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Intercultural Exodus: From Jamaica to the World

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Introduction

This essay studies the origin and globalization of the Rastafarian movement. Poverty and disenchantment in the inner cities of Kingston gave way in the early 1930's to the black power movement through Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" crusade, which eventually led to the appearance of the Rastafarian movement, a "messianic religious and political movement".

In this essay, I propose to analyze when, how and why the Rastafarian movement began, its doctrines and the vehicles which were used for its cultural globalization, in other words, the diffusion of the Rastafarian's beliefs, meanings, ideals and culture outside the borders of Jamaica. My aim is to offer a better understanding of the Rastafarian movement (commonly only associated with the consumption of drugs), so it is important to analyze this study in a cultural point of view. Some authors¹ define culture as the way of life that is influenced by behavior, knowledge, and beliefs. The lack of information about a certain culture may lead to the perception that a specific culture is wrong or inferior to ours and this normally causes conflict between individuals. Appreciating and accepting cultural diversity is an ability which helps to communicate effectively in an international way, therefore, leading to the globalization of a certain culture, in this case, of the Rastafarian cultural movement.

There is a significant variation within the Rastafarian movement and no formal organization; for example, some Rastafarians see it more as a way of life than a religion, but uniting the diverse movements is the belief in the divinity and/or messiahship of the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I, the influence of Jamaican culture, the resistance to oppression, and the pride in African heritage.

¹ Zimmermann, Kim Ann. *What is Culture? Definition of Culture*. (Accessed: 2013-05-30) Available at: <http://www.livescience.com/21478-what-is-culture-definition-of-culture.html>



Picture 1 – Flag of the Rastafarian movement: The red, yellow, green are the colors of the Rasta flag. The red symbolizes the blood of black people, the yellow the stolen gold and the green the lost lands of Africa. The Lion of Judah (Rev 5:5) is a symbol of the Israelite tribe of Judah in the Book of Genesis and a phrase in the Book of Revelation representing Jesus.

(In *Rastafari Empress Thoughts*) Available at: <http://www.jamaicanrastafarianlove.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/rasta-flag1.jpg> (Accessed: 2013-04-20)

The movement went through a relatively peaceful time during the 1930's and 40's. But in the 1950's and towards the 70's the movement faced continuous and increased persecution and harassment from the middle and upper class of Jamaican society and was regarded as an outcast. Rastafarians were discriminated against by fellow Jamaicans and in the 1950's, Rastafarians ideals of racial pride and unity had unnerved the ruling class of Jamaica to the point of being constantly harassed by the police and attacked by the media. Many Rastafarians were beaten, and some killed and even some others were humiliated by having their sacred dreadlocks cut off. In 1954, the Pinnacle commune² was destroyed by Jamaican authorities. By the mid 1970's however, the movement took a dramatic turn with the rise of reggae music and his most famous representative Bob Marley.

Personalities such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Marcus Garvey helped spread the world of the Rastafarian movement through words and music. Due to these factors it is estimated that there are between 13 to 15 million followers worldwide.

² The Pinnacle commune was an effort led by Leonard Howell aimed at returning to nature in order to live outside of the realm of Jamaican jurisdiction.

Roots

The word “roots” is commonly used by Rastafarians as an analogy referring to the origins or the beginning; it is also used to characterize something which respects the traditions or the knowledge of the elders. It is commonly used in reggae music lyrics. And due to its significance, it is important to determine the beginning of the movement.

The movement’s roots “germinated” in the slums of Kingston, Jamaica, in the 1920’s and 30’s. In an environment of great poverty, depression, racism and class discrimination, the Rastafarian message of black pride, freedom from oppression, and the hope of returning to the African homeland was gratefully received. It began with Marcus Garvey, in part as a social stand against whites and the middle-classes, whom the Rastafarians and blacks in general saw as oppressors. Among their grievances, the Rastafarians believed that by being taken to the Caribbean by slave traders, they had been robbed from their African heritage, which they sought to recapture and celebrate.



Picture 2 – Two traits from Trench Town: Slums and Reggae music
(In *MAGIC MYSTIC MARLEY*) Available at: <http://www.magicmysticmarley.com/?p=535> (Accessed: 2013-04-20)

Main characters

Haile Selassie

The Rastafarian movement takes the Bible as its sacred text, but interprets it in an Afro-centric way in order to reverse what Rastafarians see as changes made to the text by white powers. The movement took as its spiritual head Haile Selassie I (1892 – 1975), former Emperor of Ethiopia, who was lauded for being a black leader in the heart of Africa. Haile Selassie I became Jah, or God incarnate, who would one day lead the people of African origin to a promised land.

The early 20th century, in Ethiopia, was marked by the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I. He undertook the modernization of Ethiopia since 1916, and in the period between 1936 and 1941 he fought the Italians. During this time, Haile Selassie appealed to the League of Nations, delivering an address that made him a worldwide figure. In 1935, *Time* magazine named him Man of the Year. He brought Ethiopia into the League of Nations and the United Nations and made Addis Ababa the major center for the Organization of African Unity. He was the only black leader recognized by the rulers of Europe.

Haile Selassie was an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian and he explicitly denied his divine status as proclaimed in Jamaica. In a radio interview with Canada's CBC news in 1967, he said: "I have heard of that idea [that I am divine]. I also met certain Rastafarians. I told them clearly that I am a man, that I am mortal, and that I will be replaced by the oncoming generation, and that they should never make a mistake in assuming or pretending that a human being is emanated from a deity." This denial has not discouraged Rastafarians from believing the emperor to be divine and although Haile Selassie died in 1975, his death is not accepted by Rastafarians, who believe he will one day return.

A major event in Rastafarian history was Haile Selassie's visit to Jamaica on April 21st, 1966. Rita Marley, Bob Marley's wife, converted to the Rastafarian faith after seeing Haile Selassie; she said she saw stigmata appear on him and was instantly convinced of his divinity. Further evidence of his divinity was seen in the fact that a serious drought ended with rain upon his arrival. He told the Rastafarians that they should not seek to immigrate to Ethiopia until they had liberated the people of Jamaica,

a command that came to be known as "liberation before repatriation." Along with its profound religious significance for Rastafarians, the event helped to legitimize the movement. In Jamaica, April 21st is celebrated as one of many Rastafarian holidays.



Picture 3 - Emperor Haile Selassie I on the cover of Time magazine, November 3th, 1930
(In © 2013 Time Inc) Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601301103,00.html> (Accessed: 2013-04-20)

Marcus Garvey

Another personality associated with the Rastafarian movement is Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). He taught that Africans are the true Israelites and have been exiled to Jamaica and other parts of the world as divine punishment, Rastafarians also looked up to Marcus Garvey whose philosophies they believed could help open the way to a new world order.

Garvey encouraged pride in being black and worked to reverse the mindset of inferiority that centuries of enslavement had ingrained on the minds of blacks. Garvey is regarded as a second John the Baptist and famously prophesied in 1927: "Look to Africa, for there a king shall be crowned". On November 2nd, 1930, *Ras Tafari Makonnen* (after the coronation: Haile Selassie) was crowned emperor of Ethiopia, which he ruled until 1974. Followers of Garvey's teachings believed that Selassie was the messiah that he had predicted, and that his coronation indicated that the divine punishment was completed and the return to Africa would begin. Rastafarians named their movement for Ras Tafari and regarded the emperor as the physical presence of God (Jah) on earth.

Marcus Garvey himself, however, did not think highly of Selassie. He regarded him as an incompetent leader, in collusion with white oppressors after his defeat by the Italians and acceptance of British assistance to regain his throne, and this evident in his articles and speeches. In 1937, Garvey wrote an editorial to the *Black Man - London* entitled "The Failure of Haile Selassie as Emperor". In this text, Marcus Garvey wrote about his displeasure towards the way Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia, his strategies during the invasions of Italian troops, and his consequent exile to England.

"(...) they were telling him how to prepare his flight, and like an imbecilic child he followed every advice and then ultimately ran away from his country to England, leaving his people to be massacred by the Italians, and leaving the serious white world to laugh at every Negro (...)"

Garvey, Marcus *Black Man – London*, Editorial: "The Failure of Haile Selassie as Emperor"³ London

March/April 1937.



Picture 4 – Marcus Garvey

(In *HISTORY IN AN HOUR*) Available at: <http://www.historyinanehour.com/2011/06/10/marcus-garvey-summary/>
(Accessed: 2013-04-10)

Garvey's view in this article and his speeches went against the general attitude of the African World. Ethiopia received much support from the African Diaspora, particularly from the immigrants in the United States. Many of them had gone to Ethiopia to fight the Italians. Garvey was also being criticized at his public speeches by those who took offence from his criticisms against Haile Selassie. In one of Garvey's speeches at Hyde Park he was heckled off the platform by angry African students. In another speech the crowd turned against Garvey when he called Selassie a "dumb trickster".

³ Full article at: <http://www.jamaicans.com/culture/rasta/MarcusGarveyeditorial.shtml> (Last accessed: 2013-04-20)

Persecution and oppression (1950's to the 1970's)

The Rastafarian movement developed among an oppressed people who felt society had nothing to offer them except more suffering. Rastafarians regard themselves as conforming to certain visions of how Africans should live, reclaiming what they see as a culture stolen from them when their ancestors were brought on slave ships to Jamaica, the movement's birthplace. The messages expounded by the Rastafarians promote love and respect for all living things and emphasize the paramount importance of human dignity and self-respect. Above all else they speak of freedom from spiritual, psychological as well as physical slavery and oppression. In their attempts to heal the wounds inflicted upon the African race by the so called "civilized" nations of the world, Rastafarians continually extol the virtue and superiority of African culture and civilization past and present. The doctrines of Rastafarianism depart radically from the norms of the conventional modern Western mind, a trait of the movement deliberately encouraged by Rastafarians themselves. Rastafarians showed loyalty to their vision of "Zion"⁴, and rejection of modern society (called Babylon⁵), which they saw as thoroughly corrupt. In conclusion, one could argue that the Rastafarian movement is a consequence of colonial oppression in Jamaica, and a tool for the emancipation and cultural affirmation of black people.

Also, in the 1950/1960's, a form of neo-colonialism emerged in Jamaica⁶. In essence, the term neocolonialism refers to the point when a nation shows the external signs of political independence yet remain economically dependent. The change from formal colonialism to one of constitutional independence did not end the poor people's struggle, but instead enabled the British colonial rule to review local arrangements for supervising the colonial economy. Despite being freed from British dominion in 1962, Jamaica became an uncharted economic entity, with the responsibilities but not the means for true independence. Neocolonialism is still present nowadays in Jamaica, more specifically, in the primary industry sector and tourism, where both depend on foreign investments.

⁴ Rastafarians assert that Zion is a land that Jah promised to them. To achieve this, they reject modern western society.

⁵ Babylon is an important Rastafarian term, referring to human government and institutions that are seen as in rebellion against the rule of Jah (God). In a more general sense, Babylon refers to any system that oppresses or discriminates against all peoples.

⁶ Dread Library, *Neocolonialism in Jamaica: History, practices, and resistance*. (Accessed: 2013-05-30). Available at: <http://debate.uvm.edu/dreadlibrary/borelli02.htm>

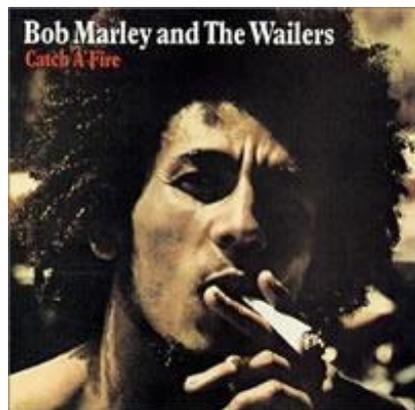
In this period, the unfortunate situation of blacks in Jamaica did not get any better. Racial tension only grew, causing conflict between the poor black Rastafarians and white middle-class police. The Rastafarians were misinterpreted and perceived as racists. However, they did not have the means or the opportunity to be racist, nor was it part of their doctrine. Most of them were only interested in going back to Africa, having lost faith in finding acceptance from Jamaican police and upper classes. Many spoke out, marched, and protested, but this only resulted in physical repression and humiliation in most cases. For example, Leonard Howell, often called the “first Rasta,” set up the first Rastafarian commune of 5,000 people at Pinnacle, in Saint Catherine, Jamaica. And, subsequently, he emerged as an early leader of the movement. He taught the three Rastafarian fundamental principles: the negation, persecution, and humiliation of the government and legal bodies of Jamaica; preparation to go back to Africa; and acknowledging Emperor Haile Selassie as the Supreme Being and only ruler of Black people. Howell was arrested by the Jamaican government in 1933 for his loyalty to the Ethiopian emperor over King George V, he was found guilty and sentenced to several years in prison. This may have contributed to the decision to keep Rastafarianism leaderless and independent. Attitudes began to change when Haile Selassie visited Jamaica in April 1966. The popularization of Rastafarian through reggae music, and especially through the fame and near-heroic status of Bob Marley, have made the Rastafarians far more acceptable than in past times, though their use of cannabis remains a major point of controversy.



Picture 5 - Leonard Howell (middle) and Marcus Garvey (right)
(In © *Tumblr, Inc*) Available at: <http://elisamexica.tumblr.com/post/6590215427/leonard-howell-middle-and-marcus-garvey-right>
(Accessed: 2013-04-15)

Bob Marley and Reggae music

One of the most important figures in the history of the Rastafarian movement is the reggae artist Bob Marley (1945-81). The son of a white father and black mother, Marley lived in the Kingston slums of Jamaica. He recorded his first singles in 1962, had his first international hit with The Wailer's album *Catch A Fire* in 1973, and he had his first solo hit outside Jamaica with "No Woman, No Cry," in 1975.



Picture 6 - Album cover of *Catch a Fire* (1973).
(In © 2013 *Last.fm Ltd.* Available at [http://www.lastfm.com.br/music/Bob+Marley+&+The+Wailers/Catch+a+Fire+\(disc+1:+The+Jamaican+Versions\)](http://www.lastfm.com.br/music/Bob+Marley+&+The+Wailers/Catch+a+Fire+(disc+1:+The+Jamaican+Versions))
(Accessed: 2013-04-14)

Reggae is a style of popular music that originated in Jamaica, in the late 1960's and quickly emerged as the country's dominant music. According to an early definition in *The Dictionary of Jamaican English* (1980), reggae is based on *ska*, an earlier form of Jamaican popular music, and employs a heavy four-beat rhythm driven by drums, bass guitar, electric guitar, and the "scraper," a corrugated stick rubbed by a plain stick. The dictionary further states that the chunking sound of the rhythm guitar that comes at the end of measures acts as an "accompaniment to emotional songs often expressing rejection of established 'white-man' culture"⁷.

Bob Marley became a Rastafarian around 1966. He grew dreadlocks, adopted marijuana as a sacred sacrament, and is said to have begun every performance proclaiming the divinity of *Jah Rastafari*. Reggae music is intimately connected to Rastafarian and its lyrics often speak of oppression, poverty, slavery, apartheid and human rights.



Picture 7 - Bob Marley live in concert in Zurich, Switzerland, on May 30, 1980 at the Hallenstadium
(In *Wikipedia*®) Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Bob-Marley-in-Concert_Zurich_05-30-80.jpg
(Accessed: 2013-04-14)

⁷"Reggae" ©2013 *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.* (Accessed: 2013-06-10) Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/495977/reggae>

His music touched on militant spirituality and reflected concerns of the needy lifestyles in Jamaica. Songs such as “War” addresses human rights and racial issues and “So Jah Seh” touches on the Rastafarian ability to find a way to solve problems within ourselves. Again, since his lyrics often speak of oppression, poverty, slavery and human rights, he quickly gained the popularity of Jamaican people and his immense popularity as a musician brought both reggae and Rasta to the international attention. England was one of the first countries to be introduced to Reggae music. In the 70’s many artists, which were not Rastafarians, adopted reggae music, language, dress code and dreads in their search for success. Most evident cases were famous British bands like UB40, Led Zeppelin and The Beatles with songs like: Red Red Wine, D’yer Maker and Obla Di Obla Da.

Marley was diagnosed with cancer in 1977 and he succumbed to the disease on May 11th, 1981. *Uprising* (1980), Bob Marley's final studio album, is one of his most religious works, including the tracks “Redemption Song” and “Forever Loving Jah”. A few months before his death, Bob Marley was baptized into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a Christian faith that rejects the divinity of Haile Selassie. This has allowed both faiths to claim Marley as "their own". He received a state funeral in Jamaica, which combined elements of Ethiopian Orthodoxy and Rastafarianism. He was buried in a crypt near his birthplace, with his Gibson Les Paul guitar, a soccer ball, a cannabis bud, and a Bible.

During his life, two events stand out due to their great political significance. On December, 3th 1976, two days before a free concert organized by the Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley in an attempt to ease tension between two warring political parties, Marley, his wife, and the manager Don Taylor were wounded in an armed assault at Marley's house in Kingston. Bob Marley received minor wounds in the chest and arm. The attempt on his life was thought to have been politically driven, as many felt the concert was really a support rally for Prime Minister Manley. However, the concert proceeded and an injured Marley performed as scheduled two days after the attempt. When asked why, Marley responded: *"The people who are trying to make this world worse aren't taking a day off. How can I?"*

Another very important moment was the “The One Love Peace Concert”, a large concert held on April 22nd, 1978 at The National Stadium in Kingston, Jamaica. This

concert was held during a political civil war in Jamaica between two opposing parties: The Jamaican Labour Party and the People's National Party. In 1974, Prime Minister Michael Manley of the People's National Party intended to redistribute wealth by nationalizing the country's major export industries. His agenda was opposed by the more conservative Edward Seaga of the Jamaica Labour Party. In order to gain power, the two politicians hired local gangsters and this only led to tension and a political civil war between the supporters of both parties. Oddly, the idea for the concert came from two such gangsters from rival factions. One of them contacted Marley, who was in exile in London, and he accepted the invitation. This concert was Marley's first performance in Jamaica since he had almost been assassinated in 1976. The concert came to its peak during Bob Marley & The Wailers' performance of "Jamming", when Marley joined the hands of political rivals Michael Manley and Edward Seaga. Unfortunately, the event did little to quell political violence.

Rastafarian Culture

In 1871, Edward B. Tylor defined culture as a complex, interdependent and interacting network of knowledge, beliefs, laws, traditions, arts, customs and habits of a particular group of human beings in society⁸. Culture, in the comprehensive sense, is a poorly defined concept of contours that are changing over time, adapting old beliefs to new situations. In summary, culture is any manifestation of habits or customs of everyday life, such as food, the way people dress, arts and crafts, among others. There are a lot of cultural features which have a great meaning in Rastafarian culture. These features include: the lion of Judah, the Rastafarian flag, the "Iyaric" (Jamaican Creole), the dichotomy between *Babylon* and *Zion*, the dreadlocks, and the spiritual use of cannabis.

The Lion of Judah: In the Rastafarian culture, Haile Selassie is considered to be Jah (God) and he is seen as both the reincarnation of Christ and the lion mentioned in the Bible's Book of Revelation. Therefore, he is "The Lion of Judah". In addition to the

⁸ © 2002-2006 Dennis O'Neil, *What is Culture?* (Accessed: 2013-06-10) Available at: http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm

biblical significance of the lion, it also represents the struggle, the strength and the cruelty that Rastafarians endured at the hands of their oppressors. The lion can be found on the Rastafarian flag, along with the colors that are also symbols associated with Rastafarians.



Picture 7 – Lion of Judah
(In © JAH.COM) Available at <http://www.jah.com/lion-of-judah/> (Accessed: 2013-04-18)

The Rastafarian Flag: The colors red, gold, and green are closely associated with the Rastafarian Movement. They come from the old Ethiopian flag used during the reign of Haile Selassie. Each color of the flag stands for something Rastafarians believe in. Red stands for the blood that bleeds to the Earth, replenishes the land, and helps to grow Cannabis. Green stands for the vegetation of Africa. And gold stands for the prosperity Africa offered before the extraction of diamonds and gold during slavery (see picture 1).

Iyoric: Rastafarians state that their original African languages were “taken away” from them when the slave trade began, and that the English language is an imposed language used to “colonize” slaves. Their solution was the creation of a modified vocabulary and dialect known as "Iyoric", reflecting their desire to take language forward and to confront the society they call Babylon.

There are a lot of words and expressions in Iyoric, but some are important to be referred⁹:

⁹ More words and expressions can be consulted here: <http://www.speakjamaican.com/glossary/#r>

- *I and I* - is an expression to totalize the concept of oneness, the oneness of two persons. So God is within all of us and we are one people in fact. I and I means that God is in all men;
- *Irie* (pronounced "eye-ree") - a term used to denote acceptance, positive feelings, or to describe something that is good;
- *Brethren* and *Sistren*- refer to the oneness of Rastafarians and are used to describe one's peers (male - "brethren", female - "sistren");
- *Ganja*- refers to cannabis, which is used spiritually by Rastafarians;
- *Politricks* - is a Rasta term replacing English "politics", because so many politicians turn out, as specified by Rastafarians, to be more like tricksters;
- *Aprecilove* - replaces "appreciate" because of the sound similarity to "hate";
- *Know* - replaces "believe", as Bob Marley sang. Rastafarians do not "believe" Haile Selassie is God and that they, the Rastas, are the chosen people. They claim to "know" these things, and would never admit to simply "believe" in them.

Babylon vs. Zion: Babylon is a mental rather than a physical place. Many things are called Babylon, however it usually refers to things of a negative nature. Examples include materialism, discrimination, prejudice and other forms of oppression. A person or people can be considered as part of Babylon if they display any of the above, or if they hinder the unification of mankind.

Zion is the opposite of Babylon. However, rather than a philosophy it is both a physical and a spiritual place. Zion is manifested physically in Africa, and more specifically, in Ethiopia.

Dreadlocks: It is believed that the first Rastafarian dreadlocks came from Kenya in 1953 when images of the independence struggle in Kenya displayed people wearing dreads. Rastafarians grew and wore their hair in dreadlocks to draw a distinction from the straight, thin hair of their oppressors. Dreads were also a way for them to accept personal beauty and to evidence the differences between Jamaicans and white people. In addition, dreads symbolize the mane of the Lion of Judah and the Rasta rebellion against Babylon (the capitalistic, materialistic, and oppressive world). For Rastafarians, the growing of dreadlocks is also a spiritual and mental journey that teaches patience. It is believed that it is patience that allows for the hair to grow naturally without the use of

cutting, combing, or washing with anything except pure water. Though many Rastafarians have dreadlocks, not all do. It is not a requirement of the religion, nor is it limited to Rastafarians.

The Holy Piby – The Blackman's Bible: is a pro-Rastafarian text written by Robert Athlyi Rogers (1891-1931)¹⁰, a protestant shepherd from the island of Anguilla who supported pro-African ideology. The Holy Piby was a response to the Western Holy Bible, which the author considered of “white origin”. The theology defined on its pages saw the Ethiopians, referring to all Africans, as the chosen people of God. Robert preached self-reliance and self-determination for Africans, by using the Holy Piby itself, as guiding document. While not strictly speaking a "Rastafarian discourse", it was certainly a primary source of inspiration and guidance to many followers of the Rastafarian movement.

Spiritual use of Cannabis: Cannabis has been used for over a thousand years by most of the world’s great cultures as medicine. Most people are unaware that many ancient cultures also recognized the value of cannabis as an aide to spiritual practice.

Like any other powerful medicinal plant, the energies of the plant must be used in a way that harnesses its basic properties to promote health and healing. Cannabis has been used for thousands of years in ancient societies, like India and Nepal (in Hinduism and Buddhism), Africa, Central Asia (especially in China) and Israel, but in the modern World it is used as a recreational drug in most countries of the Globe and commonly associated with the Rastafarian movement.

Rastafarians use cannabis as part of their worshiping of their King, Haile Selassie I, and as an aid to meditation. Rastafarians see cannabis as a sacramental and deeply beneficial plant, which is associated to the “Tree of Life”¹¹ mentioned in the Bible, more specifically, in Revelation 22:2 (*In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the **tree of life**, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the **leaves** of the tree were for the healing of the nations).*

¹⁰ Moreno, Alfredo Nieves, *Robert Athlyi Rogers*. 2011 (Accessed: 2013-06-20) Available at: <http://www.encyclopediapr.org/ing/article.cfm?ref=11112406>)

¹¹ In Catholic Christianity, the Tree of Life represents the immaculate state of humanity free from corruption.

Intercultural Exodus

When trying to explain this expression, many would say that “Intercultural” and “Exodus” are different concepts, one being the cultural relations developed between countries, regions or institutions, and the other the forced emigration or departure of a whole community, or large number of people. I chose this expression, which combines both concepts, because not only is it a reference (and somehow a tribute) to a 1977 album by Bob Marley and the Wailers, but also in the case of the Rastafarian movement, its intercultural process is due to the exodus of a community from Jamaica to the world.

The first Africans arrived in Jamaica in 1513, from the Iberian Peninsula, after being taken from Eastern, Central, and Western Africa by Spanish and Portuguese slave traders. Working as servants, cowboys, herders of cattle, pigs and horses, as well as hunters, quickly they were deprived of their cultural heritage and many of their customs survived based on memory and myths.

After the British Crown abolished slavery in 1834, the Jamaicans began working toward their independence. This eventually led, during the early 20th century, to the growth of the black population of Jamaica, also in political power and influence. Marcus Mosiah Garvey emerged as the main political leader for black Jamaicans during this time and he helped to organize and mobilize political dissent against the white pro-British government in Jamaica. With the use of Afrocentric ideology, he was particularly successful and influential among lower-class blacks and rural communities in Jamaica. His ideas helped the early spread of the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica and quickly some Rastafarians began to see Marcus Garvey as a prophet. His philosophy fundamentally shaped the movement, and many of the early Rastafarians became supporters of Garveyism¹². Although his ideas have been hugely important in the development of Rastafarian culture, Garvey never identified himself with the movement. Afrocentrism e Garveyism helped shaping the ideals of the Rastafarian movement and gaining popularity within the world’s black community, especially in Jamaica.

¹² Garveyism is an aspect of Black Nationalism which takes its source from the works, words and deeds of Marcus Garvey. The fundamental focus of Garveyism is the complete, total and never ending redemption of the African continent by people of African ancestry, at home and abroad.

Commercialization and Westernization of the Rastafarian movement and Reggae Music

The expansion movement of Rastafarian culture to the rest of the world started in the 1970's, and is due to the practices and symbolism of Rastafarianism and especially to reggae music.

One could argue that the main catalyst behind the globalization movement of Rastafarianism was the music of Bob Marley. He popularized reggae music, and thrust it to the world stage during his musical career. The music of Bob Marley and reggae music in general have impacted the lives of people around the globe. Not only was the music being commercialized, but culture itself became a worldwide commodity, as well. The popularity of reggae spawned a number of pseudo-Rastafarian groups, who imitated the cultural trappings of Rastafarianism—dreadlocks, ganja smoking, and language, without embracing its religious and ideological doctrines. Likewise, the people who were influenced by Marley have integrated and built businesses around Rastafarian culture. Although such business and shops seem to support only the most basic material elements of Rastafarianism, instead of the core of this culture, many people purchase those items to portray the image or “look” of Rastafarians. They would wear the colors of the Jamaican flag, smoke marijuana, use dreadlocks in their hair, and even use the word “*Irie*”, the Jamaican word for “powerful” or “feeling good”.

In our society, almost everything has a potential for profit and everything, including art, music and culture, has been commercialized to some extent. The Rastafarian movement and reggae were no exception. In these days and age you can go into almost any shop and see a Bob Marley tapestry, poster, t-shirt, hat, or other commercial apparel, often with the phrase “Rastafarian”, or “Legalize It”, and even with a cannabis leaf drawn in the border. It is safe to say that this message confuses the masses as to the origin of reggae music, image and culture. This commercial abuse is what has transformed reggae from its original roots into a Westernized commodity and undermines the true essence of the Rastafarian movement. In essence, one could say that Babylon took advantage of the Rastafarian movement.

Conclusion

“Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds.”

Marley, Bob Nesta. *In 2001 - 2013 BrainyQuote*® Available at

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/bobmarley385052.html> (Accessed: 2013-04-18)

This quote by Bob Marley refers to a possible “attack” on Babylon, the Western society. He seems to advise people to reject the mental slavery provided by capitalism and the media, and embrace their own ideals and beliefs. Perhaps, this idea is somehow similar to how “his” people suffered under the oppression by white people, since not only were they forced to work as slaves but also to set aside their own cultural features.

Nowadays, in my view, public opinion has reduced Rastafarianism to a stereotype of drug consumption. This happens due to the media coverage, which only focus on the smoking of marijuana. And that is my aim with this essay: to show readers the wonderful traits and cultural values that have contributed to the “interculturalization” of the Rastafarian movement.

In conclusion, the appeal of Rastafarianism adds to its ability to be easily globalized. The factors of appeal of Rastafarianism lie in three very important characteristics: the movement’s ability for adaptation; the link that exists between reggae music, dread locks, and other Rasta related tokens; and the cultural ideas of resistance.

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