”. She then goes on to describe those who came into Rastafari outside of Jamaica as having an immediate sense of the movement as one which “has to do with wearing Dreadlocks and living ital [sic]” which she then notes as an “outward expression of Livity”. Her description of Livity is one that accords with those I have researched amongst as a broad descriptor for Rastafari philosophies and lifeways. I would however suggest that for many I engaged with throughout this study Ital was also something found within the self and something which one used to interpret the world. An integral part of a broader philosophical outlook which is termed as ‘Livity’, loosely one’s own spirituality and the teachings that inform it. This is, as with all aspects of Rastafari spirituality, a highly individualised bricolage of beliefs and practices. One which individuals ‘live’ out and form their ‘Livity’ through these ‘lived’ actions’, again representing an emphasis on the importance of life and the lived nature of humanity within Iration.

Ital, I would then suggest, serves as an aspect of Livity which is utilised as a more codified category amongst participants. One which is deeply fundamental and describes an

¹¹⁶ Powell ‘Ital Trod’ 10-12

individual's attachment to the created world around them. This is broadly invoked, from the dietary practices one engages in and the way in which one grows one's hair to the intimate connection individuals have with the very earth beneath their feet. Nuances and a variation of views again exist within this, with some offering the view that Ital represents the "most natural" form of Livity, an idealised and ultimate form of 'living' whilst others describe Ital as a constituent part of their Livity. A distinction between either an ultimate form in the former or a component part in the latter¹¹⁷. During this fieldwork participants tended towards this latter description, and it is thus one I will be utilising in this study. In either formulation however, it is conceptualisations of Ital which lay at the heart of Rastafari ecotheological outlooks and which shall be explored throughout this dissertation.

Naturality and the 'First Man'

Fundamental to Rastafari Ital Livity conceptualisations is a connection with and a yearning towards the natural. Life within and amongst the most natural forms of creation as possible, away from the most inorganic and artificial forms inherent within a life in Babylon. As one participant explained after I had asked what was for them the intellectual core of the movement - "that's the basis of a Rastaman Livity, natural. Cos that's how man was created. Natural. So the earth, once I come to that awareness I find that I have to do everything possible to know that natural base". Chevannes describes the centrality and strength of this attraction towards the natural in stating that it is with "almost the force of doctrine" that Rastafari "reject artificial things pertaining to life [...] Rastafari place heavy stress on nature as a gift of the Father 'for the healing of the nation'"¹¹⁸. As shall be explored later in this dissertation, this yearning towards nature invariably results in a desire amongst Rastafari to reside in as natural a surrounding as possible, although the means of achieving this are variable. Jamaican Rastafari studies scholar Jahlani Niaah describes the "occupation" of lands in the Blue Mountains range in Jamaica of the School of Vision Rastafari group in pursuit of this so that the community "would be home to the purest natural offering Rastafari would require in pursuit of their 'Ital' or natural and pure Livity"¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁷ Further distinction here exists in use of the term "Strictly Ital" to refer to a most fundamental practice of the embrace of the natural, most commonly encountered in reference to dietary practice.

¹¹⁸ Chevannes, *Rastafari & Other African Caribbean Worldviews* 221

¹¹⁹ Niaah, *End of Afro-Pessimism* 589

As noted above in Yawney's foundational mapping of Livity in *Strictly Ital*, she points to a "natural man" influence described by some of her contributors to ground their explanations of Rastafari Livity. She describes this as a "counter-colonial ideology" in "the sense of against science, technology, and consumerism, and for self-knowledge, cottage industry and simplicity¹²⁰". As I have described and shall further establish, the counter-colonial aspect of this is absolutely central to the rubric's development and contemporary manifestation. It is my sense however that the described anti-science element, whilst no doubt present in this study in some areas, particularly regarding nuclear technology, is perhaps not as prominent as it was during Yawney's research in the 70s and 80s. Almost all of those I engaged with owned an internet-connected smartphone and connected with family, friends and fellow Rastafari all over the world through social media and instant messaging applications¹²¹. It was instead my sense that attitudes on this were now more nuanced. Whilst almost all of those I engaged with disputed mainstream scientific narratives around Covid-19¹²², the same such perspectives on the impacts of climate change were largely accepted.

I would also assert that Yawney's descriptors can be broadened out to offer a definition of the "natural man" which strives towards the 'first man'. Away from the artificiality and consumerism of the present and towards an ultimate 'simplicity' of the first times. A "striving towards a sense of primordial existence which seeks to radically return, in its literal definition to those first in creation"¹²³. King Khalid, a towering farmer and powerful rhetorician in his sixties, perhaps represented the longest connection to such an orientation having rejected life in the towns and cities of the island for an agrarian existence on communal farms on the islands hillside around forty years ago. He described this "journey" back to the first in what I would come to understand as a typically expressive style in framing it in educational terms. "What I realise is that education, man's first education came from the universe. You check? But nowadays our education comes from the university [...] I've come to realise that I have to go back into the universe to see whatever there is, that a man can have a basic education. Something that would bring you back into the realm where the creator created". A stepping back away from the teachings of the present towards the natural wisdom of the past. A going back to ultimately go forward.

¹²⁰ Yawney, *Strictly Ital* 3

¹²¹ Homiak describes the now ubiquitous interconnectivity of global Rastafari and the movements consumption of news and current affairs, something he terms the 'mediascape'. See Homiak, *Soundscapes to Mediascape*

¹²² See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah*

¹²³ Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* 12

Much like Khalid, many framed this desire for the primordial in the terms of a “return” to the life of those first on this planet¹²⁴. Those who did most frequently drew upon two sites of influence in this. First and by far most prominent amongst these was the view that given when Jah first created the earth it existed in a wild, untamed natural state, this was ultimately the vision the Almighty had for the planet in its existence. This is a view again embodied through language, as “Iration” speaks to an unadulterated creation living in harmony with itself, with the speaker and with the Almighty. As I have noted in an alimentary context this view leads some Rastafari to valorise the consumption of food only in its raw state¹²⁵, whilst a predilection for clothes and furniture in as organic a state as possible is visible around Rastafari homes and dwellings. For many this “return” was one imaged as a return “into the hills”, mirroring both a cosmological desire to head up into the righteous mountain of Zion and also a historical journey taken by both the Rastafari in Jamaica and St Lucia into the hinterlands in search of a full actualised self-spiritual expression away from persecution¹²⁶.

Others combined this primary source of primordial yearning with either a grounding, in or an inspiration from, Biblical narratives. This shall be explored in greater depth later in this piece, but for now we shall note that sources most frequently cited here included the creation narrative contained within Genesis of an Edenic paradise in which predation and suffering are absent. Sister Sheba put this in explicitly Edenic terms in stating humanity must be working back to restore humanity as close to the Garden as possible. “That is where there is great joy, everything is pure, everything will be electric! And that will make humans move again”. Frequent in reference also was the eschatological vision in Isaiah 11 in which the author describes “the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid [...] they will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” [11:6-9]¹²⁷. That this passage contains reference to a holy mountain is again of even greater significance to a movement grounded in the altitudinous paradigm of Babylon/Zion. With the heterogeneous nature of Rastafari in mind,

¹²⁴ This notion of return is of course mirrored in Rastafari desires for repatriation to Africa and is often articulated as a return that can be engaged in jointly, to the first in creation at the site of the first emergence of humanity. Many however engage in means to return to the primordial creation in the setting around them in lieu of an ability to physically repatriate to Africa. See Powell, *Ten Miles*

¹²⁵ See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* 40. The trend towards raw foods was more notable amongst younger Rastafari I engaged with, a demographic pattern also visible amongst global trends towards raw veganism.

¹²⁶ See Powell, *Ten Miles* for further discussion of this.

¹²⁷ All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless stated otherwise.

these two strands are far from exhaustive and were for many often combined alongside other elements to form an individualised understanding of the ‘first man’. I did not however find any during this fieldwork who did not identify with the premise itself in some form, and many considered a “return” to this primordial existence a core aspect of Rastafari work on this planet. A returning both of humanity and of the Iration it is a part of to an original divine blueprint for the planet, through words and through deeds.

These articulations attest to a prominent element of Rastafari thought and practice more broadly, a pronounced dichotomy between what might be termed the natural and cultural. A desire to resist the fallen, corrupted path of human culture which has strayed, particularly in the recent past, towards the destruction of everything around it and thus away from the will and the vision of the Almighty. Rastafari thus represents a movement leading efforts to return humanity to a pure naturality, and in the process reconstructing the human as it was in the first.

Ritual Purity and Organic Yearnings

In terms of situating historical influences on this aspect of Ital Livity, an exploration of the colonial oppression of 1930s Jamaica and the decades which preceded it is paramount. At the turn of the decade which would herald the emergence of the Rastafari movement in Jamaica, the country’s labouring classes were hit by a maelstrom of socio-economic tribulations. The global financial crash of 1929 alongside prolonged colonial mismanagement rendered the island’s largely agricultural economy severely bruised. This precipitated mass unemployment, rises in the cost of living, labour disputes and increasingly poor conditions for those who were able to find work¹²⁸. Whilst hundreds had been leaving the rural parishes for the urban centres of the island for several years prior to 1929, this process was greatly accelerated by these events. Rural-to-urban migration subsequently took place on a mass scale as Kingston’s population swelled from 59,700 in 1911 to 110,100 in 1943¹²⁹. Already poor conditions in the city were exacerbated as services and space were stretched, with the western side of Kingston, where the Rastafari movement would emerge and solidify amongst

¹²⁸ Unrest occurred across the island and throughout the Anglophone Caribbean during the 1930’s, reaching a head in the form of the Kingston labourers strike in 1938. At the end of the year 46 deaths, 429 injuries and thousands of arrests had been enacted by British troops. See Samaroo, *Trinidad Disturbances* 266.

¹²⁹ Cumper, *Population Movements* 275

the confines of Back-O-Wall and Trench Pen, profoundly impacted. Verene Shepherd describes these areas as consisting of “veritable slums” forced into existence “through overcrowding” with the appearance of “homes consist[ing] of thatched huts and shacks made of every conceivable type of material”. This led to an unflattering sobriquet for the area, as Trench Pen became described locally as “the ‘Tin Roof Town’ [...] on account of the fact that since zinc was rare, many of the shacks were roofed by flattened petrol tins”¹³⁰.

Through the 50s and 60s as the movement grew within Back-o-Wall, Back-o-Wall, for those in power, grew to be emblematic of a nation in decline. Jamaican scholar of Rastafari Clinton Hutton powerfully writes to this perception amongst Edward Seaga’s JLP administration whose government would eventually send in the “bulldozers and flames” to clear the settlement and markedly disrupt the formative Rastafari social order which had grown within. “By 1962 Western Kingston had become the epicentre of the nation’s woes; the signature of an apocalyptic journey into a terrain of fruitless empathy and trust, a cathedral of sorrow constructed in the building of a marasmic and miasmatic postcolonial state. And the centre of that epicentre was Back-o-Wall”. Hutton quotes a government public relations office account of the era as describing “families sleep[ing] on pieces of cardboard covered with scraps of cloth” amidst a smell of “rotting wood, mud, sour water and faeces and scraps of cooked food waste”¹³¹.

It is from this milieu that both the Rastafari movement and its intellectualisations of Ital would emerge as the forces they are today. A context Yawney graphically refers to as “the very colon of Babylon” which would come to be known as the ‘Dungle’, a faecally inspired reinterpretation of the word ‘jungle’ which speaks directly to the disordered labyrinth of filth and contamination it constituted. One in which communities were offered no physical means of escape, or even retreat, from a day-to-day life defined by the oppression of irretrievably squalid conditions. One which had formed as a result of the neglect and antipathy of a colonial government towards the wellbeing of the Black majority population in favour of those at ‘home’ in the ‘Mother Country’. The very soul of Babylon and its excesses laid out for everything that it is.

¹³⁰ Shepherd, *Economic Problems* 20

¹³¹ Hutton, *Oh Rudie* 31-32

From this base, a rubric sprung forth to offer ritual insulation from the inescapable pollutants that surrounded a community seeking purity in an impure world. Whilst the community could not exert a degree of control over their existence that would physically remove them from their immediate situation it could exert a form of control over that which occurred *within* the context. British social anthropologist Sheila Kitzinger quotes one Rastafari inhabitant as proudly asserting “though we Rastafari live on the Dungle, we are not *of* the Dungle. We don’t eat off the Dungle (that is, gather condemned food stuffs and other rubbish dumped from the refuse trucks, as some of the very poor are forced to do to survive). We do not eat like Jim Crow [...] it is below the integrity”¹³². Rites and rituals developed which allowed participants to exert control over their own selves if not their environ, all contained within the framework of “Ital”. Within this American anthropologist Mary Douglas’ pioneering yet deeply problematic account of ritual purity is of foundational value. Her descriptions of “primitive religions [...] inspired by fear” up against and “separated” from the “great religions of the world” are deplorable and speak to a deeply colonially inspired hegemonic view of spirituality¹³³. They also serve to obscure the value of the seminal contributions within. Douglas offers a broad conceptualisation of ritual purity amongst spiritual groups in which “sacred things and places are to be protected from defilement. Holiness and impurity are at opposite poles”¹³⁴. This was indeed how it was to develop amongst Rastafari, as Babylon and Zion occupied these dichotomous poles within the rubric of Ital Livity, as it would come to be known, utilised to maintain a separation between the two. A ritual distance from the material reality of Babylon towards the pure and unadulterated spiritual aspiration of Zion.

It is through this “sufferation” that the Rastafari movement would begin to develop its own unique set of rituals and practices that would constitute Ital. Early and proto-Rastafari rituals, as influenced by Myal and syncretic Revival forms, concerned themselves greatly with the purification of the self and the physical body away from the impure surroundings that defined

¹³² Kitzinger, *Protest and Mysticism* 241. Circular brackets the original authors. Kitzinger’s prominently colonial tone in this piece must be noted and renders its content unfortunately far less useful than it would otherwise be.

¹³³ Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 1

¹³⁴ Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 7

the immediate context. A resistance to the inevitability of suffering within a colonial existence. This invariably utilised natural substances such as water, salt and plant leaves¹³⁵. Later an understanding of the body and soul as a divine temple, a “temple of the Most High” in the words of many, would engender views and practices towards the consecration and sanctification of the self for the Almighty. This is perhaps most commonly recognisable through the development of the veneration and consumption of ganja, whilst growing dreadlocks and engaging in distinctive dress and speech modes served as an outward social expression of this inner sanctity as Yawney highlights above¹³⁶.

The removal of pollutants was also coupled with avoidance. The blood that entered the surrounding environment from human and animal sources was transfused with spiritual connotations, with its presence through injury or menstruation¹³⁷ limiting an adherent’s ability to engage in certain behaviours or access certain spaces¹³⁸. An increasingly organised collection of dietary practices also began to emerge which attempted to limit the presence of food deemed to have been contaminated by Babylon¹³⁹. This ranged from the deeply tainted refuse Kitzinger highlights above to an avoidance of processed and mechanised foods in favour of the organic. This processing was conceived to be a part of the industrialisation inherent in a Babylonian system that had enacted the oppression the community found itself under. Increasingly, plant-based provisions were favoured over meat. Early practitioners largely avoided pork largely along biblical lines although this has since developed into widespread avoidance of meat through a sense that flesh represents a corrupting influence in the body as a literal embodiment of death¹⁴⁰. Salt consumption was also avoided, in its earliest form due to its association with rituals and later for some as a needless adulteration and impurification of the food it is to be added to¹⁴¹.

¹³⁵ Chevannes, *Rastafari Roots*, 16-25. Chevannes pioneering text assertively traces the early spiritual influences of Rastafari and even points to the discernible presence of Revival rituals amongst some Rastafari well into the 1970’s. Homiak, *Dub History*, 132. Homiak convincingly argues these more visibly ritualistic elements were largely expunged by a zealot reform movement known as the I-gelic House in 1960’s

¹³⁶ See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah* 5-6

¹³⁷ Homiak, *Review of Rastafari*. Homiak discusses a view present amongst some Rastafari derived from the Bible that women represent the ‘weaker vessel’ through which the community might be opened to some maleficent external influence, with blood the visible indicator of this.

¹³⁸ For example, one who is bleeding or injured and thus ritually impure might have their access to the tabernacle (the site of Rastafari spiritual gatherings) or the altar within the tabernacle limited

¹³⁹ See Powell, *Ital Trod* for more detailed discussion of Rastafari dietary practices

¹⁴⁰ See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* 36-37

¹⁴¹ Powell, *Ital Trod* 13

It is within these rituals and practices that an intellectual core emerged which desired for a humanity, and an Iration, in its most natural form. With the avoidance, removal and sanctification of the self within this most extreme manifestation of artificiality, degradation and the suffering in the slums of Kingston, the community could not only avoid these surroundings but it could reverse the corruption imposed by them in moving towards a pure and natural state. An outright rejection of the artificial squalor that defined life in Babylon and towards an existence amongst the purity of Zion made attainable through ritual insulation and spiritual purity. The corruption and brutality represented by the Caribbean contrast against the original purity of Africa. The primordial vision for creation outlined by the Almighty against the corrupted manifestation enacted by the wicked human forces under them. It is thus my view that amongst these deeply practical acts of purification Rastafari would engender the philosophical trope of a yearning towards the natural and the primordial found amongst adherents through to today. The “natural man” Yawney describes, in tune with, and reaching forward to, the first in creation. A “return”, as many put it, to a harmonious life as it was initially envisaged by the Almighty¹⁴².

Common Divinity and ‘Vibrationality’

Rastafari Ital Livity, as articulated by contributors to this study, represents a belief system which emphasises divinity in everything and the presence of everything within the divine. From this emerges a belief in the shared essence of all and of unity with all. This is again audible. The frequent Rastafari refrain “InI” serves as a pronoun both in place of the first person ‘I’, as the speaker is placed alongside the Almighty as one of two I’s in the phrase which is also utilised instead of ‘we’ or ‘us’ to speak to a sense of unity with those present. This phrase offers a vocal manifestation of the limitless presence of the Almighty in everything around humanity and also within humanity. As Edmonds rightly notes, this linguistic device speaks to a fundamental aspect of Rastafari theology in the “consciousness of the self as divine embodied in the oft-cited refrain ‘God is man, man is God’”¹⁴³. In conversation Empress Eve, an Ital restaurateur based in Castries, spoke powerfully to this, describing “if you cannot see the God in you I assure you there is God in nobody else”. She

¹⁴² Rastafari here offers a noteworthy point of comparison with the ‘naturalistic’ cosmologies of Taoism and Shinto with both seeing an innate purity and power in nature but with Rastafari springing forth in contrast from a base of post industrialised desecration.

¹⁴³ Edmonds, *Short Intro*, 32–36.

further explained that before one is able to witness the divinity within broader creation, “first you recognise that the divine is within you and that you are divine”.

This sense of holistic unity forms a crucial part of what I have previously identified as the ‘Ital Hermeneutic’, a distinctive exegetical approach which offers a “radical reinterpretation of spiritual resources in serving to place the unity of creation at the centre of interpretation”¹⁴⁴. This hermeneutic shall be explored in greater depth in the latter stages of this piece. I am very much in agreement with Perkins view that whilst this outlook might “appear[] at first glance to be pantheistic” conversations I have had with participants lead me more to the view that this broadening of divinity represents something closer to panentheism. A “more nuanced” recognition that “everything that exists is in God even as God is beyond everything that exists [...] the Almighty dwells in all Iration and this energy which imbues creation is present in humanity”, as Perkins puts it¹⁴⁵. A distinction, as American theologian Loriliai Biernacki describes, beyond a notion that God is “everywhere, an animistic force in rocks and trees” and towards one in which “God is both in the world, immanent, and also beyond the confines of mere matter, also transcendent”¹⁴⁶. This separation between Rastafari panentheism and the animism often associated with Indigenous spiritual movements is one I will turn to in the following chapter. At this point however we shall note the sense of unity, or “Inity”, that lays at its heart¹⁴⁷. One in which all have a shared sense of each other and a shared sense of the divine¹⁴⁸.

It is important to also note here the sense of holism and unity which pervades Rastafari being “in the world” alongside the Almighty. This appears attributable at least in part to the Jamaican peasant roots which inspire the movement, with the movement inheriting an African-inspired monistic conceptualisation also present in Revival. A rejection of Cartesian dualism and a unity between body and mind, flesh and spirit. One in which a sense of existing refers to a specific kind of embodiment in which thinking, being and acting are

¹⁴⁴ Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* 33

¹⁴⁵ Perkins, *Earth is Lord* 14-15

¹⁴⁶ Biernacki, *Panentheism Outside the Box* 1-2

¹⁴⁷ “Inity” forms another I-form word which by its very articulation places the speaker at the heart of the unity they speak of.

¹⁴⁸ As Congo-Nyah et al note many Rastafari consider it possible to reach higher states of sensing this “Inity” through music or the use of herbs. See Congo-Nyah et al, *Communications from the Herbs* 264. Others have spoken to me about their use of meditation or tai chi to reach such a state of consciousness.

viewed as unity¹⁴⁹. This is a unity which is mirrored in human interactions with the natural world, where all are conceived as one. The reverse of this, a distinction between humanity and nature, represents a dangerously anthropocentric and hubristic sentiment which for many of my interlocutors lies at the root of the environmental and ecological degradation visible in the present. This Cartesian rejection can again be viewed through the Babylon/Zion paradigm. A Babylonian, Euro-devised spiritual energy which seeks to further emphasise this division and accordingly wreak destruction within creation, whilst the force of Zion which emphasises ultimate naturality and unity stands in its way.

Interaction within this is frequently articulated by participants as communicable through “vibrations”. An “energy” which exists throughout Iration and serves to connect everything within it - one which is transferred back and forth between all of its constituent parts. These vibrations are often seen not as neutral carriers of energy, but rather packets of information which allow for the outpouring and ingestion of either positive or negative energy within them. The Rastafari concept of Word, Sound, Power forms a key part of this. As American author Anand Prahlaḍ notes, Word, Sound, Power represents “an orientation that imbues sound with agency [and] with the power to manifest in the material world” where “the nature of matter is [understood to be] vibrational”¹⁵⁰. This ubiquitous ‘vibrationality’ thus infuses the words and sounds of all in Iration with the ability to effect all others, which itself can then be utilised to “chant down Babylon” in the chanting and drumming of Rastafari binghi gatherings and celebrations¹⁵¹.

This is also an energy communicable through actions. In an ecological context, if a farmer engages in planting or harvesting with negative energy in their heart and mind, the soil and plants they interact with will absorb this and respond accordingly in the produce that springs forth from it. Beyond this, even the presence of those on the farm with negative energy can have an adverse effect. I-3, a young farmer resided on a rural agrarian community in the centre of the island, surmised this astutely when he spoke of the impact of this energy in regard to his ganja farming. “Now Rastafari faith we live according to, we have a very special Ital Livity you know, and for instance the herb right, marijuana right, right here in St

¹⁴⁹ Jamaican poet and novelist Geoffrey Philp refers to this as a view of ‘human life as existing on a continuum as opposed to the European/Cartesian model’ one which rejects a ‘constant struggle between dualities’ in favour of holism. See Philp & Waters, *Onesness of I-manity* 19

¹⁵⁰ Prahlaḍ, *Reggae Wisdom* 19

¹⁵¹ See Murrell, *Introduction* 10-11

Lucia you can say we up here produce among the best you know? And it doesn't just come from, like it come from works, like our vibration, yuh nuh the energy we put behind it all [...] it plays a very important part so that's why we very careful with even the kind of energy that coming round yu nuh? We will discipline certain characters and different vybes like that because everything sends out an energy cos its all love yu nuh?". The insistence on interactions with all being carried out in the spirit of peace and love is thus essential for this reason, as the negative vibrations being given out in the reverse instance have the potential to represent a deeply damaging force.

Historic Roots of Common Divinity

It is my contention that as well as a rejection of this Cartesian dualism, the intellectual roots of this sense of holistic divinity may in part lay in the cosmological reorientation occasioned by Haile Selassie's coronation. Alongside Menen Asfaw, His Majesty was crowned on November 2nd 1930 at St Georges Cathedral in Addis Ababa. This represented a profoundly empowering and indeed epoch-defining event which forms the most central pillar of Rastafari observance today. Through the Black empowerment initiated by Marcus Garvey and the Ethiopianism that had punctuated pan-African Christian discourse throughout the Caribbean, members of the African diaspora saw an independent and thus inherently anti-imperialist Emperor in their own image crowned in front of the world. Indeed, in the minds of the Rastafari progenitors and many in the movement today, a divine Emperor taking up his role as "Christ in his kingly character".

The Emperor's ceremony drew heavily on Solomonic heritage, Christian symbols and grandeur. Dignitaries from across the world joined the service including representatives from France, Italy, the USA, Egypt and Japan. Most significant however in the minds of early Rastafari thinkers was the presence of the Duke of Gloucester, third son of the 'King of the Dominions' George V, who is described as having interacted and engaged with the Emperor as an equal. News of the ceremony and of the Duke's presence came to Jamaica through reports in the Daily Gleaner which gave the event its front page on November 11th as well as an Adison Southard article in the 1931 National Geographic which imbued the coronation with depictions of great splendour. The latter, which would become a highly significant introductory text for many entering the early movement, included vivid illustrations and constructed a rich mental image for audiences in its references to the Emperor receiving

“Gold-Embroidered Scarlet Robes, the Jeweled [sic] Sword, Imperial Gold Scepter [sic], the Orb, the Diamond Encrusted Ring, and two Gold Filigree Lances”¹⁵².

Descriptions also spoke of the Duke of Gloucester’s bow of recognition to the Emperor, something which both then and now has been interpreted by some as one of subservience in the face of divinity. Anthropologist Charles Price describes views on this amongst those in the early movement as “Britain show[ing] its deference to the new Messiah”¹⁵³. Reference is made still, including by those who contributed to this fieldwork, to a gift the Duke is said to have bought to His Majesty from King George in the form of a golden sceptre, an item of course imbued with significant connotations in regards to power, monarchy and authority. Roy Augier, Rex Nettleford and M.G Smith’s 1963 Jamaican government-sponsored report on the movement makes an important early contribution in tracing this coronation event theology, and offers an interpretation apparently present amongst the early movement which sees the sceptre as having “belonged to the House of Judah in Ethiopia and which carried with it the dominion of the world [and] was stolen from Ethiopia by Rome – which then had world empire – and from Rome by Britain which inherited the Roman power”. With the return of the sceptre Haile Selassie had “recovered the symbol of Ethiopian world power” and in doing so ushered in a new geopolitical era headed up by a celestial Emperor¹⁵⁴.

Within this shifting of power represented in the coronation, the early Rastafari movement also saw within it a hugely significant shift in an understanding of the self. Through Haile Selassie, a Black man is revealed to be God almighty. A Black man seen to be in the image of the Rastafari progenitors. Marcus Garvey’s prophetically interpreted words were instrumental in this recognition, as early Rastafari preachers who had looked “to Africa” pointed to a now unmistakable revelation that the “Black King” had arrived to herald “the day of deliverance”. For a proto-Rastafari movement deeply entrenched in Ethiopianism this event was largely interpreted and explained in Biblical terms. Haile Selassie’s attestation to Solomonic heritage revealed him as the “root of David” and the rightful heir of Israel. Revelation was invoked as Haile Selassie was seen to be he who had come to open the seven seals which would herald the downfall of Rome and Babylon. During previous fieldwork it was described to me that Ezekiel 30, 1 Timothy 6 and Isaiah 43 were foundational in early preacher Archibald

¹⁵² Southard, *Coronation Days*

¹⁵³ Price, *Cultural Production* 421

¹⁵⁴ Kitzinger, *Protest and Mysticism* 258

Dunkley's decision to form his own mission. Clawing these messages from the Bible was in itself an act of defiant resistance. Many early Rastafari preachers and many still today saw the ubiquitous King James Bible as an inherent symbol of colonialism and slavery which had purposefully obscured the "true" message within earlier "ancient" Biblical forms such as that of the Tewahedo Church both through translation and the non-canonisation of certain books¹⁵⁵. Original forms which, as French feminist scholar Maboula Soumahoro writes, "would have given Africa, and particularly Ethiopia, a more central position in the story of God's encounter with human beings"¹⁵⁶. Through divine revelation however and the striving for truth embodied in His Majesty the early preachers were able to discard the wool from their eyes and receive the wisdom of a Messiah now amongst humanity.

The reorientation this brought with it heralded a seismic cosmological shift within a global and national context defined by the aftermath of genocidal slavery and ongoing colonialism. As Barnett writes, "if the image of Jesus Christ¹⁵⁷ can be equated with that of a Black man, then that leads to the implication that God himself is Black. Undoubtedly the portrayal of oneself as godlike is absolutely empowering to the spirit of a people who suffered denigration and stigmatization for centuries"¹⁵⁸. Under Haile Selassie's divine leadership the people of Africa were now demonstrated to be the "true Israelites", the chosen and elect of God, and through this, divine themselves. A newly revealed Black messiah who through him reveals that God himself is also Black. A view of God "through the spectacles of Ethiopia" in the words of Garvey¹⁵⁹. Jamaican scholar of religion Randy Goldson appropriately describes this recognition as an act of "epistemological self-determination", one in which "coming to a knowledge of a Black king, a Black god, and a Black spiritual consciousness is part of systematic agenda of opting out of epistemological suppression"¹⁶⁰. A proud assertion of the divinity of a people denigrated and stigmatised in a complete reversal of the inextricably racialised, colonial plantocratic order. Just as with the spiritual insulation provided in the

¹⁵⁵ The KJV retains its ubiquity in Jamaica and St Lucia, and views towards it are again represent a spectrum amongst those who engage with the Bible. Whilst many see the book similarly as corrupted some see it vivid and emotive descriptions of an ultimately divine truth. As the most widely available form of the text in both countries choice is rarely available as to alternative versions.

¹⁵⁶ Soumahoro, *Christianity on Trial* 44

¹⁵⁷ The status of Selassie as either a successor to Christ or the true form/exposer of the falsity of Christ is again heterogenous across the movement and shall be explored in the scriptural section of this study

¹⁵⁸ Barnett, *Rastafari and Nation of Islam* 876

¹⁵⁹ Garvey, *Philosophies and Opinions* 44

¹⁶⁰ Goldson, *Liberating the Mind* 381

formation of Ital, a refusal to accept a hegemonic defined 'reality' and in its place a total cosmological reorientation.

It is the crux of this cosmological reorientation I raise here as potentially influential amongst modern conceptions of a divine unity in all through a shared divine essence. Haile Selassie's revelation and the total ontological shift bought with it demonstrates that divinity is not purely a preserve for Jesus and the prophets of a bygone era, but something that the Almighty is willing to share with humanity in the present. As the valorisation of the natural and the green grew from the organic yearnings described above this divinity was broadened and became visible amongst all elements of Iration. A Revivalist cosmology which sees the power in nature evolve toward a divinity in nature, extended from His Majesty and shared out amongst all.

Racial Parameters

In regards to human communities, perceptions of this divinity were initially limited to Black communities. An exclusive divinity that white colonial oppressors were unable to enter into, or interact with. This perception was formed through the highly influential Black supremacist writings of Robert Arthlyi Rogers and Fitz Ballantine-Petersburg¹⁶¹, and is visible in statements from prominent spiritual leaders such as Boboshanti founder Prince Emmanuel Charles Edward I. Equating Jacob and Esau with the Black and white communities of the world respectively, Emmanuel put it that "the Black man is God, my Lord. So you see only we is saviour of the world"¹⁶². As the movement developed however views on this began to shift amongst some. Interest in Rastafari increased from those outside Black communities as its fierce social critique and calls for peace and love began to spread around the world through the airwaves in the form of reggae music in broader global era of youth culture

¹⁶¹ Pettersburg penned "the Royal Scroll of Black Supremacy" in 1926, a stridently anti-white Ethiopianist influenced text which describes 'Anglo-Saxons' as a "leprous teacher" and asserts the importance of racially exclusive marriages and "race enmity". Pettersburg also describes the "chosen" status of 'Ethiopians' and describes heaven and earth as having been built by "the Living God". Rogers had put together the Holy Piby or "the Black Man's Bible" early in the 1920's, a text again in a distinctly Ethiopianist vein with the "Children of Ethiopia" described as the supreme of humanity and "God's favourite people of old". Both texts were influential in the recognition of Haile Selassie's divinity and formed an important part of the early movements ideology. This is demonstrable no less clearly than in the writings of Leonard Howell, whose text 'the Promised Key' closely resembles and verbatim replicates section of the Holy Piby.

¹⁶² Chevannes *Roots and Ideology* 182

emergence and social change and¹⁶³. Membership of the movement amongst those outside of Jamaica was increasingly not determined by those who came to the camps and yards of Back-O-Wall and “reasoned” their way into the community, but by self-instruction and identification through the words of the “prophets” like Bob Marley and Peter Tosh.

The influence of reggae was also coupled with an important intervention from the movement’s central spiritual authority. In 1963 Haile Selassie spoke powerfully to the UN against nuclear proliferation, imploring delegates to look beyond their own borders and toward humanity as a whole in a speech that remains one of the most frequently cited amongst Rastafari today - “We must become bigger than we have been: more courageous, greater in spirit, larger in outlook. We must become members of a new race, overcoming petty prejudice, owing our ultimate allegiance not to nations but to our fellow men within the human community”. On racism specifically His Majesty stated “that until the philosophy which holds one race superior to another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned [...] that until the colour of a man's skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes [...] until that day, the African continent will not know peace”¹⁶⁴. For many then and now, His Majesty’s words were interpreted as a call to recognise the unity of humanity as a species within itself rather than emphasising superficial differences without. “Members of new race”, united by spirituality and oneness¹⁶⁵.

These two forces of reggae music and His Majesty’s words served as primary movers in shifting perceptions within the movement largely towards racial inclusivity rather than exclusivity, one in which all humanity shares in the divinity of His Majesty¹⁶⁶. Whilst views in this are, as with all things in a heterogenous spiritual movement, varied, amongst a majority of those I have spoken with across fieldwork sites it is this former view which pervades. Within this there is still a spectrum of views however. Sarah Daynes writes to this in her research amongst an online group of Western Rastafari women, describing a “continuum” from “the total refusal of non-black [sic] participants on one end, until the most

¹⁶³ Max Romeo sings powerfully to this apparently bemusing increase in interest in a previously maligned and persecuted movement. ‘White men wan go a zion; the chine wan go a zion; the Syrian wan go a zion; everyone riding Rasta bandwagon’.

¹⁶⁴ Selassie, *Speech to UN*

¹⁶⁵ In a fusion of both this intervention and the reggae music that would take Rastafari global Bob Marley’s 1976 ‘War’ is lyrically composed almost entirely of elements of Selassie’s speech

¹⁶⁶ Indeed, the creed of the Nyabinghi mansion changed from its initial rendering of ‘death to white oppressors’ to ‘death to black and white oppressors’.

universal conception and acceptance on the other. Of course, most individuals take a position between these two extremes” such as “a universalist conception on a theoretical collective level [but] coexisting with a difficulty in accepting white people within the movement in everyday life”¹⁶⁷. I encountered all of these throughout fieldwork, with some participants offering the view that divinity and salvation was reserved for Black communities whilst others saw it present in all humans¹⁶⁸. What was not variable however was a sense that non-human creation was entirely imbued with a divine energy which unites it with the creator, the speaker, and the Rastafari community, a view I contend is potentially influenced by the divine example of His Majesty.

Living God and Rejection of Death

As well as the two elements of Rastafari Ital Livivity outlined above, a green yearning and a broad divinity, I will also situate a third aspect which I contend is influential within Rastafari Ital Livivity in the present. Rastafari philosophy features within it a rejection of death and of the dead. This is both observable and audible within Rastafari Iyaric and the Word, Sound, Power philosophy. During my initial MPhil fieldwork which explored Rastafari dietary practices, participants informed me that their preferred framing of ‘Ietary practices’ was one which both connected the speaker with Iration and also avoided the presence of death within the term¹⁶⁹.

This is also indeed visible amongst the organic yearnings of the movement which seeks a ritual shield of purity away from the corrupting influences of the dead and decaying of Babylon. Chevannes rightly notes that, as with the two facets of the Ital rubric outlined above, the roots of this lay in Jamaican folk taxonomies. He surmises, “in short, all the practices and beliefs of the Jamaican peasants relating to the dead are underscored by the view that death, and things associated with death, are harmful and contaminating”¹⁷⁰¹⁷¹. As

¹⁶⁷ Daynes, *Ground Beneath Our Feet* 176

¹⁶⁸ These perceptions can lead to discrimination and ostracization for white Rastafari, as some I have previously engaged with have reported. Research specifically amongst white Rastafari is greatly limited, and I would implore researchers to engage in projects with these communities at their core.

¹⁶⁹ Preferencing of the term “greetings” or similar over ‘hello’ also speaks to this in an avoidance of the term ‘hell’. In previous fieldwork in Jamaica participants would frequently refer to meat as “deaders”.

¹⁷⁰ Chevannes referenced in Yawney, *Strictly Ital* 5

¹⁷¹ It was unclear to me during research if this grounding, visibly present amongst Rastafari in St Lucia, had travelled to the island from Jamaica or if similar such ideas were present amongst St Lucian folk taxonomies also.

well as this desire for ritual purity grounded in the Jamaican peasant context however, I will contend there exists another site of influence. A distinctly Rastafari conceptualisation of a rejection of death concerned more with ontology than with purity which reaches full formulation in the rejection of Haile Selassie's death. An emphasis on a "lived" creator and his permanence which sees this rejection stretch from the very highest in creation to the very lowest and which then serves as a base for a holistic view of ecological care.

As described above, Haile Selassie's coronation and subsequent reign demonstrated God to be a living being in the present in contrast to a figure who had died on the cross in the past. One active in the present world, not an ethereal spiritual force located elsewhere. As a divine, all-powerful being active in the world his mortality was broadly considered an impossibility and his reign everlasting. This eternity was not only reserved for His Majesty however but was one that could be shared in through attestation to his status and a subsequent sharing in his divinity. Chevannes quotes a Rastafari female he encountered speaking to this, Sister Dixon, who states "man is God and God is man and he is living – translate himself in spirit inna all of unu [you], never die¹⁷²". Rastafari were thus able to share in this permanent vitality alongside the most divine. An engendering of the view that "Rasta is for the living", as Yawney puts it. One which necessitates that "Rasta cannot sick, and Rasta cannot die"¹⁷³.

Resistance is again an important element of this. First, a Jamaican peasant-inspired view noted also by Chevannes that this philosophical outlook offers resistance towards the death and pain intimately inherent within a colonial and plantocratic existence that had defined life for the first in the movement and their immediate forebears¹⁷⁴. Second, a resistance toward the colonially imposed view of God in Jesus as one who had been, gone and died for humanity in the past, and the "death religion" of Christianity that had sprung forth from him¹⁷⁵. These two are of course intimately connected, with Jesus and the Bible writers invoked regularly by Rastafari in the subjugation of Afro-Caribbeans and the justification of slavery in interactions both with the enslaved and the European-based governments which conceived providential justification for their conquests¹⁷⁶. Indeed, as Goldson notes, so much

¹⁷² Chevannes *Roots Ideology* 86

¹⁷³ Yawney, *Strictly Ital* 5

¹⁷⁴ Chevannes referenced in Yawney, *Strictly Ital* 5

¹⁷⁵ See Kebede & Knottnerus, *Beyond the Pales* 502

¹⁷⁶ Tidemann offers a very valuable contribution of the manifestation of this sentiment in reggae. See Tidemann, *Reggae reveals Church involvement in slavery*

of Rastafari interaction with the Bible since its inception has been motivated by a desire to disengage the Afro-Caribbean lived experience from the “corruption” inherent within a text which served as a foundation for hegemonic colonial systems¹⁷⁷.

Throughout the movement’s development these views engendered a commonly held perspective that a truly righteous Rastafari would never, and further, *could*, never, die. These individuals would walk the earth for an eternity at Haile Selassie’s side, continuing to live in a physical world demonstrated to be perfect and ideal through His Majesty’s presence in it¹⁷⁸. Indeed, the death of members of the community would frequently occasion a withdrawal from other Rastafari who would often refuse to touch the corpse as a potent manifestation of the deeply unclean and impure¹⁷⁹. Funeral rites were also often abjured, deemed as a ritualistic hangover from the Revival days. Early Rastafari researcher and Catholic priest Joseph Owens expresses bemusement at the contrast between these views and those of the broader Jamaican peasantry for whom death represents an “occasion for celebration”¹⁸⁰. Yawney however rightly places these seemingly diametric behaviours at the same colonial source, “in the same experience of the pain of death – the one denies it totally, the other embraces it”¹⁸¹.

Rastafari attitudes towards death were forced into sharp reconsideration however in 1975. Drought and famine combined with economic strife, anger over perceptions of administrative failure, feudalism and ethnic and regional inequalities to generate severe civil unrest in Ethiopia. A military coup was subsequently staged by a group of officers later known as the ‘Derg’ and Haile Selassie was deposed from the throne in September 1974¹⁸². The Emperor was then imprisoned in the Imperial Palace before moving to the “Alem Bakagne”¹⁸³ prison where in August 1975 the Derg reported that he had passed following prostate surgery¹⁸⁴.

¹⁷⁷ Goldson, *Liberating the Mind* 380

¹⁷⁸ This outlook places Rastafari philosophy in intriguing contrast with some Gnostic views, sharing a recognition of a divine spark within all but with an emphasis on the physical world as ideal.

¹⁷⁹ Besson offers the view that this was largely Biblically grounded around the Nazarite vow in Numbers 6 that proscribes contact with dead bodies, a fault only amendable by the shaving of the head. Whilst this may have manifested as a further explanation for this avoidance, a grounding amongst the folk taxonomies Chevannes elucidates is more plausible. See Besson, *Martha Braes Two Histories*, 270

¹⁸⁰ Owens, *Dread* 136-141

¹⁸¹ Yawney, *Strictly Ital* 5

¹⁸² Keller, *Politics of Famine in Ethiopia* 611

¹⁸³ Cruelly translated as ‘Farewell to the World’

¹⁸⁴ See Tiba, *Mengistu Genocide Trial* 515. This account is disputed still, with Tiba noting rumours that the Emperor was killed by Derg Chariman Mengistu Hailamariam himself.

Edmonds describes the reports as presenting a “potentially serious blow to the Rastafarian faith” as some within and without the movement felt “Selassie’s passing would be the death knell for the Rastafarian movement”. A movement defined by the presence of a “living God” challenged to its core by the apparent passing of its deity.

This event was, however, patently, not to be the end of Rastafari. The reports produced a number of different reactions which Edmonds surmises well. “Some Rastas have dismissed the reports of Selassie’s death as just another malicious ploy of Babylon propagandists. Selassie cannot die and hence any report of his death is a fabrication. These Rasta point to the fact that no body has been produced and no funeral held¹⁸⁵. Others accept the fact of Selassie’s departure from the human sphere, but do not speak of it in terms of death. They argue that he has just assumed a different form and moved into another dimension. Still others rationalize his passing by claiming he was a mere ‘personification’ or ‘exteriorisation’ of God¹⁸⁶”.

I encountered all of these explanations throughout fieldwork and indeed often a combination of several, although most included an element of “Babylonian deception” amongst these reports. One Rastafari I came into contact with described that Selassie had been filmed by a BBC drone walking the mountain tops of Ethiopia, where he resides still to this day. “He’s living forever. He does not know death [...] He’s in this realm right now sitting there and judging us. He could move around but he doesn’t move [...] he’s sitting on the judgement seat”. Another contributor described His Majesty as having “transcended” in his human form to “a plane other than this one”. Others spoke to this sense that Selassie was merely one personification of God, from His Majesty as an incarnation of Christ to His Majesty as a form of the Buddha or an entirely new divine being. It should again be emphasised attitudes on the exact divine nature of His Majesty also varied, from full deity to divinely informed messenger or prophet.

Plummer quotes a Rastafari in the immediate aftermath of these reports speaking both to this deception and to the permanence of his spirit. “He lives in I and I [sic]. Selassie-I is living

¹⁸⁵ Edmonds does not reference the apparent ‘reburial’ of Selassie’s remains, alleged to have been found under a toilet block on palace grounds, at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Addis Ababa in November 2000. Although the funeral was attended by Rita Marley, wife of Bob and prominent Rastafari funder in Jamaica, many still cast doubt on the legitimacy of the ceremony and the presence of the Emperor within it.

¹⁸⁶ Edmonds, *Outcasts* 55

because I'm living, both physically and spiritually. The rest of the world accepted news of his death, but they were deceived by the media. They had no choice in the matter. Rasta knows the truth because he lives in I and I constantly"¹⁸⁷. As Edmonds writes, Selassie has "a continued existence as an ever-living spirit who through "InI" consciousness continues to live in and with the individual Rasta"¹⁸⁸. A range of responses is also audible in a range of devotional music. Bob Marley's 1976 "Jah Live" written in the immediate aftermath of these reports, cries out "fools say in their hearts, Rasta your God is dead. But I know, Jah Jah. Dread it shall be dreaded and dread"¹⁸⁹. Burning Spears 2003 "Jah no Dead" speaks to this sense of a Babylonian ploy – "they tried to fool the Black population by telling them that Jah Jah dead [...] InI know Jah no dead".

Throughout all of these perceptions however a development in outlook should be noted. In the early movement, Selassie's lifefulness was one visibly present on this planet. A presence contrasted against the colonial experience of pain and death alongside Jesus and a Christian movement which operated as the vestiges of a previous era. After his passing was reported however this assertion of the lifeful became one which was no longer merely indicative of a broader Jamaican peasant-influenced rejection of death, but one which now represented a rejection of death unique to and from within the movement itself. One in which its central spiritual authority was affirmed to be alive, and through which death was rejected not only as a polluting and corrupting force but as an ontological possibility in itself. This, I would suggest, represents a somewhat bookended approach to Rastafari conceptualisations of lifefulness. One which precludes and insulates the community from death through organic yearnings and the avoidance of pollutants in the immediate at one end and one which also rules it out as a finite category of being at the other.

Here then we can see that the Rastafari movement had within it a firm basis in the rejection of death from its formation owing to its Jamaican peasant roots. This inspired a fierce resistance towards a colonial system intent on pain and death and a rejection of the "dead" Christian religious modes which underpinned it. Reports of Selassie's passing served to draw on this intellectual base of a rejection of mortality, subsequently amplifying this up to the most divine being. These reports represented something of a test for the movement with two

¹⁸⁷ Plummer referenced in Kebede Shriver Knotternus, *Social Movement Endurance* 329

¹⁸⁸ Edmonds, *Outcasts* 55

¹⁸⁹ Or, what shall come to pass shall come to pass.

possible outcomes, the “death knell” that Edmonds describes and a subsequent folding of the movement or an assertive intellectual response. As is clear the latter was the case, and the sense of a rejection of death within the movement became more distinct and more individualised to the movement itself¹⁹⁰.

I would thus suggest that in an ecological context this conceptualisation of a rejection of death stands alongside a yearning for the organic and a sense of the divine in all to inform a contemporary Ital outlook. One which insists on the lifeful and enhancing the life energy of everything around. Death is rejected both as unnecessary and as unenhancing for the abundant lifeful forces in creation. Rejected as a state of being and as a corrupting “energy”. As one participant put it to me during previous research “one of the fundamental principles of [the movement] is that Rastafari cannot die. This can be both physical and metaphysical. Rastafari cannot die in the sense that your whole mindset is upon promoting life so you see life in all things and respect life in all things”. During this study, this notion of “promoting life” in contrast to acknowledging or even obsessing over death was summed up most astutely by King Khalid, who took his lesson from nature in this regard. “You would never hear a tree say I must die, you would never hear the sun say I must die, you would never hear the sun say I must die [sic], you check? The soil saying I must die”. Death and a fixation upon it is thus perceived as a uniquely human and counterproductive preserve. Humanity must live more as nature and live more for nature, rejecting a Western-inspired fascination and insistence on death. Through this, the natural world can be built up to its strongest, greenest, state of being.

Conclusion

To conclude, as I have demonstrated and as shall be evident in the proceeding chapters, the three intellectual tropes described above of a green yearning, the divinity in all and a rejection of death, as well as a fusion between them, lies at the very core of Rastafari Ital

¹⁹⁰ The reported death of Bob Marley in 1981 also represented a challenge to the movement, with a range of explanations again arising from martyrdom to conspiracy to divine judgement amongst some for commercialisation and thus corrupting the message of Rastafari. Through the reported transition of Selassie and Marley contemporary attitudes towards the “passing” of community members have become more nuanced than in the earlier stages of the movement. Individuals are often said to have “passed onto the ancestors”. Some describe a transfer on towards the physical or metaphysical space of Zion. Others indicate this to be a kind of “sleeping” state in wait of a judgement process as Selassie as the Lion of Judah reemerges. Others still describe a process akin to reincarnation in which the “divine spark” within humanity is rehoused. Many more fusions and conceptualisations exist within and without these.

Livity. A broadening of the concept of divinity to include humanity and the wider creation around engenders a view that all aspects of creation are divine and are worthy of care and attention as a result. A rejection of death brings with it a lifeful mentality which emphasises the preservation of the energetic in all areas of creation. A yearning for the primordial “original” life yearns to see creation restored to a point in which it was at its most vibrant and dynamic. As with the spirit of resistance that has shaped the movement these are all conceived as rejection in one form of the hegemonic imperialist and industrialist powers that defined and define life in a Babylonian system. A defiant assertion of agency and control in the face of a ceaseless oppressor. The sites of influence I have put forward serve to offer further possibilities in tracing the intellectual journey of Rastafari. The Jamaican peasant roots highlighted in the pioneering work of scholars such as Chevannes, Owens, Yawney and Homiak are unquestionably fundamental to this, and the above serves to offer some possibility of influence from within the movement. I lay them here for the consideration and assessment of readers.

In the next chapter, I will begin to explore the ethnographic data gathered through fieldwork which begins to attest to the core elements described above. In this, an intimate sense of personal connection with all of that within Iration through the Almighty will emerge through a multi-faceted spiritual outlook.

Chapter Three – Spiritual Livity: Vibrationality, Natural Wisdom and Earth Changes

In this chapter, I will be expanding on Rastafari Ital Livity through ethnographic data which might be very broadly termed as being of a primarily spiritual nature, with the caveat again that this description is a loose and unrestrictive one with much crossover between this and subsequent chapters. In this, my fieldwork took place in Iyanola over the course of three months. Within its data we are able to see a range of perspectives and conclusions which offer testament to the intimate sense of spiritual connection with Iration, something that engenders a deep concern, and at times apprehension, towards its general wellbeing. This often runs parallel with perceptions around interaction with and devotion towards the Almighty. Neglect towards one engenders neglect towards the other. Disregard of the teachings and example of His Majesty lead to a disregarded Iration whilst improper care of Iration is in itself contempt for the Almighty, with dire consequences in either. Underlying all of this however is a sense of holism, of interconnection between all and within all through the pervasive divine presence of the Almighty. For many contributors to this research, this engenders delicate engagement and a sense of personal connection with a totality. Common threads emerge which gravitate around a sense of the divine in all, an intimacy and authenticity of connection, and a striving towards the presence of “good vibrations only” which connect a cosmological Livity of breadth and depth.

This section will thus offer exploration of a spiritual connection with agriculture, something at the forefront of conversations with many participants. I will then turn to look more broadly at a sense of energy and vibration as it transfuses individuals and Iration. Next, I will explore how these connections influence an understanding of the place of humanity on this earth and in Iration more broadly, and how this shapes attitudes around care and protection. Central also to the agricultural theme is the interaction between Ital and food consumption which shall then be examined. The intimate care influenced by this sense of “vibrationality” then turns to concern for plant life and discussion of plant rights. Finally, I turn to explore some demonstration of the wisdom that can be drawn from nature and the metaphorical power it holds, before examining the potential impact of human technology on its relationship to wider Iration.

Spiritual Agriculture and Land Engagement

A sense of a spiritual connection with the earth and with Iration through agriculture, conservation and land management was the foremost means of attachment for many I spoke with in articulating an Ital Livivity. Here, it is valuable to add some distinctions amidst varied forms of engaging with nature. Whilst as shall be seen in this chapter some viewed work in nature as generating a barrier, a prophylactic, towards insulating oneself against the pollution and corruption of Babylon, others saw such engagement as an assertive power for the generation and regeneration of Iration in and of itself. This might perhaps be termed “working on” nature in the former and “working through” nature in the latter. Indeed, for many these combined to form a deeply holistic means of engagement with the surrounding environment. An “earthforce” capable simultaneously of resisting and of vitalising. Chevannes descriptions are pertinent here, as he points to Rastafari conceptions of nature as a “zone which interfaces the material and spiritual worlds, thus establishing a continuum of universal existence” through which “the spirit world crosses into the world of the living”¹⁹¹. Work in nature and in the land with good intentions and a good heart thus eases the passage of benevolent forces through this threshold, increasing the presence of positive vibrations and disempowering the negative. Zion bolstered over Babylon.

Empress Dannie, a mother and energetic community organiser who led her local fisherfolk cooperative and who would take over leadership of ICAR after my departure, spoke to the centrality of agriculture in describing “the earth by itself is a creation of everything and the Rastafari people, that’s where we find our livelihood, our strength in farming. Even if you find a Rastafari person employed out doing some other work, but in their heart, I speak for myself I find farming where my heart lies being a Rastawoman”. Another described engagement with the earth through agriculture as their “zeal”, something “that’s the only means of [spiritual] survival”. Ras Shiloh, an agriculturalist and involved apiarist living near Vieux Fort, described that his journey into the movement was bought about through such a connection. “My mind was being, was to stay close to nature and then nature would teach you all what you have to learn [...] I started planting a tree because we looking to project and extend its life” something he then saw mirrored in the Rastafari around him. King Khalid spoke equally powerfully to this, describing that his community’s “trode” into the hills as

¹⁹¹ Chevannes, *New Approach* 24. Chevannes also notes throughout the book that these Rastafari outlooks bear many similarities with those of other African-Caribbean spiritual traditions.

motivated by a desire to follow a natural Livivity in which “we saw it necessary that we go and live into the plant kingdom instead of dat one dere [human society]. Seek our nutrition amongst the plant kingdom and not from the animal kingdom”, a move more in line with how “the creator created man”. A life thus surrounded by the luscious green of the hilltops in search of the Almighty’s primordial vision for humanity.

Invariably amongst contributors to this study, this engagement was described as a process of communication, and indeed communion, with the Almighty and everything that flows from “H.I.M”¹⁹². As King Khalid put it, agriculture is “how we give service to the creator”, a process through which “we keep the Creator within you cos you feeding the Creator within you”. This notion of communion was communicated in both a macro and micro sense. Whilst one’s own journey through the earth represents an engagement with a broader engagement with Iration in and of itself, interactions on a smaller scale were described as just as central to this. I-3 elucidated a tangible sense through his own agricultural work that “whatever you sending into the ground is heard”. Ibed Negus, a young agriculturalist and son of my host with whom I also resided on the farmstead, put it that his understanding of Word, Sound, Power leads him to converse with the plants throughout their life cycle to confer into them the positive energy that emerges from him and to keep them informed of what is going on around the farmstead. During planting one must ensure a positive heart is present as it is this energy that will be sown into the earth and transmitted to all around it. The same approach is just as important at the time of harvesting. “Be sure when you pick these you give thanks to them and the Almighty for their support, and make sure when you pick them you pick them only at night when they sleeping”¹⁹³¹⁹⁴.

This importance of positivity in the harvest was affirmed by another contributor who put it that “if you were to go and eat from the plant kingdom and you negative in your aspiration

¹⁹² His Imperial Majesty

¹⁹³ As Chevannes has noted the importance of lunar cycles amongst many I spoke with likely has its roots in broader Caribbean and Jamaican folk traditions which include similar considerations. See Chevannes, *Rastafari* 26

¹⁹⁴ These descriptions and indeed many of those in this section can be drawn against notions of reciprocity and restoration present in many other Indigenous faith groups. As Kimmerer notes, the idea of reciprocity with land is “fundamental” to many Indigenous belief systems. Indeed, such beliefs serve as the foundation for what have been described as “cultures of gratitude”. In such cultures, people have a responsibility not only to be “grateful for the gifts provided by Mother Earth, they are also responsible for playing a positive and active role in the well-being of the land. They are called not to be passive consumers, but to sustain the land that sustains them”. Kimmerer *Restoration and Reciprocity* 257

you still die out cos that's where you keep the creator going, because that's what it is, its something cosmic". Pure consumption then is not enough to sustain someone on its own, and a malevolent heart poisons Iration. Ibed Negus spoke similarly about his own agricultural pursuits, attesting to the importance of emotion in these interactions whilst also describing the energy one walks with on the farmstead to be "crucial". This again should be strictly positive, and leads him to walk only barefoot on the site to allow the energy to flow from his feet into the earth and from the earth into him without barrier¹⁹⁵.

Within these conversations, I asked participants what impact such an intimate and personal approach had on the agricultural produce itself compared with other farms. One participant put it that non-Ital farmers "don't have that spiritual connection with the earth mother we call the Iration. So there is a big difference between even like the way the Rastaman will relate to his vineyard [farm] as against the way the non-Rasta person relate to their vineyard. There is that difference because of the Rastafari connection with Mother Earth and the Iration". I-3 answered this question with Haile Selassie at its core. "Haile Selassie said discipline of the mind is a discipline within genuine morality and is therefore spiritual strength", a discipline applied to farming which thus imbues the plants with a "spiritual strength". He offered an example of this in reference to cannabis. "Now Rastafari faith we live according to we have a very special Ital Livity you know, and for instance the herb right, marijuana right, right here in St Lucia you can say we up here produce among the best you know? And it doesn't just come from, like it come from works, like our vibration, yuh nuh the energy we put behind it all". As previously stated, the strength of the plant, the 'fruits' it bears and the intrinsic value within the plant are all affected by the vibration and energy which surrounds. "All of that play a very important part so that's why we were very careful with even the kind of energy that coming round yu nuh? We will discipline certain characters and different vybes like that because everything sends out an energy, cos its love you know?"¹⁹⁶. I-3's statement made me grateful that I hadn't been adjudged to be bringing a negative energy to the farm, no doubt a conclusion aided by the presence of my host in this visit. His comments further accorded with

¹⁹⁵ Similarities exist here again with other African-Caribbean spiritual forms. Kumina cosmology sees the earth as well as water and the sea as one of several residing places of powerful spiritual forces. Indeed, further crossover exists here around the notion of a barrier between spiritual forces found within BaKongo and Revivalist conceptualisations of salt as a spiritual barrier. See Powell, *Ital Trod* 23-25

¹⁹⁶ This sentiment regarding the importance of ones connection to the earth can also be heard in Rastafari descriptions of 'earthdays' or 'earthstrongs' as an alternative to birthday, emphasising the moment one became connected to this earth and to Iration.

those I have heard from Rastafari across the globe, a need to ensure that the energy in any place be it a farm, a tabernacle or a home, be strictly positive, “upful” and loving. This is of enhanced importance when there is produce at play however, with the potentiality for a crop to be damaged and corrupted, perhaps beyond use, by the presence of those who do not share this benevolent force.

Ibed Negus offered his assessment of agriculture with, and in communion with, the spirit, describing this in terms of a “study” towards the “esoteric nature of plants”. A spiritual quest to reveal the intrinsic nature of the inhabitants of Iration, a form of knowledge present amongst previous generations but subsequently lost through the forced migrations and brutality of slavery at the hands of Babylonian forces¹⁹⁷. Agricultural engagement and life amongst the “plant kingdom” thus grounds an interaction in which knowledge and understanding come from *within* the plants and indeed *through* the plants rather than some kind of external study. I asked if this category of knowledge had always been something present and discussed amongst Rastafari. Bongo Wisely, also present in the conversation, stated that it “is part of our lost culture which we slowly regaining”¹⁹⁸. A part of culture which was lost through the immense rupture represented by forced movement across the Atlantic. This notion falls very much within broader Rastafari epistemological notions around the rejection of colonial forms, a reconstruction of African knowledge and the establishment of Africa as the source of “original” knowledge¹⁹⁹. In an agricultural context, many contributors attested to the great volume of botanical and alchemical knowledge brought to the Caribbean by Africans²⁰⁰, something many cite as the source for contemporary Rastafari affinity with and awareness of the earth and the plant life upon it²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁷ Ibed here attests to this notion of returning to the understanding and the forms of the “first man”, a reclaiming of a heritage and a knowledge base previously held.

¹⁹⁸ Similarity can be seen here with the foundational influence of Ethiopianism, a desire to “reclaim” a heritage and a divinity taken by force.

¹⁹⁹ Goldson describes this process of “mental liberation” as an intellectual “maroonage”, a “construction of and constant engagement with African-centered epistemologies” entailing a rejection of “ways of knowing that invalidate Africanness or Blackness”. See Goldson, *Liberating the Mind*

²⁰⁰ Dadzie connects this knowledge with early anti-colonial resistance in describing the “detailed knowledge of properties of herbs, roots, barks and plants, based on from generation to generation” of enslaved Afro-Jamaican women and its defiant application to avoid and abort unwanted pregnancies from plantation owners and others. Dadzie, *Invisible Woman* 29

²⁰¹ These knowledge bases serve as the foundation for Caribbean “bush doctors” both within Rastafari and outside the movement. Similarity also exists here with broader African influenced notions of “root work”. See Philander, *Rastafari Bush Doctors* and Henderson, *Conceptualizing Healing* respectively

Through this esoteric rendering it is not just African cultural forms that contemporary communities have been estranged from, but the very nature and form of wider Iration through their absence. A rupture from a motherland and consequently a true understanding of mother-earth, one through which the spiritual energy of the Almighty springs forth. In this, Rastafari efforts to intellectually, spiritually and physically return to Africa that have historically defined the movement²⁰² enter an explicitly botanical space. A reconnection with African forms of knowledge reveals the innate knowledge of a plant kingdom previously lost which in turn allow for a deeper and more constructive relationship with the Almighty. Ibed Negus described this as bringing forth the ability to explore the “esoteric nature of life” and of “all things”²⁰³. Ras Shiloh put it that the Almighty “is not so easily understood” as “the world make it hard because they hide the truth about him but it’s a good thing they hid it so we have to do some work”. A labour challenging but one which ultimately brings the self closer to the Almighty through it.

The role of ancestor knowledge in Rastafari spiritual epistemologies is also of central importance here²⁰⁴. Veneration of the knowledge of ancestors or “ancients” not only connects Rastafari with similar traditions in Africa²⁰⁵, it also serves to connect the movement to a time and a place of ultimate destination. A spiritually pure Africa existing before its encounter with the epitome of Babylon in colonialism. A form of knowledge attainment thus untainted by the mass brutality of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Ras Jeg, a middle aged conversationist living on the south of the island, spoke to this in describing “I grew up with a lot of old people in my area and my old time ancestors, and when you look at when you working in [the] environment [...] we need to go back to our ancestors teaching. So my Livity now is based on my ancestors preaching from way back [...] my belief is until we go back to the start of the generation we can never see the future, yu see? So I believe in going back to history to find a way forward”. This notion of going back to go forward offers further

²⁰² As I note elsewhere, the centrality of this yearning amongst those I researched amongst in Iyanola seemed more nuanced than what has previously been reported as a trajectory of primary importance. See Powell, *Ten Miles*

²⁰³ Others framed this in a broader planetary sense. Bongo Wisely spoke similarly that whilst some people have considered that the earth “is the only astronomical object known to have a life, late evidence that life exists on other planets has been promoted. What was hidden from the wise and prudent is now being revealed to this generation”.

²⁰⁴ Amongst Jamaican Rastafari communities this epistemological form can be heard through the phrase “honour the Hola [holy] head”, an entreaty to respect the wisdom of an elder for they are possession of the wisdom of the antecedents.

²⁰⁵ The Akan people of West Africa engage in particularly developed ancestor veneration, a group several participants across fieldwork locations claim lineage from. See Donkor, *African Religion Defined*

attestation to a primordial yearning defined simultaneously as a return but also as constant progress. The explicit connection here between working in nature as necessitating contact with the ancestors speaks to the deep ancestral knowledge foundation regarding the world and the plants and animals within it, and further attests to a desire to recapture this “esoteric” knowledge hidden for so long.

Ras Sly, a tour operator in his sixties, spoke also to this notion of a “hidden” esoteric knowledge within nature slowly being reclaimed through an Ital Livity. He stated that this had manifested through “Rastafari growing up [developing as a movement] it was with nature, so we embraced the environment and played the role of guardian. The role of re-education, yu nuh?”. For Sly, retrieving this knowledge took the form of a very literal re-education spearheaded by a Rastafari community which seeks to protect the environment both through physical and spiritual means, spreading an intimate love and knowledge of it to each and every in Iration. Some who engaged with me aligned this role with Haile Selassie’s position as “Defender of the Faith, Elect of God”, seeing themselves as following in his lineage as divinely appointed “Defenders of Iration” and of the environment. Sly spoke to this when I asked if there was a particular moment or revelation in which he felt this relationship with the environment change, away from what he described as an attitude prevalent amongst his parents’ generation of utility and towards one of reverence and deference. “No not really, even as natural like we were chosen. We were selected yu nuh?”. The naturalness of the environment mirrored in the naturalness of those selected to stand at its bulwark.

King Khalid also spoke to this sense of Rastafari seeking to reclaim an African knowledge hidden or destroyed by imperialist forces. “Our knowledge came from those people who at one time consider us to be wild. You check? That’s where our knowledge come from because we don’t have this natural knowledge, like the history say Adam and Eve and them natural you check? We have the knowledge that Christianity gave us. You remember when Christianity connected with man, with Black man in Africa, they say he was savage. So coming out of savagery into emancipation, that’s when it started to all change. It is totally change now because we turn ourselves away now [after] go[ing] through a lot of struggle”. Khalid’s point challenges Rastafari who would seek to ground their sense of the “natural man” in a Biblical descriptions of the ‘first man’ of Adam and Eve as those most primordial.

This is instead to be seen as information forced by white colonists onto a Black population they once considered “savage” for the means of subjugation and pacification. An awareness of this deceit, he put it, emerged after emancipation, the start of a long road in which Black communities began to rediscover the ability to construct a “natural” knowledge that had been rendered from them by imperial forces. Gaze should thus be focused back towards Africa in search of a connection with a more natural, a “truer”, form of wisdom. A campaign to be led by Rastafari for the empowerment of Black communities and humanity more widely. Ras Faiye referred to the form of this knowledge as “theocratic science”, broad swathes of knowledge to be attained by a deeper and more reverential connection with the ancestors to whom it was first revealed.

This notion of the “chosen” Ras Sly points to mirrors early Ethiopianist views of Africans and Black communities as the chosen people of God, “the true Israelites” as it is sometimes articulated. This was then incorporated into the proto-Rastafari movement through the aforementioned writings of Rogers and Petersburg, and remains a view present amongst many I spoke with in this research²⁰⁶. King Khalid expanded on this in speaking vividly of the “creator within” humanity and the “creator above” humanity. When I asked if he saw a separation between these two he replied in monistic fashion, answering that “the Creator [Almighty] and the universe is one”. There is no separation in an Iration in which all are within the Almighty. Expanding however, he highlighted humanity as a unique instrument of the Creator. “Man is a dominion factor. Man has so much intelligence [...] man has put something in space and space is a place where people ca’an [can’t] live naturally so man is the Creator”. A “Creator” in the “creative” sense, utilising shared aspects of divine wisdom to reach out into Iration in all its regions and facets. He thus expanded that the two designations spoke to different aspects. For humanity, it was “not the Creator that creating creation but the Creator that takes care of creation, the continuity of creation”. Khalid’s description here offers an interesting counterpoint to the many who sounded notes of caution at efforts from humanity, particularly those grounded in technology, that sought to probe into that beyond its immediate. Instead, Khalid offers a model of an actively involved humanity utilising all at its disposal to protect Iration around it. A kind of ‘cosmic caretaker’, as it were. Here, the view is offered that it is incumbent on humanity to use the divinely grounded and elevated faculties it has to protect and to attend to Iration wherever it lies. On this earth and beyond.

²⁰⁶ See Price, *Cultural Production of a Black Messiah* 427-431

Others framed this connection to the earth beyond Rastafari and instead towards an innate connection within humanity. Discussing the provisions for his restaurant, many of which come from a personally owned small holding in the hills towards the north of the island, Ras Kamou, a business operator in his twenties, described his farming as a “spiritual exercise”. He furthered, “from time you born you supposed to be spiritual, you a spiritual being. Religion is just a tool to enhance that, well it was supposed to! Yu nuh!²⁰⁷ But naturally you supposed to be an enlightened spiritual beca from time you thinking the voice you hearing in your thoughts that’s like the spirits. So I would say in everything I do, it like, spiritual”. Kamou’s description emphasises again a holistic Rastafari worldview in which everything is carried out in the “spiritual”. Whilst farming offers a physical connection to the earth, the soil and all of the creatures within it, there is not an action or a moment in which one is not equally “trodding” through the cosmological. King Khalid added to these sentiments in describing that whilst he was amongst a group of seven who had first established the farm he resided on, Zimbabwe Farms on the north of the island, he was now the only one remaining, with the others returning to “di system” as he put it. When I asked why was he had chosen to stay he explained “because I wouldn’t know otherwise you see? Cos that’s what Jah created man to be so since I come into the wholeness I realised there was nothing more to get from here [the farm] more than there [towns and cities, the system]. What man needs to survive is [only] the sun, the wind, the water, and the land”. Khalid’s statement points to a deeply elemental rendering of humanity’s connection to the earth, one which necessitates only these constituent parts for a life in the “wholeness”. All else is considered superfluous in an Iration in which it is these elemental forces that connect each and everything.

This for Khalid renders a living situation up in the hills which simply could not be improved upon - only diminished amongst the alterations and distractions of “di system”. On several occasions throughout our conversations, Khalid’s vivid descriptions of this strayed into a critique of Christianity and what he saw as its nefarious influence on humanity’s natural understanding of the world. “I realise that [those] four basic tings, the earth, the air, the sun the water. By combining those tings you come to the real Livity²⁰⁸, tings you can base [ones]

²⁰⁷ Kamou here highlights the aforementioned complicated nature of the term within Rastafari, religion here evidently carrying baggage.

²⁰⁸ Khalid further speaks here to the re-centring of humanity within Rastafari away from the cultural and towards the natural. The four elements he highlights here are also mirrored in use of the Rastafari ganja chalice, a smoking implement consisting of a long pipe attached to a water chamber used as the primary form of ganja

life as it is so that is what now I'm working on is making sure to inculcate that into my system where it gives me that harmony so I can move away from Christianity theology". Khalid's descriptions speak to a philosophical outlook present amongst many in which Rastafari Livity is seen to be an "understanding" or a "knowledge" of the world gleaned from the natural cues and vibrations within it, contrasted against a Christian theology, or perhaps Christian dogma, which seeks only to obscure and obfuscate humanity's interaction with the world around through falsity and oppression. Finding harmony in the universe through this brings the human soul away from the pollution that is Christianity. This was expressed again elementally, as Khalid employed natural metaphor to describe this process. "From the water, minerals from the soil and oxygen from the wind it combines into a fruit". What humanity needs for this spiritual rejuvenation and the spiritual truth it represents is purely elemental. Nature combines these forces and outputs it into an edible form which can sustain humanity. If humanity allowed itself to be beholden to these elemental forces alone it would go through a flowering and a ripening to produce a delicious fruit free from the corruption of a misleading, imposed, "religion".

Another participant spoke to the spiritual refuge offered to the community in the form of agriculture. In a conversation about increasing Covid-19-related social movement restrictions in St Lucia and worldwide, Ras Nye, an elder agriculturalist and one of the islands designated Nyabinghi priests, put it that the response of the Rasta people should be "to engage ourselves into more agriculture more farming yu nuh? Put more food in the soil [...] even we will not be able to go in the supermarket and buy, we have to plant²⁰⁹. We have to create our own market". to "sustain a nation" as another near to the conversation put it. Nye was careful to add caution to this however, emphasising that "food can't save man, it's the Almighty alone. So we need to serve the Almighty, praise the Almighty, walk with the Almighty, yu nuh? That's the only way". For Nye then it is not then the food itself which will serve as the redemption of man but the adherence to the Almighty's will and vision that is represented through agricultural labour and environmental care. The agricultural journey and not the destination, as it were.

ingestion in ritual and in communion. The ganja is placed in a clay (earth) bowl or "cutchie", before it is lit with fire then drawn through water by the air of the breath of the individual inhaling. This act thus brings all four elements together and physically into the participant, aligning them once again with the primordial and with the pure elemental force of Zion.

²⁰⁹ See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah* for further exploration of this notion of an agricultural retreat as engendered by Covid-19.

On a larger scale, many participants described the earth as a living being in itself, an animate partner in conversation that plays hosts to so many others in a broader Iration. Many spoke in personifying terms in describing the earth as “Mother Earth” or “Mother Nature”²¹⁰, a phrase employed by many other indigenous groups to denote a nurturing, affectionate force which should be interacted with in kind. Ras I-Mannuel, an elder and qualified architect living in the hills above Soufriere, put it that “the earth represents Jah, you have to be very careful what you do with the earth”, as it forms an integral part of an Iration suffused by the Almighty. He furthered that the planet “can sustain itself because it’s a living organism. It’s always in continuous process, the earth is always going to be producing. It’s how we tap into the earth and we have to do it in a very scientific and intelligent way in order for the earth to give us its bounty”. I-Mannuel’s words were mirrored by many throughout the study, expressing an ambition to shift attitudes away from the earth as a passive unfeeling object from which resources are hacked out and consumed. Instead, many sought to encourage identification with a sensitive, deep-thinking conversation partner to be engaged with. As with a human conversational partner, this requires listening and responding. “It must start with the human. If there’s no positive energies being directed to the earth the earth just stays there, and that is what is really happening throughout the world”²¹¹. With this conversation yet to be fully embarked upon by humanity the earth is yet to respond, and dangerous perspectives of passivity subsequently form.

Energy and Vibration

As previously described, throughout fieldwork a majority of those I encountered spoke towards what I would describe as a cosmology panentheistic in its nature. An intimate and divine energy which imbues all in Iration, both from and in the Almighty, sensed and felt

²¹⁰ Whilst I did not regularly encounter this in Iyanola, Rastafari in other fieldwork contexts have drawn a contrast between Mother Nature and Father Time as two balancing forces in nature. This is seen directly within agricultural and fertility contexts, as traditional articulations see the man as he who ploughs the earth and plants seeds whilst it is a feminine energy which brings forth its produce.

²¹¹ Similar notions to I-Mannuel’s expression here can be heard in Rastafari articulations of Psalm 24:1 which can be commonly heard as ‘the earth is the Lord and InI art the fullness thereof’.

through the vibrations which beings utilise to communicate and engage²¹²²¹³. This was articulated variously. Ras Abraham, a retired civil servant turned small holder based near Micoud, explained his sense of this in describing all elements of Iration as “one cosmos” shared by all and suffused with divine energy. Abraham saw this as visible right down to what might be considered to the uninitiated heart or mind its most ordinary elements. Pointing to his small agricultural plot we were stood upon he put it that “even the place I operate too, every stone I deal with is an artefact. Some of them I’m able to chip off, realise what they are, try and understand some things. [Each of them] says a story”. Each stone an “artefact” of the divine mystery of Iration which can further reveal its truths. Others saw this energy as existing in a polarity. Ras Faiye described that to create more “conscious” individuals “you have to use the positive to counteract the negative because the negative will always be there. It’s been there since creation and the reason for that is you have the negative pole and the positive pole and without the negative pole and the positive, there’s no juice [power]”²¹⁴. The two are entirely co-dependent then and are held in a kind of magnetic attraction in which if one falters the balance falls completely.

Whilst all of those I engaged with saw this energy as abundant, many described it as existing in greater quantity or strength in certain places in the cosmos. Ras Sly put forward his view that “on earth what you recognise is there are certain energy spots”, places that tangibly “embolden the human spirit and instil a sense of tranquillity”. He related this immediately to the waterfall, Latille Falls near Micoud, where many of our conversations took place and to which he served as its guardian and proprietor, a popular destination with both locals and tourists, particularly before Covid-19 travel restrictions. “You see here, here is a big earth spot. This is why everybody is attracted here. I see some kind of wisdom here, the whole topography and the way even the stream there. There [is] some type of spirituality going on here”. This sense of certain areas of earth exuding greater “energy” or “vibration” is one that

²¹² Resonance exists in this sense of a vibrancy in the seemingly inanimate with other indigenous cultures and cosmologies. Graham Harvey articulates this as “new animism”, a sense of “personhood” understood in broad terms and the interactions within it contrasted against an “old animism” which preferences an omnipotent deity cosmology. In this Harvey offers the phrase “other-than-human-persons” to attest to the potency of the wider world around. See Harvey, *Animism*

²¹³ Word Sound Power is again crucial here, with the “word” seen as the first vibration whilst words must be employed carefully to ensure the presence of positivity only within the community. These very same words are however forceful weapons of change when directed at Babylonian forces. Immediate parallel also exists between Rastafari and Christian notions of the “word” as the first in existence in the Gospel of John.

²¹⁴ This dichotomy mirrors the cosmic forces of Babylon and Zion, a polarity too of positive energy and negative energy.

aligns itself with a Rastafari cosmological outlook in which the ultimate celestial destination of Mount Zion is often conceived to be manifested on earth in Ethiopia. Those desiring to “drive on the King’s highway” and “return” regularly speak of the physical and spiritual draw, often articulated as a type of “magnetism”, that their destination holds, with a perceptible sense of this being felt wherever one is on Earth.

For Sly, these forces are one and the same. Describing his own holistic view of the interconnectivity of Iration he frequently referred to the waterfalls spiritual power emanating from the Ganges and the Nile from which they ultimately “share the same water”²¹⁵. This, he stated, was highly significant in explaining the restorative power he saw as present in the falls. “My first move toward my first reading when I came here [...] on a piece of wood inscribed and it read, I’m talking about thirty years ago, it read ‘here represents a garden where the energy of freedom flows to the vein of water that surrounds it’. I give thanks to Jah Rastafari for providing the wisdom”. This energy of freedom was one shared not just with those present at the falls but with the whole world, a unifying spirit conveyed through the elemental and universal force of water.

Many interviewees focused conversations on how one might absorb this energy that abounds, with varying conclusions. Whilst it was often stated that the human body and soul was in a constant state of passive absorption, a kind of vibrational osmosis perhaps, sentiments expressed throughout the study made it clear that at times this was enhanced or diminished, and that one could engage in acts or practices which would lend themselves to either. Having travelled to King Khalid’s hilltop farm alongside Bongo Wisely, Wisely asked our host if there was “any herb [ganja]” he might be able to partake in. Whilst he possessed his own, he described this as motivated by a desire to imbibe the energy of the locality in contrast to the energy of his own herb. “Different place, different vibration”, as he put it. An opportunity to absorb the “vibration” of the soil which had grounded the plant, the sun and rain which had nourished it, the bees which had pollinated it, the insects and animals which had encountered it, the humans which had nurtured it. All of this could be sensed and absorbed in Wisely’s subsequent “lighting up”.

²¹⁵ Sly’s reference to the Nile was particularly significant as he later described this as serving to connect his waterfalls with the spirituality and physicality of Ethiopia. Indeed, in a desire to harness this further Sly had taken to hewing a set of steps out of a section of rock that surrounded the pool at the base of the waterfall. “Dat is Lalibella”, he stated in reference to the rock hewn churches in Amhara described by many in this fieldwork as a place of immense of spiritual energy.

Another participant however put this absorption in exclusively passive terms. “It’s a natural thing, we don’t have real effort to put into that. Things like water, the sun, you get automatically, although you still have to drink it but that is what feeds the body, the sun, radiation, the oxygen, the minerals from the soil, the water they all feed us. That’s what feeds nature”. This process of absorption they saw as a process intended to bolster the creator within. “That’s all we have to do to our creator, to give our creator the pure water to drink, the positive Itality to eat and then have the oxygen to breathe [...] we practically don’t have nothing to do but just inherit it”. Absorbing the vibrations of Iration, much like sunshine and water, represent the purest form of devotion there could be. One which produces a human with “positive Itality” within them, a divine soul on this earth actualised into its best possible form. This they described as an “inheritance”, a nod perhaps to the presence of the Almighty on earth in the form of Selassie.

Numerous participants throughout this study connected the ability to receive and interpret vibrations with dreadlocks. Some referred to them as “mantenna”, a portmanteau fusing ‘man’ and ‘antenna’ to indicate the communicative ability of the locks²¹⁶²¹⁷. This for one participant was a key issue in the perceived separation between “humanity” and “nature” in wider society as two distinct categories. Those without dreadlocks are prevented from “receiving the message” that demonstrates this to be a false dichotomy whilst those with natural and unbridled hair are able to see this “truth”. Ras Faiye connected this to historical example, stating “in the beginning of the war [Italian invasion of Ethiopia] the Emperor deliberately told the civilians, he tell them don’t comb their hair man, let your hair grow rough man, just before the war he told them that”, an apparent attempt to maximise the “wisdom and strength” of his people before an invading force made landfall.

Many framed their connection with the earthly environment and indeed broader Iration as one defined, again, by elements. Faiye spoke vividly of this elemental connection in stating “I am

²¹⁶ The ritual protocol of removing ones “crown” of tied locks and allowing them to flow down the body when drumming or in communion to ease such communication attests to this.

²¹⁷ In previous conversation Homiak has noted the use of terms and descriptions for locks that relate to the life cycle of the ganja plant. The mature, long locks are referred to as “kali knots” through their resemblance to mature, harvested and dried ganja, or “kali” buds, whereas young, short locks might be referred to as “roots” much like immature ganja plants. In this he suggests an implicit reassertion of a Rastafari moral code articulated through the natural. A moral order which engenders the wearing of locks is reinforced through its parallel with the natural order as seen through the “holy herb” of the ganja plant.

an environmentalist at heart, I predict the hurricanes I predict what's happening with Mother Nature more precise than the centres that are established to do that through the societies in the glove [official bodies] ya nuh? [...] Cos I am earth and air, I related with the earth and air. So whatever happens I know even before it happens. I knew this hurricane season there is no storms that will come and hit us around this region because I monitored environmental very very close. I have a very close relationship with the environment". For Faiye this elemental link doesn't serve merely to connect and ground one in Iration on a personal level, it also serves as a powerful tool in predicting or "sensing" how these elements will move and change in coming times. Faiye's description here points to an underlying notion present amongst many Rastafari I spoke with of using one's senses and one's own connection with surrounding vibrations over official predictions or mainstream "scientific" calculations to make assessments on one's immediate environment. This directly contrasts the 'mechanical', secular, processes Faiye describes. "It's very spiritual because when it's going to rain I know. Anytime it's going to rain I know, I feel it physically because by the time I feel it my body pumping sweat, there's humidity". The body then serves as a barometer of sorts allowing Faiye to "feel" the environmental changes inbound.

Empress Desma, a young health products business owner, also spoke in these terms in describing how she responds to those seeking advice on embracing Rastafari Livity. "I would say to them when you live a certain life and you connect with the elements a lot of tings just reveal to you the creator who will show you tings. You will get visions, you feel the natural air. You will observe nature if you open up your heart and your mind and listen, you unna stan?". The elemental language employed here is vivid and is testament to the deconstruction of the self that occurs in a Rastafari cosmology centred around the fundamental unity of all in Iration. A deconstruction that reassesses oneself as a compound of parts shared with all around and animated with a divine spark in the Almighty. Observing nature thus doesn't come through the eyes but through the heart and the mind as the unity in all is recognised, as revealed by and through the creator. Desma's allusion to visions is also pertinent and will be explored in great detail elsewhere in this study.

Humanity and Iration

In conversation some interviewees also described a specific role for humanity within Iration, entrusted with specified care roles or contingent within a structure in which the Almighty has

exalted humanity above others. In this, King Khalid described a kind of dependent symbiosis between people and environment. Just as humanity would cease to exist without the sun, “the sun itself would die out if there’s no man” because “of that correlation [...] the forests would not feel good if there’s no man”. Here, both humanity and wider creation form keystones where the removal of either part sees the entire structure fall. “After a time the sun will get sad”, Khalid furthered, with Bongo Wisely adding “Get sad. Seen [understood]. Lost its companion”. Khalid continued, “Yeah, because all the time the sun will be beaming down and that place to receive the beam will not be there [...] the trees will see if they can reformulate a man. Because the sun will always be discomforted greatly to see there is no man. The water, also the trees you check?”. This notion of a crucial interdependence perhaps represents something of a reformulation of some Christian notions of stewardship in which humanity and wider creation are seen to be entirely co-dependent²¹⁸, rather than existing in some form of hierarchy. This co-dependency means that one will always seek out the other. “Rastafari [can] never really truly [be gotten] rid of on earth [...] the environment has always been arising a man or two you check? One man to revive one man to recreate the vybe”.

Khalid drew on Biblical allusions in employing John to further emphasise this point. “The Bible say Jesus Christ came out [of the environment] as if it’s a mystic ting²¹⁹, even if it’s not so it is because of the environment that the environment create that body to re-educate man, to show man how to reincarnate themselves. And it goes on now to this day so the environment, the universe, will always recreate it for man²²⁰”. A man emerging out of nature when it was necessitated and man so having the ability to do so again. Khalid connected this crucial symbiosis with modern-day conservation efforts. “That is why you see now the people saying if you destroy ants it’ll have some effect on man literally. If you’re going to destroy even the turtle, that’s why you see today man is trying to see that they conserve everything you check?”. Whilst non-human creation would experience a deep “sadness” in its absence so too humanity recognises the sorrow and pain that would greet it in the absence of all those around it. As one participant put it, Rastafari Livity is a “way of life [...] in tune with creation. So if we destroy it we destroy ourselves [...] a complete cycle, a complete universe”.

²¹⁸ Parallels exist in this with a number of indigenous spiritual traditions. See Salmon, *Kincentric Ecology*

²¹⁹ Khalid’s allusion drew my mind also to Mark 8:24, as the man at Bethesda begins to see people “like trees, walking”, or, perhaps, coming *out* of trees.

²²⁰ Khalid’s simultaneous critique of Christianity whilst frequently employing its scripture and themes was striking, and is explored in Chapter 5 of this study.

In another conversation Ras Kwaku, a young Nyabinghi living in Castries, offered a view on this relationship which had been tainted by humanity's actions. Upon asking him if the other elements of creation recognised humanity as special or chosen in some way, he responded. "Yeah yeah yeah. All aspect of creation, even if you see the bees would see a man and destroy a man but you know the presence of a man would still bring some fear in all bestial. It's just because man is the dominion in all creature. Yeah, cos you see since we lost that dominion because we go and eat the animal, so we become a lesser being than the animal". Kwaku appeared to be making Biblical allusions in describing "dominion" as per Genesis. Humanity has however abused this position and subsequently weakened its authority amongst the animal kingdom through the consumption of animals. This dominion has thus disintegrated to the point where humanity is now loathed and distrusted, operating from a cowed position and seeking forgiveness and reintegration with the creation that it has scorned.

Others put this interdependence in more explicitly biological terms. Faiye, a middle aged male eco-tour operator and active amateur archaeologist, described to me a concept he called the "bioweb" in which "every bacteria or organism rely on each other. So it's about micro bacterial organisms and each have a connection to each other". An intimate biological symbiosis then, a "compass web" which connects all within it in all directions²²¹. This was not merely a biological interconnectivity however. "You have to be connected spiritually, because that is the whole nub of your existence cos if you sound spiritually you're sound mentally and you'll be sound physically and you'll be sound environmentally". An intimate, typically holistic outlook which connects all right down to the smallest bacteria, spiritually and physically. Ras Shiloh described this interconnectivity as "the maker [being] in everything. So like he speaks to you through everything, yeah. Every little incident, whatever happens he's speaking to you through all these things [...] he's the actor and the motivator throughout. There is no need for action in this realm without his initiative so he's in everything, he's making everything happen the way it's happening, yeah". This notion of the Almighty "speaking" through all things speaks also to the notion of constant communion

²²¹ Faiye's descriptions have resonance with the work of biologist Suzanne Simard, an author who attests to the interdependence described by many contributors to this piece and describes a "Wood Wide Web" which connects the network of beings in a woodland. Simard also describes "elder trees" as of foremost importance in providing an "anchor" for the network, an exalted position aligned with Rastafari veneration of elders. See Simard *Mother Tree* 4

mentioned previously, a constancy in conversation with Jah occurring through all and every action big or small.

Faiye also offered a perspective on “stewardship” in which humanity has lost its way. “God created man in his own image and likeness and we are all Gods [...] He gave dominion over all things. He gave power and privilege over everything. How do we work with that? But what we do is we forget that so we powerless, we cannot change things. Somebody have to do it for us. So that’s when the dependency comes when people neglect the environment”. It is not here then an overbearingness of humanity onto creation but instead a faltering of humanity and a collective amnesia of both its responsibilities and the powers it has been imbued with. A forgetfulness of sorts of the God and the Divinity within all humanity to the point where humanity feels powerless over the state of the world around it²²². Faiye made this noted this in the immediate context of global change, a critique particularly of those in Western nations who feel they have no “agency or power” in what he construed as a global “battle” against climate change.

Climate Change and Earth Damage

Participants also voiced concern about the causes and impacts of climate change and damage to the earth more broadly. Many expressed great dismay about the harm being caused to what was often considered a fellow creature living in communion with humanity and the rest of Iration. Bongo Vision, a middle aged semi-rural farmer, spoke with passion on the subject when he described that “people have been so disrespect to mudda eart and have been looking all sorta form [ways toward] creating enemies and looking for all sorta form to destroy di images”. Vision’s reference to images was striking, pointing to the manifestation of nature as one of many “forms” of divinity in coming from the Almighty²²³. He went to say “Now, when you inna war both young and great and small, like unborn, will perish. Ok? It’s not to say if you in war and you had to be protected you will not be protected, you will be protected whether sometime you might be the most evil man or the most godly man. The Almighty is the only man that know the time for you, it’s that time”. The militaristic comparison from

²²² Forgetfulness and remembrance serve here again as another polarity in the Babylon-Zion dichotomy.

²²³ Vision’s description here is evocative of the quasi-Platonic writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg, one who saw the manifestations of creatures on this planet as indicative of a “truer” heavenly form.

Vision was a familiar one amidst a sense of cosmic order which pits the forces of Zion against the wicked armies of Babylon in a fight for truth, justice and redemption. This was no less the case in the “battle” against climate change and a battle for the earth as many put it. His stark language on the nature of war necessitating that the “young and great and small” will all perish was marked, however, and a philosophy in which the Almighty is not partial is laid bare here. Whether you are innocent or godly, young or great, when the time comes for the Almighty to judge an individual, or perhaps humanity on its collective merits, that time will come.

Whilst it was not a term mentioned by those in this fieldwork, previous Rastafari communities I have engaged with have drawn a link between contemporary campaigns for “ecojustice”, often defined as a connection between environmental and social justice issues²²⁴, and Rastafari involvement in campaigns for racial equality and reparatory justice. In this, the holistic outlook of Rastafari sees not only a cosmological “vibrational” link between the two, but a deeply practical one in which those most impacted by racial inequality are those invariably most effected by an increasingly precarious climate. Whilst this was not explicitly mentioned by participants, it may have formed a backdrop for some.

This fight against the “evil” of climate change was for some waged through metaphysical rather than physical means. “The fight against the nations, the only way we can fight is by doing good. We don’t fight against it”, one participant opined before another nearby added “we don’t fight against flesh and blood but principalities, wickedness in high and low places”²²⁵. Others however saw things in more temporal terms, forming a connection between a rejection of death and the importance of ensuring a future living environment for humanity. Ras Shiloh put it that, with the righteous “living for ever”, it is incumbent that humanity “start through cleanliness and we learn there’s no ways [unless] we become more gentle and calm” in ensuring the environment is kept “clean” and functional, an emphasis on maintaining an “enabling environment”. A rendering of end times that sees this present earth as continuing to exist in some form, something that necessitates its proper maintenance.

²²⁴ See White, *Environmental Harm* for further discussion of this.

²²⁵ These sentiments are mirrored in Rastafari articulations of “dread” as a means of Word, Sound, Power challenge to the forces of inequity. As Christensen describes it, a confrontation of society “not with weapons of physical violence, but with the power that came from knowing oneself and the truth of one’s history”. Christensen, *Rastafari Reasoning* 64

The hubris and “disobedience” of man atop the earth which has bought about such a perilous situation as seen in the present was also a frequent topic of conversation and consternation amongst contributors. Bongo Vision put it that “people have tried to control the world how they want and do whatever, and try to do whatever man will do to destroy the earth [...] you must come from the earth to destroy the earth you see?”. Vision’s statement is rich in Adamic comparisons both in the literal material sense and in regards to the responsibility placed on man’s shoulders, both raised up from the earth and “coming from the earth” as a resident and custodian. When I asked if anthropocentric climate change, a destruction emanating from the earth and its human inhabitants, could be viewed as a punishment for the immorality of humanity and delivered through the earth the response came “all that could be Joe cos as I show yuh, man have been so disrespect to creation and whether that should be big forest man turn it into city and the people in it suffering²²⁶. You check it? Where man should have hospital they have jail for man. Yu nuh? And dis kinda ting. So it is jus a dread vybes yu nuh? Because we cannot limit the power of the Almighty yu nuh, never limit the power of the Almighty”.

Vision’s use of these two examples lays bare two prominent strands of ecological concern expressed by participants to this study. First, humanity commits injustice against the earth. The forests and the jungles are torn down, “earth’s lungs”, as it was put to me, and they are turned into an urban, industrialised sprawl in which the forces of Babylon reign. Here, poverty and sufferation, which similarly defined the early urban existence of the Jamaican Rastafari, goes unaided. Second, humanity commits injustice against humanity. Jails are erected in the place of hospitals, shackling a populace in need of care and offering unyielding brutality to those requiring compassion. Here we see further similarities with an ecojustice perspective. The battle for the wellbeing of the earth is thus again a battle for all Iration. A holistic Rastafari cosmology which sees no separation between the creatures of the earth and the earth itself can see no progress for either until all are fulsome. This reference to prisons is one with deep historical significance given the frequent use of incarceration against Rastafari as a form of persecution and the physical incarceration of slavery which preceded it. Whilst less frequent and less overt than in previous times, the criminal status of cannabis possession

²²⁶ This is a sentiment echoed by UK dub artist Dub Judah in the song “Wake Up”, where he implores “city ites [residents], pay attention. Look after the eart and the eart will look after you. Even the birds and bee know whats going on [...] Prepare! Wake up your city is falling down”. This singling out of urban residents here is common, simultaneously impoverished due to their concrete surrounds as well as the lack of agency that comes from its location within a Babylonian stronghold.

still looms over Rastafari in some parts of the world as a means of justifying searching and detention at law enforcement official's discretion.

Some ascribed the present environmental crisis as a result of humanity's disobedience to the forces of truth and righteousness and to Haile Selassie. Nye spoke with apocalyptic fervour in decrying this. "Man reject the teachings of Haile Selassie, the teachings of Haile Selassie will always stand [so] the whole world will go down in flames, in fire. And the truth will always stand yuh see so the leaders of the world reject the teachings of Haile Selassie. It's a conspiracy against truth, against righteousness, against justice. Yuh see? So that is what is going on upon earth, bare disobedience, a rebellion against the most high and that could go way back in time you unnastan? So to me that is the climax right now, so the way it looking like it going to be a sudden destruction". Nye spoke in terms familiar to millennialist movements throughout time. Disobedience toward spiritual authorities, a wilful ignorance of persecution and a subsequent "sudden destruction" once this judgement comes to pass. Disobedience here is not merely a moral failure against a code of conduct however, it is a failure to serve and protect an entirety of Iration.

Others employed Selassie's words to speak of ultimate redemption for humanity and wider Iration. Referencing His Majesty's 1963 speech to the UN, Ras Zeb, a middle aged agriculturalist and community representative living in the rural hills in the island centre, stated "in the ending of it he said well, where are we to look for our survival? Where are we to look for the answers to questions that have never been posed? He say well we have to look to the Almighty and put our trust in him". The citation of this passage felt particularly pertinent in the context of ecological crisis, a global challenge constantly posing questions humanity has not yet encountered and to which it is seemingly light on answers. One solution ultimately lies at the core of anything that should come however, remaining faithful to the Almighty and staying firm on this path. Zeb furthered, "he will not desert us nor permit us to destroy humanity, which he created in his own image". In this rendering, the Almighty is perceived as possessing ultimate faith in humanity, unwilling to destroy something created in their own image. This could also be construed in a broader metaphysical sense, a fiery physical destruction permitted for the earth in its end times but a continued spiritual existence for its/some of its inhabitants which live on in the Almighty.

Zeb furthered that more was still required from humanity in this. Continuing in almost direct citation of the words of His Majesty, he added “we must become more courageous, ya unna stan? We have to be more broad in our outlooks, you know we have to voice our opinions on the big issues even if it may cause our death he said, ya unn stan. We have to stand up for the truth. Ya unna stan? So I feel that is really yu nuh? Powerful. Yu nuh? Saying of His Majesty and he said we supposed to owe our allegiance not just to our own country but to a wider humanity. Become members of a new race, truly”. The allusion here to the ‘members of a new race’ proclamation from His Majesty stands amongst the most oft cited of Selassie’s wide canon of oratory. One which carries immense power for a movement which emerged out of racial segregation, persecution and discrimination. Zeb’s application of this speech in the context of climate crisis was, in this research, novel and poignant. As is so often stated by world leaders, particularly in the run-up to global events such as COP26, climate change and ecological challenge are issues which know no national borders. Whilst these platitudes hold some truth in their broadest sense, a vast imbalance of course exists between countries with the largest emissions and those most impacted by such emissions²²⁷. Despite this, decisions are invariably and predictably made with recourse to national interest and a desire to maintain capitalistically defined “growth”. A maximisation of profit and “output” at the expense of the earth and those around it. In this context, Selassie’s words are imbued with a new power, a call to action beyond “allegiance” to “our own country” and “to a wider humanity”, and indeed, non-humanity. Not just a recognition that the epoch-defining issues of our time confront all of us beyond borders, but action which also takes account of this. Decisions made not with narrow national interest but in the broader interests of justice, not just for humanity but for all. “Becoming members of a new race”, without recourse to species even, to face down existential threat. It is the relevance of these words in the present that demonstrate to many I spoke with not just the wisdom within His Majesty’s words at the time of their utterance but the reflexivity and foresight at their core for this to continue to the present²²⁸.

²²⁷ Whilst World Population Review puts Chad 176th in terms of 2020 global carbon emissions at 0.8 megatons (compared to 11680.42 from China) analysis from the University of Notre Dame places it as top and most vulnerable to climate change of 182 countries. In a Caribbean context, Haiti ranks 149th for 2020 emissions with 3.01 megatons whilst being placed 13th most vulnerable country globally. See World Population Review, *Carbon Footprint* and ND-Gain, *Country Index*

²²⁸ Yawney describes this reflexivity, or “ambiguity” as she terms it, as emanating from the increasingly globalised nature of the Rastafari movement. See Yawney, *Rasta Mek a Trod*

Conversations with participants on the state of the world and the possibility of its cessation inevitably engendered conversations concerning themselves with eschatology. As well as with all aspects of Rastafari spirituality, outlooks on this are, and indeed during the study were, varied and heterogeneous. Whilst Rastafari has frequently been classified as a millenarian or millennialist movement²²⁹, it is not my belief that these are categories into which those I encountered in this study fit neatly. There are certainly elements of crossover with traditional definitions of this cosmology. Those I spoke with often described salvation in the “end times” as total for the righteous and the followers of the “true path”, a destiny which I only occasionally heard applied to those outside the movement. This was often articulated as taking the form of a complete transformation and “redemption” of the children of Jah upon Mount Zion, a “here on earth” transformation in the minds of many²³⁰. Similarly, notions around time were often interpreted variously as non-linear and a purely “human construct” which is not recognised in divine conceptions of the universe. It seems to me however that a primary departure with traditional definitions of millennialist movements amongst those I spoke with would be an absence of a sense of imminent judgement or eschaton, something that was not articulated by any I spoke with²³¹.

This may well be attributable to the passage of time, with scholarly descriptions of Rastafari as millennialist perhaps influenced by earlier sentiments within the movement. Chevannes offers his view that the movement has displayed millennialist behaviour on a large scale on three large scale occasions, the most recent of which being His Majesty’s arrival in Jamaica, or ‘Grounation Day’²³². This event brought an outpouring of spiritual energy and a vehement belief that his landing would herald a period of change for the movement and for the world in the immediate. The time since these occasions represents a period which has included the deposition and reported passing of His Majesty as well as the passing of a widely regarded prophet in Bob Marley, reactions to which did not include conceptualisations of an imminent judgement on a mass scale. In the present however, the majority of Rastafari I encountered

²²⁹ Murrell & Taylor, *Messianic Ideology* 390

²³⁰ Landes, *Millennialism* 334

²³¹ Werden-Greenfield is also right to note that a broad variance in conceptualisations of a messiah also make traditional categorisation of Rastafari as a millennialist movement unfitting. See Warden-Greenfield, *Warriors and Prophets* 9-19 for further exploration of this.

²³² Werden-Greenfield, *Warriors and Prophets* 18.

during this fieldwork appeared less focused on *immediate* and *imminent* salvation through Selassie and look towards a future orientation of *eventual* salvation through His Majesty²³³²³⁴.

Whilst for some these visions of end times serve to explain how the righteous will eventually receive their reward, others however offered a wholly different eschatologically grounded theodicy. Ras I-ron put forward his view that life on this earth represented something of a staging ground for eventual progression. He put it that “I remember Haile Selassie said that we must prepare ourselves while we are here living this terrestrial we must prepare ourselves for the celestial life. So I believe that there is a life after this, you know in a celestial form you know in a heavenly form [...] because there is physical warfare and there is spiritual warfare. There are things that are unseen, unseen forces that may try to hinder you and put stumbling blocks in your way and you have to be really strong physically and spiritually”. I-ron’s rendering offers resonance with Irenaean formulations as to the presence of suffering under a benevolent God. Here a life featuring pain and impediments is viewed as necessary a “strength” to develop and progress into this “celestial life”. It is this that stipulates humanity embodying a loving and caring approach to the complex Iration around it.

One participant I encountered put this in explicitly ecological terms, describing climate change and damage on this earth as part of a valuable, if not necessarily mandatory, episode in human development. An educational and formative experience of sorts. Ras Shiloh put it that “everything has been directed by H.I.M, even though something looks wrong to us it is there for a purpose to be corrected [...] If we do something then we have to know how to avoid it in the future, the next in the coming minute”. Climate change thus represents humanity “learning the hard way”, with the lessons for humanity in this era preventing the same mistakes being made again. Shiloh here speaks to a perspective of deep faith in the Almighty. All is enacted by him and through faith in him humanity will live and learn toward another day regardless.

²³³ This trajectory may well have also been influenced by the gradual integration of the group and its philosophy into the mainstream societies around it, an imminent yearning for tumult giving way to a settled if not fully content status for many.

²³⁴ Yawney also offers her view of another point of difference with “millennial cults”, the status of Rastafari as not “encapsulated” and instead engaging in “frequent and meaningful interchanges on a daily basis with non-Rastas in the communities in which they live. Whilst it doesn’t appear to me that this description applies to all millennialist movements it is certainly the case that Rastafari do not largely represent an insular group”. Yawney, *Remnants of All Nations* 232

Ital Livity and Food

As well as ever-present conversations around a sense of connection with the earth through agriculture, conversation frequently turned to the produce and foodstuffs which spring forth from it. As I have explored elsewhere, Rastafari notions around the importance of food both as something which grounds humanity within Iration²³⁵ and as a protective force against impurity and disease are central²³⁶. Further, these notions form perhaps the most recognisable manifestation of an Ital philosophy for those outside the community in the form of Ital restaurants, cafes and food stores²³⁷. As with previous fieldwork, almost all of those I spoke with in Iyanola followed an entirely plant-based eating mode with the exception of three who occasionally ate some fish and two others who sometimes partook in some dairy consumption. I have explored these practices amongst communities in Jamaica and the UK elsewhere in greater detail²³⁸, and in general terms there existed little variation between these and the communities in Iyanola I spoke with. I shall however offer two more specific observations. First, expressions around a desire towards raw consumption were very much present and perhaps more frequent during this research. King Khalid put it that “I come to the realisation eating fire is not a good ting²³⁹. It’s just like you eating ice, it’s not a good ting. It’s too cold for the body”. This he saw a gradual process, “you see adopting the same like 50% that use your base and about 50% raw”. Second, trends towards taking up an alkaline diet²⁴⁰ I had previously noted in Jamaica were also prevalent, again perhaps more so, and advocated by a number I spoke with. This was framed by some in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as individuals sought ways and means of further bolstering an immune system against any pathological threats that might emerge.

²³⁵ See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics*

²³⁶ See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah*

²³⁷ Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* 32-33

²³⁸ See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics*

²³⁹ This view had led Khalid to cease smoking cannabis, instead consuming only by eating it in its raw dried form.

²⁴⁰ This notion was expressed by participants as a desire to ensure a slightly alkaline pH level in either the blood or the stomach, or both, as this represented an ideal, healthier state for the body. The emergence of a prioritisation of alkaline food amongst some again points towards the reflexive and engaged nature of Rastafari philosophy. Conversations around an alkaline diet have become increasingly popular in recent decades globally amongst North American and European online “alternative health” communities from where Rastafari individuals and groups may have encountered it. Yawney notes a path of similar nature in the “upgrading” of Ital cuisine in the 1980’s and 90’s to include tofu after its popularisation from North American communities. See Yawney, *Tell Out*

Some voiced concern however around an anecdotal growth in interest around veganism and plant-based eating nationally and regionally. From this, individuals outside the community were said to be taking greater interest in Rastafari eating modes, both as a long established plant-based cuisine as well as an eating mode with an intimate and innate spiritual core. Whilst this may ultimately bring some into the movement and serve to “awaken a consciousness” which connects to broader Rastafari teachings, many expressed concern that this was broadly not the case. Zeb put forward his view that in the wider world people are waking up to “our Livity, what we eat” but are still “crops [far] away” from “the Rastafari teachings [...] of Haile Selassie you know seeing Haile Selassie as the most high, ya unna stan? Yeah. And the teachings and philosophy of Marcus Garvey, ya unna stan? Yeah”. Zeb touches on a concern expressed by many in fieldwork I’ve encountered globally, and indeed has been recounted to me as a fear long standing, that wider awareness and embrace of limited elements of Rastafari teachings or culture stops at just that, a limited embrace. In the 1970s and 80s and through to today the worldwide embrace of reggae and the greater awareness this brought of Rastafari spirituality was considered by many, although certainly not all²⁴¹, as a promising means of increasing both awareness and legitimacy for a movement that was still undergoing overt and brutal persecution in many parts of the world. In the minds of many however, reggae merely served to commodify and essentialise Rastafari spirituality. Generating vast revenue for white Western record executives and creating a market for Rastafari-inspired products sold by those outside of the community whilst the core spirituality of the movement remained misunderstood and largely unexplored.

As Zeb expresses, whilst there exists greater awareness of the Rastafari movement as a result, he perceives an embrace of Rastafari in its entirety is still not forthcoming. Within an Ital philosophy grounded at its very centre in holism, this can be frustrating for adherents. Such an approach, as with the example of reggae, also presents the threat of commodification and essentialisation. Many expressed concern about Ital-branded restaurants or those featuring Rastafari motifs operated by proprietors outside of the community appearing with increasing frequency around the Caribbean. These trends are however not entirely without commercial benefit for those in the community. Zeb, himself a medium-sized farmer, reported that “the

²⁴¹ Rastafari patriarch and influential early Nyabinghi organiser Ras Boanerges, otherwise known as Bongo Watto, was perhaps foremost amongst these voices, often decrying reggae as a corrupting influence taking community members away from the more spiritually pure “churchical” forms of Rastafari inspired music. See Berhane, *Bongo Watto*

people an dem know in terms of health Rastafari is concerned about health and how we eat, they want that for themselves too because them refined foods a lot of cooked food, salty food, it's not that healthy", something which leads some market consumers to a stall visibly operated by Rastafari in search of a natural organic product to counteract these products. Zeb reported that it was even the case many customers had come to his stall reporting they were there to buy Ital produce on doctor's orders. This was something mirrored by Jah Lamb, a seasoned restaurateur operating in the urban centre of Soufriere popular with tourists in times before Covid-19, who reported customers arriving to his restaurant having been seen by their health practitioners in search of "coconut cream" and other "natural" products. "Most of them use to tell me the coconut will kill me [...] We still here drinking our coconut".

Plant Life and "Plant Rights"

Further, some participants expressed a broader suspicion around global trends towards vegan and plant-based cuisine in the context of concern for plant welfare. Ibed was amongst these, positing "is the plant-based industry in harmony with Mother Nature? [...] because there is a plant-based industry, this whole veganism ting, it's an industry". This reference to "industry", imbued with Babylonian connotations around mechanisation and artificiality, gave a sense of the view that Ibed was about to offer. "Is it in harmony with Mother Nature in terms of, when we look at plants only for profit you have people just growing plants only for profit, you may consume it and think of it holistically but the person that grow it did not have, they did not look at it holistically they just grow it for profit and I personally believe that that plant is not bless²⁴²". Ibed offers further indication of the central importance of intention and emotion in shaping the vibrationally which humanity interacts with. The corporate desire for profit from these plants represents an impact on the plant in itself, as well as further engendering an attitude towards plant care that is anthropocentric and self-interested. "It not bless mon. It not bless compared to an individual who care for the plant and give the plant love from seed to harvest. It is not bless like that".

Ibed unpacked his concerns further in describing that the issue was "just like the chicken and dem [...] those chickens that born in a cage they never turn around in their live, just born in a cage and sweat and give man egg, that egg not bless. It not bless. Like you have a local fowl

²⁴² Good, spiritually upright

when you eating bread you give it a bread to eat you eating corn you give it corn, you feed it, it give you egg. Yeah man, you feel more bless about that egg”²⁴³. Just as consumers may feel more comfortable about eating free range meat and dairy products, so too should it be for plants. In this scenario, the caged chicken becomes the fertilised cornstalk, imbued with growth hormones and offered no love or affection with the soul aim of achieving maximum size and yield. A cornstalk in immediate, indeed stark, contrast to the cornstalk growing at the back of Ibed’s plot which lives an organic life in communion and conversation with the farmer. With this mindset outlined, Ibed furthered that such an awareness should also engender legal protection. “We should have a ting of plant cruelty, they have animal cruelty and I feel they have it against woman too and man. Yeah, what about plants? Are not plants a part of life?”²⁴⁴. Again, a holistic outlook renders all in Iration worthy of equal legal protection and care, not merely that which *appears* to have some kind of sentience²⁴⁵.

Many I spoke with connected this desire to protect the plant kingdom with a dichotomy of the veneration of cannabis within the movement and vilification of it from the outside. This was much the case for Ibed, who spoke of a deeply personal connection with the plants in his care. I asked how he viewed the actions of police forces in their efforts to destroy cannabis plants in the context of plant rights, he described “Yeah man, because I go through it when them man come and cut my herb. I cry an I cry like it some boy that beating me. I not crying cos I afraid of the consequences as in ok police man bring me to the cell, not that I crying for ya nah? I crying cos I looking at my plant put through what they going through because every day I wake up I wake my plants, and to see a morning I wake up and I have to go to bed at night, it’s like somebody take your child from you. It’s like the system come and take your child ya nuh? And I not ok with that brudda”. The sense of raw emotional pain Ibed spoke of in reference to an event months earlier was tangible in describing a confiscation which not only deprived the household of its sacrament but also of some of its integral members, the “children” greeted in the morning and bid farewell each evening.

²⁴³ Ibed further elucidated this in describing concerns around industrially grown plants being exposed to artificial light and processed water. “It will look nice but on a spiritual or esoteric level I would like to compare it to a plant where a man love up the plant from seed to harvest”, he added.

²⁴⁴ Ibed’s suggestion is familiar amongst contemporary debates around “plant rights”, the notion that plants should be afforded the same or similar legal protection to humans and animals. See Marder, *Should Plants Have Rights?*

²⁴⁵ Matthew Hall expands on indigenous cosmologies with references here in his *Plants as Persons*, describing that a view divergent from this represents “human hyperseparation from the natural world” which has “entangled us in what conservation biologists recognize as the sixth great extinction crisis”. See Hall, *Plants as Persons*

It was often stated however, by Ibed as well as others, that this feeling of attachment and connection applied to all herbs and was not one reserved exclusively for cannabis. It was however cannabis which was the only herb that received such brutality, a non-sensical and discriminatory distinction given the universality of divinity within each and every herb, as it was put to me. Seeking to understand perspectives on why cannabis was singled out for such brutal treatment, Bongo Wisely described to me that in his view this was “because cannabis enlightens your inspiration, as we would say it opens the third eye²⁴⁶ that clarifies so it helps communication with your inner being or with the higher spirit, the creator. Yu nuh? It enhances that. So they don’t want. They don’t want humanity to be on that level”. As well as this attempt to limit the inspiration of Rastafari, Wisely also stated that Babylonian governmental authorities “were aware of the economic side of it as well yu nuh? That is a way which we would enhance our [the Rastafari community’s] economic stand. The stand we live in. Yeah”. Wisely offered a view acutely aware of the burgeoning yet thriving cannabis industry internationally. This was itself tainted with hypocrisy. “The brutality with which they execute on the herb, yeah it’s sickening. Yeah, real. And den now later on like for example all now in Jamaica they tell you a lot of the people who have the [cannabis growers] licence are ex-police ya nuh?”. This was a point made to me on numerous occasions throughout fieldwork, and one which instilled trepidation amongst Iyanolan Rastafari about what a potential legalised cannabis marketplace in St Lucia might look like – one in which those who had perpetrated the most violent and most arbitrary persecution against cannabis and against Rastafari now profited the most from legislation the very community they harassed had fought for.

Natural Wisdom and Metaphor

The grounding of participants in the natural saw countless expressions of wisdom revealed through nature as well as in natural metaphor. These can simultaneously convey the power of Iration around as well as the words through which it is explored. Towards the former, Bongo Vision saw natural wisdom in lessons for the domestic organisation of Rastafari

²⁴⁶ Several participants spoke to the notion of a “third eye” during research, a notion with Eastern philosophical roots. Often conceived as a hidden sensory organ which can provide some kind of enhanced perception, here stimulated externally through the consumption of ganja to offer both a site and source of divine inspiration.

households²⁴⁷. “I know, well, every tree upon the face of the earth is male and female, so if the father create all animal male and female, trees male and female, who is me, who is you and I, for it to create you and I male alone? Who is you and I to want to be doing tings and segregate yourself from women and say they not clean they not worthy, who is man to be? As far as in all the father tradition that is why it is not now dem ting going yu nuh Joe?”. Taking lesson from all the elements of nature around humanity, Vision spoke forcefully against Rastafari groups and households who would seek to diminish the role of women, particularly around the time of menstruation²⁴⁸. If the animals and trees practice no such separation then why would humanity? Where would humanity take such a lesson from? Through the animals and trees, we are able to observe that humanity and the men and women who form it are all one. Expanding this, Vision stated if “man is to be the tree trunk” then it must follow “woman is the roots”. Households that neglect this simple natural truth are bound to shrivel and wilt as does the tree without either its trunk or its roots. Vision’s view was one doubtless connected to his own domestic situation, as of course all are, as one living in a “mixed” household with a non-Rastafari partner completing the unit along with his son. Speaking with this critical distance, he identified such patriarchal Rastafari households as “holding back” the Rastafari community in limiting women’s potential.

Ras Shiloh spoke of lessons he had taken from his kept bees and from the queen bee specifically. On her succession, “the first thing she does is to prepare three queen cells, when the first one hatch she kills the two others in their cell. Yeah. She kills the two of dem so there’s only one left. When she’s ready that young is the one that will stay in the hive so the queen has to leave, the elder queen has to leave. So that’s showing she’s broadening the continuity. Yeah. Always [...] Act like that. Bees are very wise”. This “making space for the you” as Shiloh put it, serves as a powerful example for him amongst a movement which places great value in the words, experiences and lessons of its elders, in the minds of some, particularly in the younger generation, at the expense of progress and the inclusion of youth. As with all things in the Rastafari cosmology, all things must be achieved with balance, and a

²⁴⁷ Historically many Rastafari households have been ordered along firm patriarchal lines with the man at the top and authority subsequently flowing down from this source. Indeed, perceptions have existed previously which describe that a woman may only be Rastafari through union with a male partner or a “kingman”. Some households and communities have and indeed still view women’s menstruation as a period of impurity during which they should be separated from clean spaces such as cooking areas or, further, from men completely.

²⁴⁸ See *Lake Rastafari Women* 93-95. Of those I spoke with on this topic in Iyanola I did not encounter any who practiced such rigid separation, although there were those, both male and female, who sought to limit the presence of menstruating women in food preparation.

recognition from elders that “continuity” should be strived for. This is not a one-way street however. As humanity learns from the bees “they supposed to learn from us also, we supposed to teach them righteousness and judgement”, imbuing the Almighty’s creation with the aspects of Iration he has most concerned humanity with. Shiloh also reported that working with bees has helped him “spiritually” in teaching him to be “calm and still”.

Bongo Wisely turned to a slightly more unorthodox natural metaphor to describe his exasperation with the corruption he saw on the island exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. “If you remain confident in the victory of good over evil eventually it will be achieved. Yeah. So the good overcoming the evil, the evil meaning the evil force. It going down, diminishing whereas the good is multiplying, its increasing yu nuh? So that is how it is, not to say its somewhere you going out there to hunt down the evil man, nah. It’s by your work, by the appearance of righteousness in itself. It’s like I would say in agricultural terms, it’s like a pesticide for the evils yu nuh? So that is why we have to keep on doing good”. The presence of righteousness then serves as a defensive measure against evil. The pesticide sees the evil creatures that consume it fade away as the righteous carry on unwounded. Whilst Wisely by his own admission did not use any pesticides on his farm the potential use of an agricultural metaphor as we were amongst the soil was clearly irresistible, perhaps a natural pesticide of righteousness countered against an artificial pesticide that exists amongst the plants.

During my time on the island I attended several “binghi” gatherings, which mark special occasions in the community’s calendar. All of these took place at the Vieux Fort tabernacle and included marking Ethiopian New Year amongst other local celebrations These serve as an important communal demonstration of ritual Ital practice, as the community gathers to reason, celebrate and to manifest Ital Livivity as the “lived” practice it is. As well as informing numerous other areas of this research, these events contained some vivid demonstrations of the elemental power contained within Rastafari cosmology. The “fire key”, or fire pit, outside the tabernacle served to imbue the ceremony with energy whilst the fire within the tabernacle operated as a purifying force that both cleansed individuals present and served as an immediate reminder of the fire that would eventually befall Babylon at the hands of the Almighty.

Technological Overreach

Much discussion concerning the increasingly perilous state of the earth was grounded in concern regarding technological and scientific invention and innovation. With a yearning towards the primordial at the foundation of cosmological outlooks for many, such innovations, it was said, represented a diametric step in the wrong direction. Away from the Almighty's original blueprint for humanity and towards a hubristic and progressively isolated future. Bongo Vision spoke to this. "When Mudda Nature is taking its course, that mudda nature is tornado, hurricane, lightning, tunder, lava, yu check it? Storms and dis kinda ting. Tings like war bomb and them kinda ting, dem is not of Mudda Nature. Dem ting is tings people make to destroy people". Mother Nature expresses herself through these natural phenomena whereas humanity expresses itself through the decidedly unnatural means of bombs and weapons. Such a discrepancy serves only to distance humanity further from natural Iration and from the Almighty. In the case of bombs, this unnatural means of expression is coupled with direct destruction of the earth itself, indiscriminately destroying sections of earth brimming with life.

Further to these militaristic fears, many grounded these conversations in fears around nuclear weaponry specifically. Zeb put it that on its current trajectory, humanity will soon cease to exist. "It will be the end because when you check, man have so much knowledge that he talk about, technological advancement and all dem kinda ting right now. Man could split the atom right? He can have nuclear bombs being stationed all over the world", something he said nations choose to do instead of seeking to heal an already wounded world. Whilst at the time of research there was little regular discussion globally of the deployment of nuclear weaponry, those who raised it as a prospect frequently did so in the context of Haile Selassie's work towards nuclear disarmament²⁴⁹. Zeb furthered "Haile Selassie talk against that [nuclear weapons], they were supposed to defuse all those bombs [...] disarmament. All dem countries sign for that yu nuh? The United States, England, France, you know China all of them they sign to disarm, they not doing that". Zeb referred here to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons or the NPT, a treaty which, although attested to in some form by all five members of the UN security council, exists in a world that also features around 12,700 nuclear heads as of February 2022²⁵⁰. "Now they want to punish Iran. they say

²⁴⁹ Haile Selassie spoke frequently on this topic beyond World War Two, perhaps most famously to the UN in 1963 when he implored delegates not to show the same passivity towards the nuclear threat they had shown at his warning against Mussolini's Italy and fascism more broadly in 1936.

²⁵⁰ FAS, *World Nuclear Forces*

well you trying to develop nuclear warhead, bare hypocrisy!” he added. A contemporary form of ‘nuclear colonialism’, perhaps, as Western nations attempt to keep this particular element of power exclusively in their hands. “So when they have their tings dere, so at one point all hell might break loose. Maybe that will bring the end of humanity because the amount of nuclear warheads they have stationed all over the world. It’s like His Majesty say, it has the capacity to wipe out the human race from earth, so that is what is taking place”. The hubris of actors and states to ignore the words from divinity, the direct disregard of instruction and prophecy, may well bring about the end of humanity and the end of earth itself. “Armageddon, total destruction”, as Zeb put it, at the last.

In discussing these themes with Nye, he put forward his view that “tings changing you see. There’s great change from even when I was born to now, yuh see. So according to the prophecy we certainly, we the Rasta people, see it as a judgement upon earth because of the disobedience of mankind. Man no longer obey the laws of the most high. Man wanting to do their own ting, inventing a lot of inventions other kinds of mass destruction, [it is these] causing climate change you know”. Elaborating further he made this point with reference to an immediately contemporary example, “well technology good in one way cos it helps man but in the other way, like it destroying man at the same time. Because check what happening right now there with the coronavirus. Nobody know exactly what causing it as I hear people saying it’s the 5G radiation and all of those things and check what they doing to mankind”²⁵¹. As with others, Nye added nuance in stating that it was not technology in and of itself that was problematic. Instead it is merely some manifestations of it, innovations which are deemed to be by some measure “too far” away from the natural original life of man, in this instance global communication technology and weapons of mass destruction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the above offers further demonstration of both the breadth and the depth within the holistic nature of Rastafari Ital Livivity. We see the spiritual connection between an individual human and the Almighty as one in which all outside of the individual also engage in, simultaneously sharing a space and a divine energy from the “Most High” which necessitates a sensitive, loving engagement. In this research this was most frequently

²⁵¹ See Powell, *Pandemic Iwah*

expressed through agriculture, an area which will receive greater focus again in the following chapter. The connections here serve not only to ground individuals in the Iration around them, it offers warm emotional engagement as well as education as to the ways of the world. As discussions around human/non-human interaction and plant rights indicate, these beings are to be protected and cared for as fellows in divine power.

It is for these reasons the climatic changes and degradation of the earth occurring around the community are of paramount, even apocalyptic, concern. Ignorance, at times willful, towards fellow beings and to the teachings of the Almighty has brought the earth to a point where Rastafari Ital Livity not only offers a progressive, engaged and emotive alternative, it offers one of a seemingly limited number of hopes for the community and those who might engage with it. This perhaps mirrors its functions in the slums of West Kingston in the movements genesis, offering a spiritual insulation to an outside world increasingly, pervasively, deteriorating and corrupted by the destruction inherent in an environment shackled by Babylonian forces. It is thus up to each individual to counter these forces, exuding loving vibrationality everywhere, every time.

This chapter also demonstrates some aspects of Rastafari Ital Livity more broadly. A philosophy which sees Rastafari confined in a pervasive Babylon which is near impossible to resist wholly, but liberated through the location of the self in Zion. Such relocation requires the regular re-centring of the self within it through the discourse, reasoning and practice described above, with the land and the environment serving as both an interlocutor and a crucial source of energy which can facilitate it. This re-centring is adapted and re-adapted in the face of novel challenges thrown up within Babylon such as challenges around climate change and the emergence of Covid-19. Here previous meanings are renewed whilst new meanings are formed, and the manifestations of Rastafari thought and practice and their relation to identify flex and expand.

In the next chapter, I will draw out some of the manifestations of Ital Livity that might be crudely categorised as of a more practical nature. Here, the above finds its application out in the fields and green spaces, cities and towns, within Iration, as what might be considered a Rastafari ecology emerges.

Chapter Four – Ital Livivity in Practice: Earth Connections, Foodways and Living in Iration

In this chapter, I will be drawing out themes that emerged during research that might broadly be categorised as offering some demonstration of Ital Livivity in practice. An applied engagement with the environment and with Iration more broadly serves as an important development of the deep and reverential spiritual found within the movement. A spirituality that both manifests and is enhanced through action, the “good works”, of Rastafari individuals and communities. As Ras Jeg powerfully put it, “unless we conscious about the environment, the Rastafarian movement will never go forward. We have to start from the environment [...] Rastafari is about Livivity, you see. Environment is Livivity”. A foundational “start” point which orients towards the very start, the primordial earth.

Again, at its core Rastafari engagement with the earth and with Iration was framed around a consciousness and a need to be “in tune” with the movements and vibrations of the earth as well as of wider Iration around. As one participant outlined, if “we conscious about this environment then Rastafarian works must [go] forward cos we come from back, we go back to the earth. We go back to Mother Earth. That’s what Mother Nature need, us to take a leap back and nurture the earth”. Returning to ensure the future, in a ‘great leap backwards’. Back to the womb, as it were, to a connection more primal and more potent. This yearning and manifestation of a life amongst the green of Iration offers spiritual and social safety, and grounds an existence described by Mama Lavie, an elder matriarch living in remote woodlands with her son, in succinct simplicity as “most Irie, most Irie”.

As will be evident from the below, this engagement was again articulated most frequently in agricultural terms, with such labour frequently described as fundamental to Rastafari Ital Livivity²⁵². From this and beyond it we can see the outlines of a Rastafari “ecology”, a sense of the priorities and means of engagement that formulate interaction with the earth and Iration. The connections within this are again extensive, as participants expanded in discussions on natural agriculture, a desire towards and visions for agricultural initiatives, national and international food security and the engagement of these with the foodways of the movement.

²⁵² Powell, *Ten Miles* 88

Further, individuals spoke about how personal understandings of Ital Livity influence an engagement with agricultural and conservation projects as well as land allocation and visions for communal agrarian living. The legality and farming of ganja featured, and demonstrated for some the irrationality of government approaches to plant life, whilst beekeeping was grounded as fundamental to all of these processes by some. Mixed views on the pacifying or empowering potential of technology were also offered.

What will become visible from this discussion is the presence of previously established common threads that lay at the very ideological heart of Rastafari Ital Livity as it was articulated by those in this research. All of these connect with a foundation which sees the divine in all, yearns towards the green and rejects death and corruption. We see a holism which offers a comprehensive sense of the self and drives actions and interactions to be taken with all of Iration in mind. A desire for autonomy and self-understanding, back towards epistemologies present in previous times and away from colonial modes and practices. Equally within this, a fierce rejection of the Babylonian forms of industrialisation and privatisation which serve to disconnect humanity from Iration and Iration from itself. A practical engagement with the natural serves as a means of enhancing ones connection with Iration and with the Almighty, and also grounds a proclivity towards drawing broader wisdom, and indeed specific lessons, from the natural world that shapes an Ital Hermeneutic. This shall be explored further in chapter six. These threads run across these myriad areas of engagement, and present a “practical” Ital Livity inextricably linked to the spiritual and the cosmological.

Engagement with Agriculture

Most frequent in conversations around practical manifestations of Ital Livity were those related to agriculture. Of central importance, both through its practical provision and through the deeply spiritual act of communion it represented, agriculture and farming were described perhaps no more succinctly than by one participant who labelled them “dear to the Rastafari heart”. The aforementioned history of the movement is central to contemporary manifestations of this engagement. For many of the first generations of those forcibly transplanted into the Caribbean from Africa, engagement with the land and with agriculture was a brutal and deeply unequal form of labour as either enslaved or indentured labourers, conducted exclusively on the terms of others.

Such forms have left a legacy both in the intellectual development of Rastafari and in contemporary access to land as manifested through neo-colonial power structures in which hotel resorts, large multi-national agricultural companies, the government and descendants of plantation owners control much of the land on the island. It is these power structures that further attempt to limit access for Rastafari through this ubiquity of private land, furthered by vast disused plantation and reserve spaces, expensive land prices when it is available for sale and bureaucratic means of purchase and rent. As such, the agricultural engagement of those within this dissertation and of Rastafari more broadly often represents resistance against these forces, as well as the assertion of a values system of empowerment for the community. When access to land is achieved and work can begin, although at times costly, these efforts to limit access have ultimately failed and this system of oppression and dependency is resisted.

In this, British Rastafari scholar Robbie Shilliam is right to note the intimately counter-colonial nature of Rastafari engagement with agriculture. Here he writes that “as much as is possible, food should be sourced directly and personally (unlike the export-crops of the plantation system) in a way that assures that I-n-I are grounded (rather than depersonalized through exchange relations in nature)”. This indicates how the “production, preparation and consumption of Ital food” serves as a “good example of how economic activity is judged [amongst Rastafari] by reference to the degree that it exorcizes physical slavery”. The value of these activities thus comes dually from the empowerment and sustenance it offers as well as the extent to which it challenges these Babylonian power structures²⁵³.

Modes of agricultural engagement with the earth are thus valorised and established as an important cultural value within Rastafari groups. As such, agricultural work, both individually and in groups, serves as an important form of bonding in which produce, labour and wisdom can be shared around an activity and it's fruits that speaks to values at the core of the movement. Relations with the earth are idealised to represent a source of self-sufficiency and independence that assert the importance of separation from a Babylonian system which has always sought, forcibly, to make dependent. In this, material work establishing the physical means for self-reliance on the farm is met with a more emblematic form to emphasise the sheer power of this labour.

²⁵³ Shilliam, *Redemption from Development* 339-340

With this in mind, it came as no surprise to me that each visit I made to see those in the community, in domestic spaces or explicitly agricultural spaces, invariably featured carefully maintained and often fruitful agricultural plots surrounding whatever dwelling the residents resided in. These ranged from small one room urban huts and medium sized semi-rural farmsteads right the way up to large multi-acre farming plots in the hills and valleys of the island. The means in which these came to be also varied greatly. Whilst many had inherited family land or established themselves on a plot with other family members, others had occupied what was referred to as “Crown Land”, land formally owned by the state but upon which they had now established themselves to the point of de facto ownership. Larger agricultural plots were a mixture of this latter category and of the collectivist purchase and ownership of community members.

At the smaller end of this, individuals and small families I visited perpetually had a small plot surrounding the house or some boxes and plant pots if surroundings did not permit this. Ras Kwaku belonged to this latter group, and offered the view that whilst he was not able to glean much in the way of sustenance from the herbs and chillis that stretched forth from his window box he considered it an essential act of “spiritual devotion” to pour his energy into the soil in any way possible²⁵⁴. Bongo Vision considered himself fortunate to have space enough around his house to grow the yams and beans which he served us up for lunch one afternoon. “It is the bounty of the Almighty before us today”.

Towards the middle of the scale stood the farmstead Bongo Wisely had established near Vieux Fort and where I spent much time during fieldwork. He described his efforts to establish this operation on “Crown Land” and develop the plot from an irregular parcel of what might be considered brownfield site to the rich and varied “vineyard”²⁵⁵ I could see around me today. “Just pasture, that’s how here was. Occasionally during the rainy season people within the other communities would come and plant sweet potatoes and pidgin peas [but otherwise] nothing. Real”. Wisely found himself on the island southern tip after domestic disagreements emerged with his parents after he had returned from study in Jamaica

²⁵⁴ Keba’s sentiment mirrors that of many Rastafari I have engaged in the UK, often urban-based and for whom agricultural plots of any meaningful size such as allotments are often hard to come by. This invariably does not prevent individuals from engaging in this act of communion however.

²⁵⁵ A commonly used and to my mind biblically grounded synonym for a farmstead or place for crops.

and began visibly and audibly embracing Rastafari, a new identity which was not well received by his Catholic parents. Wisely thus found himself starting again, utilising his newly earned agricultural science degree and a sense from His Majesty that agriculture was a “divine calling” to establish what was initially a small farmstead.

At the larger end of this spectrum stood Zimbabwe Farms, an expansive professionalised agricultural operation operated by around twenty workers and located in the hills of Babonneau in the north of the island which featured neatly ordered rows of pumpkins, pineapples and yam as well as an abundance of fruit trees. On meeting the farm’s proprietor, King Khalid, I inquired as to its origins, receiving in turn a familiar tale of agricultural necessity through the social and economic conditions of the era. “Well I came up here with a group, we started the group in 1980 maybe a little more than that 1978. Yu nuh, in those days Rastafari, [it] was hard for one to survive as Rastafari. So then we became, when we realise we must eat and drink we decided it would be better for us to become farmers”²⁵⁶. Khalid’s story demonstrates the practical necessities which so often run parallel to the spiritual yearnings for such a journey into agriculture and into the earth, building this need into a community and a shared symbolic expression of Rastafari spiritual identity. This trajectory was mirrored and repeated by many I engaged with in Jamaica in the movements earlier days, forced by persecution and a lack of employment to seek an existence out in the hills surrounding towns and cities²⁵⁷. A physical refuge matched by the spiritual purity of the green expanses, and offering opportunity in the place of oppression.

Whilst the amount or variety of crops might have changed between agricultural locations on the island, the tangible passion and pride each participant exuded when walking me around their plots did not. The visible joy in sharing in the bounty of the Almighty from the earth they themselves had imbued with divine power seemed evergreen, as Rastafari of all ages spoke with the same ardour and awe about the gifts they had received up from the soil. Many insisted that I immediately join in them in tasting some of the immediate surrounds before

²⁵⁶ Khalid described the group’s work on the site over decades as of great significance for both its immediate eco-system and for the “vibrational fabric” that surrounds it.

²⁵⁷ Empress Dannie also spoke to this in describing that “in the earlier years of Rastafari within the Caribbean you find the Rastafari people were persecuted people, they were taken advantage of and not given opportunities they were refused opportunities not going to school not being educated not being able to participate in society and within that the only means of survival for the Rastafari people in the Caribbean was farming [...] that’s just been the way of life for the Rastafari people to be engaged in farming as a sustainable way of livelihood”.

very generously loading me up with a bag of whatever looked ready for harvest for me to take back home. Food for both “body and Irit”, I was instructed. The handing down of produce further from the Almighty through the live earth and soil beneath and then onto me.

Natural Agriculture and Rastafari Identity

Similarities between the agricultural approaches described by participants and those which might be described as organic in approach have led to comparisons by some scholars²⁵⁸. Indeed, I have made use of this framing before²⁵⁹ and in the earlier stages of this fieldwork asked those I engaged with if they saw points of crossover between their approach which similarly valorised low intervention, non-chemical and non-GMO agriculture. This was invariably resisted however and is as such not employed in this paper, as participants sought to emphasise the nuance that comes with a Rastafari approach. Bongo Wisely summed up the views of many in describing “Rastafari more stick with natural instead of saying organic, you nuh because we know with the different standards they have in America, different in Britain you nuh, the organic standard so to avoid all dem kinda tings we just say our production is natural instead”. The Rastafari “standard”, as it was idealised, is, much like the British and American standards highlighted, distinct in its own right and thus requiring distinction.

The practices contained within this were broad and spoke to the intimacy and connection with which participants viewed their connection with the earth and with Iration. Rainwater harvesting systems that utilised the regular downpours the island experienced were ubiquitous²⁶⁰. Agricultural work in the locations I visited was invariably done by hand. Broad bio-diversity was visible and crop rotation was practised with consideration. Ibed spoke to this in complaining that whilst a perception existed outside the community that “Rasta up in dem hills only growing ganja” the reality, he said, was an approach that was holistic and oriented towards “family food” provision. It was emphasised to me by almost all of those who spoke with me on the topic that the mentality and approach of one engaging in agriculture when it came to planting and picking was key as an act of meditation, communication and communion. I saw on many occasions seeds sown with a prayer and a

²⁵⁸ Thiesen, *Religious Implications* 4

²⁵⁹ Powell, *Ital Trod* 29 & 49

²⁶⁰ A small minority of participants stated that this water collection exclusively provided their drinking water as well. Ibed was one of these, and put it that “tap water filters our both good and bad”, and that it was preferable to ‘share in the same drink as nature’.

moment of introspection. Similarly, Ibed emphasised the importance of dialogue in harvesting. “You must give thanks to the plants before picking, don’t just snatch”. He described also that one should make efforts to harvest in the early morning whilst the “plants are sleeping” and before a plant’s energy has “come out to meet the sun”. In this vein Bongo Wisely described that tubers should be planted only after full moon “because they go down and the energy from the moon is going down”, whilst Faiye advocated planting bamboo only “during the winding [waning] moon when no pests are prevalent”²⁶¹. Towards maintaining the plants and the land, dasheen (or taro) was said to soften up the earth it grows in for other plants, whilst aerial microbial banana fungus can be treated by aerating the roots of the banana tree.

My host Bongo Wisely represented a figure of agricultural authority for many on the island and beyond as one both academically qualified in agricultural science bolstered by practical experience from an entire working career within St Lucia’s Department of Agriculture. Speaking to an online audience shortly after I returned from Iyanola on the topic of Rastafari “heritage and preservation”, something he connected with agriculture throughout his contribution, he emphasised to those present the importance of “sustainable agriculture”. “Sustainable agriculture is considered to be farming for a better tomorrow. Now, if we are farming for a better tomorrow it means that we are not just farming just for today, we are thinking of generation and generation to come so we must be mindful of the soil, the conditions of the soil because the soil is the source of life. Soil quality and balance is essential to the long-term future of agriculture. Within sustainable agriculture we feed the soil and not the plant”. Wisely’s notion of “feeding the soil” offers an immediate practical embodiment of a holistic Rastafari Livity in which it is not that which appears as the immediate “product” which is focused on but that which grounds it, quite literally in this instance. Practically, this entails growing crops sensitive to the nutritional balance of the soil, mulching to ensure nutritional retention, and introducing natural and sensitive composts when required. Feeding the soil then within a “sustainable agriculture” Ital ethic represents a delicate and balanced interaction with the earth, prioritising holistic “earth health” over that which is to be harvested next.

²⁶¹ Both Wisely and Ibed speak to commonplace lunar/solar influenced Rastafari agricultural practices shared with other African-Caribbean spiritualities. Chevannes expands on these and rightly traces their roots to Jamaican folk cosmologies. See Chevannes, *Rastafari* 25-27

Whilst I encountered no disagreement with the vast majority of the framework offered above, one issue of significant variation however did arise during fieldwork. All participants attested to the importance of “natural” Ital agriculture free from synthesised substances. However, interpretations of this varied, and there existed a present tension. Whilst some decried any “unnatural” chemical involvement in agriculture as something which would render the plant “corrupted” and unsuitable for consumption or even a harmonious life in Iration, others described using “a lickle fertiliser” in the plants earliest stages to “give a lickle boost”. Individuals utilising both of these approaches however still utilised the designation of “natural Ital” farming in relation to their endeavours. One rural farming group I encountered led by older Rastafari described their methods as “Ital farms, natural farms”, later adding “sometimes in the early days we’ll give it a little fertiliser to kick off and then afterwards you use more manure and organic liquid fertilisers”. Another subscribed to this approach, stating that the plant would eventually “flush out” any inorganic substances over the course of its life thus rendering it “Irie”.

Within this dichotomy, we are given indication again of the breadth of interpretations and manifestations that exist within Rastafari. For some, it is an act of gross natural vandalism and a logical inconsistency to refer to a farm which makes any use of fertilisers as an “Ital farm”. For others, the early boost and subsequent ease of growth provided by early-stage fertiliser does not represent a corrupting transgression. This degree of concern is also intimately influenced by practical necessity. Zeb, a proprietor of a non-fertiliser “natural” Ital farm, described fellow Rastafari as increasingly swayed by market forces in utilising fertiliser in order to keep up with the production of other non-Rastafari farmers selling around them. This led some to split their smallholdings, with a smaller patch dedicated to purely “natural” produce for family consumption whilst the rest would be given over to that which involved fertiliser to varying degrees²⁶².

I asked a group of younger Rastafari congregated at an Ital restaurant how they felt about explanations of “flushing out” and the necessity of market forces, with the response coming

²⁶² Immediate parallels exist here in Rastafari dietary practice. Whilst conceptualisations of an ideal Ital approach are rarely defined beyond a plant-based, non-processed, entirely ‘naturally’ produced diet, the ability of individuals to adhere to this are intimately affected by a range of factors including socio-economic status, geographical location and health. It was largely the view of most I have engaged with through various research projects that individuals should not be judged harshly for engaging in dietary practices they deem most apposite for their situation. Judgement does however of course present itself at times. See Powell, *Ital Trod*

that it spoke to a “Babylonian mentality” that could not break free from capitalist parameters that had “held the community back since its emergence”²⁶³. They also expressed concern about the damage that might be done to perceptions of Rastafari farming and moral uprightness, an “identity” sought out by those buying from the community, they said, through an understanding that it was chemical-free²⁶⁴. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear those outside the community offer feedback, frequently unsolicited, on the perceived reputation and Livivity of those within. In this, Jeg described a “conscious awareness” of the position of influence held by the Rastafari in this. He put it that Rastafari “are the conscious ones so if you actually lead to show teaching people will follow[...] that man is a Rastaman and he spraying that fertiliser, I doing the same ting’. So it have to come within all of us first”²⁶⁵.

Kamou spoke of the essentiality of incorporating a natural agricultural approach in wider business ventures, with his restaurant, “Ital Vital” in Castries, described as operating as an “eco-system”. “Doing my garbage I usually take all the tings like fruit skins and all dese tings to make compost cos [...] before I doing that work I was a farmer like planting so I still have my little garden on my ends [neighbourhood] where I living”. He described that the fruit skins are hauled up the hills surrounding the town by bicycle where they are composted and scattered with the resulting produce bought back down to the restaurant for preparation and sale. A full cycle of fruits and vegetables emanating from the restaurant with waste returning as consumable food. This was essential he said in giving people “an experience like from the farm to the table”. As with all of those I spoke with who operated on a domestic and small to medium sized business scale however, Kamou was not yet at a stage where he could offer his customers an “farm to table” experience in the totality of his offerings. “In time we come out like everyting I use straight from the land, straight to the point yu nuh?”. He emphasised also efforts in the restaurant to “use less plastics, less of everytin that just polluting the atmosphere and polluting Mother Earth” making the locally uncommon effort to “have three or four different garbage so you can put your plastic in one, separate them yu nuh?”. Kamou

²⁶³ This divide in approach seemed to have a generational element, with younger Rastafari making the point more vociferously that fertilisers were to be entirely avoided whilst those who took a more nuanced stance were generally amongst the older members of the community.

²⁶⁴ One Rastafari interviewee described that when buying from the market amongst fellow Rastafari, “gravitating” towards produce that had “holes in it” for this reason as an indicator that the grower had not made use of pesticides.

²⁶⁵ Jah Lamb described this influence positively, describing that Rastafari agricultural modes had influenced wider practice and accordingly bought a greater availability of non-fertiliser grown food for Rastafari to purchase. “They get sensitised and they get to know the value of their health”, he added.

spoke proudly of his efforts to serve as an influence and inspiration in these practices to those around him. With no public collection of recyclable products, Kamou occupies the status of a pioneer in this regard, sensing a struggle ahead but one he saw as well worth engaging in.

Large-scale provision of organic food across the island was also discussed by many participants. Whilst there were a number of Rastafari led operations, none operated at a scale capable of providing the islands Rastafari community or even smaller groups with consistent natural Ital produce all year. One of these endeavours, Roots Farm near Micoud, had seemingly received a great deal of buy-in from many of those with whom I was immediately connected with and was now creeping back from a period of destitution. The aforementioned Zimbabwe Farms operated self-sufficiently but was at the time of research not engaged in supply on any large scale. Jah Lamb stated this meant he was forced to rely on non-Ital small-scale growers at his local market, something he regretted but was hopeful would soon change. “We getting there [...] we have a couple farms in St Lucia, Rastafari [...] but they not on a consistent or large volume but I think that will change because the bredrin been lamenting about that on the Calling Rastafari [island wide radio] programme and ting, yeah. I think that will come through. Rasta will start getting the organic stuff which in time to come will get abundant”²⁶⁶.

Jah Lamb’s vision saw “in the next couple years we might have a Rasta organic market or a Rasta organic supermarket”. The presence of a Rastafari market was something many spoke about their desire for during this research, something which could connect small-scale farmers with others in the community and with those outside of the community in search of the produce grown by those whose authority they respected in this regard. Such a market would mean customers could “go and get your stuff, no looking over your shoulder” at the unwholesome elements of food production which lay in the future for non-naturally grown produce, as one put it.

Community Agricultural Initiatives

²⁶⁶ Participants described multiple factors to me as laying behind this present lack of scalability including a lack of governmental support, the prevalence of imported food on the island, a lack of financial resources within the community and also the presence of some occasionally “factional” relations within the community holding back collectivist efforts.

Further to this, many expressed the view that the depth of connection with, and passion towards, the earth within Rastafari was at present being underutilised, both inside and outside the community. Various individuals described to me how agricultural initiatives could and should be better supported to further the strength of the Rastafari community and of the island more broadly. Many of these conversations were framed around the group²⁶⁷'s Rastafari umbrella organisation, the Iyanola Council for the Advancement of Rastafari [ICAR], and what impact this group might have. Empress Dannie, at the time of research a committee member and now president, described ICAR's core premise as "looking after the welfare of the Rastafari community and the Rastafari people in St Lucia and the environment most naturally. As a people the Rastafari people environment is something all people hold dear and they appreciate as farmers because most Rastafari people are farmers". Sly described Rastafari as historical outliers in this degree of care. "When I first came here [after returning from education abroad] people were going up and down and saying I was mad because I wasn't planting banana and duttying the river with plastic. I recognise that was not what the ancient come to teach".

Ras I-ron, the group's then president, spoke of the agricultural focus inherent within ICAR. "As an entity we always seek to encourage Rasta farms to keep in production [...] farming is something that is dear to the Rastafari heart, yeah man. So as ICAR we've always been that agency to encourage that". He described schemes on two different scales. First, a "self-help programme" in which the organisation can mobilise its members to aid farmers with "a day of planting or harvesting". Second, a project entitled "soy for life", a large-scale Rastafari led operation to establish St Lucia as a regional hub for soybean and soy product export. "It is ushering St Lucia into the soy industry and that has been a project proposed by the Rasta community for many years". I-ron stated that through the government supported Covid-19 "Recover St Lucia" recovery initiative positive conversations had taken place and interest had been registered to secure funding for this latter programme. This he further connected to issues of security and sovereignty. "That will be at least one of the things we'll cut out from our food import bill".

²⁶⁷ Banana cultivation here representing agricultural homogeneity as the dominant, non-native cornerstone of St Lucia's economy in the period of Sly's return.

ICAR's operations were however described as limited and unambitious by some. One participant offered the view that ICAR should adopt a role akin to a non-profit farming cooperative, offering its subscribed members the ability to take out loans to maximise yields and thus increase money circulating around the community and ICAR itself. They put it "if ICAR have \$1000, instead ICAR want to take that thousand dollars and go spend it on fundraising. Why don't ICAR come and visit me and see what I really interested in planting [...] I want to do a crop of cucumber [...] then we providing you with \$200 of ICAR [funding] to go ahead with your farm and we expecting on harvest that \$200 will replace it back to ICAR so somebody else could get it to make another farm"²⁶⁸. Others saw the benefit of a more regular collectivisation of labour through the organisation. One put it that "I tell you go and help me go and help this one that day is your turn the whole congregation must come with you. So instead there a whole week ploughing, a whole day we come and we plough so that is the togetherness [...] next day its mine so the whole congregation come with me [...] its collective security that is the working together"²⁶⁹. Collectivised labour furthering both the community's food security as well as a sense of interdependence of each other through a network of mutual aid.

Beyond ICAR, another initiative mentioned as part of this conversation was the opening of an Ital seed bank that could serve Rastafari growers across the island. Many described wariness of "seed dependency", growers being beholden to big seed companies such as Monsanto and becoming reliant on them for their own agricultural progress. Not only was this seen to be something which removed Rastafari autonomy in place of support for Babylonian institutions complicit in similar disempowerment exercises in Africa and beyond, the seeds themselves were described as "artificial" and counter to Ital farming visions. An Ital seed bank, featuring non-synthesised seeds with normal reproductive functions and acclimatised to the specific agricultural conditions of St Lucia would empower growers and represent advancement for the community into an "agri-science" initiative that may provide further legitimacy in the eyes of any potential state and government partners.

²⁶⁸ See Wenner & Proenza, *Rural Finance* for discussion of the efficacy of agricultural financing in a Caribbean context

²⁶⁹ These descriptions mirror the "day-for-day" and "partnership" agricultural forms common in Jamaica. In the former, farmers provide a days labour on another farm with the expectation the same is offered back. Partnerships involve the more regular exchange of work as a group of farmers operate a formal or informal rota working on each other's farms on selected days. See Beckford, Barker & Bailey, *Adaption*

Further, Empress Dannie described her vision for a national-scale plant nursery for both domestic and international markets. “Surely government could produce a couple thousand plants [...] government could be helping farmers develop an orchard [...] within a couple years we have [enough] soursop in the country, we able to export soursop [...] you get good crops good fruit you have a market to export, that’s how government could get us out of poverty. The government cannot help me get out of poverty if I have two trees and expect me to sell on a national scale. How do I get out of poverty?”. Dannie’s final comments spoke to a previously voiced sadness that it was not the desire of this government or those prior to help communities out of poverty, instead nurturing a dependence familiar within the machinations of a Babylonian machine. Agriculture could however represent empowerment and self-sufficiency should it become desirable to an incumbent regime.

Bongo Wisely spoke of the increasing necessity of irrigation support for Rastafari farmers as “all our projects are rain fed, the rains getting less and less all the time”. This, Dannie added, would be greatly helped by water storage tanks for use during the dry season in which “the farmer would need assistance to build proper tank”, something Wisely stated could take the form of a storage tank under the house. Wisely saw immediate self-interest underlying this need for self-sufficiency. “If you are only depending on the water company within the country, ya nuh they themselves would be prioritising the hotels and industrial estates and those kinda places where they make much bigger profit²⁷⁰. So the people, ya nuh, individually need the water. Especially people who doing their little farming at home”.

Food Security and Food Sovereignty

Broadening this engagement out to the macro, many participants saw their agricultural efforts as part of a broader orientation to ensure “food security” for the Rastafari community. This was most often defined as the regular and consistent access to quality, organically grown produce for the Rastafari community and those connected to it. Self-sufficiency and autonomy were again at the core of this. As Bongo Vision put it, “any nation that will live for another nation to feed them, that leader will lead you astray”. The St Lucian government

²⁷⁰ Criticism of a perceived sense of prioritisation of the tourism sector was prominent during fieldwork. Whilst before the emergence of Covid-19 it served as the island’s biggest driver of GDP, global lockdown served to destroy its impact overnight, demonstrating what was said to be a myopic focus from the government. This was a “lesson” taught to them as one put, a reminder that “agriculture is the backbone, it’s always been the backbone”.

were regularly castigated both for their lack of support for Rastafari ventures and for a neglectful and ultimately dependent food strategy which saw domestic agriculture deprioritised in favour of US imports²⁷¹²⁷². Ras Abraham bemoaned “they don’t do enough to enforce environmental standards, allowing rivers to be polluted by pig farmers and polluting the future wealth of the youth. It shouldn’t be hard to sort out in a country of this size!”

Empress Dannie reported that “food security is at its lowest” when we spoke. “Years ago you would go to the market, you would get a hand of banana, plantain, dashin, potato, you would get a variety and go to the market. Now you have the money but you do not have the food you need”. This she attributed to a lack of governmental support for small domestic growers who make up almost the entirety of sellers at a town’s outdoor market. “The government have not prepared the nation in going into sustainable farming and farm development. Everyone have a little lot, I have a little lot behind my house I do my own ting but then I have no irrigation, I have no technology, no assistance you unnastan?”. This “technical support” she suggested could come in the form of “irrigation and ploughing” and would “take me twenty steps forward”.

As well as food security, others spoke more specifically about “food sovereignty”, not just the consistent access to quality food but the control of the means of its production through a rights based framework²⁷³. A refocusing of the debate towards smaller autonomous communities and away from a corporate industrialised food production system. As one participant put it, “they talking about the security of the food but they not talking about the sovereignty of the food, how sovereign the food is to man”. Some participants offered the view that notions of food security were perilous decoys for the community as there could be no “real” food security in Babylon. Autonomy was integral to progress. Faiye offered his view that “everyone talk about food security but without sovereignty there is no security”. This to him was broader than establishing the provision of food itself. “Sovereignty is a whole mindset towards how you work with your sustainable environment and to bring the security [...] if you don’t have a positive mindset there’s no way you can try and secure things”. In typically holistic fashion, Faiye offers the view that food sovereignty for humanity

²⁷¹ Of St Lucia’s total merchandise imports in 2019 27.1% was made up of food. Knoema, *Saint Lucia*

²⁷² Many participants put it that the necessity of this had been emphasised by a global pandemic context which had impacted supply chains and driven domestic and international hoarding

²⁷³ Patel notes this term is nebulous and carries variable meaning. Those who spoke with me on this topic most frequently utilised the description present in the sentence attached to this footnote. See Patel, *Food Sovereignty*

is something that relies on one's positive energy, and thus vibrationally, with the impact this brings for a broader Iration. Humanity cannot be sovereign and free until all else is also.

Within this, the notion of St Lucia importing food, particularly from the USA, to feed the people of an island with fertility and space was met with scorn²⁷⁴. This was something I had encountered previously in Jamaica, again an island with minerally rich soil but one which still opts for American imports for vast amounts of its consumed food²⁷⁵. In Iyanola participants expressed the view that such a system nurtured neo-colonial dependence, weakened the status of the Rastafari community on the island²⁷⁶, represented an environmentally deficient means of food production and also offered worse quality often highly processed foodstuffs²⁷⁷. Jeg put it that “we have to live on what we grow not what they bring for us because for us we vegetarian. We don't know what's in there. So we, if we plant-based and try to help people with sustainable food economy without importation you are more healthy living in the region”. A healthy life within oneself and a healthier life within the region.

Jeg's concern towards not knowing “what's in there” speaks also to the avoidance of pollution and corruption which lay at the core of Ital notions. Not only is the possibility of mis-labelling and mis-selling raised by such importation, knowing what is within that which is eventually unboxed poses danger in equal degree. The specific fertiliser, pesticide and, perhaps most crucially, the vibrational make-up of the produce is beyond the knowledge of those whose plates it ultimately lands on. Such concerns then serve to motivate avoidance and thus offer to insulate a contemporary Rastafari community as much as is possible from reliance on the heavily processed and industrialised foodstuffs from a Babylonian superpower in America.

Eating, Foodways and Health

²⁷⁴ WITS, *St Lucia Food Imports*. Estimates put St Lucia's food import bill from the US at \$27.129m, almost 30% of its total. Trinidad and Tobago stand second at \$20.25m and 22% of total imports.

²⁷⁵ Trade.gov, Jamaica. 2020 data from US Department for trade describes \$390.3m of US food imports to Jamaica (42% of total) whilst \$238.5m of food is exported from Jamaica globally

²⁷⁶ One individual described this as a concerted effort to debilitate Black and Rastafari communities and to “limit the strength of the nation”, a concern mirrored elsewhere in conversations around Covid-19 vaccines. See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah*

²⁷⁷ Karfakis et al offers intriguing analysis of the connection between food security and obesity in both Jamaica and St Lucia. See Karfakis et al, *Biggin' It Up*

Rastafari eating practices were often raised by participants in discussions around Ital Livity and environmental connections. With a deep connection to the earth and to Irration sensed through agriculture, the consumption of the produce which stems forth from it was often seen as just as important an ‘Irrational’ element representing the subsequent absorption of the energy and vibration that has coursed through the foodstuff throughout its life cycle²⁷⁸²⁷⁹. Indeed, many of the conversations I engaged in throughout this research took place over food. I sensed in this both a desire from my interlocutors to engage me in the as ever effusive Rastafari hospitality I had grown very gratefully familiar with and also to offer me a direct means of engaging in the spirituality and vibration we were reasoning on²⁸⁰. Some “Ital for my belly” as well as my “brain”, as one put it. Through the natural ethos that pervades the Rastafari approach to agriculture, Rastafari dietary practices amongst almost the entirety of those I engaged with were plant-based, whilst attempts were made to minimise processed, tinned or preserved foods wherever possible and maximise fresh, self-grown produce²⁸¹.

Faiye described that Ital foodways were a prominent feature of the early movement in Iyanola. “When you look at Livity during the early days it’s about Ital. That’s what it was about. Nourishment, organic foods grown naturally and it wasn’t about meats, nah it wasn’t about that”. He stated this was a logical reflection on the dietary practices of the first humans. “I always say to people we were not born to be carnivorous, our jaw structure and teeth is not cannibals. And I also say if you walk around and you look at the horse and the cows they have the same structure as we do and if you look how healthy they are how fat they are and they only feed of grass and water”. Faiye’s words again point towards a proclivity within Rastafari to draw lessons from the natural world also present in the Ital Hermeneutic explored in the following chapter. The similarity in teeth structure between humans and horses or cows demonstrates that we should eat as them, herbivorous. His reference to cannibalism is also

²⁷⁸ See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* for further discussion of these themes.

²⁷⁹ Morgan rightly grounds Rastafari dietary practices in aforementioned “monistic concept[ions] of mind and body” as a rejection of “Cartesian dualism, which has sought to divide the elements of the human mind from the body and therefore juxtapo[s]es us against ourselves”. Thus, a “Rastafarian perspective of universal oneness, one’s diet (vegetarian or vegan) and Livity become critical in maintain[ing] a total health system”. Morgan, *Rastafari* 164

²⁸⁰ Sister Sheba described how through this culinary engagement policemen across the island still show deference to her to this day. “They’ll call me mother or they’ll even ask me ‘Madda, wha we use to eat at your home again when we were young?’ You know why? Because they use to come to my home wit my children they were in the same class, yu nuh so those younger children always have that love for Rastafari, they love the food”.

²⁸¹ I encountered little consumption of non-fresh produce during fieldwork, with that I did see primarily taking the form of processed grains and flours. Tinned and preserved foods were rarely seen.

striking and points once more to the innate holistic outlook of Rastafari. All non-plant creation is as one in a dietary outlook and consumption of any member of this group is tantamount to the consumption of humans.

As with my fieldwork in Jamaica, many spoke of hostility and fractious domestic relationships they had faced through their dietary practices if they were raised in non-Rastafari households²⁸². Much like many Anglophone Caribbean countries, St Lucian culture includes an important emphasis on large family meals, most frequently constituted by meat and fish dishes. As such, a decision grounded in Rastafari dietary ethics to remove oneself from the animal products at the heart of these dishes can both be interpreted and intended as a rejection of the family unit and further a rejection of an important element of the national conscience²⁸³. Criticism exists within this for a culinary national identity ultimately, often irretrievably for many, shaped or “tainted” by colonialism which has entrenched European eating modes. In this, Ital eating thus becomes a form of counter-colonial resistance and an assertion of an independent future no longer determined by it.

Regardless of their domestic situation, all of those I engaged with described receiving hostility or ridicule at some point in their “trod” due to their dietary practices. Ras Kamou described to me that despite winning a pan-Caribbean gold medal in boxing in his younger days, something for which he received a national civil award, “people use to look down on me and say ‘how can you be a boxer and you not eating meat?’ All dem kinda ting so I was just there to prove them wrong”. This involved some extreme displays of endurance to this end. “You see right now mow the sun is very hot, there that is the time I would go and run in the sun training yu nuh? Real training yu nuh. So I running up hills and dem tings dere”. These indictments of malnutrition and weakness attributed to a plant-based Ital eating mode have been frequently attested to by those across all of the fieldwork contexts I have

²⁸² Several I engaged with had been kicked out of their family homes due to dietary divergence, one describing it as the “straw the broke the camel’s back”. Whilst often traumatic, some described this as a formative experience which strengthened self-determination and faith. As one put it, the process “taught I self-reliance, taught I how to be independent and rely on myself and how I could make it so I could help others. As a Rasta I never dependent”.

²⁸³ Indeed, Noland writes of Ital cuisine “eschewing the object of the nation-state in favour of Mother Earth through an alternate esthetic [sic] of the beautiful and experience of a primal sublime”. See Noland, *Subversive Sublime*

researched in²⁸⁴²⁸⁵. King Khalid described “we use to be ridiculed in the early stages, early and later stages, people use to ridicule us and tell us how unbalanced our diet and we will get malnourished”. This ridicule was, Khalid said, concordant with many aspects of Rastafari philosophy, denigrated and mocked initially but eventually recognised and often commodified by those who had cast such aspersions. “Now everybody clinging to the vegetarian diet”.

As previously noted, some participants expressed concern about global growth in the popularity of vegetarian, vegan and plant-based eating. One described this as representing a “fad”, another instance of the wisdom of Rastafari turned into something “trendy” and one which might ultimately negatively impact Rastafari communities²⁸⁶. Ras Kamou, a restaurant proprietor, differed however in describing the curiosity and questions he received about Rastafari foodways as a “benefit” of the profile of Rastafari thought. “I get a lot of that every day, I getting certain people that want me to teach them how to do different dishes or give them a piece of inspiration of my Livity itself”. An opportunity to further understanding, and perhaps, embrace of the movement.

Other’s still saw it as the means for Rastafari self-sufficiency rather than an obstacle to it. Empress Eve, a young mother and joint operator of “Ital Vital” alongside Kamou, put it that “we’re probably the best eating people when you thinking lifestyle and what’s trending right now, who’s better right? But there’s nobody capitalising on that”. For Eve this growth represented an apposite opportunity for Rastafari to gain the financial support and backing to throw itself headfirst into a scaled up plant-based Ital offering, capturing the momentum to offer consumers something they are “clearly hungry for”. A chance to form the movement’s own supply and retail system away from the tendrils of Babylon. Another attested to the

²⁸⁴ In previous fieldwork in Jamaica an elder described to me that these views were so pervasive social service authorities went as far as attempting to remove her young children from her as they alleged her diet prevented her from providing nutritional breast milk to them

²⁸⁵ At the most chilling end of this Mama Lavie described to me taking her child who had been poisoned to the hospital and being refused treatment after being told “don mind dat nothing happen to the child, you all are Rasta! Jah provide!”.

²⁸⁶ Jaffe’s *Ital Chic* explores this commodification of Rastafari across food, fashion and music, writing that the influence of groups such as Rastafari in popularising plant-based and “natural” consumption has bought these things to a point where a ‘green’ disposition is no longer countercultural or subcultural”. Instead, “natural and slow consumption has become instrumental in creating and maintaining class distinction. This is evident, for example, in the middle-class popularity of organic and fair-trade food and clothing”. Jaffe, *Ital Chic* 31

power of the Rastafari food message in describing food as a “universal language”, with non-Rastafari now ‘cleav[ing] on to the Ital Livity because they know the benefits’.

Bongo Wisely also put it that whilst many Rastafari stand as figures of authority on health and wellbeing in the local community, the Rastafari “brand” represents an issue for some, particularly in a food context. “When they go to the doctor and the doctor tell them ‘boy avoid eating all dem flesh avoid all dem salt food’ and so on they will quicker accept that from a doctor. Where as if it a Rastaman tell them they might more want to criticise that ‘Ahhh Rasta ting I not no Rasta!’ but when it come from the doctor they will accep it”. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in which this research took place, conversations linking health and diet were further commonplace²⁸⁷. As Wisely put it “if your immune system is weak then you will fall for the ting [Covid-19] and the way to keep your immune system healthy and active and alive – good fruits, vegetables, fresh vegetables, herbs from the soil, proper food. Nourish yourself properly. That will keep your immune system active to counteract corona or whatever. Seen”. Faiye seconded this point in a separate conversation. “Looking at the global crisis we face today with the coronavirus, and when you look at ecology that’s where we from because ‘wash your hands wear your mask’ but no one is saying build your immunity. No one is saying go back to Mother Nature. Do things organically”.

In this, Faiye spoke to a holistic understanding of physiology pervasive amongst Rastafari and which he further aligned with other indigenous health systems. He described that if ‘the neck hurts it may not be a problem directly with the neck it could be a problem with the arms that [are] injured because of the vessels and these it clogs the neck”. A holistic, and indeed monistic, outlook visible elsewhere in Rastafari thought presents itself in the context of health. As Ras Kwaku put it, “you see the mind, psychology plays a major role you know. If you tell yourself you going to get sick you get sick, yu nuh? So if you go around people no matter how healthy you are you go around with the flu, you get the flu, yu nuh, because your mindset has already caused you to be unhealthy. So if you are healthy you have to be heathy spirit, mentally spiritually and physically. That’s where you fit”²⁸⁸. An Ital approach to health cannot thus be reduced to separate, disparte elements, it must constitute a whole.

²⁸⁷ In separate research I explore these themes further, as well as the notion of Rastafari authority in matters of health and wellbeing. See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah*

²⁸⁸ See Morgan’s excellent *Rastafari* for further discussion of Rastafari attitudes towards health and healing

Conservation Projects and Environmental Protection

Some of my contributors were engaged in broader projects beyond their own plots and their immediate community in an attempt to improve both the agricultural and non-agricultural environment on the island around them. Faiye described to me “I develop a project with a farmers cooperative, it was a project about soil waste and soil erosion, combatting soil waste and soil erosion by empowering communities and helping them into organic farming”. This was approached in a typically holistic manner. “I decided the focal point for such a project is to create a multiplying effect [...] I bought it to schools because when I look at the schools they play an integral role because if you have to create a multiplying effect in anything you bring in the schools”. An “each one teach one” mantra, as it was often put to me, present in the most explicit of teaching environments.

Of those I engaged with, Jeg was the most involved in conservation and environmental initiatives on a regular basis. Heading up his own consultancy and conservation company, he frequently worked with the island’s government on conservation of the mangroves found largely in the south of the island. He described that the government had identified the mangroves not only as important “carbon stores” but also “part of the climate change resistance programme where actually they have seen that, especially with the hurricanes, [...] places where mangrove [remained] on the coast were very protected so a lot a dem been implementing strategies for coastal management”. Jeg described the essentiality of conducting projects such as these in tune with local people and local practices. Through education and careful management of the immediate environment he described that his group had managed to “actually create alternative livelihoods for the people” that had put a halt to the trade and production of “traditional mangrove sticks [which]”, forms of fuel harvested from mangroves and burnt for charcoal, instead teaching locals to “do beekeeping, some of them do sea moss farming”. This he described as the replacement of one “indigenous industry” with another, the latter of these has sustained coastal communities in St Lucia for centuries and now stands as a regional brand²⁸⁹.

²⁸⁹ Offering the St Lucian government’s “Throne Speech” at the opening of Parliament in April 2022, Acting Governor General Erol Charles specifically noted the “Saint Lucian ingenuity” seen in areas including “value-added sea moss products” and “honey”. See The Voice, *Government to Secure St Lucia’s Future*

He also stressed that the emphasis of his organisation was to educate communities in “agroprocessing”, turning that in the environment around them into higher craft and skill items that can command a higher price such as sea moss gels or skin care products. Jeg also spoke of his involvement in teaching school children about conservation²⁹⁰. This was again typically holistic in its outlook. “I do both the coral I do the mangrove and turtle conservation together [...] so I actually teaching them from reach to reef because everything that come from the top reach to the sea. And then if you destroy the sea what will happen? So everyting is reach to reef”. Jeg familiarly described that he felt his status as a member of the Rastafari community meant that his presentations and workshops were viewed with greater authority on nature and the environment.

Bongo Wisely also informed me that he had previously represented ICAR in engagement with the government’s Ministry of Agriculture in the form of a “biodiversity unit” that engaged communities on environmental issues. He stated it was important for Rastafari to find “those opportunities” to participate with those who can impact policy across the island and ensure Rastafari approaches are advocated. Others offered the view that large-scale policy engagement was in vain up against a government devoid of care for the environment. Ras Kamou summed up the views of others appositely stating that, contrary to this, “Rasta from the time the Livity came out it was a ting that will do yard working, always pertaining to be with nature”. An alternative of small-scale yard working activity he saw as “a form of campaigning, no big ting where we have to rally people” but “one of the foremost ting being close to nature and loving Mother Nature so that with respect you will always keep Mother Nature alive”. A “constant connection” rather than periodic campaigned engagement.

Land Allocation

Some contributors expressed unease also with current schemes for land allocation and private ownership in St Lucia and globally, systems often viewed as human impositions on originally borderless land placed into creation by the Almighty for the benefit of all. Ibed posed the question “who is the individual who had the first land title and where did he get it from? That

²⁹⁰ A BBC article exploring mangrove restoration in The Grenadines quotes a St Lucian marine biologist involved in St Lucia’s own restoration as describing community involvement as essential. “Restoration requires a lot of hands and ongoing support and monitoring. Over 400 students joined the community and partners in this venture”. See Kentish, *Caribbean Mangrove*

is what I want to know. For somebody to come and tell me dat I need to buy land from the government, I don't work with dat man. I prefer buying from an individual than the government [...] people feel safe when they buy the land from the government and the government legal but they feel safe with dat mirage or that façade of legality. Nah man that don work for me man". Human governments have overstepped this natural boundaryless order of land free and open to all and they constitute an illegal government. The absurdity of this situation for Ibed is laid out no less clearly than in the skies, "they try and put a border on airspace and all dem ting but it's just oxygen!".

Jah Lamb expressed his concern about the apparent commonality of native St Lucian's who had moved to the USA or to Europe and then used their money to buy up land which remains unused and dormant. "Some people with land, they disregard the land and they let the land abandon [...] they over there doing odd jobs when they could make a better life [here] on the land". This journey made by so many was often met with bemusement by those I engaged with, opting for a life in an often colder, harsher and more socially unwelcoming place when a life on and within the land at home which was immediately available. Jah Lamb reported some coming to this realisation however. "Some people are getting wise now, some people are coming from overseas and claiming their land and seeing their future on the land". This trend was very encouraging to him as the pull of the terrain offered some reversal of a "brain drain" he and others pointed to. He connected this pull with greater awareness of the spirituality of the earth as enhanced by Rastafari and further emphasised as a result of Covid-19. "Covid-19 a big lesson on how to be self-reliant and how to go back to your roots [...] I feel after the Covid lesson more people gravitate back to the land because agriculture is keeping us right now". An awareness, then, of the essentiality of food production amidst food shortages and empty shelves. A desire both to prevent this for one's immediate family and to connect it with that which lays at its heart instead of the industrial food chains which define it for so many. Of those already on the island Jah Lamb described that "people are redundant, people that was in the tourist industry. Right now they seeing the value of the land".

Communal Living, 'at home or abroad?'

Many spoke with me during research about the importance of a communal Rastafari setting in some form in ensuring the physical, spiritual and environmental wellbeing of the community and of wider Iration. I will point readers elsewhere for a fuller discussion of these

themes as the confines of this dissertation do not quite allow for it, although many of the agriculture themes within it have been discussed²⁹¹. Briefly however, it should be noted that “a connection with and yearning towards a communal, primarily agrarian existence, is something which connects Rastafari the world over”²⁹². Motivated by a desire to escape the impurity, corruption and degradation inherent within Babylon, all of those I spoke with in this study yearned towards the establishment of an apart Rastafari community that would provide both autonomy and a spiritual, more primal, connection with Iration and the green earth so idealised. These visions were vivid, and I would implore readers to explore these in the paper referenced.

Ganja, Reparation and Progress

As with previous fieldwork contexts, discussions around ganja as an important and practically significant element of Ital Livity were frequent. Views here ranged from how it had determined Rastafari’s interaction with wider society in the past and present, its legality, and how it might form part of the community’s long-term prosperity. On the former of these, many of spoke of persecution received as a result of ganja’s illegality²⁹³. Many had lost plants they had nurtured and had felt deeply connected to through what one participant described as an “apartheid” in the “plant kingdom”, a system which discriminates against one plant over another on purely arbitrary grounds. Jah Lamb insisted that legalisation be coupled with reparation for Rastafari who had advocated and suffered for the herb over the decades of its prohibition. “You talking about reparation from day one”. Faiye put it that Rastafari were “advocates” for ganja and all herbs in Iration. “When Rastafari bought its face forward we were criticised. We were discriminated upon. They did everything to wipe us off the face of this earth because they know what we were doing was to bring true Livity to our people. But from the Almighty we were resilient and we stood our ground and that’s why we are the champions today”.

²⁹¹ See Powell, *Ten Miles Away* for fuller discussion of this topic. As I note in this piece, the emergence of Covid-19 has impacted these yearnings in offering the most vivid demonstration for decades of the filth and unsanitary nature of Babylon.

²⁹² Powell, *Ten Miles Away* 88

²⁹³ Homiak has described to me previously Rastafari at the height of persecution in 1950s/60s Jamaica referring to themselves and the ganja plant as “twin brothers”, dually orphaned by an oppressive society.

The legal and civil framework for cannabis was a frequent topic of conversation amidst growing trends in the Caribbean towards legalisation, regulation and marketisation of cannabis. Over the duration of this fieldwork members of the community were struggling against what was perceived as a “log jam” in governmental processes moving towards full and free legalisation. After appearing as an election pledge from the victorious centre-right UWP in 2016, it was said that little movement had been made. First came a 2018 Caribbean Community (CARICOM) report recommending a regulated cannabis market across the region²⁹⁴, before a subsequent 2019 report from Malaysian consultancy firm PEMANDU urged the St Lucian government towards “urgent reform” and eventual legalisation for sacramental and personal use²⁹⁵. The PEMANDU report was followed by the establishment of a cannabis commission in the same year by then UWP Prime Minister Alan Chastanet which had featured members of the Rastafari community as well various government ministries and the St Lucian Christian Council, chaired by St Lucian QC Michael Gordon.

The commission’s final report published in June 2020 recommended that “cannabis/marijuana should be declassified as a ‘dangerous drug’ or narcotic, in all legislation and reclassified as a controlled substance”. It furthered that small farmers and business people should be included in “production and supply arrangements” as well as “special provision” made “to protect religious rights in the new regime”²⁹⁶. The commission’s recommendations were however not acted on in the lifetime of the parliament. With an election coming within the year many in the community anticipated the incumbent UWP government intended to leverage the report’s recommendations both to prevent losing votes to anti-cannabis voters by not being seen to rush into introducing legislation and also to win votes from pro-cannabis voters by using it as a “carrot” during the election campaign²⁹⁷. The obfuscation on this issue was of immense frustration throughout many conversations.

Attitudes towards the commission were mixed throughout my fieldwork. Some saw it as a body purely of placation and inactivity which would not, and indeed could not, make amends

²⁹⁴ CARICOM, *Waiting to Exhale*

²⁹⁵ Cannabis Movement of Saint Lucia, *Roadmap*

²⁹⁶ Saint Lucia Cannabis Commission, *Report*

²⁹⁷ The UWP subsequently lost the election to Phillip Pierre’s SLP who in September 2021 ratified legislation decriminalising the possession of less than thirty grams of cannabis. In January the following year, Pierre described that his government was moving forward with efforts to establish the country as an exporter of cannabis. See Voice, *Exportation of Ganja*

for the physical and social brutality meted out to the community under the auspice of cannabis policing. Mama Lavie, a contributor who had offered some of the most graphic details of persecution at the hands of the island's police and government forces, left me in no doubt whatsoever about her feelings on engagement with the government over legalisation. "So much wickedness you did to Rastafari for sake of ganja! Right now you waiting for ganja legal [so you can] go plant [and profit from] ganja! I don[‘t] deal with that!". Others believed an agreement could be reached but significant recognition and reparation must first be enacted by the government. Zeb formed one of the Rastafari representatives on the commission and was present throughout discussions and contributed to the subsequently published report. I asked if he felt that Rastafari had been listened to and if the commission had understood the connection between the movement and ganja. "Yeah, yeah I think so yu nuh because, yu nuh, they know well its Rastafari that really go through the brutality, even the martyrdom, yu nuh, for marijuana". Zeb's reference to martyrdom was not uncommon amongst interviewees belonging to a movement in which cannabis has served as the primary justification for persecution throughout Rastafari's emergence and into the present. "They were of the opinion that if money was supposed to be made like Rastafari supposed to be in the forefront for all what we go through for marijuana, so I feel well they kinda listen to InI. Although they can and just pretend in my presence! But it felt like it".

Seeking to expand on the notion of martyrdom I asked Zeb if he felt that as well as prioritisation and a share of profits in any future cannabis industry there should also be compensation for the past suffering of the movement. "Yeah well I said so because yu nuh I came with a letter that they should give an apology to the whole Rastafari for what have transpired. They should give some form of reparation ya unnstan?". This view is one I have heard expressed amongst Rastafari across fieldwork sites, an official recognition and reparation both for the persecution the movement received in the main but also an eventual share in a cannabis industry which is now generating billions worldwide through recreational consumption and its therapeutic effects. Some saw a historic continuation here in this demand, with ganja production a means of community self-sufficiency throughout the history of Rastafari, most prominently in sites like Pinnacle. Abraham spoke of the sale of ganja as "a survival for the Rastaman [...] without that you had nothing. It was an economic ting". Ras I-ron, who had also engaged with the commission through his role in ICAR, spoke positively of the government having "engaged the Rasta community every step of the way

because they have realised that, ‘look, Rasta is the authority on this’”. He stated this was encouraging given “we are going down into uncharted waters, we’ve been down that road before dealing with that issue and Rasta have been dealing with this for 40/50 years”.

Some however viewed movements towards legislation as problematic. Ibed was amongst these, describing such efforts as a naked attempt to co-opt Rastafari into the “system”. “What about the Rastaman who get brutalised [for cannabis], he have a child and all ting like that and from his father generation they agree with the herb they get killed for it. He alive right now and he still singing the same song as then but he get accepted into the system. Is that progress? I don’t see that as progress, that is deception”. Any closer alignment and cooperation with any government where cannabis is the catalyst thus serves as an act of extreme amnesia, as the movement gets itself caught up with a “system” that has persecuted and murdered its members for the very olive branch it now holds out. Another participant labelled cannabis legalisation as a “trap” designed to create “a lack of self-reliance” and keep Rastafari bound to the opportunities and parameters put out by a Babylonian regime.²⁹⁸

Many spoke with anger at the terminology that surrounded the debate, with the notion that cannabis might be “decriminalised” offering nothing close to the full exoneration that cannabis and its activists required. Some expressed unease at the involvement of money in these discussions. As one participant put it, “we have always advocated for the use of the herb as our sacrament so now they are the ones putting the economics into it and putting the money into it right now”. Others spoke with great concern about legalisation as a pre-cursor to the marketisation of cannabis, a commodification process familiar in other areas of Rastafari culture in which the community has invariably come off poorer²⁹⁹.

Beyond conversations around legislation, many described ganja as instrumental in attempts to restore and renew Iration and its inhabitants. A crucial part of “humanity’s armoury” as Ras Kwaku put it. He furthered, “now with all the factories and even them vehicles on the road all

²⁹⁸ Others expressed incredulity that entering into such a debate bought with it the implication that ganja could possibly be confined by human legal parameters in the first place. A matter of “not if it legal, it legal now” as one put it.

²⁹⁹ King Khalid spoke to this in describing that “ganja, marijuana was a Class A drug [Schedule I under US Federal law]. Now it’s medical and it’s not Rastafari doing that. It is true that it is part of Rastafari education that is causing it to happen like vegetarianism, like all the dreadlocks all the basic tings that we use as material to base our structure, our foundation. Now the system has taken it”

these pollution creating more carbon in the atmosphere, the cannabis plant absorbs carbon dioxide three times the rate of normal plants so in terms of carbon sequestration meaning the absorption of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and the plant to put out oxygen if cannabis that's planted the cleaner the environment will be". That a plant already revered for such a broad variety of practical and spiritual uses could operate as a powerful ally in the fight against climate change came as no surprise to those who described it in these terms, and indeed the close union between Rastafari and ganja indicated to this participant an innate "connection" between Rastafari and environmentalism.

Other's spoke of an environmental impact at ground level. Whilst I-Mannuel pointed to the transformative power of hempcrete, a hemp based composite building material, another participant described a purifying effect for the soil that supports ganja, "The cannabis can be used to clean out pollution [...] in Chernobyl you know the disaster with the place in Chernobyl? Cannabis was used to clean the area as it was contaminated with nuclear waste and they planted cannabis and right now the land is being used for agriculture". Apart from any scientific claims within these statements, we are able to see broader Rastafari frameworks around pollution and purity in action. Ganja the holy herb and cleansing force within the human temple also at work out in the wider world ridding it of contamination. "All them years they trying to stop marijuana growing and it marijuana itself that protecting the ozone layer! If this was letting the plant grow in abundance we probably would not be in this situation", as Jeg put it.

It should also be emphasised that whilst cannabis legalisation was considered by many to be amongst the most pressing issues for the community³⁰⁰, this was not an issue in isolation. As Jeg put it "the Rastafari movement is not all about legalisation of marijuana, we should talk about anything effecting the environment cos it effect our Livity. So unless we Rastafarian say don't even check about the pollution and everything [the environment will be degraded]. Self-conscience must be environment, trees, birds, ants, anything, cos that's what make the whole balance. So if you actually helping to destroy this your Livity as Rastafari will be challenged". A broad focus is thus essential as any narrowing presents the danger of "helping to destroy" this intricate network. If cannabis is focused on over the importance of trees or

³⁰⁰ Indeed, as with previous fieldwork cannabis consumption was not practiced by a totality of the community at all. Whilst a majority consumed ganja in some form several did not for a multitude of reasons.

ants, the wider ecosystem as a whole faces precarity and its constituent parts face peril. Inner Livity is also impacted, as the presence of the holy herb cannot make up for a heart which is not attuned to everything around it.

Bees and Beekeeping

In divergence to previous fieldwork sites, I found in Iyanola a Rastafari community deeply interested and engaged in beekeeping. Whilst I had encountered in Jamaica previously a deeply respectful veneration for the essential work of bees, here I also encountered extensive discussions and demonstrations of beekeeping. As soon became apparent, apiculture held a strong foothold on the island represented nationally through two umbrella groups both of which featured members of the Rastafari community³⁰¹. In regards to the keeping of bees and the consumption of honey there exists a point of variance with what some might practice as advocates of a more secular vegan or plant-based diet where honey is often restricted. This was something that for some participants was important in distinguishing Rastafari foodways from those without spiritual grounding, with bees serving almost direct as conduits of ‘vibrationality’ in their efforts to transfer a fertile energy from one place to another. Many of those I encountered consumed honey and considered it perfectly in keeping with a natural food approach, keeping bees alongside their Ital farming practices.

As well as their fundamental role in eco-system maintenance, some spoke of a broader philosophical influence taken from bees. Detailing hours spent watching his hives Ras Shiloh stated, “if we work together we will not work ourselves to death. The work will be lighter if we work together. Everything will be lighter [...] I’m not just looking as Rastafari or just my community I’m looking at the world on the whole. With your resources you may share them with you, share with me yu nuh?”. A wisdom present in nature waiting to be harvested, distinctly communal and collegiate in its nature.

Describing his own personal involvement, Jeg described apiculture as central to his Ital Livity as it relates to conservation and preservation of the earth. “I starting in the first line of

³⁰¹ Whilst I was unable to unearth much material on the history of beekeeping on the island several participants told me that its practice stretched back many decades, and that the islands conditions were particularly suited to it. Indeed, a 1992 report from the ‘Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture’ describes that the island as “presently free of all diseases and parasites that plague other beekeepers in most areas of the bee world today”. IICA, *Beekeeping in Saint Lucia*

the food chain which is the bees so if you have no bees you have no food. So right now I'm actually rearing bees, this is the first step [...] when you understand the bee you understand everything. So that's why I tell you if you don't back where you come from you can never know where you going". This understanding of history as an orientation of the future is again at the core of a Rastafari cosmology which yearns to return to the primordial and the first, in Jeg's case the first in the food chain the bee. This was of immediate importance in the now however. "The disadvantage that the food chain is in is because we kill the bees. Yuh see? With pesticide [...] the world gone unbalance because of pesticide yuh see? Because every pest you kill with the chemical it was there as prey for something [...] now within climate change a lot of the farmers saying oh the crops not producing. Yes, why? Without pollination you can't produce so they have to look for a beekeeper". It is again thus an approach with disregard for a holistic understanding of Iration that is at fault, one intrinsically short-termist and without perspective. This can and will be remedied however through the refocusing that a Rastafari Ital Livivity represents, with love and respect for the smallest in creation at its core. Blessed are the beekeepers, perhaps.

Technological Considerations

Attitudes towards technology were largely suspicious, with views pointing to its non-primordial nature and often hubristic and disunifying effects. Empress Eve put it that society as a whole has "lost the blueprint" to life as originally intended by the Almighty, arguing that "now we live in an age that tells you if you don't Google or if you didn't read it's not factual. So the intrinsic nature of a being is not necessarily understood anymore" as people are beholden to "official accounts" within books and on the internet. She offered the example 'If I now tell a person well I drank tea and I think that it's good for my urine if I don have some big fancy words and I don have a statistic that just doesn't make sense anymore. So people [are drifting,] especially Rastafarians because we are the ones who are the last stronghold of man". A shift, then, from an innate sensing or "feeling" a natural truth to a desire to "read" a natural truth.

Ras Shiloh however offered a more optimistic view, arguing that technology and scientific endeavour were gifts from the Almighty and cornerstones of Haile Selassie's premiership. "We have to make use of modern technology. Quick. The Father, the science that's going on it is our science, it is our science of the maker. The Father inspiring us and even all the races,

he's the one that's inspiring all the races to come out with something good [...] we cannot go against it, we have to make it work". Jah Lamb offered a view put forward by many that technology was a "tool", something to be used by humanity and not the other way round. "It was supposed to unite people but now people get more self-headed [...] materials distract them so they not 100% like how they were supposed to be with creation because people still distracted with the commercial life". Technology has thus served to further "distract" people away from the true meaning of life with Iration.

Conclusion

To conclude, the above offers further demonstration, and indeed notes toward, the practical manifestations of the rich and multi-faceted Ital Livivity rubric described in this paper. Throughout it, we are able to see a deep connection with Iration laying at the heart of practical engagement with it. Natural agriculture strives to engage with the earth in as gentle and communicative a way as possible, whilst proliferation of Rastafari agricultural initiatives seeks to disseminate this love and wisdom as far and as wide as possible. Rastafari foodways offer another step in this communion, serving both to bolster the community whilst also influencing those outside of it. More temporally, recognition of the endlessly nefarious influence of Babylon drives concerns around food security and government engagement on cannabis legislation. Communal living serves both to insulate the community whilst offering example and template to those outside it. Beekeeping offers a very immediate and direct connection to the transfer of 'vibrationality', as technology variously serves as friend and foe.

Throughout all of these a deeply entrenched holism, assertive and innovative means of knowledge formation and a rejection of the tainted and corrupted, pervades. A method of engagement which strives to foreground the entirety of a being or an ecosystem away from a short-sighted and short termist-approach criticised as forming the root for environmental degradation and disengagement in the present. As can be seen also in subsequent chapters, these are lessons both applied to and drawn from Iration. The wisdom is there to be garnered, and indeed must be garnered for reconnection and restoration.

In the next chapter I will begin to turn to the perhaps more explicitly ecotheological, as I explore some of the spiritual sources which ground the Ital rubric described above and

throughout this dissertation thus far. Here, what I have previously termed an Ital hermeneutic appears through Rastafari exegetical methods.

Chapter Five – Ital Inspiration: Scripture, Spiritual Authority and Exegesis

In this chapter, I will begin to explore some of the spiritual sources that ground Rastafari Ital Livity as it appears through the practices and philosophical outlooks explored within this dissertation. Participants were characteristically broad in this. Whilst Haile Selassie was invariably cited as a source of spiritual inspiration and authority, attitudes towards the Bible were mixed. This latter variance in view very much aligns with previous fieldwork contexts in which relationships with the Bible have been complex, varying from a text central to the personal belief and rule of Haile Selassie to a text central in the brutality of colonialism and the subjugation of African and Caribbean communities. Across all sources and perspectives towards them however, participants invariably offered modes of interpretation that centred the green, the natural and the organic.

This speaks to what I have previously identified as an ‘Ital Hermeneutic’, present within Rastafari engagement with spiritual sources³⁰². This, I have posited, is an “innovative mode of exegetical interpretation, which seeks to ‘read’ the natural into and out of each source” as influenced by foundational elements of Ital Livity, namely the respect for and unity with all life in Iration alongside a yearning towards the natural. What emerges is an exegetical form which orients itself around the natural. Lessons about nature reveal themselves through scripture whilst scripture is encountered through a lens which foregrounds the natural. Guidance from this leads individuals to an understanding of their interaction *with* nature whilst guidance is often expressed *through* it³⁰³. Crucial within this also is the function of the Babylon/Zion dichotomy which amongst these exegetical interpretations represents a yearning towards the natural and the free away from the industrialised, the oppressive and the colonial.

The below thus offers testament to the centrality of these green yearnings within Rastafari spirituality and within Rastafari modes of exegesis more specifically. These modes, even more so than Rastafari theology as a broader category, currently stand as heavily

³⁰² As I have emphasised in my initial explorations of an Ital Hermeneutic, any originality of the term lays with the Rastafari community and those I have engaged with throughout fieldwork.

³⁰³ Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* 43-44

underexplored and under-researched. It is my hope that this chapter and this dissertation offers another contribution towards countering this paucity, whilst also serving as a foundation for others to utilise in similar efforts.

I also note here as I have previously that this form of hermeneutical engagement is not limited to written texts. The centrality of oral epistemology and knowledge formation amongst Rastafari communities, in reasoning sessions and in more informal conversation, engenders a form of engagement which goes beyond scripture and applies itself to any and all aspect of spiritual wisdom wherever it might be encountered. This is most visible in the lessons offered by Haile Selassie, as his utterances and life episodes are interpreted through deep ‘green’ spectacles.

I will thus conduct this chapter by beginning with an exploration of the central importance of the words of Haile Selassie, before moving on to explore Bible passages that participants raised and finishing with personal revelations, also of deep importance amongst participants to this study. I will conclude by restating that whilst the composition of Rastafari spiritual sources represents a broad bricolage, a central philosophical core orients all of those featured. What will become visible is a deep rooting in the natural. Lessons that are expressed through nature and exegetical wisdom that is gained from nature.

His Majesty

Most frequently on the topic of spiritual sources that ground an Ital Livity interviewees pointed to His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, with almost all participants to this study describing his influence across quotes, speeches and a broader philosophical influence³⁰⁴. Towards the former of these, those I spoke with variously accessed Haile Selassie’s oratory through pamphlets, small books, printed sheets, and hand-written notes, as well as the print book ‘Selected Speeches’, a collection of His Majesty’s addresses throughout his reign that was exalted by some in this fieldwork as the “third testament”³⁰⁵. These forms were however in the minority. Instead, a rich, largely oral, cannon describing His Majesty’s actions and interactions has developed in the movement over the decades of its existence, informed by a

³⁰⁴ This range of influences mirrors previous research conducted through the lens of Rastafari dietary practices. See Powell, *Ital Trod*

³⁰⁵ Possession of this text was not overly common due to importation and postage costs.

bricolage of journalistic, historical and anecdotal sources, further shaped through the refining and revising process that reasoning represents. It was this form that most of the evocation of His Majesty came in, as participants spoke of lessons, actions and words in more general terms that have emerged from H.I.M, often in conversation with fellow Rastafari.

Perceptions around the divine status of His Majesty were characteristically varied. Some expressed his being as the Almighty incarnate, whilst others saw a prophet and others still a divinely influenced leader. One contributor in this former category put it that “I use the teachings of His Majesty as my guide even more than the Bible. If I see something in the Bible that contradicts or that I think is contradictory I turn to Selassie word”. The ultimate spiritual authority beyond equal for this participant. Another who drew Selassie in this latter mould described him as one of several “prophets of this time”, alongside “Marcus Garvey, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Gandhi”.

Those who sought wisdom from the Bible also frequently connected Haile Selassie with the Christianity he himself practised. “Selassie say to read one Bible verse a day”, one interviewee attested. His Majesty also stood as “Defender of the Faith” of the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church and the “Conquering Lion of Judah” of the Ethiopian people, the latter a title evoked with greater frequency by Rastafari globally and present on the Selassie era Ethiopian flag flown at Rastafari tabernacles the world over³⁰⁶. Another put it that “Haile Selassie stand on the Bible and the teachings of the Bible”, whilst for others his life represented a continuation of it. “Just like Christ two thousand years ago he was rejected by the Romans and dem kinda ting dere. So ya nuh, that is what is being played out where’s there’s a rebellion against truth”. A figure reclaiming a since neglected “truth”.

Ital Practices

In regards to Ital Livivity more specifically, many spoke of an influence from His Majesty directly into their agricultural pursuits. Bongo Wisely spoke with immediacy about his grounding in the words of His Majesty. “His Majesty spoke about agriculture being a divine calling. Right? So the method, it is a divine calling which is something from within yu nuh?”.

³⁰⁶ Some have drawn a contrast between Haile Selassie and Jesus Christ in this imagery, Jesus as the meek sacrificial lamb offered up to the Almighty in place of human sin and Selassie as the fierce, vanquishing lion present on earth to dismantle the wickedness of Babylon.

Wisely spoke as one who had been an agricultural student studying in Jamaica where he had embraced Rastafari and the guidance of His Majesty. “That in itself had me like ‘well yeah man, I’m on the right path’, agriculture yu nuh?”. Guidance from the Almighty that the path he was on was a righteous one given its personal advocacy and valorisation from H.I.M. Whilst Wisely had always sensed a connection with the earth and with agriculture, it was coming to an understanding of Selassie that give this a divine purpose. “By the time I get to know myself as Rastafari then I was able to really equate and get the fullness and yeah. Understand it. Seen.”

Others described direct engagement with His Majesty during agricultural processes. Speaking with Nye and those on the farm around him, I inquired as to what it was that separated their processes from a farm that might describe itself as ‘organic’. “Well, you know the difference is we exalt Haile Selassie. It’s Haile Selassie we worship as God almighty”. I-3 added to this “we believe Haile Selassie is the Almighty and all our confidence while planting we pray to him to give us strength and make our crops grow yu nuh? Yeah. And really and truly we seeing a lot of light in what we do and what we say, seen?”. Selassie is thus invoked by name and prayer throughout the farming process to witness the engagement with his Iration that is taking place in the soil, something which Nye described as adding “extra blessing” for all elements of Iration engaged in the process. The effects of this are said to be tangible in the health and well-being of the produce which subsequently impacts size and taste. I-3 expanded on these themes, stating that the food is indeed materially different from that on others farms. “You know, because Haile Selassie said discipline of the mind is a discipline within genuine morality and is therefore spiritual strength”. It is the discipline which defines Rastafari agricultural practices as well as the communion which underpins it. “We have a very special Ital Livivity yu nuh”.

Similarly, others described calling out to His Majesty in search of support and protection. Bongo Vision described one such instance when labouring in the central rainforests of the island. “There was a piece of logs Joe, I tried to put it three times on my shoulder to put in my head and I could not put it on and I put down the logs. I call on the Fadda, and then I finish prayer, I go and lift up the logs and yu nuh the logs was lighter than all the logs I ever lift up [...] and I say ‘Wah! Selassie is the life Rasta’”. Strength provided from the most High at the time of most need. The same afternoon he also recounted the police coming to search

his house for ganja. “I have big stove just behind the house there where my dog is and police surround my house yu nuh. And I inside just in the corner watching tings and smoking weed and the police just set up on the outside where I am [...] I speak to Selassie and just stay, and the police go”. In the most vivid and perhaps fraught of these Vision described receiving forewarning from His Majesty of a roadblock on the way to a destination, a premonition that saw him leave his ganja at home. When reaching the roadblock he was stopped and was accosted. “Three or four man pull off from the bush and tell me ‘you don’t make a move dere’. Joe, when the man come and search my vehicle them man put everything I had in my van outside”, eventually concluding that nothing was present. “They cannot identify me cos I been protected underneath [Selassie’s] wings”.

Earth Care

Many contributors sought lesson from His Majesty towards how humanity should interact with the earth and with Iration more broadly. Ras Shiloh spoke in this regard in describing that it was essential that humanity “obey our maker, walk as he wants us to walk. Walk like H.I.M because he walked the earth” in the form of Haile Selassie. Gesturing to a nearby picture of His Majesty at coronation, he added “that’s him there, he is the maker and sustainer. He is the one sitting on Mount Zion judging good and bad”. The presence of the Almighty on earth then offers clear indication that this planet is one worthy of being cared for and cherished. Humanity must proceed delicately, walking as the Almighty did. His Majesty set the “perfect example” in this, one who embodies a striving towards a “tranquil earth [...] if everybody focused on just that we will soon find out that what we have is not ours” but instead belongs to all in Iration. Humanity should therefore refocus its gaze away from a possessive, perhaps covetous, view of the world and towards one centred on the peaceful vision of His Majesty. “H.I.M” whose presence “makes us know what we have to do, we have to do it .We cannot go against the word of our maker”. As one contributor put it, “His Majesty King Selassie has established the kingdom of heaven on this planet. Rastafari is the calling of the Kingdom of Heaven because it’s the Kingdom of Heaven that must be established on the earth, on the planet”. Others pointed to Selassie’s guidance as one which encouraged preparation for a life beyond this world. “I remember Haile Selassie said that we must prepare ourselves whilst we here, living this terrestrial we must prepare ourselves for the celestial life”.

Zeb put it that “the teachings of Haile Selassie is the way of peace, justice, love in order for us to survive on this planet and sustain this planet”. This, for him, came partly in the form of speaking against “the proliferation of nuclear, yu nuh, warheads”, a destructive force contrary to His Majesty’s explicit warnings. The “natural wisdom” of His Majesty was also extolled. Citing a speech of his, Shiloh put it that “education which ignores man’s intrinsic nature and neglects his intellect and reasoning power cannot be considered true education”. A neglect occurring far too frequently in the minds of many contributors to this paper.

Speaking with Empress Desma, a cosmetics and health products business proprietor, examples and lessons from His Majesty were immediate and applied daily. Speaking more broadly about her approach to business she reached for His Majesty’s words. “I cannot afford waste. I cannot. His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie said the secret to production is saving what you have and ever since I learnt that I try my very very best to avoid wastage”. Desma’s inspiration speaks to frequent references to Selassie as a model for restraint and prudence³⁰⁷, and he is invoked in this to keep her business prosperous and moving forward.

Broader Influence

Many also spoke of lessons that can be gleaned from Selassie’s images and depictions. This form of more aesthetic engagement appeared frequently as conversations and interviews often took place beneath or alongside a proudly hung picture of His Majesty in domestic residences, eateries or tabernacles. This form of reflection led participants to take wisdom from how Selassie appeared. “I spoke to you about the symmetry of his position”, Sly described to me as we sat opposite a large three by four foot portrait of His Majesty he had situated in the main communal area of his premise. This notion of “perfect symmetry” is one that had been described to me before. Symmetrical in both appearance as visible in His Majesty’s face which serves to indicate the symmetry of his character. A holistically balanced supreme. This was visible in his actions also. Sly furthered, “you never see him lean, never see him lean so its jus strictly balanced. Just a medium, and this is one of the ways we recognise his balance”. An upright figure morally and physically.

³⁰⁷ See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* 45

Shiloh added to this sense of visual pedagogy, describing that “there’s one part of his life that a lot of people don’t know. He was born with locks. Yeah! From the time he was born he never comb his hair until the coronation. Just after the coronation he said in the crowning in the conference, he said that ‘though I am high I will come low to meet the people’. Then he said he will get a professional barber to cut his locks because people cannot understand H.I.M with his beard and his locks”. His Majesty was thus born not only in the most natural way of being, he was born with hair which represented the wisdom beyond his years. This was however beyond the comprehension of those around him and so he opts to lower himself to aid their comprehension³⁰⁸. For Shiloh, this meant “our maker is a locksmith. The maker of life. He didn’t just create the world but he originated life, he originated the animals, human beings and plants”. His lifeful energy and purpose in this world is embodied, as it is for many Rastafari, through his locks. “The dread would represent the development of that energy. The growth of that energy. Yeah”.

Jah Lamb expanded on this broader influence regarding Ital Livity in describing that “the teachings of the Emperor just enhance the whole Rastafari vybe when it comes to nutrition, hygiene, life style. Yeah. When it comes to infrastructure, economics, yeah. He teach us all. Yeah. His Majesty was a universal teacher”³⁰⁹. A deeply holistic philosophy led from the front by a ‘universal’ teacher. He furthered that “Rastafari is itself the teachings of His Majesty” most fundamentally. This was a message being all too often ignored however. “He tell you about self-reliance and he talk about togetherness. To me that’s what we lacking now. Cos if we had that ting intact we would have been further up right there, because you talk about self-reliance and the basic of food and there’s the Livity and how ones and ones should cleave together because it’s a chain reaction”. A message of unity and togetherness is one with direct links to food and its provision. A message that Jah Lamb describes, as many did, that was again not being heeded. He did however see reason for hope. “I find we not that together because if we were together we’d have conquered higher heights together, but right now it’s getting there cos man starting to put their difference on the side [...] each of us is a link in the chain so we have to play our part. It’s not a one man ting”. Jah Lamb here makes a

³⁰⁸ This sense of Selassie as a humble leader who ‘lowers himself’ to embolden those around him is often cited by those who would seek to draw a lineage between His Majesty and Jesus Christ. Others have pointed to this propensity as something which represents Haile Selassie’s inclination towards the natural and desire to be amongst the smallest and most humble elements of Iration. See Powell, *Ital Hermeneutics* 45-46

³⁰⁹ It is worth noting here that Haile Selassie served as Minister for Education in his civilian government during his reign

link between disunity and disobedience towards His Majesty, a picture of division that goes against his fundamental teachings and his example. A shift in the latter thus brings a shift in the former.

Others were keen to emphasise that even with the fundamental influence of a central spiritual authority in Selassie it was essential the movement maintained its notion of horizontality and the value of individuals. “If I make a mention of Selassie in what I said because he’s the head everybody will appreciate it but since I’m the foot when I say it nobody would bother with me, you check? But the body, the entire body, is full to the body and that is the kind of thing we have to inculcate in our education. It’s not only the head that is important but also the foot”, as King Khalid put it. Much like the human form the “body” of Rastafari is equally reliant on all its constituent parts. “If you were to walk from here maybe a mile away on your head then what your state you think you would reach here? [...] but if you want to walk six mile on your foot when you reach there see how glad you will be when you reach there [...] that’s who we are!”. All must work in harmony, from top to bottom.

Some contributors described Selassie as a “mystic” or a “natural mystic³¹⁰”, one who could not quite be fully grasped at. One who moved through the earth in an ethereal existence, flowing through Iration without any clear sense of an entry or an exit. This sense of connection with the natural and non-human was invoked in the Italo-Ethiopian war also as one participant described “witnesses said that even birds assisted [...] one witness said that he saw a flock of geese literally attacking the planes. Yes. An causing them damage, cover the screen the wind shield and stuff like that the pilots couldn’t see where they were going and crash into mountains”. Ras I-ron described another episode in which “witnesses said that when Haile Selassie was seven years old he wandered off into the wild and when he returned he had two lions, one on his left and one on his right. A seven year old child with two grown ass lions. And their jaws were shut that they couldn’t harm him”. This sense of the mystic was thus present, emphasised by the powerful symbolism of the lion. “That war with Mussolini’s Italy was fought on a very mystic, and, yu nuh, very high level of spiritual connectivity. Even the animals rose up to defend Ethipia yu nuh?”. Nature is thus invoked as

³¹⁰ These descriptions may have been allusions to Bob Marley’s 1977 ‘Natural Mystic’, itself suffused with eschatological themes as the “natural mystic blowin’ through the air” is described as potentially “the first trumpet”, but it “might as well be the last”.

on the side of the righteous and the righteous on the side of nature, something that continues to be sensed through the web of connectivity of ‘vibrationality’.

Defence of His Majesty

Others spoke to Haile Selassie as a figurehead and an inspiration that requires defence from those seeking to besmirch both him and the movement from the outside. Zeb put it that “Rastafari come to free the people, the system want to keep them in chains and shackles [...] even like the leaders, you nuh they themselves spread a lot of propaganda about Haile Selassie and have the people thinking Haile Selassie was a wicked man [...] the leaders all over the world spread propaganda concerning Haile Selassie so they have people thinking that Rastafari, nothing good could come of Rastafari? Yu see? When that is not true at all!”. This sense of governments and governmental agencies having an agenda against the Rastafari movement was frequently encountered throughout this research, although those who spoke of a campaign against Haile Selassie himself were less common. Whilst this contributor did not expand, many have previously described attempts to assign culpability to His Majesty for the events surrounding his deposition and subsequent instability in Ethiopia as guided by this agenda.

These perceptions parallel those present within the movement of an embattled group fighting threats and misinformation from the outside that have been present since the emergence of Rastafari and its days of violent persecution. Many described this sense of suspicion as a healthy defence mechanism, particularly when the group still experiences unequal treatment and indeed persecution. In invoking Selassie as part of this, he becomes a figurehead not only in divinity but also as a fellow embattled figure of resistance, fighting for truth and recognition against falsehoods and for the strength and survival of the movement that follows in his inspiration.

These descriptions are evocative of a broader natural inclination within Rastafari that celebrates and seeks expression of truth through nature. Within an Italo-Hermeneutic, Selassie is seen to reveal elements of divine truth and of cosmological order through his interaction with nature. The actions of birds in the war demonstrate they are on the side of righteous order. Selassie’s interactions with lions demonstrate him to be on the side of and one with nature, from his earliest years until the end. The sheer power of natural imagery and

testimony is thus demonstrated again. His simultaneously meek and yet fierce example offers a blueprint for sensitivity in interactions with Iration and for strident resistance in the face of the wicked forces of Babylon. All of this demonstrates him to be a figure in, from, and unifying, the natural on earth.

Bible Sources

Allusions to the Bible were also frequent throughout this research³¹¹³¹². Shiloh spoke simply in citing the Bible, alongside nature, was one of two “guides” to life, offering wisdom and a sense of how he should conduct himself. “It’s guiding me to know how I should behave even with humanity and living things. Yeah the whole of nature”. This regularity of allusion mirrored previous fieldwork in the Caribbean. As well as standing as a movement rich in Biblical imagery and symbolism through the movement’s own foundations and the Solomonic figurehead of Haile Selassie, the Rastafari community in St Lucia exists in a country with a deeply imbedded Christian faith³¹³. This meant that the older participants in this study had invariably engaged in some form of Christian education at some point, whilst this was also the case for many younger interviewees. For many this came in the form of the Roman Catholic Church, a denomination with its roots in French occupation of the island³¹⁴.

Attitudes were thus mixed towards Christianity and towards the Bible as a spiritual source. One with echoes into Rastafari spirituality and one embraced by His Majesty himself yet a movement deeply connected to the militaristic and spiritual colonialism of Africa and the Caribbean. Whilst some sought to gain wisdom and teaching from the Bible, a majority of those who contributed to this study, others cast fire upon a book tainted with the blood of

³¹¹ Participants most frequently drew on the King James Version, the formulation still most pervasive on the island and one which offers a linguistic “punch” lacking in modern translations according to one participant. Quotes here thus most frequently related to the KJV.

³¹² A note should also be made here on positionality. My status as a white, European, outsider from an elite university may well have shaped responses here. How individuals presented their interaction with the Bible may have been influenced either towards or away from it in conversation with a researcher possibly perceived to have a good understanding, or even embrace, of the Bible as a PhD Theology student from the University of Cambridge.

³¹³ US Department of State estimates from 2020 put the Christian population of the island at over 85%. DoS, *Saint Lucia*

³¹⁴ The Roman Catholic Church has often received particular ire amongst the Rastafari communities I have researched, fuelled for some by its very direct role in imperialism and allusions to it in Revelations as the “whore of Babylon”. This was particularly so in St Lucia where many perceived a tight relationship between itself, the state and the persecution meted out to the Rastafari community across its presence on the island. This sentiment in part laid the foundation for what may be the only act of violent extremism from Rastafari individuals in St Lucia in the form of the 2001 Castries Cathedral attack. See Powell, *Fire Fe The Vatican*

thousands which serves to mislead rather than guide³¹⁵. As one interviewee put it, “I am a living Bible, why do I need Bible?”. In this, such familiarity with Christianity and with its teachings resulted in an intriguing tension amongst some participants who saw no authority in the Bible yet would still employ its characters and events in making their own theological points. Fluent in the language and references of its books yet resistant to its very being.

Amongst those who did seek the Bible’s wisdom however, references were broad and again invariably grounded in the natural. As with interpretation and engagement with the wisdom of Haile Selassie, this was not always presented in the interrogation of specific verses, although this was largely the case. Discussions also included Biblical figures, events and themes invoked in broader terms. As shall be explored below, the presence of an Ital Hermeneutic was seemingly present in the interpretations of those who addressed the Bible in richly green language and lesson, drawing out from it innovative teachings as to the workings of Iration around, and humanity within.

Environmental Guidance and Wisdom

Many contributors spoke directly in Edenic terms when describing Biblical influence on personal expressions of Ital Livity. Bongo Wisely spoke to this in describing that “man was placed in the garden yu nuh, and that’s where life started”. This narrative for the emergence of humanity was drawn on by various contributors, rich as it is with lush green imagery. This notion of humanity being “placed” in the “garden” suggests a very considered emergence of humanity, almost as fully formed beings set into the ultimate “natural” environment. Some contributors indeed cited a non-evolutionary origin for humanity in this vein, whilst others saw this language as more indicative of a “selection” and elevation of humanity. All of those who invoked Edenic themes however saw this as grounding for the notion that humanity occupies a special and designated role amongst the rest of Iration.

Ras Kwaku expanded his view of this verse, also speaking to the connection between humanity and all else in Iration, one that is underemphasised in the present. “It shows that man have to have that connection with the earth”, one that is fundamental and co-emergent.

³¹⁵ King Khalid spoke to this in describing Rastafari Livity as an “understanding” and a “knowledge” of the world gleaned from the natural cues and vibrations within it contrasted against a Christian theology which seeks only to “obscure” and obfuscate humanity’s interaction with the world around through “oppression” and falsity.

“Also it tell you he take the dust, he take some earth and breathe within it the breath of life, so we come from the earth. Yeah. So we are part of it, there is that connection. Seen”. Whilst all are connected through a shared divinity it is also the case that humanity is from the very same substance as the earth, as all is. This was a notion highlighted by many Biblically grounded contributors as something neglected if not wholly ignored by other groups who take wisdom from the Bible, all too frequently led astray by an anthropocentrism which does not allow room for these connections to be made. As Wisely furthered, “we cannot run away from it. We have to, whatever life we living it have to be in harmony [...] because we are all part of the creation”. This sense points again to an intriguing tension present within the movement. One which straddles a near egalitarian sense of shared materiality and shared essence, and the inherent criticism of anthropocentric forms that spring from the opposite, whilst also asserting a “chosenness” and thus degree of separation for humanity. Humanity as a ‘first among equals’, of sorts.

Furthering this sense of “chosenness” in Edenic terms, King Khalid offered an interpretation of an expansion in enlightened humans out from that moment. “From Adam and Eve going down maybe it’s one man or two man [that are enlightened] but now we have thousands of Rastafari. We have come to a to have a great stage in our [development]”. Rastafari as a community and as a set of outlooks has thus reached a position of ubiquity, with adherents the world over and themes and ideas taken up by many as has been explored here. Khalid’s words here speak to a sense I encountered frequently, that Biblical and spiritual figures from previous eras were the “first Rastafari” in the sense that they were the first enlightened humans to embrace the knowledge and wisdom of the Almighty. A similar thread can be seen in responses I have heard to questions around when individuals started to identify themselves as Rastafari. “We are all born Rasta, it is when you realise it that is the question”, as one familiar account came back. Whilst in previous times those who had had this realisation were limited to those venerated and documented in scripture, there are now many who number amongst them. “The sand on the seashore”, as Wisely added. This is not the time for resting on laurels however, Khalid asserted. “All we have to do now is propagate ourselves to go and do good research, cos when we manifest it we will harmonise with nature and that is where we will live”. Research further into these innate divine truths that will further the place of humanity within Iration and within the Almighty as a harmonious existence into perpetuity.

Sister Sheba also spoke to this sense of Eden as a primordial blueprint. “If the Garden of Eden was established from the beginning [then] that shows us everything! We have been placed in a garden so that’s the kind of life we have to develop. Our food, our medicine have to come from this garden. So from the very beginning of creation that was established, that was where he put mankind”. This placement came with a sense of obligation however. Humanity must “protect that garden and make sure we keep it healthy, the soil healthy that the generation to come will benefit³¹⁶. That is our responsibility, to keep things alive you know”. Whilst humanity might not be in the garden as it was then, it is still incumbent on all to safeguard what is present in the now seemingly in the hope that future generations can continue in attempts to return it to its original primordial state. Sheba described this vision as one in which “there is great joy. Everything is pure, everything will be electric and that make humans move again”. This sense of electricity and vitality connected Sheba’s words to a sense of inactivity and idleness in the face of “nature” many had spoken to before. Humanity will be connected to each other and to Iration like never before. “The further you go away from creation, from the garden, the less spiritual closeness you have eh? Everything I tell you is one”. Holistically, the further humanity moves from the garden the further it moves away from the Almighty and from itself.

In distinctly environmental terms Bongo Vision made an intriguing reference to the flood and Noah’s salvation in describing the divine intention of current climatic changes. “Even in the time of Noah when he created the flood, yu nuh, it wasn’t the whole world that get rid of [in] the flood, it was just the place of Israel where he wanted his children to be and Noah wanted to take them there and there and they were being stubborn”. The great environmental surge event of this term then in climate change, including floods already itself, is not intended to destroy the chosen. Rather, it can perhaps be seen as a moment of deliverance away from the sin and inequity of the time. “I take all dese tings and make a lesson to me so that I will not have to have the chance, for when the river get too big yu nuh, I’ll build my ark before the river get overflow. You check it?”. Deliverance that this community in this time is similarly prepared for and ready to receive. Whilst for Noah the destination was Israel, Bongo Vision was not specific about where he envisioned. Perhaps it is the immediate higher ground of the

³¹⁶ Sheba’s allusion to soil health perhaps offers a link to the ultimate act of soil degradation described later in the Eden narrative through Caine’s slaying of Able.

hills, the motherland of Africa/Ethiopia or most supremely the ultimate protective eminence of Mount Zion.

Some invoked broader more symbolic passages as grounding their Ital Livivity. When I asked Ras Kwaku if there were any particular passages he drew wisdom from he invoked the first words of John. “In the beginning was the word and the word was God and the word became flesh and dwelled amongst man, yu nuh?”. Repeated by several others in this study, this passage in its consequences was expanded on within an Ital Hermeneutic as representing demonstration of the fundamentals of an Ital Livivity. The unifying divine energy that pervades all in Iration is here given its origin narrative - first there was the Almighty who then brought all into existence in him before becoming flesh in either or both of Haile Selassie and Jesus. All is thus connected through this creation and all share in the divinity that has been weaved through Iration through it. This of course renders the care and protection of Iration is of paramount importance as directly instilled by the Almighty.

Speaking to the inspiration gained regarding his visions of sustainability, Shiloh powerfully invoked Ecclesiastes 11, describing “as the spiritualists would say, by casting your bread upon the waters it will return to you a thousand-fold. These are the words of our maker and every line of his is perfect. He came to show us the way, he cannot lie he cannot twist, nothing. He has to come straight all the time”. Shiloh described that he saw the verse as a powerful parable describing the benefits of “returning” one’s wealth to nature and watching it multiply into wealth for all of the elements of Iration. Christian interpretations of this passage I have encountered frequently foreground human experiences, being generous to those in need or offering resources without expecting much if anything in return³¹⁷. Shiloh’s interpretation however offers further demonstration of an Ital Hermeneutic in representing a perhaps more literal rendering in which the natural abundance humanity has gleaned from the earth is to be returned to it for the benefit both of humanity and of the Iration around it. This reading of course has particular pertinence in the contemporary. As the passage continues, these actions should be taken “for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth”. So it is then that environmental campaigns persist toward ensuring resources remain in the earth. Here, a step further is taken as natural resources are returned, reploughed, into an earth that will multiply their worth unceasingly.

³¹⁷ Ryken, *Ecclesiastes* 254

Ras I-Mannuel spoke vividly in describing a Biblically grounded manual intervention approach when speaking to the notion of construction of a Rastafari settlement. “My vision in that directive, in that aspect, it should really be – we would like to do as much work as possible with our hands using the simple tools. I would prefer to shift away from heavy machinery. I do not want to disturb the earth because those who destroy the earth, as Jah said in the Bible in a text, I would destroy those who destroy the earth”. Referencing Revelations 11:18, I-Mannuel spoke to a very cautious view in which destruction of the earth, even through perhaps accidental or collateral means, is gravely warned against. “The earth represents Jah, you have to be very careful what you do with the earth. I would like to see a lot of work done by hand, even our road systems. We may have in instances small machinery”. The sensitive form of engagement with the earth in agriculture and construction inherent within the movement receiving Biblical grounding.

Biblically Guided Foodways and Eating

Many also drew on Biblical sources in discussions around food and eating practices. Khalid drew a link between human food consumption and notions of humanity as a “dominion” figure elevated in Iration. I asked if he felt that the rest of Iration also sensed this status for humanity. “Yeah, yeah, yeah. All aspect of creation, even if you see the bees would see a man and destroy a man [due to fear of this dominion], you know the presence of a man would still bring some fear in all”. This was not a fear grounded in an inherent cosmic order however, or one built on some kind of reverence of human might. It was instead an angry indignation that has produced a form of “dominion” that is wholly different from the kind that defined human/non-human relationships in the earliest days of creation. “You see, we lost that dominion because we go and eat the animal so we become a lesser being than the animal, that’s why we say beast in the Bible [...] so we now less now, the value as man”. In consuming animals, something not part of the original vision of those early days, humanity has forsaken the non-human around it. In possession of the mental faculties and acute sense of vibrationally which humanity possesses such acts should be beyond consideration, but evidently were not. Humanity is thus devalued and wider Iration takes issue with this embodiment of a “creator” which turned so violently and needlessly against it. The transgression that was meat consumption for Khalid has and continues to ripple across a cosmological order. In order for this to be corrected he furthered we need to “go back to the

natural self, with man go back into his natural self. The animal will not fear man because the animal know that man is unlikely to kill him”. Khalid here spoke to the ubiquitous sense of “return” to the primordial, the restoration and correction of a natural order before human predation. It is only then that Iration will truly come to forgive and reintegrate humanity into its fold.

Khalid’s interpretation here has direct resonance with another verse cited by many, that found within Isaiah 11. Verse six here describes, “the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them”. This vision of a time without predation was cited both as a vision of a primordial age and of a future age to come. One in which the “ultimate unity” of all in Iration is finally realised and embraced. Whilst speaking to a sense of unified cosmic order, this passage was usually referenced in a dietary context, speaking, as others cited Edenic passages as doing so, to an idealised vision for creation from the Almighty. This was furthered by the later proclamation in 11:9 that “they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain”. The noting of the “holy mountain” taken as clear indication that in Zion, the pinnacle of righteousness and divinely mandated existence, these forms of harmful consumption are absent.

I-3 pointed to a sense of “forgetfulness” from humanity of this relationship between itself and non-humanity. “They taught us that God created man in his own image and likeness and that we all are Gods [...] he gave dominion over all things. He gave power privilege over everything [...] but what we do is we forget that, so we powerless, We cannot change things. Some body have to do it for us. So that’s when the dependency comes when people neglect the environment”. I-3’s Biblical invocation here offers a view in which humanity’s drift from the original formulations of the Almighty has engendered a state of amnesia, forgetfulness as to the power and impact humanity holds in its ability to impact and protect wider Iration. I-3 applied this also within our community, humans waiting for the Almighty to act as well as other humans to act. Instead it is incumbent that humanity acts more assertively, not less. “That’s what we have to do to bring back to people”.

Another Biblical episode which received much consideration concerning Ital practice was that of that of the Israelite exile and the book of Daniel. In Chapter 1 Daniel describes that he

and those in his party wish to abstain from the kings table, instead asking merely for “vegetables to eat and water to drink” as “Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine”. This was a diet which renders them “better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations”. In his subsequent encounter in the lion’s den, Daniel describes that he was spared “because I was found blameless” before the Almighty (6:22). This description was attributed by several participants as relating to the dietary purity practiced by Daniel and those around him during this time, as one “blameless” in interactions with wider Iration³¹⁸. Ras Kwaku put it that Daniel’s “innocence” and salvation gave clear indication that these practices were to be embraced and revered. The symbolism of rejecting the food of a Babylonian king, one who had similarly exiled a people from their homeland, was also emphasised as a clear rejection of the “wickedness” inherent within the food systems present in modern Babylon. This passage represents a fusion of both of these deeply held truths.

Others employed Biblical metaphor to express their disbelief and displeasure at the dietary practices around them. In a conversation about the perceptions of friends and neighbours at his dietary practices, Ibed sounded concern at the notion of making others aware of an individual consuming a plant-based diet. “So the whole we have to say we don go round and he say he going plant-based ya nuh? We go round the moment they start eating the flesh! The forbidden fruit. That is when we go round”. This reversal of a frequent dynamic suggests a more proactive approach to influencing others than many of those I encountered. It was my sense that Ibed was not advocating for some kind of doorstep inquisition for neighbours consuming meat, but was more venting frustration at the hegemonic nature of current meat-centric dietary practices in St Lucia. “It become normal because we born into that culture but despite me being born into that culture I not limiting my heavens”. Resistance against this dominant culture is grounded in a determination not to constrain an individual’s divinity and thus their “heavens”.

Most pertinently, Ibed’s invocation of meat as the “forbidden fruit” was striking. Whilst the term is of course steeped in Biblical symbolism, Ibed hastened to add “I aint talking about Adam and Eve (Gen 3), I talking reality”. This struck me as instance of that described above,

³¹⁸ This passage was also cited by interviewees in regards to the notion of being “blameless” in remaining free of Covid-19 vaccination. See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah* 9

an individual's verbalisations couched in Biblical language somewhat unwillingly. A resistance to Biblical hegemony but a spiritual vocabulary unavoidably informed by it. In terms of its application however Ibed's utilisation bears similarities. "When people wasn't eating meat and dem ting, I want to know who decide, well, they going for the forbidden fruit. I wonder who decide and what they say about it". Ibed's descriptions imply the same degree of conscious rebellion inherent in the Adam and Eve narrative, a time before meat consumption and thus one in line with a primordial vision for the earth ultimately rejected by an individual or a community. Parallels with the original invocation exist here with hubristic attempts to advance humanity beyond a blueprint that has already been established by the Almighty. The results of this disobedience are seen to still be playing out in present in which those actions were ultimately to become a default position, one to be resisted and fought against by the Rastafari community.

Khalid drew out a reading of Genesis 9:3-4 in this regard. He stated that the chapters early passages indicated that "everything [had been] given over [to humanity] but anything with the lifeblood in it you must not eat, and he said that day you eat it your life I will require and he said I will require it in the hands of every living ting [...] so therefore you see that because we start eating flesh everything become your enemy, even yourself become your own enemy". Whilst interpretations of the passage have commonly offered a reading in which the consumption of anything that holds blood in it is precluded³¹⁹, Khalid offers an interpretation of this in a more intricate sense in concluding that because the substance is flesh it still holds "lifeblood". An innate quality that permeates that which once belonged to the living animal. Such consumption thus results in deep cosmological damage in which humanity becomes its "own worst enemy". This forceful and species horizontal interpretation offers further demonstration of a hermeneutic in which scripture is read at its most fundamentally equal and through a lens of a primordial peaceful coexistence.

Others spoke to a broader Christian influence in citing the faith as a foundation for Rastafari modes of dietary self-denial. One put it that this was a "spiritual reincarnation", one in which "you have to deny everything. Even you yourself have to deny and take on that new dispensation and you know it is not easy to deny yourself". The earthly must thus be denied in favour of the spiritual in its totality. This was drawn against the example of Jesus and

³¹⁹ Leupold, *Genesis* 181

Christianity as laying a foundation for the model of worship. “I say Christianity formulated that way, say Jesus Christ lay down his life and didn’t get back up again. When he say that it doesn’t mean you lost your breath, it’s just like general sacrifice. The entire ideology”. One participant referenced Matthew 19:21-22 in this. “He tell a man go and sell whatever you have and the man never come back³²⁰. Now you see sometimes we see our properties as only, as what is monetary. But you eat and drink your knowledge, everything you have put together to be your property, and the man’s biggest property is his health. Biggest wealth you will have is your health³²¹”. Implicit criticism lays within this of a Babylonian mindset which sees value only in that which is possessed rather than that which fortifies and enriches the human condition. Had the rich man realised he would still be rich in health had he joined Jesus’ ministry perhaps his path would have been different, and indeed if those striving for material wealth today were shown the same truth perhaps the path of the environment, the world and Iration would too be different.

Agriculture Exegesis

Participants also frequently referenced the Bible as informing Ital Livity in its interaction with agriculture. In a conversation with Bongo Wisely on the farmstead regarding sustainable farming conducted in delicate engagement with the earth, he extolled its “regenerative capacity”, calling it the “key to a better future”. He ended, “the Pslamist Dawid³²² reminds us that the earth is the Lord and the fullness thereof”. Referencing Psalm 24, Wisely’s comments and pointed omission indicate an interpretation grounded in the green. Whilst translations including the NRSV and KJV describe the earth as “the Lord’s”, Wisely instead describes the earth purposefully as “the Lord”. Through this subtle variation, a more panentheistic rather than possessive rendering emerges. The earth is the Lord as is all else in Iration. All connected and all divine.

Empress Dannie also cited the same passage, describing it as the “one” Bible verse which comes to her mind in her work out on the land. Her rendering and her conclusion differed from the above. “The earth is the Lords and the fulness thereof and all that dwell in it”. And

³²⁰ Parallels here, unexplored by this participant, exist with Alexander Bedward and Leonard Howell, individuals who implored followers to sell their possessions to join an exodus without a return.

³²¹ The notion of “wealth is health” is an oft cited notion I encountered amongst many across field work sites and often took the form of a slogan painted or hung at a restaurant or food vendor.

³²² It was not uncommon for participants to use non-Anglicised forms of Biblical names

if we look at the earth, everything comes from the earth everything our clothes our shoes our whatever”. Dannie’s reading was however one steeped in history and in emotion, as she passionately recounted to me. “I think as a people we must recognise, and as Black people mostly I would speak as a Black woman coming from as far back as slavery [...] our ancestors never had nothing or never inherited nothing per se apart from working and labouring in the land [...] so you find being the descendent of slaves we have always, we have never inherited or never owned up to nothing apart from working the land so you think spiritually, you find all that has been imbedded in us here [...] all the material you have we know we have the material we worked to acquire the material”. As a people stripped of any material inheritance or familial support networks, it was left to the earth to serve as sole provider and sole carer for early Afro-Caribbean communities and the Rastafari groups that descended from them. This is not a lament here however but a thanksgiving. The earth is the fullness thereof and as such is the totality of all anyone could wish for. Dannie’s note here intended to bring this into perspective for those who might stray towards more materialistic paths in the present. The earth provided when there was nothing and is as such ultimately all an individual, and the community more broadly, needs³²³.

Khalid spoke Biblically in outlining the connection between humanity, human self-divinity and reverence for the Almighty. When I asked if he regarded his agricultural activities and life amongst it as a form of communion or indeed a constant communion with the creator, he replied “yeah, that’s how we give service to the creator. You know, by doing [that] we keep the Creator within you cos you feeding the Creator within you”. In engaging with the broad community of those the Almighty has imbued with divinity, the “Creator within” is further bolstered and one’s relationship with the Creator above further so. Furthering this, he added “now in the same way, like if you giving the Creator yourself [priority] you start intoxicating yourself, what you do is you elude yourself gradually”. This communion is thus one which necessitates a humble approach and the right action and the right motivations beyond oneself, in veneration of the Almighty and of the Iration which lives in him. As soon as one starts to prioritise the Creator within over the Creator above, a logical inconsistency as well as a moral one in a panentheistic worldview, an individual has failed and can expect to be in receipt of righteous judgement as a result. Khalid saw in this direct parallel with Adam and Eve’s self-

³²³ Similarly, another participant described that Rastafari should take much guidance from the example of Joseph in the land of Canaan when considering issues of food security.

enrichment. Such hubris, he stated, was “why you see the Bible say that God put an ever turning sword round the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). Prioritising the short-sighted sense of one’s interests saw the tree of life rendered permanently off limits and a subsequent fall away from a garden paradise many Rastafari yearn directly towards today.

Nye drew on Proverbs to ground his engagement with the agricultural endeavours which defined his hill top community. In this, pouring oneself into agricultural work was the only way to engage in a true divine communion with the Almighty and with Iration. Exploring the emergence of Covid-19, Nye offered his view on the ability of agricultural work to insulate Rastafari communities from the virus³²⁴. “Well, really and truly do good and good will follow you. Righteousness exalts the nation. Food can’t save man, it’s the Almighty alone so we need to serve the Almighty praise the Almighty walk with the Almighty. Yu nuh? It’s the only way”. Any earthly substance cannot “save” humanity, it is merely alive in the Almighty. Invocations of Proverbs 11:27 and 14:34 furthering the sense that beyond all ultimate faith must be placed in the Almighty.

Biblical Earth Destruction and End Times

Others looked to the Bible to ground heightening senses of earthly destruction and “end times”. Speaking with a community up in the remote central hills of the island I was told in no uncertain terms by what I perceived to be the group’s patriarch, Radix, that “the Bible in particular talk the judgement, and according to the doings of mankind and in the last days how tings gunna be. And we seeing a lot of changes”. A sense then that the changes happening around can be perceived now, something they later grounded in environmental terms, reflecting that which had already been foretold in the Bible. “The time of the Lord is at hand”, another present added. One community member pointed specifically to Matthew 24 in this. “They ask Christ when shall he return and what signs are there for the end of the world, and he said, well, you shall hear wars and rumours of war. Earthquakes, pestilence, yu nuh? Earthquake in diverse places and all these tings, and he saying that what is being manifested”. This sense was heightened for those present by the outbreak of war in Tigray, Ethiopia, just as my fieldwork commenced in November 2020. Part of a tapestry of eschatological “signs”

³²⁴ See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah* for further discussion of these themes.

and warnings. Here this human disobedience to the Almighty through “tribal war” in the most holy of lands is coupled with judgement through familiarly natural means.

More general eschatological reference was made elsewhere to Revelation. Zeb forwarded “it feel like the Almighty will deliver his people as he promised, you know, in the book of Revelation and elsewhere where he say he will come forward and deliver them and those that believe in him so that will be the Doomsday”. Not only destruction but deliverance for the select, for “his people”, is also at hand. “There is a way out. The way out is to seek the Almighty with all your heart and all your mind, all your life. That is the only way out”. This spoke to what seemed a concern that oriented much of Zeb’s exegesis as it regarded technology, that humanity was drifting further and further away from the truth of the Almighty to its peril. Nye added in agreement. “Fadda is the only way, yu nuh?”, leading Zeb to respond again Biblically “yeah, righteousness exalt upon nations. Sin is a reproach” invoking Probers 13:34. Here again righteousness in adherence and devotion to the Lord is shown to exalt a people whilst the opposite condemns them to the “Doomsday” foretold above.

Ras Kwaku, like many others, grounded this sense of apocalypse and grave concern in the environmental. “I would like to refer to Revelations 17 I think where they talking about, ‘I see all the inhabitants of the world have been made drunk with the wine of fornication, all the leaders in bed with the whore [of Babylon]. So when I look at what is taking place on climate change and all the leaders of the world, they are one mindset. It’s a mindset against the Almighty yu nuh? It is a conspiracy yu nuh?”. Kwaku here spoke to a sense present amongst many across other issues of a global leadership elite engaged in behaviours and actions against a majority³²⁵. One which has been intoxicated by a malignant force and is thus unable to see how far it is falling from the path of righteousness.

Another Biblically grounded explanation was offered for the environmental crises emerging globally however by Radix. In this, he invoked Numbers and the example of Phineas. “World falling now as communities and tribes mixing”, he stated in reference to mixed-race relationships and the children it produces. This he described as a “grave sin”, which has caused the Almighty to react with fiery vengeance upon the earth manifesting as climate

³²⁵ See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah* for further exploration of resistance to ‘elites’.

change. “Phineas was right yu nuh”, he added in reference to the Israelite priest who set about killing a man from his own tribe and a Midianite woman to bring an end to a plague befalling the Israelites for similar such acts (Num 25:1-9). Radix’s descriptions were vivid and spoke to a tangible sense of fear and anger. He was however very much in a minority in espousing a view of such rigid racial separation and even further of its apparent eschatological effects³²⁶.

Biblical Criticism

Just as with those who cited the Bible there were also many who criticised the text, its place in Caribbean society and its place within the Rastafari movement. Empress Eve spoke about a hegemonic occupation of the means of interpretation for humanity presented by the Bible which has supplanted the place of relying on the knowledge and experiences of ancestors. “There’s no real information, there’s no real storage of information [because] I feel like the system has been in place for, about 2020 years to be exact”. Eve described the emergence of Christianity and the Bible texts in saying “there is a group of people coming with information that’s new, that’s different. That hasn’t been heard before, and you’re presenting in a way that’s, wow, its captivating. When you hear the story of Christianity, this guy died wow, it seems like the most noble story you could ever read. I mean who hasn’t been captivated by a good book?”. Ultimately however, it is just this. “It is just a group of people being captivated by a good book to the point where it became their knowing system, right? So it cause them to let go” of their own means of perception. Eve here seemingly describes a trade-off from humanity, substituting perception and the means of perception of the “real” world through past progenitors for one that is fabricated. Swapping a work of non-fiction for one of fiction, as it were. A familiar criticism of Christianity as inauthentic and misleading present amongst others in the movement.

For others, inherent contradictions demonstrated the Bible to be a source which should be viewed with suspicion. Ras Kamou saw this as apparent in the Biblical narrative where a herbivorous diet for humans in Genesis 1:29 (I have given you every plant yielding seed that

³²⁶ Indeed, Radix vision was directly countered by others both Biblically and non-Biblically. Towards the former, Shiloh cited Bible reference in advocating for a non-racialised approach to world politics. “Psalms [1:1] is telling you stand not in the way of sinners. Right? So right now we wanna be living a calm life, you cannot go and fight with the races. We still, even though them man a fight, we have to teach them tranquillity”.

is upon the face of all the earth) is later met in the New Testament by Peter's demonstration that the consumption of any animal is permissible via the "sheet" from the heavens (Acts 10). "So when they come and try and change it and say it like God gave people permission to eat certain meat and in that is just a whole contradiction [...] every animal love their lives so the pig or whatever the cow or whatever, you have to tie it up to kill it", a restraint indicative of their desire to remain in this world. This irreconcilable tension between an apparently loving God who instils a love for life in creation and then instructs humanity it is permissible to kill renders the Bible conflicted beyond utilisation. "I don't really like to put too much in the Bible cos it's a book of contradictions [...] I don really go too much into Bible talk".

Revelations

Instances of revelation also formed important aspects of spiritual grounding for many participants³²⁷. Bongo Vision described to me one such instance when he was travelling into the rainforests with some friends to harvest ganja which had previously been planted. Whilst Vision described others as having approached the mission with "bad energy" in their heart, he stated he did not and was subsequently saved as a result. "We pass man up in the hills [...] somebody pass and teef [steal] his weed so he trod the wood and get our plants, he destroyed the plants and he say it's we dat do dat. And we never do dat, never do dat". After subsequently ending up at the man's plantation the situation deteriorated and Vision was left looking for a way out. "Once I on that meditation and we just about to leave the bredrin plantation and just go down on the floor I see big hand, wide like a bread nut tree leaves³²⁸ [...] the same leaves, I see one big hand like that just push underneath me. Yu nuh? Then bam, to the river bank. Bam to the riverbank [...] when we reach at the riverbank we meet with them, the one they just reach the riverbank, they had so there I tell I-Sta [friend present] how we reach there? He telling me its walk, I tell him nah man I tell him of the vision of the hands of the Almighty". Through his positive energy Vision was literally swept up in the "hands of the Almighty" that took the form of the breadnut leaves and was taken to salvation, an experience of divine intervention with directly salvific results.

³²⁷ This mirrors previous fieldwork in which vivid descriptions of visions served as deeply instructive and deeply individualised sources of divine revelation. See Powell, *Ital Trod* 44-47

³²⁸ Also referred to as the breadfruit tree, its leaves resemble wide spread fingers not dissimilar to a fig tree.

Additionally, Empress Desma recounted to me a vision which resulted in a new avenue for her business. “A lot of the products have to do with my feelings and the spiritual connections, some of the times I remember laying down on my bed on Sunday I get my eyes, one of my eyes, had a deep feeling in my right eye but the left eye was just not being shut. It just kept on vibrating. It was just flapping open and closed and I was just getting like a vision through the left eye. I was getting a vision, I just had to look at what I’m seeing and I saw a particular cream being use to make out of cucumber and I’m like, I saw the exact measurement, everything for it, and then after the vision cut off, the voice said to me ‘write it down’ so I said I’m gunna write it down in a while and I just continue resting that afternoon. I never wrote it down but I still remember it. Yeah [...] It was divine inspiration!”. Here, Desma’s own physical sensations led to a moment of visionary revelation in a fully formulated recipe ready to use and to distribute which she describes has powerful healing effects for treating eye pain. Something handed down directly from the Almighty for the betterment of humanity which continues to be active to this day.

Faiye described a moment of seeking strength after he had been subject to a false incarceration. “While I was remanded in custody I got visions of being close to water, and I’m seeing crystal clear water and angels around the water and right now I’m in a house in the rainforest by the river and that’s where I started as a Rastaman”. In this moment of strife Faiye was demonstrated where it had all begun for him, and took great strength from it. “It give you strength to keep going, to get that strength and that inner strength and that self-confidence too. You have to be positive”. Faiye furthered that this was a form of divine truth that required development. “It’s there because you see there is this Bible story of Joseph the dreamer, you see you need to be very spiritual to be able to get visions and be able to document it in sleep and then put it on paper”. This he connected to a broader emancipatory struggle amongst Rastafari. “you have to be thinking right because you have to free yourself from mental slavery because anytime the shackles are in the mind you don’t think clear, people think for you”. Visions thus come to those who are mentally free and able to receive the revelation of the Almighty. “When you are Rastafari and you a Rastaman and you deal with nature especially you use the wind of wisdom”.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as the above demonstrates the spiritual inspiration that grounds Rastafari Ital Livity is, much like the philosophy itself, characteristically broad and holistic. Within this however common threads emerge. Nature serving as the foil from which divine wisdom is revealed. This divine wisdom subsequently educating those in its receipt how to interact with nature, and in this how to interact with the Almighty that suffuses it. It is this that demonstrates the distinctive and innovative means of exegetical engagement that is found in an Ital Hermeneutic, as the natural both operates as a lens with which to view spiritual sources and as an ultimate trajectory to seek lessons within. From this, innovative Biblical interpretations emerge which stand to offer new approaches, lessons and images to other groups who read and venerate the Bible. This is perhaps an interaction that has arguably never been more important than in an era when innovation and novel approaches towards the environmental challenges that face us are crucial.

In this, it is my hope that this chapter has offered more theological consideration to what is at present a limited canon of its consideration in academic form. The deeply rich, vivid and original interpretations that emerge from this rubric are of great value to the field of theology, and I would encourage other scholars to pour their energy into its exploration. Such an approach and establishment of conversations will also be seen the next chapter, as Rastafari Ital Livity is placed further in dialogue with contemporary ecological and ecotheological outlooks of the present.

In the next chapter, I will connect Rastafari Ital Livity as it has emerged here with contemporary discussions in ecotheology and ecological humanities scholarship, establishing it as both a lens and a partner in conversation for those engaged in the field.

Chapter Six: Ital Livivity in Dialogue with Contemporary Ecological and Ecotheological Discourse

In this final chapter, I will provide some reflection on my dissertation and the fieldwork that underpins it in placing Rastafari Ital Livivity as it is described here amongst participants to this study in dialogue within contemporary theoretical frameworks that surround ecological and ecotheological debates. In the introduction to this dissertation, I described a primary aim of this research as to establish Rastafari Ital Livivity as a voice within these mainstream discussions, whilst also engaging Ital Livivity with other philosophical and spiritual conceptualisations around environmental themes. Through this, Rastafari can offer points of resonance and of reflection, of comparison and critique. Having offered something towards an establishment of the development and composition of Rastafari Ital Livivity, an exercise again of much scholarly value in and of itself, this thesis now turns toward this latter aim. In this it is hoped Ital Livivity will appear to readers as an outlook which can engage with others and be engaged with by others, diversifying voices and narratives within an area of debate in which a plurality of perspectives is a patent necessity in informing decisions and actions that affect all of human and non-human kind. In doing so it is hoped that these reflections do not just speak to the authors which have been engaged with here, but also offer demonstration of Rastafari Ital Livivity as a vibrant interlocutor of value to ecological and ecotheological scholarship as a whole.

This is not an exercise in seeking out similarities or points in common per se however, an intention which can threaten to erase the uniqueness of Rastafari Ital philosophy and philosophy into larger, more generic categories. Instead, points of dialogue and reflection are identified, junctures at which conversations might take place between communities, scholars and authors, generating novel connections that may further shape ecological and ecotheological discourse. It is not intended necessarily that harmony and accord in viewpoint will result from these junctures, although this may well be the case at times. It is both of these outcomes and a spectrum between - fusion, fission and fissure - that will constitute this interaction and through them untried and untested thoughts and approaches might emerge. The results will bring much to a present discussion of never greater pertinence.

In this, I will first establish some important contemporary ecological and ecotheological themes and debates, exploring conceptualisations of an “Anthropocene” before examining eco-Marxist responses to environmental discourse, offering comment on opportunities for reflection with Rastafari Ital Livity. I will then turn to two expansions on an Anthropocene foundation both involving Donna Haraway, these being the “Plantationocene” and the “Chthuluscene”, again offering Rastafari Ital Livity as a partner for dialogue. Finally, I will turn perspectives towards the ecotheological by engaging with writings and formulations from Michael Northcott and Sallie McFague, concluding by offering some summary thoughts on the value of Rastafari engagement within these broader debates.

The choice to explore these concepts and these scholars is not incidental, although space constraints determined the volume of that which might be engaged with. Eco-Marxist theory continues in a rich vein of thought ubiquitous across scholarship. Haraway stands as a highly influential figure in contemporary ecological scholarship, and the two concepts offered here guide debate for many in the field today. Similarly, Northcott occupies the status of one of the most prominent figures in contemporary Christian ecotheological discussion in the UK, whilst McFague’s scholarship stands equally esteemed and offers some intriguing ‘jumping off points’ for discussion of the themes within this thesis. Both represent scholars making direct appeals to the Biblical themes relevant to many contributors to this study and a broader backdrop of Rastafari thought. In engaging with all of these, Ital Livity interacts with perspectives of currency and seeks to bring itself into the many discussions happening around these thinkers.

Ecological Challenges and Discourse in the Present

Before we begin to engage Rastafari Ital Livity with some contemporary ecological formulations, it is important to offer some further reflection on the current state of the environmental challenges facing us all and the discourse that subsequently emerges from it. As stated in the initial sections of this dissertation, the health of the earth is in great peril. Ceaseless extraction of materials and their consumption, alongside a plethora of other issues, have rendered an increasingly less hospitable planet. Activist groups, multi-lateral governmental organisations, insects, governments, religious movements, algae, non-governmental organisations, microbes, multi-national corporations, to name a limited few,

are variously engaged in the dichotomous enhancement and attempted reversal of this degradation to varying degrees. The relationships and tensions between this multitude of actors has done and will continue to define the journey of the earth and all of those on, within and around it for millennia to come.

As will hopefully be visible from the preceding pages, Rastafari groups are immensely connected to this journey on multiple levels. This has been the case since the group's inception, and ecological and environmental issues lay at the heart of the contemporary movement. This has however regrettably been heavily under-researched as has the movement itself. It is within this that this thesis attains a crucial strand of its purpose. The spiritual, philosophical and practical connections within Rastafari generate a formative contribution to their immediately local and national environments from which the community is able to speak to the contextual realities of all of those groups described above and all of those beside them. In this thesis, this conversation concerns itself primarily with the concepts and thinkers identified above, which may perhaps be considered examples, invitations, as well as discussions in and of themselves, for others both within the Rastafari community and without it to dialogue further. Indeed, many in the community would greatly welcome such a dialogue. Such engagements going forward present the opportunity for greater understanding as well as the generation of novel approaches, each of which offer this thesis, and this chapter specifically, significance. It is hoped that those in the Rastafari community and readers beyond them feel something towards this, at least.

With this in mind, it is important to establish some elements of contemporary discourse which will be integral in offering these 'examples'. Many scholars working in this area ground discussion in the parameter of the "Anthropocene", a present geological age delineated as one now significantly shaped and defined by human interaction with the earth. The term was popularised by Paul Crutzen, who linked its commencement to the invention of James Watt's steam engine and the subsequent scramble for fossil fuels that followed. This, Crutzen later argued, intensified after the 1950s as greater atmospheric carbon, methane and nuclear isotopes joined deforestation, overfishing and intensive agriculture to bring humanity to a point where it was no longer "merely influencing the global environment in *some ways*" but now instead "dominating it in *many ways*"³²⁹. The term has been and continues to be of

³²⁹ Crutzen & Steffan, *Editorial Comment* 253

huge influence across a range of disciplines, no less so theology where it now occupies the thoughts of many dealing with spirituality in the age of environmental challenge³³⁰.

Crutzen's foundational framing has since been critiqued and tweaked by countless scholars who have used these ideas as a framework to articulate what they consider to be central to ecological debates in the present³³¹. One such critique comes from Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, who in contrast, offer 1610 as a starting point for an age of concerted human environmental shaping. The two provide this date as one which attempts to establish a tie to European colonial conquests which resulted in the death of millions of African and Native American farmers and hunters alongside the occupation of their lands and the profound environmental impact contained within it³³². Whilst the stratigraphic evidence for this comes from the intermixing of new plant and animal species, this is also a marker which attests to the sudden and almost complete removal of environmental agency for those who would find themselves under the yoke of imperialism. A 'before' in which these people contributed to the condition and well-being of the earth through and for themselves and an 'after' wholly defined and determined by interaction with it for others.

Eco-Marxist Critique and Rastafari

Such a view mirrors some of the considerations present in an eco-Marxist perspective, also referred to in portmanteau fashion as the "Capitalocene". Christophe Bonneuil elucidates eco-Marxism as a response in which the Anthropocene is interpreted as the "second contradiction of capitalism, its inability to maintain nature", a continuation of Marx' first contradiction of an "inability to reproduce the labour force". An economic system, then, that inherently separates and stratifies humanity and nature as it did the proletariat and the bourgeois. Contrary to a more benign and inadvertent narrative represented in what he terms a "Naturalist Anthropocene" oriented around "undifferentiated population and economic growth", it instead represents "processes of dispossession and commodification associated

³³⁰ Bergmann amongst others points to "intensified discourse about the Anthropocene" in theological scholarship in her description of influence of a Trinitarian cosmology in its shaping. See Bergmann, *Trinitarian cosmology* 33

³³¹ Christophe Bonneuil describes four pervasive "grand" Anthropocene narratives present within the canon. He details these as a "good" eco-modernist perspective, a "post nature" view that further emphasises human technological intervention without a need for the natural world in its current form, a "naturalist" outlook which sees the Anthropocene as a temporary blip resolvable through scientific endeavour and an "eco-Marxist" outlook. See Bonneuil *Ecological Turn* 27-28

³³² See Lewis & Maslin, *Defining the Anthropocene*

with the logic of capitalist expansion, along with the mechanisms of imperial domination” that are the “essential causal forces of the geological turn”³³³.

In its strident colonial and anti-global capital critique, an “eco-Marxist” narrative seemingly offers resonance with a Rastafari Ital Livivity which sees an inseparable alignment between the cosmological force of Babylon and the colonising powers of this earth. One in which the powers of imperialism enacted a “technical, economic and social trajector[y]” for dominant colonial powers that “could not have occurred had they not benefitted from unequal exchange with the dominated regions”³³⁴. Central here in a Rastafari context is the scholarship of Guyanese historian and political activist Walter Rodney. Rodney is widely recognised within the movement both for his towering academic work and as a symbol of resistance to Babylonian attempts to crush the free and independent spirit of anti-colonial campaigns and its activists, resistance which would ultimately lead to his assassination by Guyanese authorities in 1980. Rodney writes of imperialism and the enlargement of Western economies, “development and underdevelopment are not only comparative terms, [...] they also have a dialectical relationship one to the other: that is to say, the two help each other by interaction”. As such, he contests that from the 15th century onwards “Africa helped to develop Western Europe in the same proportion Western Europe helped to underdevelop [sic] Africa”³³⁵. Eco-Marxist narratives and Rodney’s work both attest to the inextricably colonial nature of West-led global capitalism across the world, one which bears all the same hallmarks of inequality inherent within imperialism. The African continent is underdeveloped and polluting far less but vastly more vulnerable to environmental change than Europe³³⁶.

Of significant variation however, Ital Livivity looks up as well as down in implicating this wicked force. As the testimony of those in the dissertation attests, on a broader ‘vibrational’ level Babylonian imperialism served to spiritually and physically poison human and non-human environments, pollute the pervasive energy which forms this Iration, separate communities from the Almighty and sever cultural roots. All of these compound

³³³ Bonneuil, *Ecological Turn* 27-28

³³⁴ Bonneuil, *Ecological Turn* 29

³³⁵ Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* 86

³³⁶ Yusoff rightly notes the importance of emphasising this link in combating an “erasure” of “climate racism, social injustice in fossil fuels, and differentiated histories of responsibilities through homogenization in a ‘we’ of the Anthropocene” that offers a horizontalized notion of culpability in the emergence of the Anthropocene. Yusoff, *Anthropogenesis* 6-7

environmental crises which are located at the micro level of an individual's interactions with the earth and the soil as well as its upper ends in the form of an exploitative global financial system geared towards neo-colonial control. Interactions conducted still today in the absence of an intimate relationship with the environment engendered over generations of forebears. It is perhaps this that informs the suspicions of interviewees who look warily at attempts to further entrench the technologies, systems and power structures that have brought humanity to where it is today. A today grounded wholly in the "unequal exchange" and degradation Rodney describes.

Here, the opportunity for constructive dialogue emerges. Whilst eco-Marxism and Rastafari Ital Livity evidently share ideological similarities, Ital Livity offers an intimate praxis which appears to present a point of differentiation. Eco-Marxist scholars such as Guha and Martinez-Alier put forward the case for the end of private property and the restoration of commons land to decentralise and improve land management³³⁷. Kovel suggests a restructuring of the monetary system to diminish the role of currency as a commodity in and of itself³³⁸. Both of these relate to desires I heard repeatedly from contributors to this research, that Rastafari communities should occupy commons land and limit interaction with money in favour of a bartering system³³⁹.

It is however perhaps this that also separates an Ital Livity from broader eco-Marxist theory, a focus on smaller human groups and largely on the Rastafari community itself. Persecuted and scarred, in some cases literally, by political and economic systems, I did not encounter many at all who made a case for political overhaul or revolution. Instead, most anticipated this would come only from Haile Selassie himself upon taking the throne as "earth's rightful ruler". Whilst Kovel, Guha and Martinez-Alier's suggestions above have long historical roots in a movement where individuals have prided themselves on avoiding "Babylon's money" or even "Babylon's tarmac"³⁴⁰, this was more often described to me as another means of spiritual insulation rather than some form of divestment. Whilst a desire for separation has perhaps softened for some, evidenced in part by a shift in attitudes towards involvement in

³³⁷ Guha & Martinez, *Environmentalism* 60

³³⁸ Kovel, *Enemy of Nature* 22

³³⁹ I explore both of these often central pillars to Rastafari visions of community elsewhere. See Powell, *Ten Miles Away*

³⁴⁰ Powell, *Ital Trod* 31

“polytricks³⁴¹” that ranged now from community members voting to even standing for parliament, this primary desire for insulation of the community away from the pollution and corruption of Babylon was an ever-present feature of the visions amongst those I spoke with³⁴².

As shall be seen below in discussion of some of Michael Northcott’s contributions, perhaps it is at this juncture we see a critique of eco-Marxism emerge from Ital Livity which looks to influence “grand narratives” such as these to consider, or at least not lose sight of, the crucial, intimate interactions that happen at the literal ground level of human interactions with that around us. Interactions that serve to foster harmony and a positive ‘vibrationality’ which not only engender care for all manner of conversation partners but also grow a deep-rooted care for the broader eco-systems in which they feature. Equally, there are doubtless those within the Rastafari movement in Iyanola and globally, some of the aforementioned engaged in political systems possibly, who would see vision and merit in the suggestions of Kovel, Guha and Martinez-Alier as attainable means for change. An encouragement through this dialogue perhaps to soften some of its political scepticism, with the example of Marcus Garvey offering inspiration, and engage with like-minded thinkers and movements. Whilst Marxist narratives have historically offered an outlook innately dubious of religion and divinity and Rastafari of secular politics, further thought and conversation may well be generated from interaction between the two.

The “Plantationocene” And Historic Roots

The “Plantationocene” offers another opportunity for Rastafari critical engagement with eco-discourse. First conceptualised by Haraway alongside anthropologists Noboru Ishikawa, Scott Gilbert, Kenneth Olwig, Anna Tsing and Nils Bubandt, the terms seeks to foreground the plantation as both a site of, and a totem for, human and non-human ecological degradation in its uniquely and seminally destructive manifestations on earth. What Haraway would surmise as denoting a “devastating transformation of diverse kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forest into extractive and enclosed plantations, relying on slave labor

³⁴¹ Politics

³⁴² This desire to insulate was for many heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic. See Powell, *Plandemic Iwah*. Niaah also references the School of Vision, those of a more millennialist bend “bunkered” into the Blue Mountains of Kingston and preparing to make “a way for the arrival of Haile Selassie I and his righteous government”. Niaah, *End of Afro-pessimism* 589

[sic] and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor”³⁴³. This homogenisation and economically driven brutalisation of human and non-human, she states, served as a watershed in environmental degradation and ushered in a new epoch with it.

This descriptor foregrounds exploitation in its engagement with notions of an Anthropocene, in doing so representing a form Murphy and Shroering describe as “implicating raciality, coloniality, and capitalism in the past, present and future sociological changes on planet earth”³⁴⁴. An encircling of humans, non-human animals and plants into agricultural units that degrade all on every levels. Wolford further reflects that the Plantationocene emerges as a valuable descriptor “precisely in the failures of both the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene” in foregrounding plantations as inherently power-laden social structures found in every modern economic system. “They embody both racial violence and resistance, straddling or bridging the divide between rural and urban, agriculture and industry, town and country, and local and global”³⁴⁵. A universal form at the heart of degradation the world over.

This description does not seek to speak in purely historical terms however. “The Plantationocene continues with ever-greater ferocity in globalized factory meat production, monocrop agribusiness, and immense substitutions of crops like oil palm for multispecies forests and their products that sustain human and nonhuman critters alike³⁴⁶”. Carney argues that within the designation a “reliance on enslaved labour” is coupled with “large-scale cultivation of a single exotic crop” to a render a destructive uniformity of biospace. This serves as a “founding model” for “carbon-consuming and carbon-committing industrial food production systems” whilst anticipating “agribusiness monocultures, factory meat production and simplified ecologies implicated in biodiversity loss and species extinctions”³⁴⁷.

The Plantationocene, then, seeks to foreground the immediate experiences of the human and non-human on the plantation alongside the macroeconomic systems they underpin. A very real and proximate suffering and displacement that lays at the root of a reckless disregard which defines degradation in the present. Foregrounding this experience of the non-human,

³⁴³ Haraway, *Anthropocene* 162

³⁴⁴ Murphy & Schroering, *Plantationocene* 402

³⁴⁵ Wolford, *Plantationocene* 1624

³⁴⁶ Haraway, *Anthropocene* 162

³⁴⁷ Carney, *Subsistence* 1076

Noburu reflects his view that “plantations are just the slavery of plants³⁴⁸”, with Haraway drawing this down even further in adding “microbes” to this description. These spaces are not purely places of human suffering as they have perhaps been depicted historically, or indeed mere cogs in a broader economic system as an eco-Marxist framing might contend, but the very root of human destruction of the planet in themselves.

Whilst impactful, further refinement is however required within the first broad brush strokes Haraway and her colleagues provide. Murphy and Schroering offer a critique of what they describe as “early” conceptualisations of the Plantationocene as lacking “adequate attention to the racial dynamics that attend colonial displacements and dispossessions”, specifically an absence of “critical attention” towards “whiteness” and the “fulfilment of European/white needs” which fuelled colonialism and accordingly the plantation³⁴⁹. It is undoubtedly the case that racialisation and racism, both the elevation of white and the subordination of non-white, stands at the core of colonialism and the capitalist world system it serves to this day, something equally at the heart of Rastafari conceptualisations. Murphy and Schroering are right to highlight both this and the seminal contributions of Walter Rodney amongst others in offering analysis which foregrounds this connection.

Another point of refinement comes from Carney who writes appropriately of the presence of “an alternative food system” within plantation landscapes emerging from the “small plots the enslaved planted for their daily sustenance”. Just as with engagement with plant life and apothecary noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, the “plantation agricultural system was not totalizing”. Plantation owners “could not always apportion all the acreage under their commodity production”³⁵⁰, either consciously through the unsuitability of land or unconsciously through clandestine engagement with land and plants from those under their apparent control³⁵¹. As such, the agency and assertive resistance within these spaces must also be attested to within what otherwise might threaten to manifest as a disempowering narrative.

³⁴⁸ Haraway et al, *Anthropologists* 556

³⁴⁹ Murphy & Schroering, *Plantationocene* 404

³⁵⁰ Carney, *Subsistence* 1076

³⁵¹ Carney describes these efforts as a ‘subaltern history to narratives of agricultural production in the Plantationocene’ which have been ‘inherit[ed] by the ‘smallholder farms’ of the present day ‘New World tropics’, farms which make up much of the research within this research.

Haraway's framing of the Plantationocene represents some familiarities within Rastafari perspectives. The starting point proposed by her and others for this era foregrounds the rise of plantations which served to facilitate and then epitomise the savagery and brutality of a slave trade which tore ancestors from Indigenous homelands and left the displaced community in a strange land, itself ravaged by colonialism. For many Rastafari, this is a plantation which still today manifests in inequality, suffering, racial, cultural and spiritual hegemony, a corrupted landscape and a corrupted Iration. A point of rupture that represented a watershed moment in humanity's time on this earth as a period which represented a time of almost unchallenged dominance for the wicked forces of Babylon. Human relationships with non-human and with the Almighty were poisoned to their very core, a rupturing again still visible in the present which the righteous must contend with and fight against today.

Beyond this, as has been noted throughout this research, engagement with agriculture has been foremost amongst the ethnographic data gathered both in interview and participant observation. The efforts of a Plantationocene narrative in foregrounding the agricultural represents a similar locus, with both expanding from this out toward a broader critique of global power structures that seek further fiscal profit and further environmental loss. Criticism of industrialised farming, particularly the meat industry, as well as industrialised means of production, fertilisation and harvesting of course represent further resonances, as well as discussions of "plant slavery", and attempts to foreground the experiences of and protection for microbes and the very smallest in/on/around the earth.

There exists here also progressive discussion to be gained from critical engagement between the two. Haraway's framing seemingly almost identifies exactly with a Rastafari diagnosis of the problems facing humanity, both contemporary and historic. The formulations put forward by Haraway and her colleagues however seem to lack a praxis that might empower readers to counter this dangerous epoch. This stands in contrast to a Rastafari movement in which practical engagement is inseparable from, and symbiotic with, the philosophical. Where the ideas which converge with the Plantationocene discourse are rooted in inter-generational oral transmission, tradition and culture. This has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, as practical action serves as a manifestation for the spiritual and the intellectual which underpins it, imbuing it with a tangible power.

Further, the linguistic framing of Haraway's outlook is immediately reminiscent of plantocracy. Referenced by many contributors to this study and in prior fieldwork, the era of plantocracy refers to a time of de facto rule by the dominant planter class in the late 16th and 17th century. A time which stands amongst the most violent forms of rule that would brutalise and commodify Black communities in the Caribbean, the Americas and those on the African continent³⁵². Haraway, however, does not appear to engage with this term at all, one which not only attests to both the human and non-human cruelty she describes, but one that also predates the Plantationocene and thus may offer critical means of engaging with it. Indeed, plantocracy serves as an integral element of the global economic systems she offers criticism towards. This is an unfortunate oversight, and given the depth of such engagement by the Rastafari community with this notion through a similarly, characteristically, ecological lens, Haraway's formulation would doubtless profit from interaction with a discourse which has engaged philosophically with the plantation and the plantocracy for almost a century³⁵³.

Such an interaction might offer Haraway's formulation a depth of emotion and human experience that shows the ills of the Plantationocene for what it is. That is, not an abstract concept which speaks to the evils of modern agriculture and a need for humanity to be more conscious of it, but one which indelibly shaped the lives, and deaths, of millions of humans and non-humans in the era of an imperialism which it still defines. One challenged by the Rastafari community intellectually and practically. From daily engagement and bolstering of the soil and the vibrations within it, to criticism of mass industrialised farming and its destructive footprint. Resistance which ranges from attempts to foreground the rights and protections of plants, to yearnings towards food sovereignty which removes power from those engendering these systems. Rastafari Ital Livity offers a vibrant means of spiritual and philosophical engagement with notions such as Haraway's, crucially underpinned by a praxis which sees these harms and the power structures above them challenged out in the soil.

The “Chthulucene” and Irational Connection

³⁵² See Burnard & Garrigus, *Plantation Machine* for further exploration of this and what they term “the golden age of the plantocracy”

³⁵³ Indeed, Jegathesan notes similar opportunities for engagement and rightly emphasises the “foundational Black feminist scholarship on plantations that came before the Plantationocene”, an absence of which threatens to “obscure and era Black feminists” scholarly contributions. See Jegathesan, *Before the Plantationocene*

The “Chtulucene³⁵⁴” descriptor is similarly articulated here by Haraway, a term she describes as one which attempts to respond to an earth which is “full of refugees, human and not, without refuge”. One which “entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages”, a concept which constitutes a web of “speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fiction, and scientific fact”. Within this web she suggests “one way to live and die well as moral critters” is to “join forces to reconstitute refuges, to make possible partial and robust biological-cultural-political-technological recuperation and recomposition, which must include mourning irreversible losses”³⁵⁵. Haraway notes that in these deeply stark times “a big new name” and with it a big new idea “is warranted”. In fact “more than one name”, hence “Anthropocene, Plantationocene, and Capitalocene”. Each one with their strands and their own evocations which can engender understanding and action in different people in different ways, she states³⁵⁶.

The Chtulucene is however framed quite differently to the iterations noted above. It is one which “entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages-including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus”³⁵⁷. We are all but “String Figures (SF)”³⁵⁸, all intimately connected in one way or another in a frame that is constantly in flux. An all-consuming entanglement between everything, and one which requires celebration and necessitates a holistic care for all. Haraway articulates this “entanglement” through “tentacular” connections embodied through the innumerable webs that permeate this life, from spiders, jellyfish and “fingery beings like humans and racoons”, to “IT critters in and out of clouds”. It is this, she states, that indicates “myriad tentacles will be needed to tell the story of the Chtulucene”³⁵⁹

Perhaps in most notable contrast to other formulations of a geological epoch in the age of anthropogenic climate change acceleration, Haraway’s here is timeless. An epoch with no

³⁵⁴ Haraway notes that this name does not emerge from “H. P. Lovecraft’s misogynist racial-nightmare monster Cthulu (note spelling difference), but rather after the diverse earth-wide tentacular powers and forces and collected things with names like Naga, Gaia, Tangoro [...]”. Haraway, *Anthropocene* 160

³⁵⁵ Haraway, *Anthropocene* 160

³⁵⁶ Haraway, *Staying* 47. Christophe Bonneuil also shares this need for multiple frameworks in arguing that it is not constructive to “choose the single best grand narrative for our geohistorical shift” of the Anthropocene. Instead, forward progress requires a “plurality of narratives from many voices and many places, rather than a single grand narrative from nowhere”. Bonneuil, *Geological Turn* 29

³⁵⁷ Haraway *Anthropocene* 160

³⁵⁸ Haraway’s descriptor refers to artistic string figures most notable of which is perhaps the ‘cats cradle’

³⁵⁹ Haraway, *Staying* 31-2

temporal measure which represents an era we are simultaneously in and travelling towards. One in which humanity is finally able to cast off the shackles of “masculinist universals” and anthropocentrism and begin to make “kin” with all of that around it. This is essential, she writes, in our “chthonic”, or earth-based lives, upon what she terms the “Terrapolis”, a “chimera of materials, languages, histories” as well as being a space for “unexpected companions”, amongst many other things³⁶⁰. The Terrapolis similarly strives for a flattening out of intra and inter-human relationships towards one which is equal and familial; one that will cast off previous inequities and brutalities and move towards a world in which all can prosper through “kinship”³⁶¹. In this, “we are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, and sometimes joyful histories too”. Importantly however, she notes “we are not all response-able in the same ways. The differences matter – in ecologies, economies, species, lives”³⁶². Haraway’s distinctive framing of this “response-ability” forms a similarly central pillar for her outlook, one which foregrounds individual practical means to respond to that which we are liable for.

Haraway’s outlook is radical in its approach to environmental responsibility. She draws environmental negligence and apathy alongside Hannah Arendt’s infamous descriptions of Adolf Eichmann’s war crimes as grounded in the “banality of evil”, the “particular sort that could make the disaster of the Anthropocene, with its ramped up genocides and speciecides, come true”. A tragically mundane “thoughtlessness” which speaks not to the manifestation of an “incomprehensible monster” but to “something much more terrifying” which strives for “business as usual no matter what”. Such an outlook is dangerously pervasive in the present, she states. Those complicit in a current age of death and destruction, much like Eichmann, are those “who could not be a wayfarer, could not entangle [...] could not cultivate response-ability”³⁶³. Haraway fears, as Arendt did, that this apparently innately unthinkable mental state is one that can befall all of us without active care and being “present” in the now, with similar tragically brutal consequences if this isn’t avoided.

³⁶⁰ Haraway, *Staying* 11

³⁶¹ Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Materiality* similarly emphasises “receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us” through “a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections bodies”. She again similarly hopes that this will “enable wiser interventions into ecology”. See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*

³⁶² Haraway, *Staying* 29

³⁶³ Haraway, *Staying* 36

Haraway puts it that this sense of kinship is not only important in recognising the connections that already exist between human and non-human, but is also essential in challenging traditional human notions of family which represent an existential threat for the planet. Haraway baulks at populations projections of 11 billion on earth by the end of the 21st century, an estimation she considers a fairly conservative estimate, and in response states that “it is high time feminists exercise leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species”. Her contribution to this is a “slogan”, of which the Chtulucene “needs at least one”, she says, which implores readers to “Make Kin Not Babies!”. Such an approach seeks to reformulate kin as “something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy”, a “gently defamiliarizing move” which serves as an “assembling” phrase pushing all “critters” which “share a common ‘flesh’ together”. Such a formulation and adherence to the “slogan” behind it, Haraway hopes, might, “over a couple hundred years”, bring “the human people of this planet” to be “numbered 2 or 3 billion or so” whilst simultaneously “increasing well-being for diverse human beings and other critters as means and not just ends³⁶⁴”. A conscious but organic depopulation of the earth then, as humanity seeks its familial connection from that around it rather than that which springs directly forth from it.

This framing of the “Chtulucene” represents much opportunity for dialogue with Rastafari Ital Livivity worldviews. Here, the articulation of a deep and personal connection, one as close as “kin”, between human and all else human and non-human is evocative and deeply personal, much like Rastafari articulations framed around emotive interactions with that around us³⁶⁵. A suggestion towards identification as kin mirrored in Rastafari yearnings for all to become “members of a new race”. Contrasted against the anthropocentric, hegemonic power structures the movement challenges, Rastafari, as indelibly influenced by its Jamaican folk peasant roots, endeavours to emphasise a similar sense of holism through relationships *with* that around humanity rather than a distant observation *of* it. Haraway’s efforts to foreground this, particularly with a view towards grounding ecological awareness and care, are political and intellectual battle lines witnessable throughout this dissertation.

³⁶⁴ Haraway, *Staying* 101-103

³⁶⁵ Hall also points to a “recognition of the kinship between human beings and the natural world, a kinship that is [...] based upon shared heritage and substance” as a common feature of Indigenous cultures of Australia, North America and Aotearoa/New Zealand. See Hall, *Plants as Persons* 100

The framing of Haraway's discourse also offers some interesting points for reflection. Centred so much as it is around "refugee's" and an absence of "refuges", Haraway's framework operates as one shaped so much by forced dislocation and a lack of sanctuary in a strange, inhospitable land. A community seeking safe haven in a space which it spiritually inhabits. The intellectual roots of this within Rastafari are central, and the two share a sense of displacement which serves to ground an emphasis of the importance of connections beyond anthropocentric and ultimately superficial categories of separation.

In this, Haraway's explicitly feminist outlook also offers consideration amongst Rastafari communities. One still largely constituted by men and historically criticised as patriarchal in its manifestation³⁶⁶. These descriptions and criticisms of early and indeed contemporary Rastafari groups occur on top of a Jamaican folk peasant foundation in which the spiritual power of women and the roles they occupied served as a regular element of spiritual observation. Indeed, a Rastafari movement featuring a mansion named in honour of the female warrior queen Niyabinghi, a figure whose militant anti-imperialism sprung forth from her feminine energy. Whilst anecdotally I have both observed and been informed of women taking greater prominence within the movement, there exists great potential for novel thought in conversations between Rastafari ecological frameworks and feminist articulations and critiques. Conversations within the community that may perhaps utilise this dissertation in some form.

Equally, it is the case that Rastafari Ital Livivity can offer Haraway's outlook some points for reflection. Whilst Haraway describes a connection which she interprets as personal, this connection seems to ultimately be one taking place wholly in the physical. Physical "webs" which bring all of those in the Terrapolis together in similar fashion to the string figures she describes. This is a relationship one has to come to an understanding of rather than something innate which can be felt. It is seemingly causal, "tentacular", through a shared space in a shared time. An understanding that is cognitive perhaps rather than one which is sensory.

Within this, the author offers a framework which might perhaps be viewed as incidental; one in which all are connected and worthy of care as a result but without speaking to the 'why' of

³⁶⁶ Most notably Christensen and Julien offer hugely pertinent contributions to the exploration and challenge of such histories and manifestations. See Christensen, *RastaWoman* and Julien, *Warrior Queens*

such a question. The ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of this connection are answered within Rastafari Ital Livity in the same panentheistic breath of the Almighty. A why and a how which offers an innate sense of the importance of such a connection, and a natural mode of careful relationality that springs from it. With Haraway’s aim of offering a formulation which presents itself as live and one in which humanity can and must interact in the now, further engaging with the why of such a connection may generate further dialogue and thought.

Perhaps the issue of greatest fissure however comes in Haraway’s suggestion that humanity needs to reformulate family structures, a vision epitomised in her aforementioned “slogan”. As I have noted elsewhere, suggestions around attempts to limit the population or “strength” of the “nation” of Rastafari or of Black communities more broadly were invariably met with deep suspicion during this fieldwork³⁶⁷. In research exploring attitudes towards Covid-19 and its management strategies, participants spoke with a deep distrust of the motivations of Bill Gates’ vaccination campaigns in African continent, perceived to be an exercise in sterilisation. These suspicions arise from a deep-seated resistance to the commodification of Black bodies, the use of Black bodies in chattel slavery and in the brutality of medical interventions such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. Within this research, suggestions of actions I put to interviewees that resembled aspects of Haraway’s slogan such as eco-reproductive childlessness³⁶⁸ were viewed conversely not as hopeful but as enslaving, and derided as efforts to constrict and confine the power, strength and size of Rastafari and Black communities.

Here, dialogue between Rastafari Ital Livity and Haraway’s Chthuluscene identifies something of a cultural insensitivity in her formulation. Haraway’s desire here is to reformulate social perspectives away from the hegemonic, androcentric, and indeed colonial, attitudes which pervade this status quo. In this suggestion however she risks engaging in the opposite in advocating the self-limiting of fertility toward communities in which the control and limitation of fertility bring with them immense colonial baggage. In this way, Haraway’s argument mirrors a colonial power dynamic which not only prevented Black and Indigenous communities from making their own reproductive choices, but made reproductive choices for them expressly without consideration for their own benefit.

³⁶⁷ Powell, *Plandemic Iwah* 6-8

³⁶⁸ See Schneider-Mayerson & Ling, *Eco-reproductive*

Haraway's formulation could perhaps offer more sensitivity if it is to represent one with broad appeal. Whilst her consideration of "response-ability" is important in contextualising this, for the human population to reduce down to "2-3 billion" communities the world over would be required to heed Haraway's slogan, not merely those in nations far more "response-able" for imperialism and climate change. Engagement and dialogue with Rastafari Ital Livity and the Rastafari community more broadly can thus serve here to drive further consideration, and novel connections with it, which are further inclusive and more applicable.

Ecotheological Engagements

As the title of this dissertation suggests and has been previously noted, it is also an aim of this research to place Rastafari Ital Livity within the somewhat nebulous cannon of ecotheology. Ecotheology stands as a form of inquiry with its roots in the contemporary, in the heightened environmental consciousness of the 1950s and 60s. The seminal contributions of American Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler³⁶⁹ alongside the religiously contextualised contributions of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Lyn White Jr offer a foundation from which a great number of texts, treatise and related fields have emerged. The varied thoughts within them are imbued with an immense relevance in these current times of crisis and into which Rastafari Ital Livity can offer much.

It is this breadth however as well as the constraints of this dissertation that render it neither practicable nor desirable to engage in something towards an overview of the field. Instead, of pertinence to this study, I am interested in thinking with recent and contemporary theologians making direct appeals to Biblical themes and religious narrative structures of relevance to Rastafari outlooks. The broad composition of attitudes and perspectives towards the Bible, both of those in the Rastafari community who did not engage with it and those who cited it, offers a critical lens toward the field which I contend can offer significant points of reflection. In doing so it is hoped that these reflections do not just speak to the authors which have been engaged with, but also offer demonstration of Rastafari Ital Livity as a vibrant

³⁶⁹ See Pihkala's excellent *Early Ecotheology* for comprehensive treatment of the early development of the field and of the work of Sittler more specifically.

interlocutor of value to the broader field as a whole. In this, I shall engage with the writings of Michael Northcott and Sallie McFague.

Northcott and Political Theology

I will commence this section by offering some engagement with British theologian Michael Northcott's ecotheological writings. Northcott, Professor Emeritus of Ethics at the University of Edinburgh, stands as a highly influential figure in the field of ecotheology, both bolstering the canon and broadening awareness of it through books and articles across decades.

Contributing texts from the late 1980s onwards, Northcott's writings stretch between eras of varying environmental consciousness. Indeed, writing his preface to 'The Environment and Christian Ethics' in 1995 he remarks that "the idea that Western civilization faces an environmental crisis is much less in public view" than during the formulation of the book in 1992³⁷⁰. In more recent contributions this perspective has of course been replaced by a pervasive sense of immanent degradation, crisis and direct call for action.

In his 2013 'A Political Theology of Climate Change', Northcott writes in intimately theistic terms in imploring the world's leaders and policymakers to move away from a hedonistic and backward "cult of carbon". One in which carbon emission trading, or carbon bond trading, represents a market of "carbon indulgences" which "acquire an independent, idolatrous existence from what they signify"³⁷¹. Instead, Northcott suggests governments and individuals adopt greater sensitivity and consideration towards the dual prongs of science and scripture, a combination which can serve to reconnect humanity to the world around it in a sensitive and informed way. Efforts to press on exclusively with the former in place of the latter are undesirable and short-sighted. After all, "there is still a great deal that science does not know about the earth's climate because it is not made by human beings; it is more complex than science can yet, or may ever, know"³⁷².

In language very familiar to this study, he lambasts global capitalism as representing "Babylonian Captivity" and castigates "the Babylon of fossil fuelled economic growth and

³⁷⁰ Instead, he writes, in thinly veiled reference to the Major government of the time, that people are more concerned with a crisis in "human moral ecology". A present edition might reflect on the good fortune to be living in a present era afflicted by both. Northcott, *Christian Ethics* xiii

³⁷¹ Northcott, *Political Theology* 134

³⁷² Northcott, *Political Theology* 114

heedless consumerism”. Instead, humanity must yearn towards “a new covenantal community between creatures, humans and the heavenly realms”³⁷³. As is evident, Northcott’s vivid Biblical language and calls for action offer much resonance with a Rastafari Ital Livity determined to shake the foundations of the oppressive, industrialised hegemon in place of harmonious interaction and cooperation. Inspiration for this new formulation he writes should come from a Hebrew covenant which stood as a “cosmic covenant between God and human beings in which the land and its nonhuman inhabitants were included as moral subjects, and fidelity to the covenant involved their respectful use³⁷⁴”.

It is clear that, for Northcott, not only does scripture challenge human hubris and belief in a totality of the knowable, it also offers blueprints and emulatable narratives which humanity can take into the present and use to inspire a new, and yet old, connection with that around it. As previous sections have demonstrated, whilst attitudes towards the Bible itself were mixed, both of these strands are important elements within Rastafari Ital Livity. A horizontal sense of humanity’s place in Iration and a deference to the Almighty that surrounds it as well as a form of praxis inspired and mirrored in the quests of the prophets, tribes and those closer to the “first” more generally. Northcott is right to note the potency of these and their potentiality for a broader influence, something deeply familiar to a Rastafari movement which has seen its Biblically inspired imagery and its language take on a cultural force beyond its direct control.

Jesus as an Inspiration to Action

Northcott here offers two means of influence to be drawn from Christianity in regards to human interaction with the world around, a “self-sacrificial model” inspired by Jesus’ example and one of “revolutionary messianism” as seen in the writings of Paul. Towards the former, Northcott writes against hubristic efforts and attitudes towards climate change which would continue to foreground the ability of humanity to unilaterally “fix” the environment. The author takes issue with writers such as Andrew Revkin³⁷⁵ Elena Bennett³⁷⁶ and Erle

³⁷³ Northcott, *Political Theology* 267

³⁷⁴ Northcott, *Political Theology* 286

³⁷⁵ Revkin, *Building a Good Anthropocene*

³⁷⁶ Seeds of Good Anthropocenes, *Home*

Ellis³⁷⁷, as well as those involved in the drafting of the “Ecomodernist Manifesto³⁷⁸”, who would advocate for a position observing a “good Anthropocene”. Although defined variously, this view at its core describes that the climatic changes presented by an Anthropocene facilitates previously unheralded opportunities for human innovation and development.

Northcott offers recognition of the terms of the debate at least in describing awareness of the Anthropocene as the “second Copernican revolution”. One in which an understanding now pervades that humanity influences the state of the world so deeply the world revolves around humanity’s actions. He writes that “earlier agricultural peoples had a sense that in their relations with gods, species, and skies they had a role in shaping climates that gave either good harvests or famines, and they sacrificed to the gods to give them favourable weather. But the account of the Anthropocene as a second Copernican Revolution suggests that human beings are now as gods – they not only desire favourable weather, but they have the technical means to bring it about”. In contrast to Revkin and others however, Northcott sees such hubristic attitudes as the cause, rather than the solution, to the climate challenges of this era. The “overreach” of such attitudes indicates a “foolishness” in believing “climate scientists could reliably know in advance the outcomes of large-scale interventions”³⁷⁹.

Northcott furthers in offering an alternative framework with its “source” as the “Jewish and Christian imagery of the nation-state as a terrestrially bound minister or servant of the intergenerational welfare of the peoples and species living within its delimited territory³⁸⁰”. Familiarly, the author describes the severance between humanity and the broader natural world through the emergence and prevalence of technology as the root of environmental alienation, apathy and ultimately abasement. Northcott offers as a solution to this - the re-emergence of “politico-theological” communities which can challenge the “anomic borderlessness” engendered by the “corporate and imperial agencies of industrial capitalism”³⁸¹. Within these forms, a sense of the aforementioned covenantal can drive humanity toward sustainable sourcing of resources and gentle engagement with that around. Decrying contrasting eco-modernist perspectives as “promethean”, Northcott counters with

³⁷⁷ Ellis, *Planet of No Return*

³⁷⁸ Ecomodernist Manifesto, *Manifesto*

³⁷⁹ Northcott, *Political Theology* 270

³⁸⁰ Northcott, *Going Gently* 33. The author speaks elsewhere with particular reverence about the covenantal community of Abraham in this.

³⁸¹ Northcott, *Political Theology* 304-5

Clive Hamilton's loan from classical Greek in encouraging humanity instead to act more in alignment with Soteira, the deity of safety and salvation³⁸².

He ultimately concludes however that there exists a better, more "powerful" figure prepared to serve as the inspirational figurehead of a new kind of human interaction with the earth enacted through the "politico-theological communities" of nation-states. One imbued with "more cultural power" than allusions to figures from Greek spirituality which also serves to foreground a model of "self-sacrificial service" that must be "modelled" if humans are "not to commit the planet to mid-term irrevocable warming events that will render much of the earth's surface uninhabitable"³⁸³. Northcott here offers Jesus, quoting Mark 10:45 as one who lived "not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (NRSVA). A nation-state thus that seeks to serve all within its boundaries, rather than have all within its boundaries serve it.

In dialogue with Ital Livity, this outlook finds some parallels. Northcott's dismay at the "overreach" represented by humanities "Promethean" sense that it and it alone can repair both the earth and the human relationship with it is exactly mirrored. Such an approach is similarly derided as both hubristic and undesirable. Northcott's fears here appear to be more grounded in feasibility and a lack of human knowledge. Whilst those I spoke with in this study offer a more immediate cosmological sense of danger that unbridled and unchecked technological advancement can bring with it, Northcott's base may well also have been present. His desire to reaffirm the importance of community in grounding sensitive interactions with the environment also bears similarities, as Rastafari autonomous communities are idealised as the settings of the most harmonious and positive interactions between humanity and nature.

Northcott's point on familiarity is doubtless valid in a Western spiritual context suffused with Christianity and in which Greek figures make only cameo appearances, to be used as metaphorical props on occasions such as these rather than standards to march behind. His approach here is however open to question. The author notes that whilst Soteira is known "to all but classical scholars" Christian motifs remain "an influential cultural trope in the

³⁸² Northcott, *Going Gently* 31

³⁸³ Northcott, *Going Gently* 33

majority of nations”. This he ascribes to two factors, the live community and “presence of two billion Christians around the planet” as well as the “long cultural memory of Christianity”.

At this juncture there appears to be an oversight. Whilst one might anticipate some acknowledgement here of the pain of these “memories” for many whose communities and nations had this “familiarity” forced upon them, Northcott opts to evidence this through a general populace which “still” listens to Handel’s Messiah and “exchang[es] gifts in the mid-winter” with family members. These references come across somewhat odd, as Northcott decides to offer a sense of the quaint instead of an engagement with a problematic history of Christian expansion here or anywhere in the text. It thus seems particularly jarring the author would attempt to offer a figurehead for a renewed sense of human morality with no discussion or even a noting of the deeply complex context surrounding this “familiarity”. One which was utilised in a different geopolitical context to offer moral justification for imperialism, and served as a differently applied figurehead in appearing as the namesake for one of England’s most infamous slavers, John Hawkins’ *Jesus of Lübeck*.

Indeed, it is this complex baggage that for many Rastafari render Christ and Christianity as the absolute antithesis to the “self-sacrificial service” that will place humanity back in communion with the natural world. Instead, its utilisation within, and indeed for many complicity with, the extraordinarily brutal period of imperialism and settler colonialism renders both beyond irrevocably flawed. A period which destroyed human relationships with humans, utilised the earth and the creatures within it for material profit and ultimately poisoned a pervasive vibrational connection between Iration and the Almighty. Christ in this view is thus not a figure with broad inspirational appeal but rather the embodiment of everything wrong with a domineering, wicked anthropocentrism that has served as the foil for a period of human history which cleaved both the human and non-human world apart. Here the benefit of dialogue is apparent, as Northcott’s formulation is offered the opportunity to interact with a movement with these intellectual themes at its core, observing that such cultural weight brings it with a raft of further connotations.

Further, Northcott’s employment and seeming valorisation of the “nation-state” may also perhaps benefit from further dialogue. His conceptualisation of these “politico-theological”

communities seems to rely in some part at least on the presence of borders. It is these “nations” he describes as the only structure which can properly collect data on its environmental impacts and steer its citizens towards environmentally sensitive actions³⁸⁴. Concepts of “nationhood” or “statehood” are however complicated in themselves, not least due to their connections to a European imperialism which subsumed communities under the control of other nations. These colonising nations then formulated borders for new nations without regard for cultural, linguistic or ethnic considerations, driving conflict and disagreement through to the present. That this should be framed explicitly within a “Jewish-Christian” framework further attests to these roots, a religious framework that provided the intellectual, and indeed providential, justification for such campaigns.

Notions around borders in the present have been challenged repeatedly by those I have engaged with throughout this fieldwork. Many described them as entirely artificial lines intended to separate. To keep some humans in affluent and less environmentally precarious nations, such as the Dominican Republic, away from others in underdeveloped and environmentally precarious nations, such as Haiti, for example. They are as such irrevocably colonially tainted in their formulation and guided by a self-interest in their application today, engendering a separation not envisaged for a world initially established by the Almighty in their absence. Despite describing a desire to challenge “imperial” agencies, Northcott’s framework has the potential to reassert them.

Instead, dialogue with Rastafari Ital Livity offers a significant intervention which may render an altered formulation going forward. Perhaps it is not these macro means of government influence and monitoring that are the most meaningful, but the micro interaction of each human with the earth and the broader Iration around them. One’s own sense of a true connection with that around, a depth of feeling and shared identity in the heart, equally represents a means of ensuring responsible engagement and the future flourishing of the earth at least on a par with such “national” endeavours. Such attitudes, many participants to this study might argue, would be better achieved in the small, autonomous communities that have been advocated for in previous chapters. Ones that actively resist governmental monitoring

³⁸⁴ Northcott, *Political Theology* 301-305. Northcott aligns himself with Roger Scruton in this. See Scruton, *Green Philosophy*

and “nudging” to place faith ultimately in the Almighty and the Irration that springs forth from them.

Paul the Apostle and “Postcoloniality”

Northcott offers Paul as the second of his potentially paradigm shifting Biblical figures. Paul, he suggests “more than any other New Testament writer advances a view of history and theology which, if not anti-imperial, is at least what today might be called ‘postcolonial’”. One who valorises the “strong defer[ing] to the weak” and a “competition” towards “performing works of love and service rather than in the lust for power or status” as united in the “polity of the body of Christ on earth”. Instead, the Apostle, he states, offers the contrast of Rome here, a polity defined by inequity and suffering put against a society defined wholly by love and equality³⁸⁵. Paul even embodies this new formulation himself as he tells the Corinthians in his second letter that God works through his fallibilities rather than his strengths, as “my power is made perfect in weakness (12:9)” (NRSVA). Northcott attempts then to establish Paul as a champion for, and indeed an embodiment of, the subaltern, and one whose message of deference can inspire humanity to lower itself before the deep environmental challenges of today.

Northcott’s descriptions of Paul’s “postcoloniality”, whilst intriguing, may benefit from further dialogue with Rastafari communities and with African and Caribbean communities more broadly. It is after all within Paul’s canon that Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22 stand as regularly utilised verses in the exercise of establishing a theological justification for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. These are verses which oblige of slaves to “obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ”³⁸⁶ (NRSVA). Indeed, Noel Rae describes Ephesians and its near verbatim copy in Colossians as one of two “favourites” alongside Genesis 9:18-27 of those seeking to religiously justify slavery in the

³⁸⁵ Northcott *Political Theology* 271-2

³⁸⁶ Whilst the modern application of Paul’s writings render them problematic in and of themselves, we should also note as Barclay rightly does the historical complexities involved in attempting to truly understand the social context Paul was operating in and its influence on his writings. Recognising no “explicit” defence or attack of the institution, he again rightly concludes that it is those who “dared to draw theological and practical conclusions quite beyond the reach of Paul” that should be valorised. Barclay, *Christian Slave-Ownership* 186

America's and the Caribbean³⁸⁷³⁸⁸. It is thus unclear exactly what Northcott's definition of "postcolonial" is. If it is one which does not incorporate slavery, just as much a feature of imperialist colonial rule in Paul's day as its contemporary manifestations have been, his description becomes slightly more muddled. Paul's writings here offer no ambiguity as to the intended message of the passage, a view held by those utilising it in the irretrievably wicked commodification of Black bodies and desecration of Indigenous communities alongside them. Northcott thus strays into the danger of either ignoring or forgetting the modern manifestations of Paul's writings in favour of some of their more romantic or revolutionary elements he identifies within them.

In engaging with Rastafari Ital Livity, Northcott may be offered the opportunity to witness in Rastafari a movement which offers a theology and a praxis which emerges from a position of the enslaved and of the downtrodden, a truly postcolonial and indeed decolonial reclamation of the history and spirituality of a peoples from whom it was removed³⁸⁹. A figure in Haile Selassie who simultaneously embodies the strong *becoming* the weak and its reverse, the fierce Lion of Judah humbled to the level of the smallest in creation and on the same level as the smallest in creation as they are empowered through him. One whose opposition to the very real genocidal imperialism that Fascist Italy representing resistance to "lust for power or status". Dialogue here then represents the opportunity for further consideration of these contexts and perhaps further novel connections going forward.

McFague and Panentheistic Dialogue

Perhaps closer still to a Rastafari cosmology comes the work of influential American ecological theologian Sallie McFague. McFague's work is arguably of a more conceptual and relational nature in attempting to offer greater understanding of how humans might conceive the presence of God in the world and the wider universe, and the impact that this might have on how we relate with that around us. In her 1993 "The Body of God", McFague wrestles with what she evidently perceives to be a rigid and isolating doctrine of Christian

³⁸⁷ Rae, *Great Stain* 85

³⁸⁸ De Ste.Croix adds to this in emphasising historical reality over theology. "Whatever the theologian may think of Christianity's claim to set free the soul of the slave [...] the historian cannot deny that it helped to rivet the shackles rather more firmly on his feet". de Ste. Croix, *Property and Slavery* 20

³⁸⁹ Drexler-Dreis offers some important further reflection on the catalysing power of decolonial theology in a 'North Atlantic world'. See Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Theology*

transcendence, seeking to find ways to bring God closer and more immanent. The result is one of metaphor that then reaches beyond metaphor, a sense that this immanence can be brought closest in conceiving of God as having a body manifested as the earth as well as elsewhere. Whilst she insists that this is merely a vehicle for spiritual understanding and that God could not accurately be described as having an actual body³⁹⁰, this forms a foundation in which God's transcendence and immanence can not only be understood and articulated but can be felt. God thus represents an "embodied spirit" around us, the "inspired body of the entire universe"³⁹¹. McFague goes on to conclude that such an understanding in which God's presence is within all we interact with generates a view of the world in which respect and care for all of that around us emerges naturally through a sense of God being immanent rather than distant.

Indeed, she puts it that this is a visible dichotomy. McFague argues that such a sense of distance has resulted in humanity reaching beyond its station and being unable to "recognize our proper limits so that other individuals of our species as well as other species can also have needed space". This ignorance results in a lack of worth and value recognised within nature which in turn drives a refusal to appreciate and recognise the "difference" from us that animals and nature represent. Such a recognition of this otherness should lead humanity to temper its anthropocentric demands in order to allow the non-human to "be", she states. Not only this, she suggests a correlation will emerge in the better treatment of the non-human when extending our self-definitions to include not only family and friends but also animals and the whole planet beyond. A sense of a "spirited body among other spirited bodies on our planet"³⁹². In almost Franciscan terms, we are asked to embrace a new role in nurturing life, and siding "with the oppressed, which in our time must include the new poor, nature". Humanity must decentre itself as a consumer and a user and recentre instead as "the species responsible for helping the rich, varied, interdependent community of individuals of many species to continue"³⁹³.

Resonances with this dissertation are observable in this. At its core is an outlook rooted in a panentheistic theology in which God's divinity is shared out and is present amongst all in

³⁹⁰ McFague *Body of God* 19

³⁹¹ McFague *Body of God* 20

³⁹² McFague *Body of God* 113

³⁹³ McFague *Body of God* 204

creation. McFague also seems to highlight a specific role for humanity within this, one which is not only implicated in the ecological degradation occurring around it but one which has the ability to counter it. A ‘cosmic caretaker’ it seems, one able to champion the “new poor” just as Christian ministries of the past have championed the human poor. McFague also speaks in the terminology of consumption in speaking against human “lifestyles” that run contrary to these causes in their devaluing and harming of animals and of broader nature, what we might perhaps interpret as industrialised modes and those involved in meat production.

Further connections may be generated by conversation here. Whilst some foundations are unquestionably shared, some of McFague’s conclusions differ from a Rastafari perspective. The author seems to advocate for an ultimately distant relationship between human and non-human in imploring humanity to let the earth “be” rather than to work towards it flourishing. Further, whilst God is recognised to be in all and all in the body of God, McFague reaches a conclusion at odds with Rastafari conceptualisations in framing this as demonstrating the “difference” in the creatures around us. Rather than recognition of a unifying shared essence, McFague instead implores us to allow this to affirm the variety of that around us. Somewhat counter-intuitively this is presented as an elevation in status for the non-human, a recognition of diversity and variety that engenders a kind of passivity and ambivalence in “be[ing]”. This raises questions regarding the practicability of McFague’s position. Might it not be the case that a shared essence diminishes the difference in that around us, something which further elevates the status of the non-human as a common being, a conclusion offered by many contributors to this dissertation. From this, McFague’s considerations may be offered an alternate effort at “extending self-definitions” that includes plants, minerals and the whole planet beyond our own spheres.

It is this that indicates perhaps somewhat of a timidity in McFague’s early writings, possibly conscious of the radical realignment that would be represented by an out-and-out panentheistic theology with Christianity. Indeed, Northcott’s 1996 “The Environment and Christian Ethics” describes McFague’s “radical” ecology as representing a “compromise” which “abandons central elements of Christian theism”³⁹⁴. Perhaps it is the case that it does not “abandon” them enough however. Clinging to a desire not to diminish the status of humanity as made in the image of God, and from this necessitating a “difference” in status

³⁹⁴ Northcott *Christian Ethics* 159

that produces a cosmology that only gestures towards a reorganisation of power structures³⁹⁵. How much can it be the case that humanity is expected, or even encouraged, to view the non-human as part of a family network when this is done through the lens of “difference” and thus within it an inherent separation?

Rastafari Ital Livity stands in contrast however. Whilst humanity for many occupies an elevated status as seems to be implied through McFague’s writings, there exists no space for consideration of “difference” in the universal oneness and Inity that Ital Livity represents. Instead, this shared divinity foregrounds a shared essence and a shared purpose which serves to unite rather than separate, and in doing so offers a concerted challenge to the hegemonic power structures McFague rightly identifies as ecologically and spiritually damaging. It is perhaps this sense that grounds McFague’s desire for humanity to recognise human “limits” and “space” away from the non-human, again offering a sense of necessary separation and “difference”. The plausibility of such a separation is both doubtful and indeed surely undesirable within a cosmology which attempts to engender an inclusive sense of the self towards all in creation. Further, the notion of a necessary separation and of human and non-human ‘space’ represents only a maintenance of the status quo rather than the challenge to it McFague sets out to offer.

Northcott’s comments are perhaps particularly indicative in this dialogue. Lacking what seems to be the constraints of Christian theology, Rastafari Ital Livity and the pantheistic and panentheistic foundations it builds on from Jamaican Folk and African spiritual forms offers faith in a horizontal unity of all without qualification. One which sees in a divine commonality only this, commonality. In conversation with Rastafari Ital Livity McFague may find encouragement and subsequent innovation from a movement influenced by Christian theology and its motifs yet able to look beyond them.

“Kenotic” and ‘Anachoretic’ Theology

³⁹⁵ Perhaps it is indicative that McFague’s 2013 ‘Blessed are the Consumers’ offers a reframing of these notions as the ‘universal self’ an understanding which moves beyond being one ‘limited by one’s physical body (and its immediate family and friends) to one which ‘stretch[es] to include all of creation’. Any mention of ‘difference’ and separation of spaces seems to be absent. McFague, *Consumers* 67

Writing later in 2013 and in an era of markedly different ecological conversations, McFague penned “Blessed Are the Consumers” in which she seeks to challenge and reframe modes of consumption within a decidedly proactive and assertive Christian spiritual form. Presenting language immediately familiar to eco-Marxist frameworks, she begins by noting that humanity is becoming “increasingly” aware that economics and ecology are “tightly interlocked”, and that religious groups have a crucial role to play in this “two-sided crisis of our time”³⁹⁶. This is not a recognition that should drive an adherent to gaze up however. Focus should be fixed firmly on this world and the action one can engage in towards its salvation. McFague intends to move people “from belief to action, from denial to profound change at both personal and public levels”³⁹⁷. From part of the problem to part of the solution, perhaps.

Throughout the text McFague invokes three “saints” and their examples, French philosopher Simone Weil, eighteenth-century quaker merchant John Woolman and Catholic social activist Dorothy Day. McFague describes that all three through their sacrificial and benevolent deeds have acted on the “basic assumption” of “the sense of the self as composed of, embodied in, dependent on, other beings, both human and nonhuman”. The self as a broader assemblage beyond what might have previously been considered. Whilst this “view is not ‘natural’ to many (if any) of us”, “our goal is to accept or assume it to be the ‘the way things are’ and to practice it in daily, mundane, and lifelong ways”³⁹⁸.

McFague’s primary thrust in this text however presents itself in a more distinctly ethical form as she offers a treatise on the potential contribution of “kenosis” towards ecological debates. This is of course a term with deep Christological roots in describing Jesus’ submission to the omniscient divine will of the Almighty. McFague however offers a “kenotic theology” which speaks to the emptying of oneself for the benefit of others. A “body theology” which orients itself around “sharing of scarce resources among the needy”. Not a “lofty theology” but one “that begins with need, both God’s need and ours, a need that runs all the way from the most elemental biological processes of the energy transformation to understanding the Trinity (the being of God) as one of continuous and total exchange of love”. One which recognises “food” as the “primary symbol of need at all levels of our existence”. The saints stand as

³⁹⁶ McFague, *Consumers* 6

³⁹⁷ McFague, *Consumers* 8

³⁹⁸ McFague, *Consumers* 90

exemplars of this emptying process. “Woolman’s economics based on universal love, Weil’s notion of ‘cannibalism’³⁹⁹ of others as the most basic sin, or Day’s endless soup kitchens feeding hungry bodies”⁴⁰⁰. It is in this very direct and practical self-emptying we in the present can learn to serve the broader human and non-human network around us rather than our immediate human network.

This kenosis is also connected to McFague’s broader cosmological reordering and to her foundations of the body of God in the world. Here, it mirrors God’s “quintessential act of self-emptying both within the divine being and for the creation and salvation of the world”. For humanity then, “Christianity’s manner of making contact with the most basic physical, biological processes is through an inclusive, radical interpretation of its doctrine of the incarnation of God, not now merely in one human being, Jesus of Nazareth, but in the world as God’s body”. The relationship between Jesus and the world is as such one of “shocking totality and intimacy”, one which implores a humanity “made ‘in the image of God’” to “model our relationship with the world in a similar fashion: the world as *our* body”. The emptying of God was then an act of divine overflow, touching and connecting everything in this creation from the largest to the smallest. Through this “God is *always* incarnate” and “bound to the world as its lover” intent on seeing that their “body”, or God’s world, flourishes’⁴⁰¹.

Opportunities again emerge for dialogue with Rastafari Ital Livity. A similarly panentheistic sentiment appears to emerge again as McFague’s language here aligns itself here closer with Rastafari articulations of a common divinity and connection. Descriptions of “intimacy” and “totality” speak to the heart of an all-consuming, emotive Rastafari ‘vibrationality’ centred within the Almighty. God is also said to be eternally present, although McFague largely places this somewhat ambiguously in terms of “the world” rather than a definitive wider cosmos. With its explicitly Christian formulation, it does appear to attest to a Cartesian dichotomy which attests that the world as God’s “body”, the implication perhaps here that God’s mind/soul is elsewhere. This separation is of course absent from Rastafari

³⁹⁹ The sense that human desire for consumption can infiltrate and corrupt human to human and human to non-human relationships. See Irwin *Devoured by God* for further exploration of this.

⁴⁰⁰ McFague, *Consumers* 121-22

⁴⁰¹ McFague, *Consumers* 122

cosmologies, and it is unclear what such a separation adds to McFague's formulation beyond keeping it more closely aligned with Christian dogmatics, which may well be the motivation.

Further, it seems McFague's language has a hint of self-awareness in describing her framework as running contrary to the "natural". A view which those within the Rastafari community and many others might consider the epitome of a natural relationship. McFague follows this description in noting that a "version" of this view is "endemic to Christianity" whilst "different versions are found in most religious traditions". Within this, whilst this sense of connection may not present itself as tangible or logical it is a mantra that must be internally reiterated as it is just the "the way things are". This seems somewhat tinged with a lack of sincerity, and looks to stand in contrast to a Rastafari philosophy which dually foregrounds an earnestness of feeling and connection with a wider Iration and inherently challenges blind adherence to the "way things are". Even with a notion of connection very similar in outlook to an Ital Livity, the nature of the vibrations that emerge from an individual that has not made this connection at the heart will ultimately stand hollow. As such, whilst McFague is doubtless right to note this sense of relationality is one of the "central contributions" religions can make towards "the current conversation on changing our minds so we can change the world", further reflection on how this plays out amongst other spiritual groups may be of value⁴⁰².

There also exists opportunity for consideration as to the efficacy of kenosis as a means of social change in contrast to what might be considered an antonym, an inpouring or withdrawal. Whilst the "saints" McFague invokes "emptied" themselves to variously serve the communities around them through their acts of physical and philosophical sacrifice, renouncing wealth, status and comfort to live amongst the poor and the oppressed as they all did, the three were ultimately incorporated into the systems they identified as problematic. Inherent within a kenotic theology it seems is an engagement with society and with a system where one might outpour oneself into societal systems and structures which thrive on the suffering alleviated, but ultimately unchanged, by these "saints". Rastafari examples in this dissertation may instead offer withdrawal as an alternate means of enacting change, divesting from a Babylonian system and fighting for spiritual and social change away from the tendrils

⁴⁰² McFague, *Consumers* 90

of its corruption. Perhaps this might be termed in contrast an ‘anachoretic’ theology⁴⁰³, a theology of withdrawal which refuses to legitimate or allay a system of such brutality and sufferation, and might represent action just as powerful.

Within this the ambitions McFague lays out for her kenotic theology might also be reflected on. McFague’s social and ecological concerns are expressed as a sense of “moral paralysis” in the present, a challenge to which she holds up the exemplars of Woolman, Weil and Day. Paragons whose kenotic works might offer a blueprint for the very antithesis of such an immobility. Intriguingly, McFague contends that the three constitute examples so extreme they may in fact contribute to this paralysis in being too unattainable. Their example is to be seen as “paradigmatic but not programmatic”⁴⁰⁴. The voluntary poverty witnessed through them “need not and should not” mean the same to us in the now. Instead, “a critical step should be a significant reduction of energy at the personal level towards the practice of simplicity in our daily lives”. For “our basic calling as middle-class people is not to imitate St. Francis or Dorothy Day. Rather those of us with money influence and various forms of expertise should harness our specific and considerable gifts to help change minds and legislation to reverse and control global warming⁴⁰⁵”.

Beyond the plausibility of McFague’s ambitions to “reverse” climate change, this call to action seemingly grounds itself within a neoliberal consensus which has had this very same *modus operandi* at its core for decades with very little sign of change⁴⁰⁶. Instead, McFague may wish to consider perspectives such as those emanating from an *Ital Livity* which advocate for change led through the self, and which fundamentally challenge the power structures that have bought society to its current place just as with Woolman, Weil and Day. Instead of continued reduction in energy use and petitioning of national governments which continue to yield little, and towards a pouring of oneself into the green expanses which can dually amplify a pervasive positivity of vibration whilst serving as an example to others to do the same.

⁴⁰³ From anachoresis: to withdraw, to retire

⁴⁰⁴ McFague, *Consumers* 174

⁴⁰⁵ McFague, *Consumers* 61

⁴⁰⁶ The author furthers that “twenty percent of us have considerable power, influence and money”, an estimation which seems to lack recognition of the limited power of individuals within neo-liberal systems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the above demonstrates that Rastafari Ital Livity stands as a vibrant conversation partner for contemporary environmental discourse, offering a depth of attachment to the world and wider Iration that combines spiritual power with proactive and “front line” praxis. Whilst Ital Livity clearly has points of resonance with eco-Marxist, Plantationocene and Chthulucene outlooks, the points of differentiation represent opportunities for further growth and further consideration for all involved. Macro elements within these systems are offered an equally powerful micro counterpoint which emphasises quite literal ground level action. The importance of engaging with the historical forces which have driven these articulations can be seen, whilst the value of engagement with spiritual themes within them is also demonstrated. Northcott and McFague operate within a spiritual framework in which Rastafari engages to offer input again on the importance of praxis, of offering ‘practical’ ideas and concepts, and of remaining sensitive to the means of challenging power structures that underpin environmental degradation.

The significance and indeed value of these dialogues, then, comes in their distinct and innovative core. Rastafari Ital Livity and Rastafari conceptualisations bring with them a uniquely pervasive sense of connection and of divinity, of challenge to injustice and faltering systems, which serves to offer reflection to all of those outlined. In turn, those described above present opportunity for internal reflection for those in the Rastafari community, something this chapter may serve as a future foundation for. Engaging these ecological outlooks and ecotheologies which have stood influential within academia for decades with Rastafari perspectives which have been ignored by it, the opportunity for novel connections and future fusion and fission presents itself. Conversations which have not previously occurred, and which must continue occurring. As Bonniuel rightly states, present times necessitate a plurality of voices entering into these discussions, and Rastafari Ital Livity is ready for this conversation.

Conclusion

To conclude this dissertation, this research has attempted to detail, explore and dialogue what is the vibrant, distinctive and deeply powerful environmental worldview of Rastafari Ital Livity. Ital Livity is imbued with an immense spiritual potency, present as a worldview in which every single interaction, movement and emotion bears influence on the entirety of Iration around it. The power this has for those within the movement is visible in the pages that have gone before, attesting to a sense of great responsibility but also of peace in the understanding that all ultimately are one unified divinity in the Almighty. Interrelated, co-dependent and united under the auspices of a creator who exudes love and care. Relating to and taking wisdom from nature and the broader elements of Iration at every opportunity. Engaged in thoughtful agricultural modes on a micro level whilst attempting to achieve self-sufficiency and sustainability on the macro. Drawing inspiration from the strident yet caring example of Haile Selassie. Attesting to or casting fire upon the Bible.

All of this generates a worldview with vast depth. One which offers much value as a comparative, a counterpoint, a lens, a formulation in its own right, for contemporary ecological and ecotheological discourse. It is dearly hoped that this research might catalyse further future engagements in this area. It is also hoped this dissertation will offer further theological and scholarly awareness and desire for research more broadly of a Rastafari movement still deeply under-researched and historically, indeed presently, maligned and persecuted. If the writing contained within it has sufficiently conveyed even a small amount of the eternally lifeful energy present amongst those who were kind enough to share their thoughts and feelings with me, then these prospects are hopeful.

As has been demonstrated above, within a St Lucian context Rastafari groups and individuals are in the present offering positive demonstrations of Ital Livity in ecological and environmental contexts. From the smallest, domestic agricultural initiatives up to those which seek to offer those across the island access to pollution free produce, the energy and initiative present within the community is tangible. Conversations were frequent as to how these initiatives might be expanded, and it is left for me here to speculate, and indeed hope, that further projects which can serve to manifest this seemingly endless resourcefulness will come to pass. Further engagement between ICAR and the St Lucia government will doubtless continue, and proposals and petitions will continue to be made. Further, the frequent sense of

regional and global interconnectivity represented by the CRO and its linkages with CARICOM and other Rastafari groups around the world raises the very exciting prospect of further collaboration. For those both within and without the community, this dissertation might offer a means of exploring an Ital Livity which transfuses these interactions in this geographical context and as such perhaps further inform these collaborative engagements. Any small degree would represent a hugely edifying outcome for this author.

Rastafari Ital Livity offers a powerful opportunity for reflection for readers formed in societies built on the ill-gotten gains of empire in which individualism, self-aggrandizement and greed serve as the foundations inherited from a wicked colonial era. Rather than recognise the destructive impact these forces had on human and non-human alike they have continued unabated, now cornerstones of a neo-liberal political system which has presided over further degradation and now, today, presents the very real prospect of total environmental ruin.

Although initially successful in their physical conquests, these colonial forces crucially failed in their mission for complete cultural destruction. Rastafari worldviews and the threads held in common with Indigenous communities worldwide who similarly centralise a personal and impactful engagement with the environment stand as testament to this failure. That of a hegemonic forces' ambitions for a passive homogeneity. There exists in this hope again, and indeed a blueprint for resistance towards manifestation of these forces in the present.

These worldviews, and the communities which have indefatigably served as repositories for the knowledge, epistemologies and cosmologies that surround and constitute them, are indispensable in this dispensation. Whilst opportunities for change are doubtlessly becoming fewer and fewer they are not yet wholly exhausted. The outlook is bleak, as indeed it was for those in the ghettos of 1930s Kingston. Current trajectories suggest the entire world, rather than just a small corner of Jamaica, may soon be residing under foul fells that will define skylines and surroundings. But this is not an inevitability. Attempts to understand the stories and lived experiences of a community which has climbed out of such a setting to stand as one which exudes a profoundly deep environmental care and connection should serve as an inspiration that such degradation is far from inexorable with the right mindset and the right heart.

A correlation between the persecution noted above and throughout this piece and the challenge to Western modes of thought and praxis inherent within the movement is not incidental. The Rastafari community must be celebrated for the unwavering bravery it has shown over the decades in the face of a Babylonian engine intent on crushing dissent. This machine chunters on for now, but its power may soon fall.

Appendix I

In the introduction to this piece I described offering information to allow readers to locate where named contributors were speaking from in terms of their own personal backgrounds. I as such detail the information here of all named speakers in broad terms with an estimated age range, gender, place of residence I.E urban/rural/semi-rural and profession if known. Those with asterisks represent pseudonyms.

1. I-Mannuel*, 55-65, male; semi-rural, architect
2. Ras I-ron, 35-45, male, urban, tour operator
3. Ras Shiloh*, 45-55, male, urban
4. Sister Sheba, 55-65, female, urban
5. Faiye, 45-55, male, urban, tour operator
6. Zeb, 35-45, male, rural, farmer
7. Nye, 55-65, male, rural, farmer
8. I-3, 18-25, male, rural, farmer
9. Empress Dannie, 35-45, female, urban, fisher
10. Ras Kwaku*, 25-35, urban
11. King Khalid, 55-65, male, rural, farmer
12. Jah Lamb, 45-55, male, urban, chef
13. Jeg, 45-55, male, urban, conservationist
14. Abraham, 55-65, male, urban, retired civil servant
15. Sly, 55-65, male, rural, tour operator
16. Empress Desma, 18-25, female, urban, business owner
17. Ras Kamou, 25-35, male, urban, restaurateur
18. Bongo Wisely, 55-65, male, semi-rural, retired civil servant
19. Bongo Vision, 45-55, male, semi-rural, farmer
20. Empress Eve, 25-35, female, urban, restaurateur
21. Ibed, 18-25, male, semi-rural
22. Mama Lavie, 65-75, female, rural

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